

Lesson Plan: Stance adverbs and hedging in formal writing

Level	Advanced (C1-C2)
Time	60-90 minutes
Skills	Writing, vocabulary
Focus	Attitudinal adverbs; epistemic hedges; distancing language; avoiding overclaiming

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Use stance adverbs to convey attitude and degree of certainty
- Hedge claims appropriately using modal verbs, adverbs, and reporting structures
- Understand the difference between factual claims and hedged assertions
- Produce academic writing that is appropriately cautious without being vague

TARGET LANGUAGE & EXAMPLES

Stance adverbs by category

- Certainty: clearly, obviously, undoubtedly, certainly, definitely
- Probability: probably, likely, presumably, apparently, seemingly
- Attitude: interestingly, surprisingly, unfortunately, remarkably, crucially
- Distancing: arguably, supposedly, allegedly, reportedly, ostensibly

Hedging with modal verbs

- This may indicate a wider trend.
- The results could suggest a causal relationship.
- The policy might have contributed to the decline.
- This would appear to support the hypothesis.

Hedging with reporting structures

- It appears that / It seems that / It would seem that
- The data suggests / indicates / implies
- There is evidence to suggest that / It has been proposed that

Over-hedging: the opposite problem

- Too vague: 'It might possibly perhaps be the case that...'
- Too bold: 'This proves that social media causes depression.'
- Right: 'Research suggests a possible link between social media use and depression.'

Meaning & Nuance

Adverb	Function	Strength	Example
clearly	marks something as obvious to the writer	strong	Clearly, further action is needed.

arguably	presents a position as debatable	distancing	Arguably, this is the most important factor.
surprisingly	signals unexpected information	attitude	Surprisingly, the results showed no significant difference.
apparently	based on what seems to be true	hedging	The policy apparently had little effect.
presumably	reasonable assumption	hedging	This was presumably an oversight.
crucially	marks a key point	attitude / emphasis	Crucially, no consent was obtained.

LESSON PROCEDURE

1. Warm-up: Bold or hedged? (10 min)

Task: Students rate 6 claims from 'too bold' to 'appropriately hedged' to 'too vague'.

- 'Social media destroys relationships.' / 'Social media may affect relationships.' / 'Social media possibly might somewhat impact...'

→ Establishes the spectrum before teaching specific devices.

2. Presentation (20 min)

Task: Stance adverb categories. Hedging modal verbs. Reporting structure hedges.

- Key principle: academic writing hedges because most claims are not absolute facts.
- Distancing adverbs (arguably, supposedly): signal that the writer is not fully committed.
- The would appear to / it seems that constructions are very common in C1-C2 writing.

3. Editing task (20 min)

Task: Rewrite 6 overclaiming sentences with appropriate hedging.

- 'This proves that exercise improves mental health.' → 'The study suggests that regular exercise may be associated with improved mental health outcomes.'

→ Focus: change the claim, not just add one hedge word.

4. Academic paragraph (25 min)

Task: Write a 150-word academic paragraph using at least 6 hedging devices from different categories.

- Peer review: are any claims still over-bold? Is any hedging excessive or repetitive?

TEACHER NOTES

- Over-hedging is as problematic as under-hedging — teach students to hedge deliberately, not habitually.
- Arguably is a particularly useful stance adverb — it signals the writer's position while acknowledging the claim is debatable.
- This topic is directly relevant to IELTS, TOEFL, and Cambridge C1/C2 academic writing.

EXTENSION / HOMEWORK

Choose one or more:

1. Rewrite 5 bold, unsupported claims as appropriately hedged academic sentences.
2. Write a research summary (100-130 words) using hedging throughout.
3. Find 10 stance adverbs and hedging devices in an academic article and categorise them.