**Appropriate written language style for different audience and purpose**

1. **Reflection**

Compare ideas with your group about the 2 job application documents that you read before class.

1. Which paragraph of these 2 documents is an example of the Unit 1 reflective personal story task?
2. Have you ever written a personal statement or job application email before? Who was the audience?
3. Do you think the language style is appropriate for the audience of the personal statement and internship application email from the out of class work? Why/why not?
4. What can you conclude about features of academic writing style?
5. **Practice**

With a partner choose 1 of the language and style exercises below to work on. While working on them, ask your instructor if you have any questions during the lesson. Consider how the learning points of each exercise could be applied to your portfolio submissions.

**Exercise A –** Hedging (ensuring statements are not exaggerated)

**Exercise B –** Formality (communicating appropriately for the audience)

**Exercise C –** Academic verbs (communicating precise relationships between ideas)

1. **Hedging**

**Task 1 –** **Read the reference boxes below to learn about hedging**

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| **What is hedging?** Hedging is cautious language to ensure that our statements are true, not exaggerated.  * Climate change is the only global problem.*  * Climate change is one of the most serious global problems.*  * HKUST is the best university in the world.*  * It could be argued that HKUST is one of the best universities in Asia.*  * Living in cities is best for everyone.*  * Living in cities can positively impact on some people’s living standards.*  * Studying English will definitely help your career prospects.*  * Studying languages such as English can help career prospects to some extent.*  * Tutorial schools are necessary for all students.*  * Tutorial schools may have some benefits for some students.*  **Why is hedging important?**   1. Not everything is absolute or certain or true in all cases for all people. 2. Many things are uncertain or can be argued for and against or apply only in some cases. 3. If you do not have enough evidence, you cannot write absolute statements. 4. You need to be cautious (hedging) with any claims you cannot support or prove. 5. Hedging shows you are open to different ideas and opinions, where relevant, which is often the norm in academic contexts. |

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| **Type of**  **language** | **Vocabulary for hedging** | **Example** |
| Modal Verbs | can, could, may, might, should, would | *This option might be better.* |
| Modal adjectives | possible, probable, likely, unlikely | *It is likely to succeed.* |
| Adverbs | conceivably, perhaps, possibly, usually, probably, practically, presumably, apparently | *Presumably there is a reason for this.* |
| Nouns | assumption, likelihood, possibility, probability, claim, suggestion | *The likelihood of success is high.* |
| Verbs that show uncertainty | assume, believe, indicate, interpret, seem, suggest, appear, estimate, tend, think, argue, propose, speculate | *It appears to have many strengths.* |
| Approximators | approximately, roughly, about, often, occasionally, generally, usually, somewhat, somehow, a lot of | *It was somewhat more successful.* |
| Introductory phrases | It appears that…,It can be argued that…, We can assume that…, It is likely that…, It is probable that..., It is conceivable that... | *We can assume that this trend will continue.* |

**Task 2 – Analysis of hedging in a personal statement**

The sentences in the table below come from the personal statement you read before class. In each sentence, an instructor has crossed out exaggerated claims, and the student has corrected them by adding a more appropriate hedged version in green.

Agree with your partner on why each green hedged part is more appropriate in each case, for this personal statement. The first one is done for you.

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|  | **Example from the personal statement** | **Why hedge in this example?** |
| ex | I am a final year mathematics undergraduate student, ~~and I will~~ predicted to graduate this summer with a 2:1 BSc. | *because your future grades are not certain. You might not get a 2:1.* |
| 1 | This experience has confirmed ~~I definitely want~~ my desire to become a maths teacher in a secondary school. |  |
| 2 | What I am particularly drawn to, is the way that maths puzzles ~~are always~~ can be designed to help students understand the real world |  |
| 3 | My research ~~proves~~ highlights that maths is increasingly becoming a tool to understand not just the physical world but also the social world. |  |
| 4 | I ~~prove~~ argue that ~~all~~ many maths curricula around the world are no longer culturally, socially or politically neutral |  |
| 5 | ~~Everyone told me my insights into globalized maths education and my presentation skills were amazing.~~ I received positive feedback from the judging panel of STEM professors about my insights into globalized maths education and about my presentation skills |  |
| 6 | My supervisor offered great advice for how to contact ~~all~~ certain organizations ~~perfectly~~ more effectively. |  |
| 7 | I ~~know~~ believe my experience demonstrates that we share this same value. |  |

**Task 3 – Analysis of hedging in an essay**

Identify with your partner 3 examples of hedging in this good sample. This is an extract from an essay on the future of cities.

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| **Good sample**  In the next thirty years, 70% of the world’s population will be living in urban areas. There are numerous issues with this trend, and perhaps the most important challenge is managing overcrowding. It could be argued that modern cities with dense populations are already not the best environments to live in. If more people decide to move to urban areas, these problems may get even worse. City authorities may need to start planning early to ensure that their cities are clean and comfortable living environments if they want to manage issues such as crime, pollution and sustainability. It seems reasonable to suggest that the issue of designing better cities is one of the most important issues of the 21st century. |

**Task 4 – Improve a poor personal statement sample**

Identify 5 places where hedging is needed to improve this poor sample. This is a reflective personal story about overcoming a challenge, extracted from a personal statement. How would you improve it with hedging? Work with your partner to rewrite the paragraph with more appropriate hedging.

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| **Poor sample**  In my secondary school life I had the most important learning moment of my life. It happened when I was studying for my DSE’s. I was definitely terrible at time management and was totally unprepared. I had the worst panic attack in the world 2 days before my first exam. I couldn’t breathe at all for the whole day. Afterwards, I could not eat or sleep and I locked myself up in my room. Everyone was very worried and contacted my school. The student counsellor arranged to meet me and we discussed my problems. We came up with the best ever solution which was to make a schedule for revising and always follow it. I will never make the same mistake twice. I learned you must always find people to help you with every problem. |

**Task 5 – Reflection**

1. Do you think hedging would be useful when writing science reports? When? Why? How about essays? proposals? emails? cover letters for job applications?
2. Write down any questions you want to ask the teacher about hedging and make sure you ask them!

**Task 6 – Improve your portfolio drafts**

1. Go back to your portfolio drafts, and identify how you could improve them, using learning points from this task.
2. Show your partner what changes you have made.
3. **Formality**

**Task 1 –** **Read the reference box below to learn about formality**

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| **What is formality?** Formality exists as a scale. Some language is a bit more formal, some language is a bit less formal, and most language is somewhere in the middle of the scale. To decide the right level of formality you need, think about your audience and the purpose of your writing.  * Dear Mr Lam, I wanna apply for the job teaching kids with u.*  * Dear Mr Lam, I would like to apply for the primary school teaching position.*  **Why is formality important?** Imagine if your best friend suddenly started talking very formally to you. You might feel this is less friendly. Similarly, if you write informally when your audience expects formal communication, you might offend or confuse them. Meeting your audience’s expectations can help build an appropriate relationship with them.  **How can I use more formal language?**   1. Replace informal words that are ‘chatty’ spoken styles with more formal vocabulary. 2. Replace contractions (it’s, I’m, he’s) with the full form. 3. Be careful with idiomatic language. Some idiomatic language is informal. 4. Be careful with use of exclamation marks. Often we avoid them in formal writing. 5. Be careful when writing rhetorical questions. Sometimes these are inappropriate.   **Where can I learn more?**   * Advice for writing formally: <https://www.academic-englishuk.com/formality> * Examples of informal vs. formal language: <https://www.engvid.com/english-resource/formal-informal-english/> * Extra practice with formality in vocabulary: <http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/formal.htm> |

**Task 2 – Analysis**

How do you know what is formal or informal language, and when to use it? Discuss with your partner about whose advice below you agree with, and why?

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| **Mark:**When you look up a word in a good dictionary, it sometimes says “inf.” which means “informal”. That’s how you know it’s useful for informal communication, not formal communication.  **Mandy:**University assignments need formal language, because essays and research reports and professional emails and presentations are all very formal.  **Lana**: All words are either formal or informal, so you should keep two separate vocab note books.  **Sean**: Formal language is better than informal language. Formal language is more impressive and more complex and higher level vocabulary, so this is what the teacher is looking for in your assignments.  **Janet:**Remember that when you use the words “I, you, your, my, our, etc” it means the writing is informal.  **Selina**: When you watch TV or YouTube, remember that they are using informal language, so make sure you avoid using this type of language in your formal presentations and essays.  **Jeff**: You should replace words with more formal synonyms when you can find them for your essay.  **Priya**: You can identify formal words usually because they are longer. If the word is very short, it is probably an informal word.  **Ranjit**: It’s simple. Formal language is for writing; informal language is for speaking.  **Eric:** Phrasal verbs and idioms are informal, so make sure you avoid them for formal writing. |

**Task 3 – Analysis of formality in job application letters**

Read the 3 extracts below. These are from application letters for an internship with a pharmaceutical company. Decide which style of writing is the most formal. Decide which are appropriate for the audience and purpose.

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| **Extract 1 –** *I am applying for the internship advertised in the South China Morning Post. I am an excellent candidate for the position because of my significant lab experience, good language skills, and sense of organization.*  **Extract 2 –** *I am applying for the internship that is now open in your company. As you are aware, I have worked as a summer intern for one month with your company before. As such, I not only have experience and knowledge of the operation of the laboratory, but also already understand the company's culture and needs.*  **Extract 3 –** *I read in the paper that you’re looking for an intern to work in the lab. I think that I am good for that position. I have done stuff like this in the past. I am good with words, and incredibly well organized!* |

Now go back to the personal statement and email that you read before class. How formal do you think they are, and why?

**Task 4 – Improve poor samples**

The extract below is from an academic essay. Problems with formality are underlined. How can you make the level of formality more appropriate?

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| **Extract 4** – *The research into sustainability in building cities has been going on for several years. How are the results looking? At the moment, we dunno. We’ve got loads of data, but still waiting to check out the details to account for differences in construction methods and stuff affecting the environment, etc. But when that work’s over, the information will be really awesome!* |

The extract below is from a personal statement. How can you make the level of formality more appropriate?

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| **Extract 5 –***What is my most awesome learning experience? Well, it took place during my summer exchange last year. I bumped into this cool guy called Maximus!! Yeah, he’s like his name ‘the greatest, the best, and so on’. He taught me what life is about and how to live life to the max.* |

**Task 6 – Reflection**

* + - 1. Write 3 tips with your partner that you want to keep in mind about formality for your own writing.
      2. Write down any questions you want to ask the teacher about formality and make sure you ask them!

**Task 7 – Improve your portfolio drafts**

Go back to your portfolio drafts, and identify how you could improve them, using learning points from this task.

Show your partner what changes you have made.

1. **Academic verbs**

**Task 1 –** **Read the reference boxes below to learn about academic verbs**

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| **What are academic verbs?** They have precise meaning, and are particularly useful for academic writing.  * The authors say the trend will continue.*  * The authors claim the trend will continue.*  * We looked at the data.*  * We analysed the data.*  * Reagent A was changed for reagent B.*  * Reagent A was substituted with reagent B.*  * The team made it possible to have improvements.*  * The team enabled improvements.*  **Why are academic verbs important?**   1. Academic verbs have very precise meaning. In academic writing, you should aim to communicate ideas and relationships between ideas as precisely as possible. 2. Academic verbs are an appropriate level of formality for academic style. |

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| **Type of relationship** | **Academic verbs** | **Example** |
| cause–effect | cause, create, effect, determine, generate, improve, induce, increase/decrease, produce, provoke, result in, lead to, bring about, give rise to, be responsible for | The spread of fake news on social media has provoked a fierce debate on whether tighter controls on information are required. |
| problem-solution | problems – aggravate, amplify, exacerbate, damage, deteriorate, intensify, heighten, impair, magnify, worsen  solutions – achieve, accomplish, assist, eradicate, mitigate, manage, overcome, resolve, settle, solve, support | The continued use of fossil fuels exacerbates climate change.  Climate change issues can only be mitigated if there are strong government policies. |
| comparison-contrast | compare, conflict, contradict, contrast, deviate, diverge, differ, differentiate, distinguish, modify, transform, vary | Cultural attitudes towards same sex marriage vary greatly across the world. |
| explanation of significance | affirm, assert, clarify, confirm, define, demonstrate, depict, embody, emphasize, explain, expose, highlight, indicate, illustrate, reiterate, signify, underline | Increased automation and use of artificial intelligence in the job market may indicate an imminent change in our economy. |
| Other |  | |

**Task 2 – Identification of academic verbs in a personal statement**

Identify the academic verbs through the extract below. This comes from the personal statement you read before class.

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| As part of my university’s *World Urban Campaign* project, last year I conducted a research project focused on the role of globalization in the development of maths curricula. Basic maths is a globally understood language, and my research highlights that maths is increasingly becoming a tool to understand not just the physical world but also the social world. I explore how globalization has reinforced the traditional approach to maths in schools, and a Western bias in maths curricula around the world. At the same time, localization is also becoming important in these globalized maths curricula. I argue that many maths curricula around the world are no longer culturally, socially or politically neutral. Maths problems and questions in textbooks reflect – and help to create – the social, cultural and political biases that children develop. Finally, my research discusses the implications of globalizing and localizing maths curricula around the world. I had the opportunity to present my research at the university’s *World Urban Campaign* conference. I received positive feedback from the judging panel of STEM professors about my insights into globalized maths education and about my presentation skills. I believe these presentation skills and my passion for education will serve me well in the teaching profession. |

How frequently are academic verbs used in this extract?

**Task 3 – Analysis**

How do you know what are useful verbs for academic contexts and how to use them? Discuss with your partner about whose advice below you agree with, and why?

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| **Mark:**When you look the word up in a dictionary, you know it’s a useful verb when it has only one clear meaning, not hundreds of different meanings like the words “*make*” or “*do*” or “*get*”.  **Mandy:**If possible, try to use verbs that can replace a longer expression with the same meaning, e.g. “*make a good change”* can be replaced by “*improve”*.  **Lana**: Verbs are the main action words in the sentence, so they are especially important for subjects that are communicating clear actions.  **Sean**: Linking words show relationships between ideas. Verbs show what actions you do.  **Janet:**I try to remember that for academic formal writing verbs should be in passive voice.  **Selina**: You don’t need to worry about proofreading your verb tenses. That’s what the teacher is for.  **Jeff**: Long verbs are generally more formal and more precise words.  **Eric:** I know that phrasal verbs are informal, so I always avoid them for formal writing. |

**Task 4 – Practice**

Choose the most appropriate verb from the box to complete the following topic sentences in main body essay paragraphs.

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| *underline– explore – contradict – resolve – eradicate – predict– result in* |

1. Recent evidence and research in food science has unexpectedly (\_\_\_\_\_) established theories on food nutrition and this is leading to new approaches.
2. Ensuring cultural diversity and integration may (\_\_\_\_\_) problems related to racial differences and ease tensions.
3. Rigorously tried and tested vaccines are the only solution that can (\_\_\_\_\_) this deadly virus.
4. The continued rise in property prices has (\_\_\_\_\_) a huge wealth gap between the rich and poor.
5. Serious rainforest fires in the Brazil (\_\_\_\_\_) the importance of protecting our planet from the negative impact of climate change.
6. The underlying reasons for world economic recession need to be (\_\_\_\_\_) in order to prevent another downturn.

As the above are all topic sentences of main body essay paragraphs, what details would you expect to be elaborated in each paragraph?

**Task 5 – Practice**

With your partner, use the notes below to write 3 topic sentences for 3 essays. Choose your academic verb carefully, to show a clear relationship between the key ideas.

1. virtual reality and faster internet connection >> significant changes in video games industry.
2. student survey responses: students like face-to-face classes more than online classes
3. European immigration policies = not succeeded > issue of illegal refugees from other countries = worse

**Task 6 – Reflection**

1. Do you think academic verbs would be useful when writing science reports? How about essays? proposals? emails? cover letters for job applications? presentations? discussions?
2. Write down any questions you want to ask the teacher about academic verbs and make sure you ask them!

**Task 7 – Improve your portfolio drafts**

1. Go back to your portfolio drafts, and identify how you could improve them, using learning points from this task. To do this, identify all the verbs and consider if a more precise academic verb could replace any of them. In particular, check the verbs in your topic sentences.
2. Show your partner what changes you have made.