

**Teaching Stance-taking
in Academic Writing**

**Second Language Writing Interest Section
“Designing academic writing tasks using
corpus findings”**

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Teaching Stance-taking in Academic Writing

Overview of Presentation

- provide background on stance
- link corpus findings and pedagogy
- illustrate challenges for students for
 - limiting and strengthening claims
 - reporting ideas
- demonstrate pedagogical ideas for presentation, practice, and student resources

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Definition of Stance: The personal attitude, feelings, or position that a speaker or writer has about the information in a proposition.

Examples of stance

1. The use of steroids is a controversial issue in major league baseball. (a proposition)
2. The use of steroids **could** be a controversial....
3. There is a **possibility that** the use of steroids...
4. The use of steroids is **liable to** be
5. The use of steroids **seems to** be the most
6. I **suspect that** the use of steroids is....
7. **Not surprisingly**, the use of steroids is
8. It is **clear that** the use of steroids is
9. Sports writers **claim that** the use of steroids is...

Lexico-grammatical features for stance
(Biber et al, 1999)

<u>Grammatical categories</u>	<u>Examples</u>
• modals & semi modals:	<i>might, have to, will</i>
• stance adverbs:	<i>certainly, rightly</i>
• complement clauses controlled by:	
stance verbs:	<i>prove that, seem to</i>
stance adjectives;	<i>aware that, likely to</i>
stance nouns:	<i>the claim that, the failure to, the possibility of</i>

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Lexico-grammatical features for stance
(Biber et al, 1999)

Semantic distinctions

- epistemic (certainty, likelihood)
might, possibly, seems to, likely that, an indication that
- attitude and evaluation
must, fortunately, expect that, reasonable to, the hope that
- speech act/communication (verbs, nouns)
claim that, urge to, proposal that
- style of speaking (comment on communication)
honestly, I swear that

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Findings show complexity of use in academic writing: lexical and grammatical features

Univ. corpus (Biber 2006): textbooks, course packs

- Fewer stance markers in textbooks and course packs compared with spoken registers
- Stance typically expresses:
 - epistemic meanings
 - perspective or point of view
- Wide range of devices used for these meanings
- Textbook language often a simple reporting of information, with no stance.

LGSWE (Biber et al, 1999): academic prose

- Stance markers prevalent in AP--all 3 categories
 - Clause type: extraposed with stance adjective of possibility, necessity, evaluation
It is possible that...
It is likely to
 - Noun + complement (to/that or prep phrase)
the possibility that... the value of going...
- Adverbials:
single word -- *generally, perhaps*
prepositional phrase: *in fact, in some ways*

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Limiting and Strengthening Claims

Making Generalizations Less Certain

Challenges for Students:

- assignment design: prescriptive v.s. inquiry-based
- perceived expectations of the teacher/reader
- fear of diminishing arguments
- strategies for making claims defensible
- knowledge of linguistic tools for stance-taking
- understanding appropriateness: academic writing

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Looking at Stance in Student Writing: Essay on Slanting in the Media

- Main Idea: "Because of professional restrictions, mainstream newspapers and television news inform rather than influence the audiences while online sites and magazine articles influence readers with their biased perception; therefore, the public must be aware of the degree of slanting in each source in order to get accurate information on certain issue."

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Looking at Stance in Student Writing: Essay on Slanting in the Media

- Claim #1: "Newspaper articles serve one purpose and that is to inform readers on news and stories around the nation rather than persuading the audience to appeal to the issues; therefore, slanting doesn't occur in newspaper articles."

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Looking at Stance in Student Writing: Essay on Slanting in the Media

- Claim #2: "Americans read the newspaper daily, but even more people revolve their knowledge and accept information given by public news because of its professionalism and unbiased way of releasing facts."

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Looking at Stance in Student Writing: Essay on Slanting in the Media

- Claim #3: The audience magazine articles attempt to influence happens to be people who have limited knowledge on issue; therefore, writers can include more slanted language because they are aware that those people are easily influenced by others' opinions.

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Looking at Stance in Student Writing:
Essay on Slanting in the Media

- Claim #4: "Online sites, specifically blogs, aren't like other sources, they are written and published by random people who expresses and comments on an issue according to their personal points of view, so there are less limitations while practicing slanted language."

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Making Generalizations Less Certain

Strategy	Expression	Example
Use a modal auxiliary.	may, might, can, could <i>(Use the simple form after the modal.)</i>	
Use an adverb or noun showing probability.	<u>Adverbs</u> : possibly, probably, generally <u>Nouns</u> : a possibility, a probability	

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Making Generalizations Less Certain

Strategy	Expression	Example
Use a frequency adverb.	sometimes, always, often, usually, rarely, hardly ever	
Use a verb that shows uncertainty.	seem, appear, tend, suggest,	
Use a quantity modifier to limit the group.	most, many, some	

**Strategies for Making Generalizations Less Certain:
Steps for Working with Students**

1. Give examples. Ask: which statement is more convincing? Why?
 - Blogs are more biased than newspapers.
 - Blogs are **usually** more biased than **most** newspapers.
2. Build the chart: show strategies and expressions.
3. Ask Ss to find examples from their papers or add expressions to form examples. Discuss.
4. Ask Ss to revise claims using the strategies and expressions. Trade papers and discuss again.

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Making Generalizations Less Certain

Strategy	Expression	Example
Use a modal auxiliary.	may, might, can, could <i>(Use the simple form after the modal.)</i>	...they are aware that those people [are] may be easily influenced...
Use an adverb or noun showing probability.	<u>Adverbs</u> : possibly, probably, generally <u>Nouns</u> : a possibility, a probability	Americans read the newspaper daily, but possibly even more people...

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Making Generalizations Less Certain

Strategy	Expression	Example
Use a frequency adverb.	sometimes, always, often, usually, rarely, hardly ever	Slanting doesn't often occur in newspapers.
Use a verb that shows uncertainty.	seem, appear, tend, suggest,	Newspapers tend to inform rather than influence.
Use a quantity modifier to limit the group.	most, many, some	Many people accept information...

Looking at Stance in Student Writing:
Essay on Slanting in the Media

- Main Idea: "Because of professional restrictions, mainstream newspapers and television news **tend to** inform rather than influence the audiences while online sites and magazine articles **attempt to** influence readers with their biased perception; therefore, the public must be aware of the degree of slanting in each source in order to get accurate information on certain issue."

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Looking at Stance in Student Writing:
Essay on Slanting in the Media

- Claim #1: "Newspaper articles **usually** serve one **main** purpose and that is to inform readers on news and stories around the nation rather than persuading the audience to appeal to the issues; therefore, slanting doesn't **often** occur **as much** in newspaper articles."

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Looking at Stance in Student Writing:
Essay on Slanting in the Media

- Claim #2: "**Many** Americans read the newspaper daily, but **possibly** even more people revolve their knowledge and accept information given by public news because of its professionalism and [un] **less** biased way of releasing facts."

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Looking at Stance in Student Writing:
Essay on Slanting in the Media

- Claim #3: The audience magazine articles **attempt to** influence happens to be people who have limited knowledge on issue; therefore, writers can include more slanted language because they [are] **may be** aware that those people [are] **might be** easily influenced by others' opinions.

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Looking at Stance in Student Writing:
Essay on Slanting in the Media

- Claim #4: "**Generally** online sites, specifically blogs, aren't like other sources; they are written and published by [random] **less professional** people who expresses and comments on an issue according to their personal points of view, so there are [less] **fewer** limitations while practicing slanted language."

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Stance in Reported Speech

Challenges for students:

- when and why to report, how much to report, and how to report (paraphrase v.s. quotation)
- varied syntactic patterns for reporting
- semantic choices for reporting verbs
- verb tenses and mechanics of reporting structures

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Student Writing: Overuse of Direct Quotation

"Before any specific details on the steroids abuse by Major League Baseball players, *The New York Times* focuses on giving a brief introduction to steroids, "Steroids, synthetic hormones that promote retention of protein and the growth of tissue, and their use can help an athlete build bigger muscles far faster than with workouts alone." Then, the article redirects its focus to the history of steroids, "Steroids came to America by 1960. For nearly two decades, starting in the late 1960s...Despite strong testing procedures, steroid-related scandal has continued to follow the Olympic Games, the Tour de France and major professional sports...As a result, most sports have banned steroid use." After history on the issue, *The New York Times* finally go into depth of steroids in Baseball. A clear and unbiased statement, "the Mitchell report described case after case where players were caught with steroids but not pursued by club officials or the commissioner's security office." As you can see, newspaper articles only pursue to release true facts and quote statements to the public without a single piece of opinion and judgment."

Student writing: lack of control of varied syntactic patterns

1. After history on the issue *The New York Times* finally go into depth of steroids in Baseball. A clear and unbiased statement, "the Mitchell report described case after case where players were caught with steroids but not pursued by club officials or the commissioner's security office."
2. According to the *Schoolnet News Network*, a Canadian magazine written by student reporters, had released countless slanted and opinion-filled papers.

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reporting signal	message/idea	pattern
The article tells us in a clear and unbiased manner, According to the Times article,	"The Mitchell report described case after case where players were caught...."	direct quotation of a full clause
According to the article,	the report gives examples of athletes found guilty but not punished.	full clause (paraphrase)
The article points out	that many athletes have been found guilty but not punished.	that clause (paraphrase)

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3. Jason also had no means to inform readers with any facts about steroids but rather, he suggests readers to avoid and prevent steroid uses.

Reporting verb	Pattern	Example
advises, suggests, recommends	+ <u>that</u> clause with simple form	He suggests that readers avoid steroids.
says, states argues	+ <u>that</u> clause	He says that readers should avoid steroids.
cautions, encourages, instructs	+ to + verb	He cautions readers to avoid steroids.

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Working with semantic choices

your position	verbs	grammar, example
Neutral (you neither agree nor disagree)	say, tell, write, state <i>According to X,</i>	He says that... He tells us to... According to her, steroid use is...
Show the author's purpose (your idea of that purpose)	argue, explain propose discuss	She argues that... She proposes to... They discuss how to solve the problem.
Show your view: a. doubt/question b. agree (no doubt)	claim point out, show As+subject + verb	They claim that... The article shows that... As he points out, steroid use is...
c. the author wasn't explicit	imply	The author implies that...

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Steps for working with students on reporting ideas

1. Elicit problems in incorrect citations:
 - The author tells that Barry Bonds confessed to using steroids.
 - According to the author, he says that Barry Bonds confessed to using steroids.
2. Highlight reported ideas in papers.
3. Work with reference charts showing patterns:

reporting signal + message/idea + pattern + tips

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Steps for working with students on reporting ideas

4. Find examples of patterns from papers.
5. Discuss examples showing semantic differences in reporting verbs:
 - The article says that many guilty athletes were not punished.
 - The article claims that many guilty athletes were not punished.
 - The article implies that many guilty athletes were not punished.

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Steps for working with students on reporting ideas

6. Work with reference charts showing frequently used verbs, organized according to semantics.
7. Find examples from papers, focusing on meaning first, then form.
8. Revise reports using appropriate patterns and lexical meanings.
9. Trade papers and discuss.

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