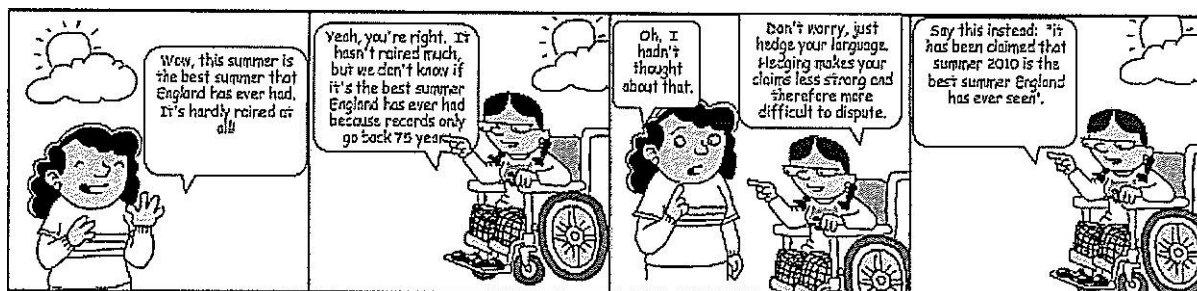# Hedging

It is often believed that academic writing, particularly scientific writing, is factual, simply to convey facts and information. However, it is now recognised that an important feature of academic writing is the concept of cautious language, often called "hedging" or "vague language". In other words, it is necessary to make decisions about your stance on a particular subject, or the strength of the claims you are making. Hedging is absolutely crucial in good academic writing and hedged words are said to account for 1 in every 100 words. Different subjects prefer to do this in different ways.

When writing for academic disciplines it is necessary not only to show that you are able to write in a formal, abstract fashion, but also that you are able to show the extent to which you believe in, or are prepared to stand up for, what you are reporting/claiming.

People use hedged language for several different purposes but perhaps the most ftndamental are the following:
•	to minimise the possibility of another academic/teacher/lecturer/colleague/student opposing the claims you are making
•	to enable you as a writer to be more precise when reporting results, e.g. you can show that something is not 100% proven, but rather that it is indicated and subsequently assumed. • to enable you to execute a politeness strategy in which you are able to acknowledge that perhaps there may be flaws in your claims
•	to conform to a now accepted practice writing style.

Language used in hedging:

1. Introductory verbs:	e.g. seem, tend, look like, appear to be, think, believe, doubt, be sure, indicate, suggest
2. Certain lexical verbs	e.g. believe, assume, suggest
3. Certain modal verbs:	e.g. will, must, would, may, might, could
4. Adverbs of frequency	e.g. often, sometimes, usually

4. Modal adverbs	e.g. certainly, definitely, clearly, probably, possibly, perhaps, conceivably,
5. Modal adjectives	e.g. certain, definite, clear, probable, possible
6. Modal nouns	e.g. assumption, possibility, probability
7. That clauses	e.g. It could be the case that .
	e.g. It might be suggested that .
	e.g. There is every hope that .
8. To-clause + adjective	e.g. It may be possible to obtain .
	e.g. It is important to develop .
	e.g. It is useful to study .

Avoiding over-generalisations.

Compare the two texts below.

Example 1 Chinese are Buddhist. They go to the temple five times a year. Buddhists live simple lives and give money to charity.

Example 2 Many Chinese are Buddhist. Practicing Buddhists go to the temple about five times a year, depending on how devout they are. Generally, Buddhists try to live simple lives and to give money to charity when they can.

The second statement uses qualifiers (such as generally) and quantifiers (such as many) to avoid over-generalisation, állowing for exceptions and variations in degree. Notice how this paints a more nuanced and realistic picture for the reader.