

## Developing language – using modifiers and tentative language

**1. Here is a short case study from Health and Social Care. Read though it and answer the T/F questions. Discuss your answers with your group or partner.**

“Jayne is a “looked after child”. She has been in residential care since she was three years old. Jayne finds it difficult to make friends as she doesn’t always feel confident. She often feels that she is less important than other children who live at home with their parents” (extract from a case study)

*True or False*

- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| 1. Jayne has no friends.   | T/F |
| 2. Jayne never feels confident.  | T/F |
| 3. Being a ‘looked after child’ is the main reason for Jayne’s lack of confidence. | T/F |
| 4. Jayne knows that she is less important than other children.                     | T/F |
| 5. Jayne has been in care for most of her life.                                    | T/F |

**2. Here is a one student’s response to the question about the case study.**

**Question:** Investigate the development in self concept, the influence of personal development and relationships of children.

**Version 1**

Jayne is a looked after child which means she will get positive comments from the residential home people. This will lead her to having a positive self concept. When Jayne is at school she will compare herself with other children who all have parents and think negatively because they’ve got their parents to turn to when things go wrong as she hasn’t got anyone to talk to or turn to. Finding it difficult to make friends will have a negative effect on her self concept because she might think that everyone else can make friends and also have a family. Due to this her self image is negative because she might blame herself for the life she has. This will lead to her having a low self esteem because she hasn’t got any friends, as she feels less confident this will have a negative effect on her self concept because she cannot talk to her peers as she hasn’t got any.

b. How true do you think this paragraph is? Is it an accurate analysis of Jayne’s situation?

Now look at versions 2 and 3: how has the paragraph changed? What is the difference between version 2 and version 3? Which do you think is more convincing? Is either of these an accurate analysis of Jayne's situation?

### Version 2

Jayne is a looked after child which means she **might** get positive comments from the residential home people. This **might** lead her to having a positive self concept. When Jayne is at school she **might compare** herself with other children who all have parents and **might think** negatively because they've got their parents to turn to when things go wrong as she hasn't got anyone to talk to or turn to. Finding it difficult to make friends **might have** a negative effect on her self concept because she **might think** that everyone else can make friends and also have a family. Due to this her self image **might be** negative because she **might blame** herself for the life she has. This **might lead** to her having a low self esteem because she hasn't got any friends, as she feels less confident this **might have** a negative effect on her self concept because she cannot talk to her peers as she hasn't got any.

### Version 3

Jayne is a looked after child which means she is likely to get positive comments from the residential home people. This will probably lead her to having a positive self concept. *However,* when Jayne is at school she **might compare** herself with other children who all have parents and **might think** negatively because they've got their parents to turn to when things go wrong as she hasn't got many people to talk to or turn to. Finding it difficult to make friends **might have** a negative effect on her self concept because it is probable that she thinks that everyone else can make friends and also have a family. Due to this her self image is likely to be negative because she possibly blames herself for the life she has. This **might lead** to her having a low self esteem because she hasn't got many friends, as she feels less confident this **might have** a negative effect on her self concept because she cannot talk much to her peers as she hasn't got many.

## ***Guidelines for use and adaptation - using modifiers and tentative language***

### **Outline and aims**

The goal of this activity is to make students think about how the language they use (particularly the verbs and modifiers) can make their writing more or less convincing and credible.

It has been designed by changing the verbs and modifiers in a piece of original student writing to make them more or less convincing, and comparing these with the original version.

### **How to run the activity in class**

1. Close to the start of the activity you will need to review what a verb is and what it looks like so that students are able to identify all the verb forms in the text definite; later in the activity it is useful to review/introduce the terms 'modality' and 'modify'/'modifiers' and give examples.
2. Work through the activity using the questions and instructions, taking plenty of time for discussion and questions you include. We recommend that, if possible, this T/F questions are removed from the worksheet and presented to the class as a whole on the whiteboard for discussion. This also an option for the questions that follow later in the worksheet.
3. Give students the rewritten paragraph to consider and discuss questions of how persuasive they find it and why
4. Consider the changes between the rewritten and original paragraphs, looking at how the verbs and modifiers are more or less likely to persuade the reader.

### **How to reproduce this activity in your subject:**

1. Choose a example of writing (a paragraph or possibly a sentence) in your subject which persuades or convinces in part by using a range of verbs (might do, definitely does, etc) OR choose an example which fails to so because it is too tentative (too many mights, coulds, perhaps's) or too definite.
2. Rewrite the sentence or the paragraph either by making it entirely definite or entirely tentative, limiting the range of verbs and modifiers you include .
3. Give students the rewritten paragraph to consider and discuss questions of how persuasive they find it and why

4. Consider the changes between the rewritten and original paragraphs, looking at how the verbs and modifiers are more or less likely to persuade the reader.

**To note**

There is no 'rule' for this activity as each subject and each topic will have its own conventions for explanation and persuasion; the key point to highlight here is that using different verbs and modifiers makes a different point to the reader, and that the students can be aware of how they do this in their own writing. The examples provided in this activity are not perfect and students should be encouraged to critique and improve them if time allows.

**Over to you activities**

Encourage students to go through a section of their own writing looking at the verbs and modifiers and to judge whether they are making a persuasive case, being too tentative and so on; students can then change the verbs and modifiers in a short section of their work to see if they can change the tone.

Please adapt these materials to your context