

Developing language – writing convincingly
(Example from undergraduate Cultural Studies)

Read the paragraph below and consider the following questions:

- Which sentences are presented as fact and which as opinion? Is there any difference between them?
- On a scale of 1 – 100% to what extent are you convinced by the writer? To what extent do you agree with the writer? Why? What makes you believe/agree or not?

Version A

The effect of current advertising methods is that the "body is turned into a thing, an object, a package" (Kilbourne). In ads, bodies are separated into individual parts: legs, breasts, thighs, waists; the result is that the body is separated from the woman. It then is acceptable for the woman's body to be scrutinized. Women's bodies receive large amounts of attention and comment and are a "vehicle for the expression of a wide range of statements" (Orbach 13). Judgements are made and opinions are formed about a woman by her appearance. A woman who is judged as overweight is thought of as a woman with little self-control, and from this premise further assumptions are made. This type of generalization occurs on a daily basis, by both men and women, and it affects the way we behave towards one another.

Paragraph from *In Pursuit of Thinness*

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- a. Underline all the verbs in the paragraph – what do you notice about them?
- b. What effect do they have on the reader?

In the paragraph below:

- c. Now underline the verbs again - how have the verbs changed?
- d. What other changes have been made?
- e. What is the effect of all of these changes? Are you any more convinced by the points the writer is trying to make?

Version B

The effect of many current advertising methods is that the "body is turned into a thing, an object, a package" (Kilbourne). In many ads, bodies are separated into individual parts: legs, breasts, thighs, waists; the result is that the body becomes separated from the woman. It then becomes acceptable for the woman's body to be scrutinized. Women's bodies receive large amounts of attention and comment and are a "vehicle for the expression of a wide range of statements" (Orbach 13). Judgements may be made and opinions may be formed about a woman by her appearance alone. A woman who is judged as overweight is often thought of as a woman with little self-control, and from this premise further assumptions may be made. This type of generalization occurs on a daily basis, by both men and women, and it affects the way we behave towards one another.

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**Thinking Writing developing language – writing convincingly
(answer key)**

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Version A

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- c. Now underline the verbs again - how have the verbs changed?
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- e. What is the effect of all of these changes? Are you any more convinced by the points the writer is trying to make?

Version B

The effect of many current advertising methods is that the "body is turned into a thing, an object, a package" (Kilbourne). In **many** ads, bodies are separated into individual parts: legs, breasts, thighs, waists; the result is that the body **becomes separated** from the woman. It then **becomes acceptable** for the woman's body to be scrutinized. Women's bodies receive large amounts of attention and comment and are a "vehicle for the expression of a wide range of statements" (Orbach 13). Judgements **may be made** and opinions **may be formed** about a woman by her appearance alone. A woman who is judged as overweight is often thought of as a woman with little self-control, and from this premise further assumptions **may be made**. This type of generalization occurs on a daily basis, by both men and women, and it affects the way we behave towards one another.

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Over to you!

Guidelines for use and adaptation - writing convincingly

(Please contact Thinking Writing thinkingwriting@qmul.ac.uk with any feedback/comments if you do use or adapt these materials)

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. NOTE – this activity used the same text as in the *Building stronger paragraphs* activity and can act as an immediate extension to that exercise. If you do combine them, it is interesting to compare version B here with version 1 in that activity in terms of how much more/less convincing the argument is, and why this might be.

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 .
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:

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.

1. Rewrite the sentence or the paragraph either by making it entirely definite or entirely tentative, limiting the range of verbs and modifiers you include .
2. Give students the rewritten paragraph to consider and discuss questions of how persuasive they find it and why
3. 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.

Important 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.

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.