

### Part I: Leaving Room for Doubt

As you saw in the introduction to reading academic writing clues, one thing that distinguishes college-level academic writing includes balanced dialogue: writers sometimes **hedge** to leave **room for doubt**, and they sometimes **boost** to leave **no room for doubt**. It's a bit like knowing when to say "maybe," and when to say "definitely": *maybe* leaves room for doubt, while *definitely* does not. Both are useful in different moments. Keeping them in balance helps writers leave some room for reasonable doubt—but not so much doubt that they offer no conclusions.

Some first-year college writers find it hard to believe that academic writers leave room for doubt. Shouldn't a writer show full certainty about their ideas at all times?

In academic writing, the answer is no. Many ideas are too complex for one, definite response, and saying something is *definitely* true when it can be refuted can make an academic writer lose credibility. Doubt is often reasonable, and academic writers are expected to leave room for it. For instance, academic writers leave room for doubt when they have not yet presented evidence, when they make critical or risky claims, or when they cannot prove a claim.

The good news is that there are many ways to leave room for reasonable doubt. For example, notice the clues in green in the following sentences that allow the writers to leave room for doubt.

- Example sentence by first-year student:

(1) Most people would recognize the idea that the twenty-first century is a time period where advancements in technology **seem to be** at their peak.

- Example sentence by published writer Freidrich Hayek:

(2) [I]t is **probably** true that in general the higher the education and intelligence of individuals becomes, the more their views and tastes are differentiated.

**Commented [LA1]:** Rather than writing *advances in technology are at their peak*, this first-year student leaves room for doubt by writing that *advances in technology seem to be at their peak*.

**Commented [LA2]:** Rather than writing that this idea is *true* or *definitely true*, Hayek's use of *probably true* leaves room for doubt.

In these two examples, the writers leave room for doubt by using **hedges** (in the sense of *hedging* one's bets). These include words like *seems* and *probably* that appear in (1) and (2) above, and they include our opening example of *maybe* (versus *definitely*). You already have intuitive knowledge about **hedges**: if a friend asks, "are you sure?", and you are not, you might say something like "**sort of**" to leave room for an alternative answer.

Research shows that experienced academic writers use **hedges** to do the following:

- a. show that a conclusion is based on reasoning rather than certain fact,
- b. tone down risky claims,
- c. acknowledge other research, and
- d. account for a critical reader who may have an opposing view.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, academic writers still need to show some conviction and emphasis—they can't hedge all the time. In these cases, they use the opposite of hedges: **boosters** (in the sense of *boosting* one's claims). **Boosters** can be useful for intensifying a claim and closing dialogue, such as when the writer has

clear evidence to support a claim or when the writer wants to emphasize a well-reasoned conclusion. Again, you probably have intuitive knowledge about boosters: if your friend asks “are you sure?”, and you *are*, you might say something like “**totally**” or “**definitely**” to boost your answer.

In the first example above, for instance, the first-year writer avoids making a definitive claim about advancements in technology being at their peak, since this cannot be proven (a reader could, for instance, object that the early *twentieth* century was a technological peak, when many households gained electricity and automobiles for the first time). The first-year writer uses *seem to be* in order to make the claim while leaving some room for doubt. But if the student had used a booster instead of a hedge, the statement would have left no room for doubt or objection. A boosted example of this sentence (using the booster *clearly*) would be: *Most people would recognize that the twenty-first century is a time period where advancements in technology are clearly at their peak.*

**In students’ words...**

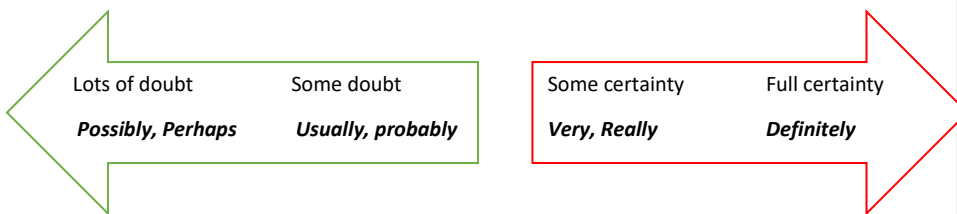
First-year student Hannah Kramer thinks of hedges this way: “Hedges are like when you want to say ‘We are dating, but it is not that serious.’ So on Twitter, you write, “We are dating, **sort of.**” You want to make the claim, but not completely, so you use **sort of** as a hedge.”

**Reviewing the clues**

Clues that leave room for doubt are called **hedges**. They include words like *perhaps, somewhat, seems, might, relatively, possible,* and *likely*. Hedges allow writers to make a statement while opening dialogue, leaving some space for objection or doubt.

Clues that leave no room for doubt are called **boosters**. They include words like *clearly, without a doubt, truly, definitely, must,* and *should*. Boosters allow writers to make a statement that closes dialogue, leaving little room for objection or discussion.

If you are thinking that some hedges and boosters seem weaker and stronger than others, you are right: hedges such as *possibly* leave less room for doubt than *probably*. Recognizing and using these different clues will come with time and practice.



Reading and Writing Like a Writer: Recognizing Possible Doubt

➔ Now you try: Reading

Consider whether writers leave room for doubt.

Consider two introductory paragraphs written by first-year students. The students’ assignment was to read an article and to summarize the article’s ideas, and the article was on the relationship between

people's feelings about issues and people's understanding of those issues.<sup>2</sup> This time, you'll read these passages paying attention to clues related to leaving room for doubt.

As you know, both passages make claims about the relationship between feelings and understanding. But they are different: one of the student passages below leaves no room for doubt, using only boosters. The other leaves some room for doubt by using both hedges as well as boosters.

Read the passages. Then select which one you think leaves room for possible doubt, and which one does not.

- (3) One's beliefs are something that all humans hold dear, but the science behind what someone wants to be true and what is true can be troubling. In her article for *The New Yorker*, Elizabeth Kolbert explores a variety of writings and studies that show people's opinions are not always based on logical reasoning. Through her writing, Kolbert argues that opinions or feelings are very fierce, and sometimes even the obvious truth cannot overpower them.
- (4) In today's day and age, while vast amounts of information are readily available to anyone wishing to seek answers to a problem, people do not feel the need to further research general issues of society and instead receive their information from those they trust, including family members, friends, acquaintances and coworkers. When children are raised with information feeding from these very sources, they do not question the accuracy or request the details pertaining to the information they are receiving. This leads to flawed reasoning and a very shallow level of understanding. However, this does not change the passion with which they share their convictions.

If you choose passage (7) as the one leaving some room for doubt, then you are already picking up on hedges and boosters as important written clues that open and close dialogue. (Don't worry if you were not sure: we will get much more practice looking for these.)

Let's look at the same passages with some annotations. These annotations help show that the first passage both opens and closes dialogue: it shows attention to other sources and to the readers' possible objections. The second passage only closes dialogue, emphasizing only the writer's ideas and leaving no room for doubt. Consider the passages with some annotated clues, and compare these to what you noticed.

- (5) One's beliefs are something that all humans hold dear, but the science behind what someone wants to be true and what is true can be troubling. In her article for *The New Yorker*, Elizabeth Kolbert explores a variety of writings and studies that show people's opinions are not always based on logical reasoning. Through her writing, Kolbert argues that opinions or feelings are very fierce, and sometimes even the obvious truth cannot overpower them.
- (6) In today's day and age, while vast amounts of information are readily available to anyone wishing to seek answers to a problem, people do not feel the need to further research general issues of society and instead receive their information from those they trust, including family members, friends, acquaintances and coworkers. When children are raised with information feeding from these very sources, they do not question the accuracy or

**Commented [LA3]:** The passage opens with a generalization, which are sometimes used in college writing but can be risky.

**Commented [LA4]:** ...but then the passage leaves some room for an alternative conclusion, suggesting that the science behind beliefs can be troubling (rather than that it is troubling or is clearly troubling). Here, the writer leaves open the possibility that the reader may or may not find the science troubling.

**Commented [LA5]:** Next, the writer shows attention to an outside source. The writer contextualizes the source as appearing in the *New Yorker* article. The writer goes on to offer detail about the source, showing attention to Kolbert's ideas.

**Commented [LA6]:** Though the use of *very*, the writer shows certainty about Kolbert's argument about fierce feelings.

**Commented [LA7]:** ...but then the writer leaves some room for possible exceptions, by writing *sometimes*.

**Commented [LA8]:** In this first sentence, the writer makes several generalizations without leaving room for possible exceptions or objections. Readers might, for instance, point out that people without internet access in many parts of the world may not find information readily accessible.

request the details pertaining to the information they are receiving. **This leads to** flawed reasoning and a **very** shallow level of understanding. However, this does not change the passion with which they share their convictions.

Clues leaving room for doubt in passage (9): *can be, sometimes*

Clues leaving no room for doubt in passage (10): *readily, do not, leads to, very*

Experienced writers use both **hedges** and **boosters**: together, these two choices help academic writers balance caution and conviction, leaving room for reasonable doubt where appropriate. This balance helps writers create civility.

→ Now you try: Writing

Pick one of the sentences in example (10). Rewrite the sentence with an additional hedge or two to open up a little space for alternatives or exceptions.

Example: Rewriting of first sentence, with hedges italicized:

Vast information is available today to people with access to the internet, but *some people may* not feel the need to deeply research issues of concern. Instead, they receive their information from those they trust, including family members, friends, acquaintances and coworkers.

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Reading and Writing Like a Writer: Annotating Hedges and Boosters

→ Now you try: Reading

Keeping in mind this information about hedges and boosters, read and annotate the passages below. Circle **hedges** that you think open dialogue with room for doubt, and draw a box around the **boosters** that you think close dialogue, leaving no room for doubt.

For this assignment, first-year students were asked to read an article by Malcolm Gladwell on how to hire and retain teachers, and then write an argumentative essay on whether they agreed or disagreed with Gladwell's proposal.

(7) One educational challenge facing schools today is the selection of teachers. Teachers who have earned a degree in a subject may have learned the subject but not necessarily how to teach the subject to students. Therefore, Malcolm Gladwell's proposal for apprenticing teachers is a necessary solution to resolve the difficulty of hiring effective teachers.

(8) The biggest problem facing schools today is the selection of teachers. No teachers will truly tell if they can teach a subject after earning a degree in it. Therefore, Malcolm Gladwell's proposal for apprenticing teachers clearly solves the difficulty of hiring effective teachers.

Do your annotations show you that passage (11) contains mostly **hedges**, while passage (12) contains more **boosters**? With several hedges, passage (11) mostly opens dialogue, especially at first: it labels teacher selection as **one** educational challenge (versus the only one), and it states that teachers **may** have learned the subject they teach, without arguing that all teachers have learned how to teach it. Then, after two sentences that open dialogue, passage (11) closes dialogue in the final sentence: that Gladwell's proposal is a **necessary** solution to the issue addressed in the first two sentences.

**Commented [LA9]:** In the second and third sentences, the writer again shows full certainty about these statements, including how children will handle information access and the consequences of that access. Readers might object, pointing out that the writer cannot prove that access to much information leads to flawed reasoning and shallow understanding.

Often, experienced writers use hedges and boosters in this way: they hedge some of their claims to leave some space for doubt, and then they strategically boost the claims that they want to emphasize and/or that they have evidence to support. This way, they leave some room for doubt but also show certainty toward their supported conclusions.

In contrast, example (12) closes dialogue throughout the passage, leaving no room for doubt. It states that **the biggest problem** is teacher selection (therefore implying that no other problem is worse) and that **no** teachers can **truly** teach a subject after earning a degree in it. Likewise, passage (12) states that Gladwell's proposal is **clearly** the solution for hiring teachers. Claims like those in passage (12) are frequent in conversation and some informal writing. They are less common in more formal writing like college writing, because they allow no room for doubt.

→ Now you try: Writing

Take a look at the full passage in example (12). Rewrite it in such a way that both opens and closes dialogic space, in other words, in a way that includes both hedges and boosters, rather than only boosters.

Example with both hedges and boosters, with hedges italicized and boosters bolded:

*One* problem facing schools today is the selection of teachers. It *may* be **very** difficult to tell if someone can teach a subject after earning a degree in it. Therefore, Malcolm Gladwell's proposal for apprenticing teachers *could* solve the difficulty of hiring effective teachers.

### Considering Audience and Purpose

While academic writing usually leaves ample room for doubt and exceptions, different audiences and purposes may vary. For instance, if you are writing an editorial for the campus newspaper or a proposal for a new initiative, you might leave more room for doubt when challenging existing approaches but then show more certainty while you are promoting the value of your ideas.

As you read the sample texts in these materials and in your courses, pay attention to how and when writers do and do not leave room for doubt to suit their audience and purpose.

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### Bird's Eye View: Experienced writers leave room for doubt

Research shows that first-year college writers leave little room for doubt, while experienced academic writers tend to leave a good deal of room for doubt. This shows up in the clues in their writing: first-year college student writers tend to use far more **boosters** than **hedges**. In contrast, most experienced academic writers use a balance of **hedges** and **boosters**, or they use more **hedges** than **boosters**.

The word clouds below show the most frequent **boosters** and **hedges** used by first-year writers and experienced academic writers. The bigger the word, the more often it is used. You'll see that first-year writers sometimes use the *same* hedges and boosters, but they use more boosters and fewer hedges.

#### First-Year College Writers



#### Experienced Academic Writers



## Part II: Leaving Room for Exceptions

In the last few pages, you read about one balancing act that is part of creating civility in your writing: leaving room for doubt, at some points, while closing dialogue and leaving no room for doubt at other points. The next few pages address another balancing act of creating civility: leaving room for exceptions while still showing that an idea is important.

In a way, you are probably already very good at picking up on boosting: you can likely tell when your friends are generalizing or exaggerating. You may have also had a teacher tell you to avoid words like *always* and *never* in your writing. Words like *always* and *never* generalize: they cast a very wide scope, shutting down dialogue by leaving no room for exceptions.

In academic writing, you might be tempted to make generalizations when you feel an idea is urgent and widely applicable. Yet just as academic writing demands some room for reasonable doubts and objections, it demands some room for exceptions. Academic writers leave room for exceptions in order to be credible and convincing, such as when making claims that apply across different people and places.

What is the difference between leaving room for **doubt** and leaving room for **exceptions**?

When you leave room for **doubt**, you limit the certainty of your claims—how *true* or proven the claims are. Thus you can convey that something is *possibly* true by using a hedge, or that something is *definitely* true by using a booster.

Leaving room for **exceptions** has to do with the scope of your claims—how *applicable* the claims are, or to what degree that can be applied to different circumstances. Thus you can convey that something is *not always* the case or that it is *always* the case. These examples have to do with scope, or whether or not there are exceptions. You can show the scope of your claims by limiting them to particular examples, such as *in this case*, or *in this example*. Or, you can generalize the scope of claims with other phrases, such as *all over the world*, or *people today*. As you can see, clues related to doubt and exceptions overlap: you could say that an example like *not always* leaves room for doubt as well as exceptions. More important than telling the difference between *doubt* and *exceptions* is recognizing that part of crafting civility means leaving room for both.

We can get better at this by recognizing and using clues like **hedges**, **boosters**, and scope markers, so let's return to some earlier examples. In these examples, scope markers are underlined, **hedges** appear in green, and **boosters** appear in red. You'll see that these all overlap.

- Example sentence by a first-year student:

(1) **Most people** would recognize the idea that the twenty-first century is a time period where advancements in technology **seem to be** at their peak.

- Example sentence by a published writer, Freidrich Hayek:

(2) [I]t is **probably** true that in general the higher the education and intelligence of individuals becomes, the more their views and tastes are differentiated.

**Commented [LA10]:** **Most people** versus *all people* leaves some room for exceptions.

**Commented [LA11]:** the use of “advances in technology **seem to be**” (versus *advances in technology are*) leaves room for doubt

**Commented [LA12]:** the use of *probably true* leaves room for doubt.

**Commented [LA13]:** Rather than writing that this idea is true all the time, Hayek's use of *in general* leaves room for exceptions.

In the first example, the first-year writer avoids generalizing about all people by writing *most people*. This is a kind of hedged generalization—the writer still emphasizes a wide scope but uses *most people* instead of *people*. Also in the first example, the writer refers to the twentieth-century, indicating a long span of years related to the scope of the claim.

In the second example, the writer is very careful to avoid claiming that education and intelligence levels lead to different tasks for all human beings, using *probably* and *in general* to hedge the claim.

Academic writers rarely make generalizations without hedges because almost any statement referring to many people or places will have exceptions. But academic writers do sometimes use generalizations. Two reasons they do so include:

- A. To emphasize the wide applicability of a claim (Example: *Every human deserves basic rights.*)
- B. To project shared ideas (Example: *We all need to understand how the climate is changing.*)<sup>iii</sup>

#### Reviewing the clues

- Clues like hedged generalizations show a wide scope without generalizing, such as *almost everyone*, *many people*, *much/ some of the time*, *almost always*, and *almost never*. These allow writers to emphasize the wide applicability of a statement while still leaving some room for exceptions.
- Clues that generalize or show wide applicability of claims include words and phrases such as *always*, *never*, *people today*, *in this day and age*, *since the beginning of time*, *American people*, *Chinese people*, etc. These allow writers to make generalizations with no room for exceptions.
- Clues that help specify and narrow the scope for claims include phrases such as *in this case*, *in this scenario*, *in this study*, *in this decade*, and *in rare circumstances*. These allow writers to identify the precise scope of their claims.

#### Considering Audience and Purpose

While academic writing usually avoids generalizations, different audiences and purposes may vary. For instance, examples (A) and (B) are claims that writers have made purposefully to apply widely. In cases like this in which there is an intentional argument that applies widely (as in A) or a concern that affects large groups of people (as in B), it can be appropriate to generalize.

As you read the example texts in these materials and in your courses, pay attention to how writers do and do not leave room for exceptions to suit their audience and purpose. You might notice, for example, that it is very common to generalize in spoken conversation and in social media, even as it is uncommon to do so in academic writing.

#### Reading and Writing Like a Writer: Recognizing Generalizations

##### → Now you try: Reading

Consider whether writers leave room for exceptions. The following introductory paragraphs were written by first-year college students. Their assignment was to read an article on cheating in high schools and then write an essay in which they developed an argument on what students cheat.<sup>iv</sup>



Both of the passages below contain at least one statement that does not leave room for exceptions. But one of the passages generalizes more than the other. Read the passages and note which one you believe leaves no room for exceptions.

- (1) Since the dawn of the "information age" many different websites have competed for the top spot on the Internet. These sites include Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, and many others. However, the most dominant website by far is the search engine known as Google. Google has without question been a cesspool of immediate information. Anything in history, science, math, or many other subjects is readily available with few keystrokes and the click of a mouse.<sup>v</sup>
- (2) School is the most stressful aspect of a young adult's life. Everyone's future is mainly dependent on how well they do in school. The unemployment rate for students with a bachelor degree is 3.9% and those with only a high school diploma or less have an unemployment rate of 11.6% (npr.org). Doing well in school is a necessary for every child nowadays. Unfortunately not everyone is not intellectually equal, some people are smarter than others. This causes great competition between students for the better grades and pushes some students to a point of desperation, cheating.<sup>vi</sup>

If you thought that the second passage leaves no room for exceptions, then you are already picking up on the clues addressed above, **generalizations**, **qualified generalizations**, and **other scope markers**. These clues helps writers show the scope for their ideas.

Let's look at the same passages with some annotations. Both passages generalize, but the first passage leaves no room for exceptions.

- (3) Since the dawn of the "information age" many different websites have competed for the top spot on the Internet. These sites include Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, and many others. However, the most dominant website by far is the search engine known as Google. Google has without question been a cesspool of immediate information. Anything in history, science, math, or many other subjects is readily available with few keystrokes and the click of a mouse.
- (4) School is the most stressful aspect of a young adult's life. Everyone's future is mainly dependent on how well they do in school. The unemployment rate for students with a bachelor degree is 3.9% and those with only a high school diploma or less have an unemployment rate of 11.6% (npr.org). Doing well in school is a necessity for every child nowadays. Unfortunately not everyone is not intellectually equal, some people are smarter than others. This causes great competition between students for the better grades and pushes some students to a point of desperation, cheating.

**Commented [LA14]:** This seems like a generalization, but a closer look shows that it narrows the scope of the claim to a particular time—the "information age" (versus *the dawn of time*). Also, rather than *all websites*, the writer emphasizes *many websites*. The second sentence then specifies examples of these websites, further narrowing the scope of the writer's claims.

**Commented [LA15]:** This claim is the generalization: it leaves no room for exception to Google's preeminence. When you make claims like this, you'll want to be sure of them. Notice as well the **boosters** *without question* and *readily*, which show full certainty and leave no room for doubt.

**Commented [LA16]:** This passage opens with a generalization, leaving no room for exceptions. A critical reader might question whether the scope of this claim is credible. They might question, for instance, whether a young adult who is starving or in a violent home or country would agree. The second sentence opens with a claim about *everyone's future* though it also hedges slightly by suggesting it is *mainly dependent* (versus *fully dependent*) on how they do in school.

**Commented [LA17]:** This is another generalization, leaving no exceptions to the claim that every child today must do well in school.

**Commented [LA18]:** Here the writer implies a cause-effect relationship with no exceptions.

**Commented [LA19]:** Here the writer hedges.

Generalizations in passage (15):  
*However, the most dominant website...is Google.*  
 Generalizations in passage (16):  
*School is the most stressful aspect of a young adult's life.*  
*Doing well in school is a necessity for every child nowadays.*

### Considering Peer Review

Given the expectation that academic writers will leave some room for exceptions, how might you encourage the student revise passage (16)?

#### → Now you try: Writing

Re-read the final sentence in example (3) above. Rewrite it so that it makes a similar claim but does not depend on generalizations to do so.

Example:

A great deal of information in history, science, math, and many other subjects is available with a few keystrokes and the click of a mouse.

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### Reading and Writing Like a Writer: Annotating Generalizations

#### → Now you try: Reading

Keeping in mind this information about generalizations, annotate the passages below. Put a box around **full generalizations**, and circle words that **narrow scope** and/ or that leave some room for doubt or exceptions. For instance, you would put a circle around a phrase like *almost everyone* because it leaves room for exceptions, and you would circle a phrase like *during the 1990s* because it narrows the scope. You would put a box around *everyone* (without *almost*), because it generalizes.

In this assignment, first-year composition students were asked to pick a controversial topic they cared about. Then they were asked to research common views on the topic and write an essay in which they presented others' views and their view on the issue.

- (5) Over the past decade, there has been increased debate over the existence of human-caused climate change. As defined by the Met office, climate change is large-scale, long-term shift in the weather patterns or average (Met office). Many persons argue that climate change does not exist or that it is not caused by human activity. However, there is a general consensus within the scientific community that climate change exists and that it is caused by human activity. According to NASA, studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals show that 97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate-warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human (NASA).<sup>vii</sup>
- (6) The debate over gun control has been going on as long as anyone can remember, with both sides arguing and nothing being done. Most gun-control supporters say that the amount of gun violence in recent years has warranted increased regulations on guns, targeting illegal firearm trafficking and implementing background checks among other things (Karimu 400). Anti-gun control supporters oppose this of course, and argue that the amount of gun violence has no correlation with the number of gun owners in the United States (Kates and Mauser 693). The discussion between these two sides has not led to any significant changes in gun violence, prompting President Obama to unveil his own pro gun-control strategies, which will likely face a large amount of opposition from Congress. The solution to this problem would have to be multiple laws that both sides can agree on. Both sides must find common ground to reduce violence and deaths related to guns.<sup>viii</sup>

Do your annotations show that both passages generalize as well as leave room for exceptions?

Here are some related clues. In passage (17), the writer **narrows the scope** of the claims with the phrase *over the past decade*. Then, the phrase *many persons* and *general consensus* suggest wide applicability but avoid full generalizations. In the final sentence, the writer uses the booster *extremely likely* to boost a claim about climate-warming trends.

In passage (18) the writer generalizes several times in the first sentence. First, the writer generalizes across time, suggesting that the gun control debate has been going on *as long as anyone can remember*, with *nothing* being done. The writer makes a similar claim later in the paragraph by suggesting that the discussion *has not led to any significant changes*, leaving no room for exception. But the writer also **narrows the scope** of one claim and also **hedges** a claim. First, the writer avoids a generalization about all gun-control supporters by using the phrase *most gun-control supporters*, and later, the writer suggests that Obama's gun-control strategies will *likely* face opposition, leaving some room for doubt since the writer cannot be sure. (In the final sentences, the writer leaves no room for doubt, by suggesting that the solution *would have to be* laws both sides can agree on, since both sides *must* find common ground.)

→ Now you try: Writing

Try avoiding generalizations in your own writing, even on a topic you care about. Below, write 2-3 sentences expressing a view that is important to you, and try to show emphasis without generalizing.

Example:

The health of the earth's oceans is of crucial importance today. As ocean temperatures rise, the melting of icebergs and the depletion of reef and other ocean life has caused a number of issues that seem impossible to reverse.

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### Bird's Eye View: Experienced writers leave room for exceptions

Research shows that first-year college writers use generalizations regularly, while experienced academic writers tend to avoid generalizations or to use hedged generalizations.

The visuals below show use of generalizations by writers at two levels. On the left, you'll see the most frequent generalizations used by first-year writers. On the right, you'll see the most frequent generalizations used by more experienced writers: experienced student writers in their senior year of college or early graduate school, and published academic writers. Both experienced student writers and published academic writers use them similar amounts, which is why they are represented in the same visual. The bigger the word, the more often it is used. As you can see by the size of the words, first-year writers make generalizations almost twice as often as more experienced academic writers.



First-Year Writing



Experienced Writing

**Hedging and Boosting Sum Up: Leaving Room for Doubt and Exceptions**

Academic writers often need to leave room for doubt and exceptions to be credible and convincing, such as when there is no way to prove a claim, or when they make claims that apply across time or groups of people. Academic writers also show certainty and emphasis for important and supported claims. Academic writers therefore tend to balance these different choices: they need to balance opening dialogue to leave room for doubt and exceptions with closing dialogue to leave no room for doubt or exceptions.

As you practice your college writing habits, pay attention to how often you open and close dialogue. Try to open dialogue, such as with hedges, when making generalized, critical, or unproven claims, and consider closing dialogue, such as with boosters, when you have support and want to emphasize a statement. Look for additional places that you can specify the scope of your claims according to when it applies, such as when it applies to a particular place, example, or time period.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Aull, "Civil Style"; Barton; Hyland *Metadiscourse : Exploring Interaction in Writing*)

<sup>2</sup> The full writing task for first-year passages (1) and (2) follows:

In [Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds](#), Elizabeth Kolbert reviews research focused on whether there is a connection between strong feelings about issues and deep understanding about those issues. After reading [Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds](#), write an essay in which you analyze and explain what you see as Kolbert's main argument about the relation between strong feelings and deep understanding about issues. Write an 800-1000 word academic essay in response to the prompt that includes the following:

1. Audience: write for an academic audience who may or may not have read Kolbert's article.
2. Focus: develop your essay around a clear, thoughtful, and compelling explanation of the key ideas in Kolbert's text.
3. Evidence: support your analysis with well-chosen evidence from Kolbert's article.
4. Structure: organize your essay in a way that supports and clarifies your key ideas.

<sup>iii</sup> For more details on how and when academic writers generalize, see: Aull, L. L., Bandarage, D., & Miller, M. R. (2017). Generality in student and expert epistemic stance: A corpus analysis of first-year, upper-level, and published academic writing. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 26, 29-41.  
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2017.01.005>

<sup>iv</sup> Full task:

Read the article "[Cheating Upwards](#)" by Robert Kolker. Then write a 1000-1200 word essay in response to the following prompt: In his 2012 article "Cheating Upwards," Robert Kolker offers several views on why cheating appears to be on the rise in highly competitive U.S. educational institutions. Read this article carefully and pay close attention to the various perspectives it presents on why cheating has become so prevalent. Drawing on one or more of these perspectives, write an essay in which you take a position on why students cheat. You may supplement your argument with evidence from your own experience and/or other texts you may have read. Be sure to indicate the source for any textual evidence, aside from this article, that you use.

<sup>v</sup> Full text

Since the dawn of the "information age" many different websites have competed for the top spot on the Internet. These sites include Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, and many others. However, the most dominant website by far is the search engine known as Google. Google has without question been a cesspool of immediate information. Anything in history, science, math, or many other subjects is readily available with few keystrokes and the click of a mouse. However, like all things on the Internet, a controversy has arisen. An argument has sprung up, making the claim that Google is in fact making us dumb, rather than smart. When I first heard this, I was somewhat skeptical. How could the source of endless information possibly making us dumb? However after I did some research, I saw the other side of the argument.

I initially thought that there was no possible way that an endless source of information could in any way be making people dumb. However, through the power of research I discovered the other side to this argument. The more people look up on Google, the less knowledge they retain. There is a perfect example of this in my life. Although it is with "autocorrect" and not Google, the idea is still the same. On my iPhone, there is a software called "autocorrect", which has the purpose of preventing typos and misspelled words. Although it can sometimes lead to typos of its own, autocorrect is for the most part a very useful part of my life. The downside to this, however, is that for all the harder words to spell, the user never has to spell it correctly to get the word out because it will be automatically corrected into the word that they were trying to spell. For example, I could go my entire life spelling "friend" "f-r-e-i-n-d", and I would never know that it is the incorrect way of spelling it because autocorrect would correct it automatically, as the name suggests. I suppose that a child in today's world, who grows up with apple devices and autocorrect, would learn even less, because their base knowledge would be autocorrect rather than school. That was just an assumption, but it is a possibility. This autocorrect situation can also be related to the

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question of Google making us dumber. I will speak from personal experience when I say that countless amounts of arguments have been settled over a quick Google search. This may not seem like a big deal, which can be seen as a part of the problem. With so many people searching quick facts so many times, these facts are often forgotten days or sometimes even hours after the time they were searched, instead of actually learning the content. From what I have gathered while researching this topic, this argument seems to have the most sustenance (to add to the argument even more I had to look up how to spell sustenance). However, despite all of this, I still refuse to believe that Google as a whole is making us dumber.

An argument has been made that the website Google is making us dumber as a whole. This argument stems from the fact that information is not often retained when using Google, but I have to respectfully disagree. When I spend time on the Internet, a good portion of it is wasting time on sites like Twitter or Instagram. However, I have learned so much more from the Internet in the past four years than people could have dreamed 20 somewhat years ago. This truly is the age of information. The argument that no one actually retains information from Google is only valid when people are not attempting to learn the information completely. I will not deny that yes, this has happened to me countless times. There is a great number of things that I have looked up on Google that I do not remember today. However, whenever I went into Google with the intention to learn for my own sake, I came out of the experience with more knowledge than before. One of my teachers always said that this generation is so much smarter than he will ever be, and I think he said that for a couple reasons. The first one being that he is not very smart (a joke), but the real reason is that we have so much information at our fingertips there is no way that anyone who uses Google could become dumber. It is called the "age of information" for a reason, and I honestly believe that the website Google makes anyone who uses it smarter.

The debate that Google makes its users dumb is a very good argument, and one that I can clearly see both sides too. However, based on research and personal experience, I believe that Google as a whole is making us smarter, not dumber.

<sup>vi</sup> Full text

School is the most stressful aspect of a young adult's life. Everyone's future is mainly dependent on how well they do in school. The unemployment rate for students with a bachelor degree is 3.9% and those with only a high school diploma or less have an unemployment rate of 11.6% (npr.org). Doing well in school is a necessary for every child nowadays. Unfortunately not everyone is not intellectually equal, some people are smarter than others. This causes great competition between students for the better grades and pushes some students to a point of desperation, cheating. The reason for cheating can be this pressure but on by the individual average student, difficulty of peers and school, their parents, or it could be a smart child who feels sympathy for those who need help to get into better schools.

As the population keeps rising and rising colleges have to be more and more selective. This creates a lot of competition among high school students. In the end the smart kids will receive the better grades and GPA's and leave the not as smart kids in the dust in this part of a college application. The smart kids will score better on the standardized tests as well. The average student needs to make his grades and scores look better, and the easiest way to do this is through cheating. So much of what college's look at is grades, "The prime offender, they say, is the increased emphasis on testing. Success in school today depends not just on the SAT, but on a raft of federal and state standardized exams, often starting as early as fourth grade and continuing throughout high school." (Cheating Upwards, 5) Students are aware that their future is dependent on college "most kids believe that in an increasingly globalized, competitive world, college, more than ever, determines success." (Cheating Upwards, 5) So the students take away that they get a good score on a test (by any means) to have a bright future. The students put in this instance cheat for themselves and their future.

Smart kids cheat as well, why? The reason is because of the newly formed competition. There are schools that only accept very smart students so now they have to compete against people with similar intelligence. These kids start to receive poor grades for the first time; they get nervous and scared and often see cheating as the answer. The students were the smartest at their old school and love being the smartest one, and they get satisfaction from it. "Kids here know that the difference between a 96 and a 97 on one test isn't going to make any difference in the future," says Edith Villavicencio, a Stuyvesant senior. But they feel as if they need the extra one point over a friend, just because it's possible and provides a little thrill." (Cheating Upwards, 6) Most students would be willing to cheat in order to get better grades than their classmates. These smart kids also cheat because the classes can be so demanding. Most of the time students will band together in order to all receive a good grade. The author of the article also seemed to pick up on this "The work can be so demanding at top schools that students sometimes justify cheating as an act of survival." (Cheating Upwards, 6) I know this from personal experience as well. In my AP 13

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Physics class, the brightest students all spent hours every weekend working on a lab report. The labs were the only way we could gain points other than the test, so to save time we would all just collaborate our answers and work on our Facebook page. Also in places of higher learning if everyone had a specific specialty then each student would do work for their subject and then share with the rest. Nayeem admitted this, he told the press that physics was his area of expertise, so he did the work for everyone and in turn received work in Spanish and History (his weaker subjects). So there are lots of reasons for smart students to cheat on exams and in a class.

Another reason why students see the need to cheat is because of their parents. Parents put a lot of pressure on their kids to do well in school. Today there are many outside courses and camp that are meant to improve a child's intellectual ability. One of my friends was telling me that over the summer he had to drive one hour to a math camp from 8-4 each day. Having put so much time and money into his education they expect good results. They tell him that he has to get good math grades. Most of families who pressure their kids, in my experience, tend to be Asian families. I went to Cranbrook Kingswood, which had a lot of Asian students because of the boarding option and most of my friends were Asian. Whenever we went out to eat or just hang out most of them responded that they couldn't because they had to study or else their parents would get mad. One of my teammates at school has almost no social interaction and all of his attention goes to school and swimming. It is hard to believe that only he just put all of this pressure on him, his parents probably influenced him this way. An article from the global post states "if you [parents] spend too much time pressuring him to perform well in school and sports, he might not get adequate sleep, which could affect his mood, his learning comprehension and his attitude. Additionally, he might feel pressured to cheat, whether on a test at school." (Global Post) So a lot of pressure does lead to cheating and clearly parents put a lot of pressure on their kids.

The last of the reasons why students would cheat is out of sympathy for fellow classmates. While in school students make close friends. If these friends need help students do not believe they are cheating, they see themselves as helping. In the article it is clear that Nayeem feels this way "Nayeem says he feels bad about what may happen to the kids who are being punished. 'I don't want them to go to lousy colleges because of this.' But he insists his friends aren't upset with him. 'I've done a lot for these people, so much so that they know I have got good intentions.'" (Cheating Upwards, 10)

Cheating is caused by the pressure school creates for everyone's future. Poor students need better grades for school, which causes them to cheat. The emphasis of tests only makes stresses the pressure kids put on themselves. Good students also are under lots of pressure at school whether it is they set a standard too high for them to reach or if the curriculum of the school is unbearable. Parents also tell their kids how important tests are and raise them to believe that a good grade is all that matters. Sympathy for fellow classmates also leads to friends cheating for each other. This is all very unfortunate, if school wasn't focused on scores and tests then maybe students would feel less pressure.

#### vii Full text

Over the past decade, there has been increased debate on the existence of human-caused climate change. As defined by the Met office, climate change is large-scale, long-term shift in the weather patterns or average (Met office). Many persons argue that climate change does not exist or that it is not caused by human activity. However, there is a general consensus within the scientific community that climate change exists and that it is caused by human activity. According to NASA, studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals show that 97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate- warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human (NASA).

Climate change will have several detrimental effects including rising sea levels, increased hurricane intensity and rising temperatures among other effects (Boorse and Wright 462). The city of Tampa, home to the University of South Florida, is located in a low lying coastal area prone to hurricanes, making it very susceptible to the impacts of climate change. In order to help combat this problem and potentially save our school and our town, we will need to make slight changes to the way we live. I am therefore calling on the students of the University of South Florida to help combat climate change by not wasting electricity and by driving less.

Although several natural factors can affect the climate for example the sun, the orbit and volcanic eruptions, these factors by themselves are not enough to explain the current trends in global warming and climate change. As expressed in Dire Predictions: Understanding Climate Change The Visual Guide to the findings of the

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IPCC, various natural factors can influence climate, only the increase in greenhouse gas concentrations linked to human activity, principally the burning of fossil fuels, can explain recent patterns of global (Kump and Mann 16). The main cause of climate change can therefore be attributed to the burning of fossil fuels. Many persons who like to argue that climate change is not caused by the burning of fossil fuels often draw their evidence from unreliable sources, which are funded by fossil fuel industries who would have the most to lose from the conclusion that climate change is caused by the burning of fossil fuels. For example, the Non-governmental International Panel on Climate Change (NIPCC) which works to prove that human-caused climate change is a hoax is run by the Heartland Institute, which is funded by sources such as ExxonMobil and the American Petroleum Institute that have reason to prove that human-caused climate change does not exist (Climate Science and Policy Watch).

Climate change will have several detrimental effects on the environment. A report done by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change explains that increased temperatures are causing thermal expansion of the ocean. This, coupled with melting ice caps, is resulting in sea level rise. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sea level rose by 0.17 meters and by 2100 sea levels are expected to rise by between 0.18 and 0.59 meters. Global warming will also result in an increase in the type, frequency, and intensity of hurricanes, typhoons, droughts, floods, and heavy rain events. The report goes on to say that climate change will have wide reaching effects on water resources, agriculture and food security, human health, 3 terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity, and coastal zones Change: Impacts, vulnerabilities and adaptations in developing 8). As students of the University of South Florida in Tampa, we should be very concerned about the impacts of climate change as we are located in an area that is very susceptible to its impacts. The city of Tampa is located in a low lying coastal area on the south western side of Florida which is susceptible to sea level rise. Dire Predictions: Understanding Climate Change The Visual Guide to the findings of the IPCC postulates that, Florida would be submerged if sea levels were to rise between 4m (13.1 ft) and 8m (Kump and Mann 122). Tampa is also located in an area prone to hurricanes from the Atlantic.

As stated in Environmental Science: Toward a sustainable future, destructive energy of Atlantic hurricanes has increased in recent decades and is projected to increase further in this (Boorse and Wright 462). We should therefore be very concerned about damage from hurricanes as well as damage from sea level rise. Florida may also be affected by the destruction of ecosystems. Destruction of coastal ecosystems can negatively affect Floridians as much of the economy is dependent on these ecosystems for tourism and the fishing industry. A report done for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection states that the state of Florida is highly dependent on the coast for several economic and social benefits. It says that coastal ecosystems in Florida support a variety of sport and commercial fisheries which contribute greatly to the economy. It also says that the marine environments attract millions of visitors to the state every year (D.D. MacDonald 6). In order to help combat climate change and potentially save our school and city, I am calling on the students at the University of South Florida to make small changes to their daily actions. Based on a study done by the University of South Florida, USF produced a net amount of 4 189,234.7 metric tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions from 2014 to 2015. Several factors contributed to this. Two major factors included purchased electricity and commuting by USF students. According to the study USF gets its electricity from TECO that has a general mix of 55% coal, 45% natural gas and less than 1% of other (University of South Florida Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory FY 2014-2015 8-11). The burning of fossil fuels such as coal helps contribute to global warming. In order to help reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, I am urging students not to waste electricity. We should turn off lights and electrical appliances when not in use. The other major contributor is commuting. The study explains that approximately 83% of students drive alone (University of South Florida Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory FY 2014-2015 9). Exhaust from cars also contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and global warming. In order to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, I am also urging students to drive less. Persons should consider carpooling with others or taking public transportation such as the USF bull runner. USF has a sharable bike program students can use and people may try to walk more when on campus. These efforts may seem small but USF has a population of approximately 40,000 students. If each and every student on campus carried out these actions we could go a very long way in reducing15



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carbon footprint, helping to curb climate change and potentially saving our school and town. Climate change does exist and is being caused by human actions, primarily the burning of fossil fuels. If nothing is done to curb the issue, climate change will have detrimental effects on the environment for example rising sea levels, increase in the intensity of hurricanes and destruction of natural ecosystems among other problems. As members of the USF community we should be especially concerned about climate change as we are in an area highly susceptible to its impacts. In order to help curb climate change and potentially save our school and city we can drive \_ 5 less and not waste electricity. If all 40,000 USF students partake in these actions we can go a long way in reducing carbon footprint and helping to curb climate change. \_ 6 Works Cited Approach to the Assessment of Sediment Quality in Florida Coastal Waters: Volume 1 Development and Evaluation of Sediment Quality Assessment Guidelines. Ladysmith: MacDonald Environmental Sciences Ltd, 1994. Web. Boorse, Dorothy and Richard Wright. Environmental Science: Toward a sustainable future. Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2005. Print. Climate Change: Impacts, vulnerabilities and adaptations in developing countries. Bonn: UNFCCC, 2007. Web. Institute and its NIPCC report fail the credibility Climate Science and Policy Watch. Government Accountability Project, 9 September 2013. Web. 28 February 2016. Kump, Lee, and Michael Mann. Dire Predictions: Understanding Climate Change - the visual guide to the findings of the IPCC. New York: Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2015. Print. Consensus: Climate is Global Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet. National Aeronautics and Space Administration, n.d. Web. 16 April 2016. University of South Florida Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory FY 2014-2015. Tampa: University of South Florida Office of Sustainability, 2015. Web. is Climate Met Office. Met Office, 2 December 2015. Web. 16 April 2016.

viii Full text

The debate on gun control has been going on as long as anyone can remember, with both sides arguing and nothing being done. The gun-control supporters say that the amount of gun violence in recent years has warranted increased regulations on guns, targeting illegal firearm trafficking and implementing background checks among other things (Karimu 400). Anti gun control supporters oppose this of course, and argue that the amount of gun violence has no correlation with the number of gun owners in the United States (Kates and Mauser 693). The discussion between these two sides has not led to any significant changes in gun violence, prompting President Obama to unveil his own pro gun-control strategies, which will likely face a large amount of opposition from Congress. The solution to this problem would have to be multiple laws that both sides can agree on. Both sides must find common ground to reduce violence and deaths related to guns. Despite the argument that gun control does nothing to stop violence, I believe that the introduction of gun-damage liability laws and the restriction of lethal ammunition would help lower the amount of deaths caused by gun violence in the United States.

The first solution that I would propose would be the restriction of lethal ammunition. This means that civilians would not legally be permitted to buy this type of ammunition. Some factories will be required to stop the production of lethal ammunition and gun stores will have to stop selling them. Instead, lethal ammunition would be replaced with nonlethal ammunition such as rubber bullets. If this happens, it would be very difficult and presumably very expensive for criminals to get their hands on dangerous types of ammunition. As a result of this, guns will slowly stop becoming the preferred weapon for mass murder, reducing the amount of gun deaths. Erwin Chemerinsky states in his article that on the anti gun control side, ownership is seen as a fundamental personal and that for the pro gun control side, control is an essential step towards protecting public (485). By restricting lethal ammunition and promoting the use of nonlethal ammunition, both sides get what they want to a certain extent. Anti gun control supporters get to keep their guns, albeit having to use rubber bullets and pro gun control supporters will get legislation that improves safety. This solution can appease both sides, which increases the chance of laws being enacted to support the restriction of lethal ammunition. However, nonlethal ammunition can still kill people, which means that further action should be taken to lessen the amount of deaths resulting from gun violence.

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The second solution that I propose is a law ensures that gun owners are liable for the damage that their guns may cause due to negligence, misuse and lending their guns to others. For example, if a gun is used, by them, or another person to kill the parents of a child, the owner of the gun will have to be financially responsible for the child and the damage that their weapon has done. Because of this, I believe that gun owners will be more responsible for the guns that they own and more careful with their guns which would decrease the likelihood of accidents and murders. Furthermore, because of the risks of owning guns due to gun liability laws, people will be less inclined to own them because of the financial risks. Hugh LaFollete, a scholar and supporter of this solution, says that, make this option more palatable, we could let gun owners purchase liability insurance to cover potential losses. We might even require them to purchase (281). Having people purchase insurance would mean that it is more likely for victims to be compensated for the damage they suffer. This solution may be difficult to enact; however, it is possible that both sides would agree to this as well as it does not stop people from buying guns but makes it more difficult to own them. Of course, having any amount of gun-control will tend to see opposition.

The main argument against gun control is that it does absolutely nothing to stop murder and violence. Statistics show that the amount of homicides seem to be lower in countries with a higher density of gun ownership (Kates and Mauser 652). This may look like proof that more guns reduce crime; however, it does not take into account any social factors. The United States, a country with arguably the population with the highest density of gun ownership, has a homicide rate that is largely due to firearm assaults (Leach-Kemon). This means that even though a correlation is perceived by Kates and Mauser to be for the anti gun control side, this is not the case. But even if more guns meant less violence in some countries, it does not mean that this is not necessarily the case for the United States. The statistics show that there is a problem with gun homicides in the United States, and ignoring the problem will not help (Leach- Kemon).

In conclusion, gun violence is a problem that everyone in the United States must acknowledge and work towards finding a solution for. Both sides of the argument will have to set aside their differences and work together; only then, will changes occur. If not, then this problem will continue to perpetuate indefinitely and the debate for gun control will remain unfinished. However, having any sort of gun control will be difficult due to norms of sovereignty, self-defense, and self- (Grillot 543). This means, that as long as people think of guns as symbols of freedom and the first choice for self defense, it will be difficult to enact any laws that support pro gun-control ideals. \_ 4 Works Cited Chemerinsky, Erwin. the Gun Control Debate in Social Fordham Law Review 73.2 (2004): 477-85. Fordham. Web. 25 Jan. 2016. Grillot, Suzette R. Global Gun Control: Examining the Consequences of Competing International Global Governance 17.4 (2011): 529-55. Business Source Premier. Web. 25 Jan. 2016. Karimu, Olusola O. The Two Sides of Gun Legislation and Control Debate in United States of European Scientific Journal 11.7 (2015): 400-14. Academic OneFile. Web. 25 Jan. 2016. Kates, Don, and Gary Mauser. Banning Firearms Reduce Murder and Harvard Law 30.2 (2007): 650-94. Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy. Web. 26 Jan. 2016. LaFollette, Hugh. Gun Ethics 110 (2001): 263-81. Wisconsin-Madison. Web. 21 Feb. 2016. Leach-Kemon, Katie. Gun Deaths - Comparing the U.S. to Rest of the Humanosphere. IHME, 2015. Web. 27 Jan. 2016.