



Exercise - Cautious language

Introduction

Using **cautious language** allows ideas, arguments, evaluations and conclusions expressed in your academic writing to remain open to interpretation by the reader. This is a very important academic writing convention.

Examples of using cautious language

- The latest research appears to indicate that we **may** require a different model of social mobility if we are to establish a truly egalitarian society.
- **Most people agree that** there are certain freedoms that all democracies should possess.
- **It has been argued** that the process of globalization should ultimately reduce global inequalities.

Further information

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Activity 1:

The following is a paragraph (taken from Paterson and Wedge, 2013, p.130) about homelessness which has been broken down into sentences. Options are provided for how part of each sentence could be structured. Identify the option that would make each sentence sound more cautious.

Example	Given the nature of their lifestyle, statistics on the number of homeless people are difficult to obtain / can be difficult to obtain .
Sentence 1	Despite this, the latest research shows / the latest research appears to show that in London the number of people who find themselves in this situation is rising.
Sentence 2	It is estimated that the figure now stands at approximately 4,500 / The figure now stands at 4,500 .
Sentence 3	The recession is likely to be responsible / The recession is responsible to some extent for this increase.
Sentence 4	Unemployment causes relationships to break down / Unemployment may cause relationships to break down , leading to one member of the household being forced to leave.
Sentence 5	According to Bowcott, economic stress has a tendency to increase levels of alcohol abuse / economic stress increases levels of alcohol abuse , which can put at risk an individual's ability to maintain a job and a tenancy.
Sentence 6	The situation has been made worse / The situation seems to have been made worse by the presence among the newly unemployed of economic migrants, who are not necessarily familiar with UK support systems.
Sentence 7	Simpson (2010) notes the relatively high proportion of young people / notes the high proportion of young people from the Eastern European accession countries among the homeless population.
Sentence 8	Apart from their obvious economic problems / It is possible that apart from their obvious economic problems , such people find it psychologically difficult to return home.

Activity 2:

The following text (taken from Paterson and Wedge, 2013, p.131) is quite definitive and could be made more cautious. Consider how the highlighted parts of each sentence could be made more cautious.

The first one has been done as an example.

Obesity, the medical condition where an excess of body fat may **cause** an adverse effect on health, is now the focus of a great deal of media attention. This interest is perhaps explained by research that (1) **shows** that the incidence of obesity in higher income countries is now rising at its fastest ever rate. Stories in the press, however, are likely to be accompanied by photographs designed to shock rather than by statistics designed to educate.

The pictures that draw attention are typically those of children, and the background narrative (2) **concentrate** on the diet of junk food that younger people (3) **enjoy**. If space allows, there may also be a reference to a lack of exercise, often with a graphic example, such as the children who are driven to schools that (4) **are** within easy walking distance of their homes. It is possible to argue, however, that the overall result of this kind of coverage is a distortion rather than a clarification of the problem.

Reference:

Paterson, K. and Wedge, R. (2013) *Oxford grammar for EAP*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Answers - Activity 1

Sentence 1	Despite this, the latest research appears to show that in London the number of people who find themselves in this situation is rising.
Sentence 2	It is estimated that the figure now stands at approximately 4,500
Sentence 3	The recession is likely to be responsible to some extent for this increase.
Sentence 4	Unemployment may cause relationships to break down , leading to one member of the household being forced to leave.
Sentence 5	According to Bowcott, economic stress has a tendency to increase levels of alcohol abuse , which can put at risk an individual's ability to maintain a job and a tenancy.
Sentence 6	The situation seems to have been made worse by the presence among the newly unemployed of economic migrants, who are not necessarily familiar with UK support systems.
Sentence 7	Simpson (2010) notes the relatively high proportion of young people from the Eastern European accession countries among the homeless population.
Sentence 8	It is possible that apart from their obvious economic problems , such people find it psychologically difficult to return home. (Paterson and Wedge, 2013, p.131).

Answers - Activity 2

Obesity, the medical condition where an excess of body fat may cause an adverse effect on health, is now the focus of a great deal of media attention. This interest is perhaps explained by research that **appears to show** that the incidence of obesity in higher income countries is now rising at its fastest ever rate. Stories in the press, however, are likely to be accompanied by photographs designed to shock rather than by statistics designed to educate.

The pictures that draw attention are typically those of children, and the background narrative **tends to concentrate** on the diet of junk food that younger people **seem to enjoy**. If space allows, there may also be a reference to a lack of exercise, often with a graphic example, such as the children who are driven to schools that **appear to be** within easy walking distance of their homes. It is possible to argue, however, that the overall result of this kind of coverage is a distortion rather than a clarification of the problem.