Sounding Like a Scholar: Helping Students Express an Academic Stance in Their Writing

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Confusing advice to student writers ...

Be critical: take a position and offer judgments ...
... but don’t be biased or judgmental

Show commitment and passion for your argument ...
... but be objective
and try not to use “I” so much

Use your own words, your own voice ...
... but don’t be colloquial and address the wrong audience

Write assertively and with authority ...
... but don’t forget you’re a student, not an expert
“Every time a student sits down to write for us, he [sic] has to invent the university for the occasion. ... He has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that defines the discourse of our community.”

(Bartholomae, 1985)
How do writers express stance?

**Stance**

“... refers to the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgments, opinions, and commitments. It is the ways that writers intrude to stamp their personal authority onto their arguments or step back and disguise their involvement.”

(Hyland, 2005, p. 176)
Examples of stance expressions
(from Hyland, 2005)

• Our results *suggest* that rapid freeze and thaw rates during artificial experiments in the laboratory *may* cause artifactual formation of embolism. Such experiments *may* not ... (Biology)

• .... two quantities are *rather important* and, for this reason, the way they were measured is re-explained here. (Mechanical engineering)

• *I argue* that their treatment is superficial because, *despite appearances*, it relies solely on a sociological, as opposed to an ethical, orientation to develop a response. (Sociology)

• Chesterton was *of course* wrong to suppose that Islam denied ‘even souls to women’. (Philosophy)
Stance matters in student writing, too

- Research shows correlations between patterns of stance in students’ essays and their grades/scores (Barton, 1993; Coffin, 2002; Hewings, 2004; Lancaster, 2012; North, 2005; Soliday, 1994; Swain, 2010; Tang, 2009; Wu, 2007)

- Research shows that stance patterns that are non-congruent with disciplinary conventions are read by faculty as:
  - “Awkward” or “too general” prose (Barton, 2004)
  - “Language” or “grammar problems” (Feak, 2008)
  - Lack of engagement with disciplinary thinking (Soliday, 2011)
  - Lack of “analytic rigor” (Lancaster, 2012)
Before we continue ...

On your handout, please respond to the question about two students’ introductions.

- Read the short writing prompt
- Read the two students’ responses
- Which introduction adopts a more “academic” stance?
- What are the features of that stance?
- Which essay do you think received a higher grade?
From handout

• Rawlsian theory, however, disputes Fraser’s sharp division between socioeconomic and cultural injustice. In fact, Rawls would respond to Fraser by saying that his theory fairly addresses cultural injustice, and her attempt to redress cultural injustice through recognition may actually lead to unjust outcomes.

• Therefore, in my opinion their views compliment each other by providing suggestions on two aspects of the same problem: how to provide social and economic justice and the grounds on which we can judge if this goal is accomplished.
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Novice academic stance v. Student stance

- Taken in whole, the **economic evidence** for grocery retailers in the decades after the Von’s decision **suggests** that increased concentration is pro-competitive and good for consumers, running contrary to the fears proposed by the Court.

- The vertical integration that occurred is believed to be good for consumers, but **in my view** once Monsanto was rid of intermediaries and could sell their product directly to consumers, their monopoly power grew and they could set higher prices, which would lower social surplus (Paldor).
Novice academic stance v. Student stance

• Using an ex post analysis of share prices and product prices, *I was able to show* that the Supreme Court decision had negligible effects on the industry, and therefore a better outcome could have been achieved.

• Using my personal opinion to analyze the remedies used in this case, *I determined* the District Court was correct in allowing the merger to proceed.
In past cases that we have read in class, this issue of establishing what constitutes the relevant geographic market area has been very important in order to prove illegality. (Econ, LG1, S6)

This worked for Monsanto because as stated in class, foreclosure will work provided that there is no competition downstream. (Econ, LG5, S61)

As discussed in class, competition at both stages would yield more social surplus. (Econ, LG5, S77)
Students’ essays

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Rhetorical features of a “novice academic” stance

1. Contrastiveness
2. Critical distance
3. Discoursal alignment
1. Contrastiveness

Use of counters to:

(1) Indicate gaps, problems, shortcomings, contradictions

(2) Negotiate claims with a skeptical reader: *While; It is true; I do not deny.*
Examples of contrastiveness

*However, their reasoning* that insurance companies act almost as simple representatives of patients is *not upheld by the current situation*. The object of the health insurance company is to maximize profit, *not* to maximize the health of the patient. (Econ, Ken, HG, S23-24)

*Fraser prefers* the transformation strategy, which would reconfigure the social structure by eliminating the groups as such. *While* this method is perhaps more decisive in eliminating the injustice, *it does have the drawback of not being in the immediate interests of any group*, as they would stand to lose their identities. (PolTh, Ethan, HG, S74-75)

*It is true* that economists and lawyers can view the same case differently. Each one has different definitions of efficient outcomes and different methods for achieving them. *However*, one thing they can both agree on is that the judgment must be rational given a specific goal. (Econ, Mike, HG, S130-132)
2. Critical distance

Detachment from the entities that are being analyzed and evaluated.

- Concept-focused, not person-focused
- Cautious judgments
Construct focused (high performers)

- Fraser’s **explanation** demonstrates ...
- Rawls’s **concept** of justice as fairness provides ...
- Rawls’s **idea** of justice as fairness primarily focuses on ...
- **Recognition** often attempts to highlight ...
- **Gay-identity politics** claims that ...
- Modern “**dominant political discourse**” often uses the term ...
Person focused (low performers)

- **Foucault** explains exercise was used to conquer, ...
- **Foucault** believes we are modern prisoners.
- These are questions that **Walzer and Hollis** do not answer.
- **Fraser and Nussbaum** both put forward ideas on how to ...
- **To Foucault**, Eichmann’s punishment has the potential to send the same type of message that spectacle punishments of the past did.
- If we consider what **Schmitt and Foucault** say, the Eichmann trial had some legitimacy and a purpose in society as a whole.
Cautious judgments

review of evidence (COMMITTED)

_Clearly_, Von’s did _not_ accomplish what it set out to achieve: _countless_ subsequent antitrust cases have _completely_ ignored the reasoning set forth by the Court.

stance on evidence (uncommitted)

_It would seem_, then, the Von’s decision was a failure. This statement leads to a natural question: _if_ the Court got it wrong in Von’s, _what might_ the correct decision have been?
Cautious judgments

review of evidence (COMMITTED)

As *shown* in a recent survey of physician satisfaction by Harvard Medical School, physician autonomy and the ability to provide high-quality care, *not* income, are *strongly* associated with changes in job satisfaction.29

stance on evidence (uncommitted)

Thus, it *seems reasonable to assume* that health care providers would take advantage of the greater bargaining power to improve the quality of care.

Recommendation (uncommitted)

Such measures *might* take the form of measures included in many state patient protection bills
Cautious judgments

However, this case is not without concerns. There is the possibility for abuse if the producer sets different maximum prices for different retailers, allowing some to reap higher profits. There is also a possibility that for new retailers to enter the market they would have to charge higher prices initially, in which case a maximum price could deter competition.

It appears, then, that maximum price fixing does the greatest harm when set below a competitive level. In Case 4 it could potentially do harm to small retailers trying to enter the market, but does so for the benefit of consumers and the producer. Based purely on the models, it appears that, at the very least, maximum prices deserve a Rule of Reason approach to evaluate their cost and benefits.

(Mike, HG2, S69-74)
3. Discoursal alignment

- Framing evaluations in terms of disciplinary constructs while also positively evaluating those constructs
- Showing appreciation of concepts from class readings and discussions
- Showing “uptake” of disciplinary concepts
Examples of discoursal alignment

- The realities raised by Fraser offer important complexities to Young’s political discourse. Young provides a useful schematic for understanding oppression both in Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and contemporary society (PolTh, Elisa, HG1, S138-140)

- Using an ex post analysis of share prices and product prices, I was able to show that the Supreme Court decision had negligible effects on the industry, and therefore a better outcome could have been achieved. (Econ, Keith, HG4, S90-92)
Examples of discoursal alignment

1. Foucault’s operational definition of ethics *provides* a description of what society does. (Emma, HG5, S115)

2. Gramsci’s *ideal* of the “public spirit” *supplies the viewpoint* to Weber’s suggestion of a political calling. (Kurt, HG6, S26)

3. Rawls’s *concept* of justice as fairness *provides a solution* to the social and economic injustice that Fanon and his race suffer. (Sarah, HG8, S29)

4. George Orwell’s *essays* *reveal* how people outside the political establishment ... (Richard, HG9, S9)
Elisa’s essay

Young provides a useful schematic for understanding oppression both in Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and contemporary society; yet, one hopes to go beyond simply acknowledging that social-structural oppression exists and begin exploring options for improvement. Recognizing oppression is a crucial step towards change, yet it is not the only step. (Elisa, HG1, S138-140)
Professor’s remarks

“Elisa’s essay is just really in control of the analysis. It is in some ways complementing the kind of typology and complementing it critically. ... So good situating, understanding of what the important questions are. Then being very sympathetic to this very cool typology, which is a very valuable analytic tool for understanding issues like oppression [...] So it’s all sympathetic. It’s critical without saying, “Therefore, Iris Young is full of s***. She doesn’t know what she’s talking about.”
Features of a critical and sympathetic stance

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| but, however, while, rather, rather than, instead, although, unfortunately, yet, still, nevertheless, even though | 19.8 | 10.2 |
Before we continue ...

Please jot down some notes on Part 3 of your handout:

(1) In addition to contrastiveness and critical distance, what are some qualities of stance that are valued in your field, or in the types of writing that you do in your field?

(2) To what degree, if any, do you look for these stance qualities in your students’ writing? Other than stance, what are some other qualities that you value in your students’ writing?
Some teaching tips

• Discuss with students what sorts of stances are valued in the field and/or genre
• Identify desired stance in assignment prompts
• Point out effective stances in reading material
• Provide good and bad models for students
• Have students “play” with stances, e.g., rewriting passages
• Give students opportunities to reflect on their own stance-taking
References


References


- Lancaster, Z. “Interpersonal Stance in L1 and L2 Students' Argumentative Writing in Economics”


References


