

Boost Free Lessons - Year 8 English

Lesson 4: Modality: Strong and Weak Language

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Worked Example 1

Rank these sentences from weakest to strongest modality.

- A. The council **might** consider a new library.
- B. The council **should** build a new library.
- C. The council **must** build a new library.

1. **Modality** is the degree of certainty, possibility or obligation in a statement.
2. *Might* is **low** modality. It suggests a possibility and commits to nothing.
3. *Should* is **medium** modality. It recommends without demanding.
4. *Must* is **high** modality. It states an obligation and leaves no room to disagree.

Weakest to strongest: A (might), B (should), C (must).

Worked Example 2

Why has this writer chosen low modality?

*The results **suggest** that sleep **may** improve recall in some students.*

1. Two low modality words appear: *suggest* and *may*.
2. Scientific writing avoids overclaiming, because evidence rarely proves something absolutely.
3. *Some students* narrows the claim further, which is called hedging.
4. Low modality here signals honesty about the limits of the evidence, not weakness.

Low modality shows the writer is being careful and not claiming more than the evidence supports.

Remember: Modality is the level of certainty or obligation. **High:** must, will, never, always. **Medium:** should, usually. **Low:** might, could, seems, may. Match it to how strong your evidence actually is.



Question 1: Write whether each sentence uses **high**, **medium** or **low** modality.

1. You must arrive by nine.

2. It might rain tomorrow.

3. Students should complete the reading.

4. This will never work.

5. The plan could possibly succeed.

6. Every student is required to attend.

7. It seems likely that costs will rise.

8. We always finish on time.



Question 2: Read the passage below, then answer the questions.

The crossing must be installed before someone is seriously hurt. Drivers will never slow down on their own, and every parent in this street knows it. The council might argue that funds are limited.

1. Find two high modality words in the passage.

2. Find one low modality word in the passage.

3. What effect does the high modality have on the reader?

4. Rewrite the second sentence using low modality. How does the meaning change?

5. Is high modality always more persuasive? Explain.



Question 3: Answer the following questions.

1. Write a high modality sentence arguing for recycling.

2. Rewrite it using low modality.

3. Explain when low modality is more appropriate than high.

4. Why might too much high modality weaken an argument?





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Answers: Modality: Strong and Weak Language

Question 1

1. High
2. Low
3. Medium
4. High
5. Low
6. High
7. Low
8. High

Question 2

1. Any two of: **must, never, will, every.**
2. **might**
3. It makes the writer sound certain and urgent, which pressures the reader to agree.
4. Model: The crossing might reduce the risk to students. The claim becomes cautious and easier to accept, but far less forceful.
5. No. If a claim cannot be proved, high modality makes the writer sound unreasonable, and a careful reader will trust them less.

Question 3

1. Model response: Every household must separate its recycling if we are to reduce landfill.
2. Model response: Households could help reduce landfill by separating their recycling.
3. Low modality suits scientific writing, uncertain evidence, or any situation where overclaiming would damage your credibility.
4. Constant high modality begins to sound like shouting, and a reader who spots one overstated claim will start doubting the rest.

