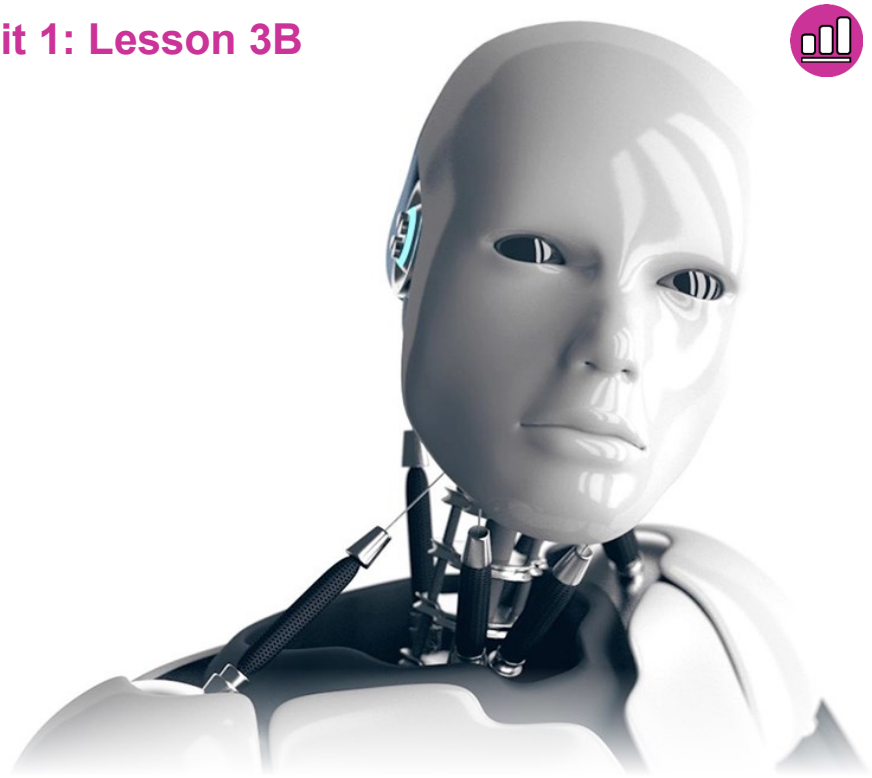
Taking positions

Unit 1: Lesson 3B

Advanced (C1-C2)



Objectives

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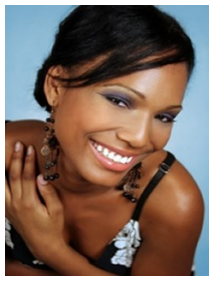
In this lesson you are going to explore how language choice can be harnessed to show a writer's or speaker's underlying position on an issue. You'll also note how stance is realised in an email exchange.

After completing this lesson you should be able to:

- Describe personality traits persuasive people have.
- Identify linguistic means of establishing a writer or reader's stance.
- Detect stance in a written exchange and assess the writers' position based on this.
- State your opinions more or less strongly.



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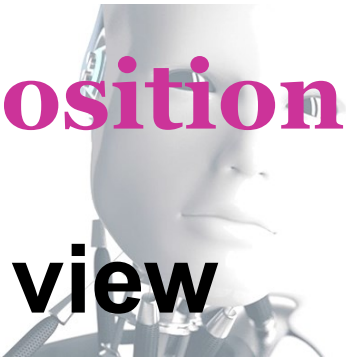

Points of view

A

A ***Task follow on.***

Work with a partner. Discuss these things.

- The last time you had to persuade someone to accept a point of view that was different from their own.
- How successful you were at doing this.
- How, exactly, you tried to persuade them.

B Rank these approaches to persuading people in order of their effectiveness for getting a viewpoint across.

- analysing facts objectively
- making clear links between ideas
- appealing to the emotions of the listener/reader
- presenting a logical and cohesive argument
- choosing persuasive language, e.g. *extremely difficult* as opposed to *hard*
- using examples, numbers or statistical data
- referring to expert opinion/an authority on the matter
- appealing to the good relationship you have

C *Work with another pair*.

Compare your ideas.

D Look at the list of phrases below.

They describe personality traits psychologists have found persuasive people usually possess.

- can engender trust easily
- can connect on a personal level
- the ability to refer to expert opinion in an argument
- show empathy with the person they are trying to persuade or the ideas they are promoting
- have an organised approach to getting their views across
- know the audience and their background well
- establish ideas confidently and assertively but not aggressively
- use persuasive language to support facts and arguments

E Do these things *in small groups*.

- Say which of the above qualities you think you have.
- Say which ones you would like to have.
- Suggest some additional qualities you think should be included in the list.

F Share your ideas *as a class*.

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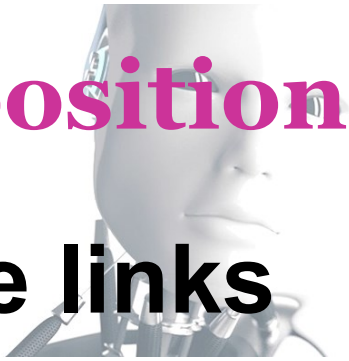

Language links

B

LANGUAGE LINKS

IDENTIFYING & EXPRESSING STANCE

A writer's, or speaker's **stance** can be defined as the opinion, or position, taken on a certain issue. It tells the reader whether a positive or negative attitude towards a statement is held, and shows the angle, or perspective, taken towards the issue. Expressing stance allows you to show your confidence in the ideas you want to express. There are a number of ways your choice of language can help you do this, for example:

Adverbs as modifiers of e.g. adjectives.
The importance of discussing AI is **clearly** obvious when considering humanity's long-term future.

Adverbs placed in initial position in the sentence or clause.
Arguably, AIs will be able to do anything a human can by the end of the current century.

Frequency Adverbs
Researchers working in the field of AI **often** underestimate the complexity of even the simplest human actions.

Determinatives
Few researchers are in agreement with this idea.

Evaluative Adjectives
The view that AIs will have memories is **misguided**.

Modal Auxiliary Verbs
No matter how efficient they **may** become, in the end AIs, **will** remain blankly uncomprehending.

Reporting Verbs
Dedekind **argues** that this view is outmoded.

A

Identify and mark examples of language used to show stance in this text.

Fromkin's clearly inaccurate view that the failure of some recent attempts to simulate human memory show the impossibility of the entire enterprise is simply wrongheaded. Surely, the essence of the scientific method will always lie in seeking to falsify carefully framed claims and then moving on from there to formulate more rigorous hypotheses based on what has been discovered to date. Indeed, we almost always learn from our mistakes and progress relies entirely on our reassessment of previously unsuccessful attempts. Without doubt, most researchers assert that progress in the field of Artificial Intelligence may well be inevitable and that critics often fail to clearly understand the real issues underlying this complex area of investigation adequately.

B

Rewrite the text to express the opposite point of view.*

Retain items you would like to.

Make any other changes you deem necessary.

*See last page.

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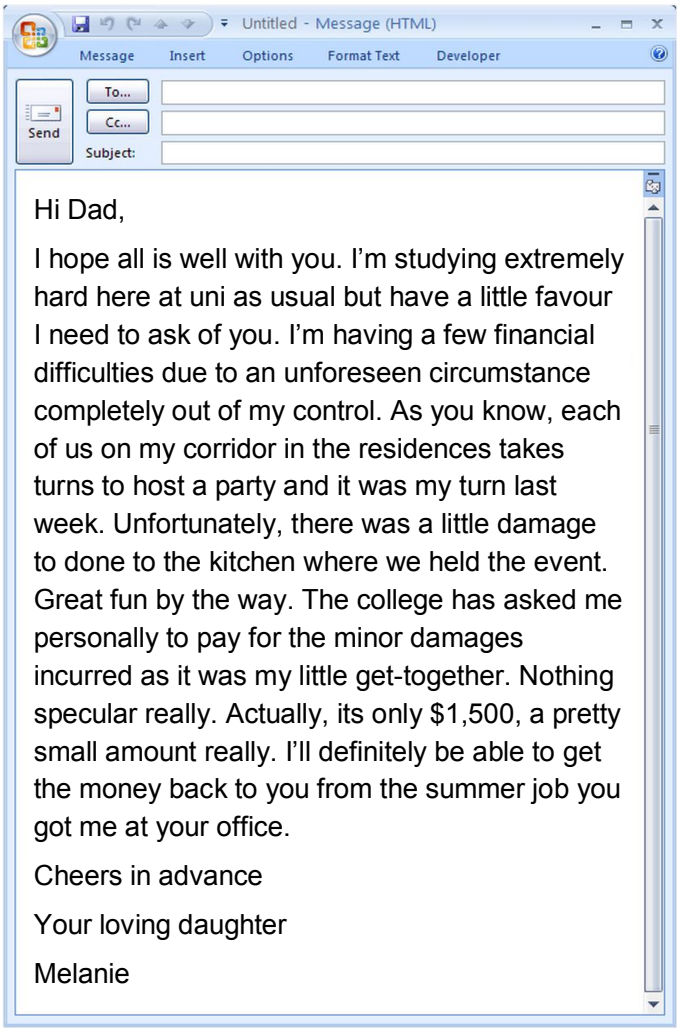
C

A timely request

A ***Speaking***.

Read this email and answer the questions that follow *with a partner*.



Untitled - Message (HTML)

Message Insert Options Format Text Developer

Send To... Cc... Subject:

Hi Dad,

I hope all is well with you. I'm studying extremely hard here at uni as usual but have a little favour I need to ask of you. I'm having a few financial difficulties due to an unforeseen circumstance completely out of my control. As you know, each of us on my corridor in the residences takes turns to host a party and it was my turn last week. Unfortunately, there was a little damage to done to the kitchen where we held the event. Great fun by the way. The college has asked me personally to pay for the minor damages incurred as it was my little get-together. Nothing specular really. Actually, its only $1,500, a pretty small amount really. I'll definitely be able to get the money back to you from the summer job you got me at your office.

Cheers in advance

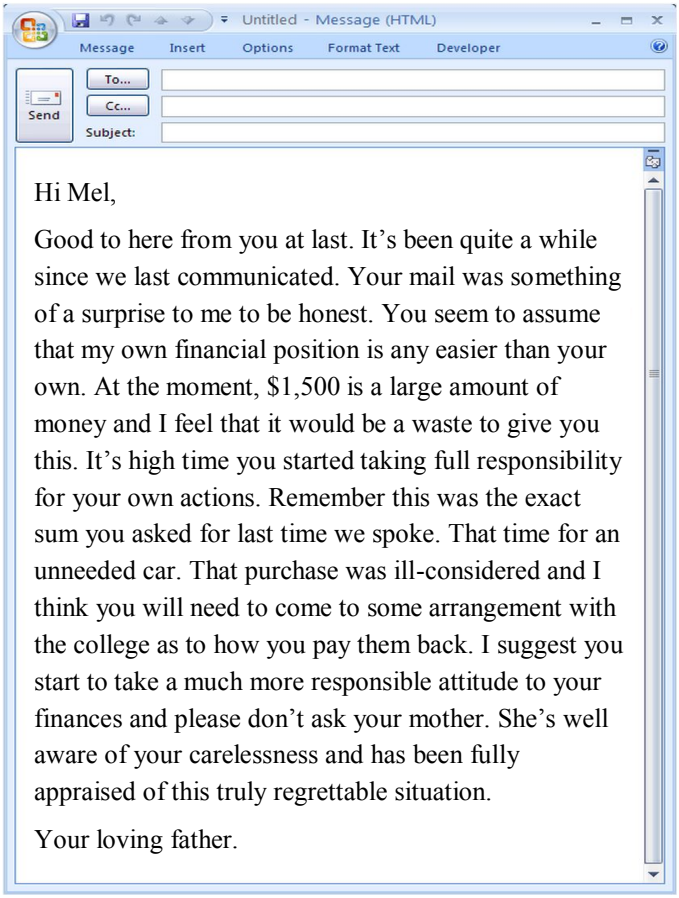
Your loving daughter

Melanie

- Why is Melanie writing to here father?
- Do you think her request is a reasonable one?
- What is the stance she takes towards her situation?
- How do your know this?

Share your ideas *as a class*.

B Now read Melanie's father's reply.



Untitled - Message (HTML)

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Send To... Cc... Subject:

Hi Mel,

Good to here from you at last. It's been quite a while since we last communicated. Your mail was something of a surprise to me to be honest. You seem to assume that my own financial position is any easier than your own. At the moment, $1,500 is a large amount of money and I feel that it would be a waste to give you this. It's high time you started taking full responsibility for your own actions. Remember this was the exact sum you asked for last time we spoke. That time for an unneeded car. That purchase was ill-considered and I think you will need to come to some arrangement with the college as to how you pay them back. I suggest you start to take a much more responsible attitude to your finances and please don't ask your mother. She's well aware of your carelessness and has been fully appraised of this truly regrettable situation.

Your loving father.

C Do these things *in small groups*.*

**See last page.*

- Identify and record lexical items which indicate Melanie's generally positive and hopeful stance to her situation.
- Do the same for her father's negative view of his daughter's behaviour.
- Say whether you think her father is being reasonable.

Discuss *as a class*.

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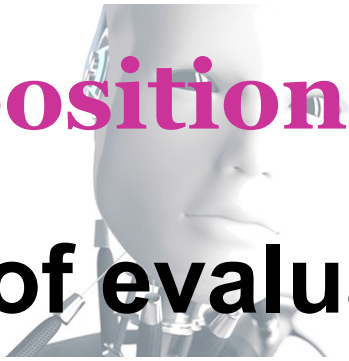


Degrees of evaluation

D

A

Lexis.

Look at this list of comments used to indicate stance of their writers.

- There would appear to be no viable solution to the problem of machine consciousness.
- The cognitive revolution can rightly be seen as a huge step forward in our understanding of human behaviour.
- General problem-solving by computers is clearly impossible to achieve in practice.
- This essential guide to machine learning is both ground-breaking, very informative, and extremely challenging.
- There may be significant risks involved in developing AI any further. We should call a halt to this immediately.
- The theory that machines will be capable of accomplishing anything a human brain can do faces unsurmountable problems and is most unlikely to be achieved.

B

Work with a partner. Decide these things.*

**See last page.*

- Which sentences indicate a strongly positive stance towards something.
- Which ones show that the writer is doubtful or take takes a negative stance towards the things described.
- Which language told you these things.

C

Look at the comments below.

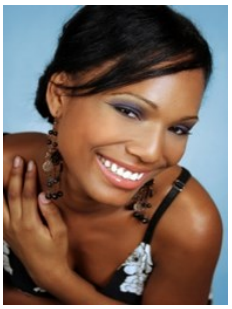
Work with a partner.

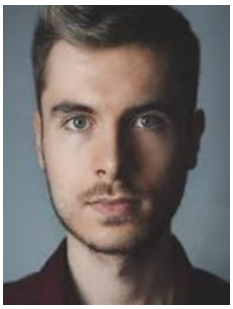
Either strongly agree, or strongly disagree with each statement.

Teenagers can't be held responsible for their own actions since the human brain isn't fully developed until we are in our early twenties.

The economic power of developing countries will surpass that of the developed countries in the next 20 years.

Our personalities are directly inherited from our parents. There's little we can do to change.





Share your ideas *with the class*.

D

Think of one issue you have strong opinions about.

- *Tell the class* about your issue.
- Be as neutral as you can.
- Guess the stance of the speakers.

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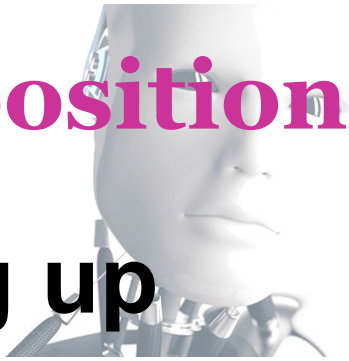

Summing up

Today you...

- talked about and rated qualities persuasive people often have and compared this aspect of your personality in terms of these qualities.
- explored how a writer's or speaker's opinions and attitudes can be expressed on an issue linguistically.
- read, and then rewrote, a short text expressing a point of view on human memory.
- read an email exchange between a father and daughter and analysed how each of these people used language to transmit their stance towards a request.
- looked at how degrees of evaluation of an idea can be expressed, and discussed some further controversial viewpoints.

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Independent study

TASK A - Find a text, an article, an essay, a report etc., in which strong opinions are expressed. Then do these things:

- Mark lexical items, e.g. adverbs used as modifiers, adverbs placed at the beginning of sentences and clauses, frequency adverbs etc. that show the writer's stance
- Decide whether this stance is favourable or negative towards the idea being expressed and how strong this stance is
- Note down a few of the arguments you encounter
- Decide whether or not you are in agreement with these arguments
- Write down your own view for those you are not sure about or with which you disagree - use language, evidence, arguments which makes your own position persuasive

TASK B - Write a short paragraph on one of the issues you uncovered for Task A. Include the argument you are contesting and try and persuade your reader of your own position.

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Suggestions & answers

Answers from page B

Fromkin's **clearly inaccurate** view that the failure of **some** recent attempts to simulate human memory show the **impossibility** of **the entire enterprise** is **simply wrongheaded**. **Surely**, the essence of the scientific method **will** always lie in seeking to falsify **carefully framed claims** and then moving on from there to formulate **more rigorous hypotheses** based on what has been **discover**ed to date. **Indeed**, we **almost always** learn from our mistakes and progress **relies entirely** on our reassessment of **previously unsuccessful** attempts. **Without doubt**, **most** researchers **assert** that progress in the field of Artificial Intelligence **may well be inevitable** and that critics **often fail to clearly** understand the **real** issues underlying this **complex** area of investigation **adequately**.

POSSIBLE REWRITE:

Fromkin's **undoubtedly accurate** view that the failure of **a few** recent attempts to simulate human memory **show** the **impossibility** of **the entire enterprise** is **undeniably well-founded**. **Clearly**, the essence of the scientific method **might often** lie in seeking to falsify **carefully framed claims** and then moving on from there to formulate **more rigorous hypotheses** based on what has been **discover**ed to date. **However**, **although** we **almost always** learn from our mistakes, this is **not always obviously** the case. Progress sometimes **relies** on **honestly** reassessing the limitations of **previously unsuccessful** attempts. **Demonstrably**, **many** researchers **now assert** that progress in the field of Artificial Intelligence **might not be inevitable**. **Such** critics **clearly** understand the **real** issues underlying this **complex** area of investigation **adequately**.

Answers from page C

Mel uses the following. Her stance is positive. Note the preponderance of adverbs in her mail.

extremely hard - a little - a few - unforeseen circumstance - completely out of my control - unfortunately - a little - Great fun - me personally - minor damages - little - Nothing specular really - Actually - only $1,500~ - pretty small really - definitely

Her father, on the other hand, is far from impressed. His stance is negative. In addition to the specific items listed bellow his style of writing turns quite formal as he progresses, indicating his growing distance from the request made by his daughter.

quite a while - something of a surprise - to be honest - seem to assume - any easier. - a large amount of money - a waste - high time - taking full responsibility - the exact sum – unneeded - ill-considered - much more responsible - well aware - carelessness - fully appraised - truly regrettable

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Suggestions & answers

Answers from page D

- This would appear to be no viable solution to the problem of machine consciousness. (STRONG NEGATIVE)
- The cognitive revolution can rightly be seen as a huge step forward in our understanding of human behaviour. (STRONG POSITIVE)
- General problem-solving by computers is clearly impossible to achieve in practice. (STRONG NEGATIVE)
- This essential guide to machine learning is both ground-breaking, very informative, and extremely challenging. (LESS STRONG-POSITIVE)
- There may be significant risks involved in developing AI any further. We should call a halt to this immediately. (STRONG NEGATIVE)
- The theory that machines will be capable of accomplishing anything a human brain can do faces unsurmountable problems and is most unlikely to be achieved. (STRONG NEGATIVE)

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