

# Can I Say ‘I’ in My Paper?: Teaching Metadiscourse to Develop International Writers’ Authority and Disciplinary Expertise

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**Abstract:** Effectively constructing a confident authorial stance and framing one’s argument in the context of the ongoing scholarly conversation are important skills for writers to acquire as they gain expertise writing in an academic discipline. Construction of an effective authorial stance is complicated by conventions of avoiding first-person pronouns in many disciplines. Varying practices for authorial positioning across languages and cultures further complicate this process for non-native speakers learning to write research in English. Learning to notice metadiscourse features related to stance can offer students multiple approaches to convey stance with and without using first person pronouns. This article discusses research from English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and composition studies to explore contrasting patterns of stance construction across disciplines, languages, cultures, and academic levels. It then describes a comparative genre analysis assignment in which writers in a required, upper-level WID course, including international students, analyze patterns of stance-related metadiscourse in their own writing and the published work of a scholar in their discipline to increase their rhetorical awareness about framing their perspective in academic arguments.

As students advance through college and into graduate school, we urge them to make a contribution to the scholarly conversation with their writing and not just repeat the claims of others. The ability to distinguish their views from the perspectives of the researchers they cite becomes an essential skill in academic writing. Yet students have heard so often to avoid using “I” in their papers, the task of situating their claims as distinct from their consulted sources must seem daunting. “Can I say ‘I’ in my paper?” is a familiar question for writing teachers, but the acceptance of first person pronouns varies across genre, discipline, and culture, so there is no straightforward answer to that question. Use of first person, or self-mentions—a noticeable way to establish presence in an argument—is a type of metadiscourse. Metadiscourse includes phrases that give the reader information beyond the content of the text—about the organization of the text (that kind is called textual or organizational) or about the writer’s attitude toward the content or the reader (called interpersonal or attitudinal). Swales and Feak (2000) note that “for native speakers of English, the right amount of metadiscourse gives readers the sense that a writer is fully aware of what he or she is doing, thus giving the impression of authority,” but they also note that non-native speakers may be used to discourse communities that value metadiscourse less highly (p. 171). These rhetorical devices can also help illuminate varying preferences across disciplines for authorial presence and assertiveness in framing an argument. Within WID research, Rebecca Nowacek’s (2011) recent study of writing instruction in an interdisciplinary honors learning community describes strikingly different disciplinary perspectives about writers’ orientations toward their claims, including contrasting expectations from faculty for the thesis to “stick its neck out” or to seem to more objectively point out reality (p. 107). Such research emphasizes that learning to convey an argumentative stance in a manner accepted by one’s discipline can be challenging. Explicit teaching of genre conventions across the

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disciplines to construct stance should therefore involve consideration of relevant metadiscourse features and their rhetorical functions.

While issues of coherence that are addressed by textual (organizational) metadiscourse have long been a focus of linguists and TESL scholars in the sub-field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), according to Ken Hyland (2005), the importance of framing an authorial presence and interacting with the reader to control one's argument has been a more recent concern (p. 173). Hyland (2005) seeks to make the theorizing of this type of metadiscourse more fine-grained in his article "Stance and engagement: A model of interaction in academic discourse." In contrast to the more obvious efforts to help a reader navigate the text using signposts about the order of the text, interpersonal or attitudinal metadiscourse helps writers "to offer a credible representation of themselves and their work by claiming solidarity with readers, evaluating their material and acknowledging alternative views, so that controlling the level of personality in a text becomes central to building a convincing argument" (p. 173). Since these moves are often more subtle than devices of textual signposting, since preferences for their use vary significantly across disciplines, and since the preferred practice for academic writing in English may be directly at odds with rhetorical conventions for authorial presence in some students' native languages, we owe it to our students—especially our international students—to engage in careful study of these forms in our writing classrooms in order to make this often hidden knowledge explicit. In a recent WAC Journal article, Wolfe, Olson and Wilder (2014) advocate comparative genre analysis (CGA) as a key practice to build the rhetorical and genre awareness of our students by asking them to "explicitly link genre conventions to disciplinary values and goals" (p. 45). In this article, I offer a CGA approach to teaching more nuanced awareness of rhetorical moves to create authorial stance across the disciplines. First I will ground a discussion of interpersonal metadiscourse in theories of expertise development for academic writing. I will then draw on research from composition studies/WID and EAP to explore how use of stance markers (including first person pronouns to mark the author's views and involve readers, along with less obvious metadiscoursal moves) varies across disciplines, cultures, and experience levels. I will then discuss an assignment I have used in an upper-level writing-in-the-disciplines course (required for all undergraduate students at our university, 6.5% of whom are from other countries) that asks students to compare their use of interpersonal metadiscourse with that of a published scholar in their field to customize recommendations for their future writing, offering them a complex answer to the "Can I say 'I'?" question.

Constructivist theory of academic writers' development describes a gradual increase of writers' awareness that their texts must connect knowledge to an ongoing disciplinary conversation and shared values. As one part of this complex process, learning to convey authority in academic writing is not easy. Educational psychologist Ronald Kellogg (2008) describes three stages of a writer's development: knowledge telling, knowledge transforming, and knowledge crafting. Knowledge telling is "the beginner's stage of using writing to tell what one knows," while knowledge transforming is "the intermediate stage of transforming what one knows for the author's benefit" (p. 3). After these two better known stages comes the advanced stage of crafting knowledge for the "reader's benefit" (Kellogg, 2008, p. 3). Kellogg (2008) explains that while novice or intermediate writers may be able to imagine readers' perspectives during parts of their writing process, only very experienced writers are able to hold simultaneously in their working memory a sense of what they want to say, how it is being represented in the text and how readers might respond to it (p. 5).

While he doesn't use Kellogg's "crafting knowledge" phrase, composition studies researcher David Foster (2006) forwards a similar theory about expert academic writers needing to know how to frame and negotiate an argument within and for a community that shares research interests and values. Foster (2006) argues that developing authority as academic writers requires students to move from an "I-centered" sense of authority grounded in expressing individual perspective or opinion and toward a sense of an ongoing, collaborative conversation within disciplines that produces knowledge through the

acknowledgement and negotiation of many voices and viewpoints (p. 123). Foster maintains that “this intersubjective authority is the essential building block of expertise, enabling students’ active participation in disciplinary conversations” (p. 124). But instead of framing this development as trading in an “I” for a “we,” Foster notes that intersubjective authority should be seen as “an enlargement of personal authority rather than as its effacement” (p. 125). But learning how to recognize and reconstruct this community conversation when reading scholarship is difficult on its own; rendering a response to it in writing that builds on others’ ideas while still acknowledging one’s own, however fledgling, is a rhetorical challenge. Composition researcher Anne Beaufort (2007) argues that expert writers must draw on knowledge from five overlapping domains: writing process knowledge, subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, genre knowledge, and discourse community knowledge (p.19). International students may also be balancing conflicting discourse community conventions for writing academic research in another language, making their process that much more complex.

Since this understanding of how knowledge is constructed not just conveyed by authors develops as writers gain expertise in a discipline (Penrose & Geisler, 1994), it makes sense that the language used to orchestrate a conversation with readers would likewise increase with disciplinary expertise. Not surprisingly, studies of interpersonal metadiscourse comparing novice and professional writers do find more of it in the work of more advanced writers. As Crismore and Abdollehzedah (2013) note, these findings “may indicate a distinction between the way novice and professional writers project themselves into texts to establish more interactional persona with their readers” (p. 202). Similarly, at City University of Hong Kong, Hyland (2004) found that NNS writers of doctoral dissertations incorporated significantly more metadiscourse than did writers of master’s theses, although the frequency of metadiscourse types varied across disciplines. In “The Use of Metadiscourse in Good and Poor ESL Essays,” Puangpen Intaraprawat and Margaret Steffensen (1995) report a greater frequency of “emphatics, hedges, attitude markers, and commentaries [all types of interpersonal metadiscourse] in well-written essays, reflecting more attention to developing the interactive function of the text” (p. 263). They reason that while interpersonal metadiscourse is rarely taught, the more proficient writers have learned to notice and use markers of authorial perspective (p. 263). Just teaching metadiscourse phrases, however, will not give students the advanced authorial voice of an expert in that discipline. Sounding a note agreed on unanimously by EAP researchers, Crismore and Abdollehzedah (2013) assert that metadiscourse must be taught “rhetorically, not as a panacea” (p. 202). Similarly, Hyland (2004) advocates teaching metadiscourse to NNS writers grounded in disciplinary rhetorical context: “Consciousness raising is crucial in L2 writing instruction and for teachers this means helping students to move beyond the conservative prescriptions of the style guides and into the rhetorical contexts of their disciplines, investigating the preferred patterns of expression in different communities” (p. 149). Drawing students’ attention to specific metadiscourse features to convey stance must be contextualized in terms of the rhetorical moves of the part of the text, the goals of the genre, and the values of the discipline the writing is situated in.

## Saying “I” – or Not

The use or avoidance of “I” as a marker of authorial stance varies tremendously across situation and discipline, illustrating the importance of raising awareness about metadiscourse conventions. While many students, NS as well as NNS, have often been taught not to use “I” in academic writing, the reality of practice is much more complex and varied. In their popular argument textbook, *They Say/ I Say* (2010), Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein urge students to abandon the perceived prohibition about the use of I, arguing that clear articulation of a writer’s perspective is difficult without it. They note that avoiding “I” will not eliminate the “ill-considered and subjective opinions” feared by many teachers and it may hurt writers’ abilities to distinguish their views from other people’s perspectives. Instead, they argue that students should learn to use “I” well and to support their claims with strong evidence (Graff &

Birkenstein, 2010, p. xxiv). They do acknowledge that certain uses of “I” would be good to avoid including “unvarying series of ‘I’ statements (‘I believe. . . I think . . . I argue’” and so they advise trying alternate statements (Graff & Birkenstein, 2010, p. 73). Interestingly, these types of “I” statements that Graff and Birkenstein (2010) identify as weak and monotonous uses of “I” are the very usages of first-person that Gere, Aull, Escudero, Lancaster, and Vander Lei (2013) found to characterize the less-prepared writers in their study at University of Michigan: self-mentions combined with verbs more often “associated with a spoken register” like “I agree,” “I think,” “I believe” (p. 620-21). Their study reminds us that contextualizing these moves as we examine them with our students is ever important. My students first think that advice to use “I” like Graff and Birkenstein’s or Hyland’s flies in the face of what they have been told their whole college career. Then when we look more closely at the Michigan study, they can reconcile the admonitions against “I” with statements like “I think” that are “obvious” and make a writer’s voice sound immature.

It can be difficult to help students understand the differing perspectives on the use of first person pronouns as more than frustratingly contradictory subjective opinions. Early in students’ academic writing experiences, frameworks for differences in disciplinary values and practices haven’t been formed yet. Nowacek (2011) acknowledges the difficulty of making “the rhetorical domain of disciplinary expertise visible to students who aren’t aware that such domains exist, who see only content knowledge and formal conventions and personal idiosyncrasies” (p.125). In my classes, before we begin a close comparative analysis of a few texts, I set the stage for students by building some overall awareness of contrasting uses of first-person pronouns and other markers of stance across the disciplines in order to make visible that larger disciplinary patterns can be seen in these practices, reframing it as other than simply individual whim. We discuss the concept of “conventions” as patterns created by disciplinary practice and more subject to the nuance of context than hard and fast “rules.”

Conventions for first-person pronoun use vary greatly with audience. In a study of 100 argument essays from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, written for a cross-disciplinary audience and in the genre of op-ed/argument rather than research article, Ellen Barton (1993) found that 96 of the authors used first-person pronouns (p. 749). Helen Sword’s *Stylish Academic Writing* (2012) is a style guide that also discusses the results of the author’s study of 100 academic style guides and 500 academic papers across eight disciplines. Sword (2012) found evidence for extensive advocacy for and use of first-person: 55 percent of the style guides called for it (p. 28) and 78 percent of the articles used it (p. 43). Yet the variation among disciplines within the research articles was striking with only 40 percent of historians using first person pronouns (and much of that use was “we” not “I”) in contrast with 98 percent of literary critics who used “I” (p. 39). Ken Hyland’s (2005) “Stance and Engagement” not only compares patterns of self-mentions and other stance-related metadiscourse moves across the disciplines, but also discusses the rhetorical rationale for these moves. The use of “I” by 98% of the literary articles Sword (2012) examined makes sense in light of Hyland’s (2005) explanation that in humanities disciplines, the self-mention is important to emphasize the writer’s contribution (p. 181).

In contrast, some disciplines have little tolerance for first person. The hard sciences do not embrace it. Hyland (2005) explains the reason for this practice: “In the sciences it is common for writers to downplay their personal role to highlight the phenomena under study, the replicability of the research activities, and the generality of the findings, subordinating their own voice to that of unmediated nature” (p. 181). Hyland (2002) found no instances of “I” in the articles he examined in biology, physics, electronic engineering, and mechanical engineering, although plural first-person writer pronouns were not uncommon (353). “I” may be as rare in those fields as the single-authored paper.

While Hyland’s work offers a helpful framework for understanding patterns of conveying authorial perspective across disciplines in research articles written in English, other research within EAP offers a window into the creation of authorial stance across languages and cultures. This research suggests that even if international writers hear repeated endorsement of first person as they gain experience in

academia, it may not be easy for them to reconcile the practice with what is favored in their native languages. Swales and Feak (2001) note that “in other academic cultures heavy use of metadiscourse can be seen as indicating unnecessary promotion of one’s own text (Finland, Sweden) or as reflecting an insultingly low assessment of the intelligence and attention of the reader (China, Japan)” (p. 171). Some cross-cultural studies find even more contrast across discipline than across culture. Trine Dahl’s study comparing metadiscourse in the writing of English, French, and Norwegian writers of research articles in medicine, economics and linguistics characterized the economic and linguistic articles by English and Norwegian speakers as having more metadiscourse including signposting and intrusion by the writer into the argument while the articles by French speakers in these disciplines showed preference for a less visible authorial presence (Dahl, 2004, p. 1822). The medical articles, however, showed very minimal metadiscourse use across languages, suggesting that the similarities within scientific disciplinary communities are stronger than differing preferences for metadiscourse across language and culture (Dahl, 2004, p.1820). Similarly, Blagojevic (2004) found more continuity than contrast between native speakers of Norwegian and English writing in English. These writers displayed more differences across discipline (psychology, sociology, and philosophy) than across culture (Blagojevic, 2004, p. 66). However, the English writers were somewhat more likely to announce their presence in the text through personal pronouns than were the Norwegian writers (Blagojevic, 2004, p. 65). Learning to write in English can change a writer’s tendencies to mention the self in the text, but the gap can be more distinctive between some cultural practices. A study (2012) of academic writing by native speakers of Turkish writing in Turkish and also in English found that they never used the first person singular pronoun when writing in Turkish but used it more frequently when writing in English. However, native English speakers in this same study used first person in their academic writing much more frequently (Akbas, 2012).

The Chinese rhetorical tradition as described by Luming Mao (1993) is not only devoid of a first-person singular pronoun but also assumes that the writer should be one with the discourse and not mark himself (traditionally) as distinct from the discourse (p. 276). Mao (1993) argues that because of more metadiscourse used within Western traditions to foreground illocutionary acts but avoided within Chinese traditions, students influenced by both traditions need to be involved in comparative study in order for them to “be communicatively competent in a rhetorical context that is different from their own” (p. 284). This tradition may influence writers strongly as they learn to write in English; Ken Hyland (2002) finds that many of his students at City University of Hong Kong feel uncomfortable using “I.” Even with encouragement to use first-person coming from textbooks like Graff and Birkenstein’s (2010) and style guides like Sword’s (2012), students who are unused to articulating stances using first person pronouns in their native languages may find it difficult to adjust to the practice in English. Studies of scholarly writing may show them that the practice is appropriate, even preferred, in some disciplines. But instruction in recognizing devices beyond first-person pronouns for writers to articulate their stance is important if we want students to construct a voice in academic English that can be effectively authoritative for the reader and comfortable for the writer.

## Articulating Stance Toward the Source

While it is an option to openly declare one’s opinion about a source with a bald “I agree” or “I disagree,” it is much more likely for experienced writers to convey this kind of evaluation through the verb used to report the source’s view or adjectives describing the source. These clues to authorial stance are called “attitude markers” in Hyland’s (2005) model. Ellen Barton’s (1993) study of arguments in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* demonstrates that verbs used to attribute ideas to a source can signal more than just where these ideas come from since they also reflect the author’s stance toward those ideas. Barton (1993) found that instead of using neutral reporting verbs, the verbs used by *Chronicle* authors typically reflected the writer’s attitude toward the source like “urges” or “implores” (p. 751). Gere et al.’s (2013) study of incoming college writers found that the more prepared writers introduced the source’s ideas with a verb

or adjective that implied an evaluation of the author's views: "convincing," "successfully," "relatively long-winded" (p. 618). This skill is an important one in the humanities and some social sciences where opinion making is central to the writer's toolkit. Indeed, Hyland (2005) found more attitude markers in the articles he searched from philosophy, sociology, applied linguistics, and marketing than in those from physics, biology, electrical engineering, or mechanical engineering (p. 187). The ability to assert a stance more subtly than baldly stating agreement or disagreement is a more compelling reason to teach versatility in reporting verbs and adjectives than fear of boring the reader through repetition or lack of creative flair.

Credibility and authority are also subtly created through the register associated with the words chosen, as Gere et al. (2013) determined in their study. The writers who placed themselves in the remedial class were more likely to use reporting verbs associated with a spoken register (like "says or believes") rather than a more formal academic written register (like "argues, discusses, claims, or asserts") (Gere et al., 2013, p. 620). So the dexterity of selecting the right verb for citing a source can reflect the authority of a writer more familiar with academic discourse. Layers of verbs were also used to communicate evaluation of the source. "Distancing verbs" as seen in the phrase "attempts to illuminate" shows a negative evaluation of the cited source (Gere et al., 2013, p. 618). With these more subtle moves available, less expert renderings like "I think" or "I believe" were largely avoided by the more confident writers in the sample (Gere et al., 2013, p. 620). Adverbs can also insert clear authorial perspective without use of first-person. "Interestingly" conveys the same idea but in a slightly more distanced way than "I think it is interesting that." So, conveying stance through attitude markers allows the writer not only to evaluate the source but also to control the formality level and distance created between writer and reader. Noticing the evaluative stance of verbs, adjectives, and adverbs along with the formality level of the register while reading and writing is an important lesson for writers as they work toward writing with greater disciplinary authority.

## How Sure are You?

Phrases that help define the writer's extent of commitment to or certainty about an idea can also incorporate the writer's viewpoint without any explicit use of first-person pronouns. Signals of perspective are frequently hedges like "could," "might," "possibly," or "suggests"; emphatics or boosters like "clearly," "undoubtedly," "obviously," "shows." These markers of certainty or evidentiality play a subtle yet crucial role in academic discourse: constructing an author's credibility, contributing to a careful, prudent tone or a confident, deeply committed one—or some other spot along the commitment continuum. While students often assume that hedges necessarily weaken a writer's stance, they can in fact strengthen it. Interestingly, boosters may be used to show greater hesitancy rather than greater confidence toward a proposition or interpretation by emphasizing the writer's hedges. Both the specific forms used and how they are used are very important in the hedging or emphasizing game.

Research in both EAP and composition studies suggests some important differences in how student writers use and perceive hedging and boosting phrases. Hedges (that indicate important limitations to a claim—"may," "might," "is possible") and boosters (that emphasize the certainty of a point—"clearly," "certainly") are not perceived equally. Hyland (2000) measured the responses of NNS undergraduate students in Hong Kong to hedges and boosters and found that they noticed hedges much less frequently than boosters. He concludes that "it is imperative that these important markers of writer attitude are made more conspicuous to learners" (Hyland, 2000, p.189). Gere et al. (2013) found that the more prepared incoming college writers used more hedges than the lesser prepared writers, but, significantly, hedges of a more "academic register" like "perhaps," "possibly," "indicates," or "suggests" instead of less academic phrases like "might," "seems," or "in my view" (p. 622). Their findings suggest that increased nuance in conveying one's certainty may be one important rhetorical skill that writers attain as they gain expertise in academic discourse. Explicit instruction in these instruments to convey stance should be a part of regular instruction in WAC/WID classrooms. A study of hedges and boosters needs to look carefully at their

rhetorical context. Just counting up hedges or boosters without noting where they are applied or how they are used could lead to inaccurate inferences about their rhetorical function.

## Guiding Student Study of Metadiscourse in the Disciplines

In “Options of Identity in Academic Writing,” Hyland (2002) describes an assignment that asks students to explore the use of self-mentions in their research writing and in published articles in their major discipline, comparing their findings with frequency tables he provides of first-person pronoun use in student and scholarly writing across several fields. He asks students to note self-mentions in terms of what their rhetorical function is in particular sections of an article. The function of each marker cannot be definitively described apart from its context. He notes that “the use of I to guide a reader through the text projects a relatively less authoritative role than its use to recount the research process, or to express an opinion” (Hyland, 2002, p. 355). More than 75% of the self-mentions his students find in their own writing “performed these relatively innocuous and text internal roles, which commit the writer to little, and carry only a very weak sense of identity” (Hyland, 2002, p. 354). He typically encourages his students to experiment with more authoritative self-mentions in their future writing (Hyland, 2002, p. 355).

In a required upper-level WID course for majors from across the disciplines, my students and I read about Hyland’s assignment in “Options of Identity” and add on to it, looking for stance-related metadiscourse features beyond self-mentions (attitude markers, hedges, boosters, asides, etc.). Our university has a substantial presence of international students, currently 6.5% of undergraduate students (and 9% of graduate students) with the largest numbers coming from Saudi Arabia, China, and Brazil, so building a cross-cultural awareness of academic discourse conventions is an important part of our classroom conversation. We discuss what they have been taught about using “I” in academic writing. Most students—international as well as native speakers—have trouble imagining that they could use “I” in their writing, unless the assignment was to write a personal narrative. I do not force them to start using “I” but ask them to look at the various devices that function to convey their stance, construct their authority, and engage the reader.

In addition to “Options of Identity,” we consult Hyland’s (2005) “Stance and Engagement” as a frame for the interpersonal metadiscourse students will examine in their writing and in an article from their field that demonstrates a voice they admire. We also read the Gere et al. (2013) study of first-year writers and discuss the impact that register can have on a writer’s voice. We look for examples of Hyland’s (2005) “Stance and engagement” features in scholarly essays we have read for class until students catch on to spotting the features and discussing their rhetorical effects. Leading up to the fuller analysis, students write electronic journal entries on our course management site in which they discuss the metadiscourse features they found in an essay of their own and the scholarly piece (or two) they have chosen for the comparative analysis.

The existence of these metadiscourse features related to stance is new to most students. While they have seen the words before, they have usually never pondered their rhetorical function and how that aligns with disciplinary values of academic discourse. Hyland’s (2005) “Stance and engagement” is very useful because it includes interview excerpts from scholars across the disciplines that discuss the rhetorical effect of these various metadiscourse moves and why they favor some over others for different purposes. These comments make explicit disciplinary values across disciplines that any one teacher may not be able to provide from personal experience. Hyland’s (2002) examination in “Options of identity” of the different levels of rhetorical assertiveness associated with different functions of “I” in the text can open up a helpful discussion in the classroom as students note the practices they are comfortable with in their own texts versus what they find in scholarly articles. A frank discussion of what teachers have told them in different disciplines about when to use and not use “I” is also enlightening. Students can realize that some self-mentions may be more assertive than they are comfortable with and feel like they haven’t yet earned the

level of authority that could pull off that much authorial visibility. Discussing contrasting examples of moves to situate the author's stance can help students learn what questions to ask themselves in future contexts as they work toward particular rhetorical effects. Wolfe, Olson, and Wilder (2014) advocate CGA because it can "teach students to extract genre features from model texts and learn what questions to ask in new rhetorical environments," thus helping them transfer this rhetorical awareness (p. 61). Such discussions in answer to our "Can I say 'I'?" investigation add rhetorical nuance to their understanding of how stance, authority, and identity in the text are constructed through self-mentions and other metadiscourse features. We can see that it is not a question of one-size-fits-all rules, even within a particular discipline. Gaining the confidence to assert oneself more strongly in an argument can be a slowly evolving process.

Through this comparative analysis, students typically discover aspects of their writing that they had never noticed. Most assume that since they usually avoid first-person pronouns, their writing will have very few stance markers. Some find that they actually include subtle evaluations of the sources they cite through the words they use to introduce them. Others admire how the scholars they studied did this and aspire to let a bit more stance show through careful word choice. Some assume that they will find an abundance of hedges in their writing since they often lack confidence as they write. Some do find many hedges but realize that many of the hedges strengthen their writing by carefully qualifying their claims while other types of hedges do make parts of their writing seem weak and lacking commitment. Many students tell me that the metadiscourse study was their favorite project of the semester because it opened their eyes to the power of verbal features that had been invisible to them before (even though they had used some of them) and that they looked forward to strengthening their authority and persuasiveness even more by using them with intent.

Reading academic articles across a range of disciplines to note usage patterns of metadiscourse—including and in addition to first-person pronouns— can increase understanding of the variability and subtlety of academic discourse. Because effective metadiscourse is highly context- and discipline-dependent, teachers can't just hand out lists of words and phrases. Students have differing levels of comfort with explicitly projecting their presence in their texts. But studying what devices help writers convey their stances and emphasize perspective without constantly saying "I" opens many options to them. These issues related to stance need to be studied in tandem with other genre features (see Wolfe, Olson, and Wilder (2014) for a comparative genre analysis study of research article topoi, macrostructures, and naming/citation features, for example) and as part of an ongoing conversation about rhetorical purpose of all these features. Investigating these practices of scholars whose writing they admire can immerse them in rhetorical strategies within the context of complete academic arguments instead of just in lists or excerpts within the pages of a style guide. Students at earlier stages than my 300-level writers might benefit from similar assignments with cross-disciplinary models drawn from student work. Hardy, Romer, and Roberson (2015) describe how to engage students in comparative analysis (not specifically of stance-related moves) of student writing across the disciplines using the Michigan Corpus of Upper-level Student Papers (MICUSP). By adjusting the sample texts to a level less-removed from the students' writing, they may be able to find patterns more in keeping with their writing development. With this collaborative investigative attitude toward authorial stance and other genre features of academic discourse, teachers can focus on learning with our students about their powerful role in creating a writer's presence and authority within a text.

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