Adjectives & Sentence Patterns for Expressing Evaluation & Stance in Academic Writing
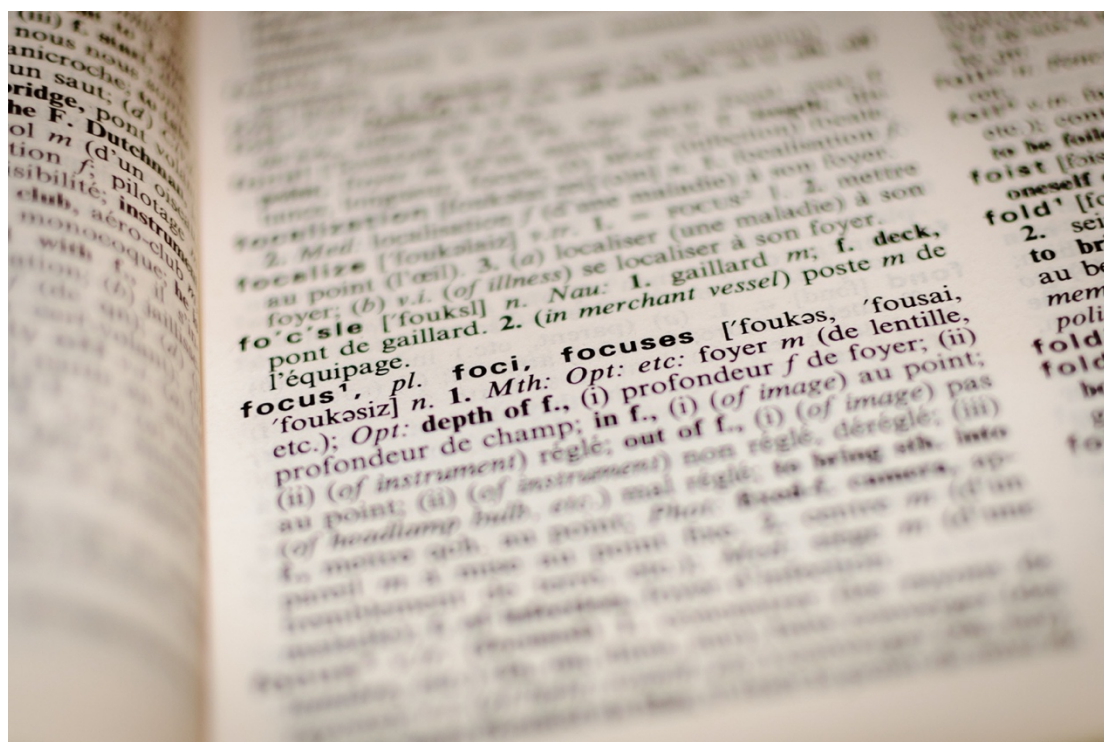

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Context Information

Target Students	College/University Students (25-28 students)
Expected English Proficiency	DSE Level 3 or above; IELTS 6.5 or above
Teaching Context	Tutorial of an Academic English writing subject: ● The tutorial is conducted in the computer laboratory, in which each student can work on his/her own computer, or undertake pair works. ● The students were previously taught the functions and organisation of 5-paragraph academic essays, and currently focusing on crafting effective paragraphs ● Students reflected that they find the requirement for making "objective evaluation" and "critical discussions" in academic essays confusing, in that they might use expressions such as "I/we think/agree/believe" or those influenced by their native language (e.g. Cantonese).
Duration	120 minutes
Corpus Used	Corpus of Contemporary American English
Aims & Objectives	Through a series of activities in this tutorial, students will actively engage with the corpus tool (COCA) for building academic vocabulary and sentence patterns. More specifically, the lesson aims to help students: ● Identify adjectives commonly found in academic writing for evaluating the topic or research findings through the two recurrent patterns: "it + linking verb + adjective + to-infinitive/that-clause" and "Subject + finds it + adjective + to-infinitive/that-clause" ● Use the above sentence patterns to suggest the topic or activities under evaluation (e.g. It is interesting to see what attracts…; SMEs find it difficult that they need to compete…) ● Avoid using more spoken-like expressions ("I think", "I believe", etc.) or those influenced by their first language (e.g. Chinese/Cantonese), such as "SMEs are difficult to compete…" (cf. 中小企很難和＿ 競爭...)

Teaching Guides

(Note: The activities in this guide will be provided to students in a separate activity sheet.)

Activity 1. Lead-in: Individual Gap-filling Task (10 minutes)

Purpose: This activity intends to induce errors from students so as to introduce the target sentence patterns in the forthcoming activities. Admittedly, the target students are expected to be capable of completing sentences with appropriate grammatical items. However, based on my experience, some of them may produce sentences grammatically correct but semantically wrong (e.g. *we are necessary* in place of <u>*it is/we find it*</u> *necessary*). Therefore, as the teacher does not give them explicit hints, more capable students would give correct answers, contrasting with the erroneous answers. The teacher can then highlight and discuss the differences between the answers before moving on to the corpus exploration.

Instructions: read the abstract from an undergraduate research article (abridged & slightly edited). Complete the two sentences by filling the blanks provided (Hint: there should be two words if two lines are given).

During the last nine years, more and more young people join in the carnival on November 11 affectionately known as "Double 11 Shopping Festival". Although Chinese millennials are often asked in marketing research studies as to why they shop online on this day, their views have never been considered seriously – many of our peers have been left out of the dialogue. In light of this, we (1) _____ _____ necessary that the reported data needs to take immediate peer groups. In addition, one subject that emerges is why millennial choose to participate in this festival in the age of such fabulous in-store experiences. (2) _____ _____ interesting to see what attracts this student group to the online venue from a list of motivational factors including social satisfaction and financial savings.

Reference

Zhao, X., Chen, X., Song, X., Zhang, W., Gao, L., & De Ciel, R. (2019). A look at Alibaba Double 11 Shopping Festival. *Journal of Student Research, 8*(1), 88-91.

Activity 2: Studying Concordance Lines for the Correct Sentence Structure of Evaluation (30 minutes)

Purpose: After introducing the target corpus tool, and basic concepts of the corpus (e.g. concordance lines, collocational patterns, authentic language use, etc.), this study serves to give students hands-on experience to work with concordance lines, in a more controlled fashion. The concordance lines are selected by the teacher to minimise confusion, e.g. having to read 50 lines at a time, dealing with difficult vocabulary, etc. The students will have a chance to explore the corpus tool in the forthcoming activities. The teacher will also remind the students to focus on the sentence patterns and their grammatical components instead of finding the meanings of separate lexical items.

Instructions: In pairs, study the concordance lines in the following figures. Check whether your answers in Activity 1 are correct. Then, answer the following questions and discuss the answers with your partner.

Figure 1. Sentence pattern for (1)

Figure 2. Sentence pattern for (2)

a. Read the highlighted words in the concordance lines of Figure 1 & 2. What word is in the Subject position in each figure? Circle those words.

b. Observe the positions of "It" in the two sets of concordance lines. How does the pronoun "it" function in the sentences?

c. Discuss with your partner: suggest the possible sentence patterns that collocate with the adjectives for evaluation.

Subject	Verb	Object/ Complement

Suggested answer:

Subject	Verb	Object/ Complement (not complete)	
Noun	Find	Dummy "it"	Adjective
Dummy "it"	Linking verb	Adjective	

Note to teachers: If time allows, briefly explain the functions of the dummy "it" in the sentence as a subject or an object.

-   TEN-MINUTE BREAK -

Activity 3: Categorising Adjectives for Evaluation (30 minutes)

Purpose: This activity seeks to help students explore the corpus and find the common adjectives for evaluation of the subject matter, while more distant from emotion-triggering commentaries. This is achieved through using the two sentence patterns taught in Activity 2. Students would also learn to classify different types of adjectives for expressing positive or negative stances. Through this activity, they do not just learn the sentence structures, but kinds of evaluative meaning targeting different topics in terms of possibility, necessity, importance, etc.

Instructions: based on the sentence patterns found in #2, engage the corpus tool and look for top 30 adjectives collocating with such patterns in the sub-corpus of academic writing.

1   Instructions:

　　1.1　In "Collocates", key in "it is" or "find it" in the first search bar.

　　1.2　Click on the "POS" next to the second search bar, and choose "adj.ALL".

　　1.3　Click on the number "2" to identify the adjectives collocates within 2 words on the right of "it is"/ "find it".

　　1.4　Click "Sections", and choose "ACADEMIC" in [1].

　　1.5　Click on "Find Collocates".

Figure 3. Instructions for searching the right collocates (adjectives) of "it is" in academic texts

2   Sort the adjectives into seven main categories (modified based on Bednarek [2006]). Students can complete the table collaboratively using Google Docs:

Category	Examples (Students can add more)
Ease	easy, difficult, hard
Importance	important, crucial
Expectedness	obvious, surprising
Possibility	possible, impossible
Necessity	imperative, necessary
Reliability	useful, good
Emotivity	wise, unfortunate

Note to teachers: before the activity, Teacher can briefly explain these categories (note that these categories are not definitive), and that these adjectives are useful ones for giving comments on their essay topics, research activities, etc.

Activity 4: Completing the Sentence Structure (25 minutes)

Purpose: This activity aims to help students complete the sentence structure that combines the expression of evaluation (*we find/it is* + adjective) and the target of evaluation (i.e. essay topic, subject knowledge, research findings, etc.). They will consult the corpus tool again, and identify the Complement components in the concordance lines (i.e. to-infitives or that-clauses).

a. T tells students that it is not enough just to express comments; they also need to direct their comments to the topic.
b. In pairs, students will study the concordance lines (either in the activity sheet or on COCA directly) and identify the two common phrase/ clause patterns immediately following the adjectives.

Suggested answer:

Subject	Verb	Object/ Complement		
Noun	Find	Dummy "it"	Adjective	1. To-infinitive 2. That-clause
Dummy "it"	Linking verb	Adjective		

c. They will also copy, from the concordance lines, one or two examples for each pattern. If necessary, they can click on a particular entry for more context.

Grammatical pattern	Examples from the corpus
N + find it + adj + to-inf/ that-clause	1. 2.
It is + adj + to-inf/ that-clause	1. 2.

d. T tells students that the things described in the to-infinitives and that-clauses after adjectives would be the targets of evaluation. For example, in the sentence "**it is necessary** to pay more attention to the older patients."

Comment	Target of evaluation
Necessary	Paying more attention to the older patients *(caretakers **need** to take this action.)*

Note to teachers: While it is possible to move them around in the sentence (e.g. "To compete with big enterprises is difficult for SMEs."), it is out of the scope of the present lesson, but will be very helpful to discuss it in future lessons.

Activity 5: Review & Take-home Task

(15inutes + follow-up in the next lesson)

Purpose: In this concluding session, T and Ss review the two main patterns for evaluation and expressing stance. In addition, students will also work independently to apply what they have learnt in the tutorial to the individual rewriting exercise. They are also encouraged to make use of the corpus tool to do the extra discussion activity.

a.   Discuss when each of the two patterns are used

> *Hint: note again from the concordances, especially those from the search of "find it + adjective", what nouns would usually take the Subject positions. For example:*

Figure 3. "Evaluators" (nouns in Subject position, circled) as do-ers of the thinking action (*find it + adjective*)

Figure 4. Concordance lines (*it is + adjective*) for highlighting the evaluation

Suggested answer:
- "Find it + adjective" is used when we want to indicate the "evaluator" who performs the action of "finding" (something is necessary according to **whom?**);
- "it is + adjective" can often omit the evaluator, unless the prepositional phrase "for + evaluator" is included in the structure (e.g. it is important **for everyone** to know if the President failed…)

Wrap up: the evaluative patterns introduced in this tutorial seek to help students "correct" more "Chinese-like" expressions such as "SMEs are difficult to compete…" (cf. 中小企很難和__ 競爭...) and replace them with "SMEs find it difficult to…", the pattern more closely resembling the Chinese counterpart.

b. Take-home writing task: Rewrite the underlined parts having less English-like evaluative expressions and present the results in the next class.

Text A

The majority of customers in Hong Kong are used to the traditional display space in a store. In light of this, the retailing team noticed that they are important to adopt a new approach for product assortment. For instance, they placed the new arrivals facing the door and the shoes, accessories or cosmetics next to the garments. As a result, the consumers are easy to know the possible ways to match them. This new product assortment method had great success, which encouraged the customers to buy multiple items simultaneously.

Text B

SMEs play an important role in the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs), promotion of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, creation of employment and decent jobs, promotion of sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation and the reduction of inequality. However, manufacturing SMEs are challenging to include low innovation and product development. Other challenges would be inability to access both domestic and international markets, inability to access affordable credit, tedious and lengthy process in quality standards and certification. In addition, they face limited access to markets which is a severe constraint to its growth and competitiveness. Further, as a result of their small sizes, it usually finds difficult to compete in the domestic economy with established enterprises, face competition from imported goods, and lack requisite productive capacity and technologies to meet demand in the international markets. It is argued that some affirmative action and selective interventions and preference schemes by the government can enhance their market penetration. SMEs are difficult to access public procurement opportunities compared to large firms.

Extracted and edited from

Osano, H. M. (2019). Global expansion of SMEs: role of global market strategy for Kenyan SMEs. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, *8*(1), 13.

Activity 6: "Bonus stage" – Extra observations

a. If time allows, Teacher and students can use the examples text to discuss where in a paragraph using evaluative sentence patterns is common.

1   First sentence of a point in a paragraph;

2   Concluding sentence of the paragraph, or places where the writer explains the consequence of something.

b. Using the "Compare" function, make a comparative search for the patterns of adjective use between "it is + adjective" and "find it + adjective"

1   General usage

SEE CONTEXT: CLICK ON NUMBERS (WORD 1 OR 2)   [HELP...]
SORTED BY RATIO: CHANGE TO FREQUENCY

WORD 1 (W1): IT IS (28.12)						WORD 2 (W2): FIND IT (0.04)				
	WORD	W1	W2	W1/W2	SCORE		WORD	W2	W1	W2/W1	SCORE
1	CLEAR	8688	3	2,896.0	103.0	1	AMUSING	226	100	2.3	63.6
2	CRITICAL	1378	0	2,756.0	98.0	2	DISTASTEFUL	38	19	2.0	56.2
3	LATE	1340	0	2,680.0	95.3	3	APPEALING	23	12	1.9	53.9
4	EVIDENT	1280	0	2,560.0	91.0	4	HUMOROUS	47	25	1.9	52.9
5	ONLY	2450	1	2,450.0	87.1	5	OFFENSIVE	175	140	1.3	35.2
6	APPARENT	1052	0	2,104.0	74.8	6	REPULSIVE	25	20	1.3	35.2
7	CRUCIAL	927	0	1,854.0	65.9	7	RELAXING	23	19	1.2	34.0
8	SUPPOSED	844	0	1,688.0	60.0	8	CHARMING	25	25	1.0	28.1
9	UNCOMMON	759	0	1,518.0	54.0	9	HILARIOUS	88	99	0.9	25.0
10	OKAY	733	0	1,466.0	52.1	10	ODD	267	342	0.8	22.0

2   Academic usage

SEE CONTEXT: CLICK ON NUMBERS (WORD 1 OR 2)   [HELP...]
SORTED BY RATIO: CHANGE TO FREQUENCY

WORD 1 (W1): IT IS (81.07)						WORD 2 (W2): FIND IT (0.01)				
	WORD	W1	W2	W1/W2	SCORE		WORD	W2	W1	W2/W1	SCORE
1	CLEAR	3101	0	6,202.0	76.5	1	EASIER	80	454	0.2	14.3
2	TRUE	1594	0	3,188.0	39.3	2	HELPFUL	39	327	0.1	9.7
3	UNCLEAR	907	0	1,814.0	22.4	3	DIFFICULT	405	3424	0.1	9.6
4	COMMON	603	0	1,206.0	14.9	4	USEFUL	56	587	0.1	7.7
5	POSSIBLE	5917	5	1,183.4	14.6	5	EASY	56	1214	0.0	3.7
6	EVIDENT	583	0	1,166.0	14.4	6	IMPOSSIBLE	39	1465	0.0	2.2
7	CRITICAL	558	0	1,116.0	13.8	7	NECESSARY	47	2247	0.0	1.7
8	ESSENTIAL	1000	1	1,000.0	12.3						
9	GOOD	469	0	938.0	11.6						
10	APPARENT	441	0	882.0	10.9						
11	CRUCIAL	406	0	812.0	10.0						

Note: The pattern "find it + adjective" is actually less commonly used in academic contexts. This may be because most academic texts foreground topic knowledge and research events and activities more than human agents (e.g. researchers, authors, respondents, etc.)

References

Bednarek, M. (2006). *Evaluation in media discourse: Analysis of a newspaper corpus*. London, UK: Continuum.

Text samples

Osano, H. M. (2019). Global expansion of SMEs: role of global market strategy for Kenyan SMEs. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, *8*(1), 13.

Zhao, X., Chen, X., Song, X., Zhang, W., Gao, L., & De Ciel, R. (2019). A look at Alibaba Double 11 Shopping Festival. *Journal of Student Research, 8*(1), 88-91.