

Speaking and Writing with Conviction

Whether writing a paper or giving an oral presentation, how you present your argument is as important as the argument itself. The way in which you present an idea, convey information, or convince an audience helps to determine the strength and efficacy of your argument.

Consider this example where two students must argue a similar point in only a few sentences:

- Student #1: Global climate change *appears* to be a real and present threat that *seems* to have been scientifically proven. Action *should* be taken today in order to prevent any *possible* negative implications.
- Student #2: Global climate change *is* a real and present threat that *has been* scientifically proven. Leaders *must* take action today in order to prevent *future* negative implications.

Both students communicate the same information; however, the effectiveness of their arguments is vastly different. Whether or not you agree with the information the students are presenting, student #2's argument remains more convincing as a result of its affirmative tone, active voice, and stronger word choice.

Student #2 conveys the information with **conviction**.

Affirmative Tone: Avoid taking a negative approach to argument whenever possible. For example, *Political leaders must take immediate action to address global climate change* is a stronger statement than *Political leaders are not doing enough to address global climate change*.

Active Voice: Use of the passive voice can make your argument less convincing. For example, *Action should be taken* is less powerful than *Global leaders must act*.

Word Choice: A key to strengthening both your verbal and written arguments is to replace weak and ambivalent words and phrases such as *appears*, *seems*, *sort of*, *kind of*. These are unnecessary and diminish your argument. If you have the evidence to back up your argument, then assert your points confidently using strong words.

When you write or speak with conviction—as if you believe your argument—chances are your audience will too.

**I entreat you, I implore you, I exhort you,
I challenge you: To speak with conviction.**

**To say what you believe in a manner that bespeaks
the determination with which you believe it.
Because contrary to the wisdom of the bumper sticker,
it is not enough these days to simply QUESTION AUTHORITY.**

You have to speak with it, too. --Taylor Mali

Find Taylor Mali's complete spoken word poem about **speaking with conviction** on YouTube or at www.taylormali.com/poems-online/totally-like-whatever-you-know/

