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Adapt the formality of your writing to match the purpose and task

Learning objective

- select the right level of formality for a specific text.

It is important to be able to judge how formal or informal a text should be, and to know how to adapt your writing so that it is appropriate for the reader or audience.

Getting you thinking

Read this extract from the transcript of an interview about the **culling** of badgers.

Reporter:

So, what's your basic argument against...well... this culling, killing, of badgers to stop TB, because the government, DEFRA, are convinced it's right?

Protester:

It's simple. It's not gonna stop TB. There's been loads of research done and most people, well scientists... experts...well they all say that there's no hard evidence culling will work! And we now know that only 6% of badgers have TB so any cull is gonna be pretty hit-and-miss, if you know what I mean. Plus we all know what really causes TB in cattle – it's moving stacks of cows around the country. That's what's to blame if you ask me.

Glossary

culling: selectively killing animals for environmental or public health reasons

1

If you were a reporter who wanted to write this up for a national newspaper, you would need to

- sum up the topic simply and clearly
 - report the views of the protester, but remove informal or unnecessary turns of phrase so the article represents their views accurately.
- a) Which words or phrases could you omit?
 - b) Which informal words or phrases would you change?

How does it work?

Most articles dealing with controversial issues try to balance explanation with different opinions. Sometimes this is in the form of *direct quotation*, sometimes in the form of *reported speech*.



An anonymous protester *argued that* the proposed badger cull was not *going to prevent* TB.

past tense used for reports of what was said

past tense, and change from 'gonna stop' to 'going to prevent'

Note that there are no speech marks, nor any reference to the writer ('I').

Now you try it

- 2 Read the transcript again, then turn the rest of it into a formal newspaper report. Use this as a starting point:

An anonymous protester argued that the proposed badger cull was not going to prevent TB. He also asserted that extensive research had been done and...

You could try to include one direct quotation from the protester. Decide which one is most suitable.



Apply your skills

The reporter also managed to interview a local farmer. Here is the transcript of what he said.

Alan Rickway: I mean, it makes my blood boil! These people... I mean, they don't have to deal with losing half your herd, like I did this winter. We've got to do something. I mean, this crazy idea that it's all to do with moving cattle about all over the country – well, that's just nuts! I reared my cattle here, on the farm, and they're slaughtered locally. We do things by the book, so you tell me how TB got into my herd!

- 3 Note down
- the key points the farmer makes
 - which informal words and phrases you would remove.

- 4 Write up the farmer's interview as the next part of the article, using a mix of direct and reported speech. Consider how you could use the passive voice to make your writing sound less personal. For example, 'I reared my cattle here' becomes, 'His cattle *have been reared* on his farm'.

Check your progress

Some progress

I can recognise informal and formal usages in texts, and use some of them in my own work.

Good progress

I can adapt an informal text, changing most informal features into formal ones, including reported speech.

Excellent progress

I can take an informal text and summarise key points, adapt informal features and move fluently between direct and reported speech.

Summarise and organise material from different sources

Learning objectives

- list relevant information from two sources
- organise facts and figures into an argument.

It is important to know how to select and write up relevant information into a clear summary.

Getting you thinking

Read these two newspaper articles about the homeless.

Homeless crisis as 400 youths a day face life on the streets of Britain

Number sleeping rough in London since April already up by 32% on whole of last year

A major study revealed today by the *Sunday Mirror* found 13,000 youngsters went to local authorities in October to declare themselves homeless or seek advice on how to cope.

And the number sleeping rough in London alone since April is already up by 32 per cent on the whole of last year.

The survey of more than 500 charities and councils around the country found support workers can barely cope with the huge rise in homeless youngsters...

The grim findings are expected to be backed up in the latest Government figures – already showing a 15 per cent rise in youth homelessness – out this week.

Pressures

But the true extent of the problem is likely to be even worse because many rough sleepers will never seek help.

Young homeless people told the *Sunday Mirror* the problem often starts because of their difficulty in finding regular work in the economic downturn.

Last month unemployment in the 16–24 group hit a million and the number of NEETs (not in education, employment or training) reached 1.16 million...

The report found family breakdown, often linked to financial pressures, is the main cause of young people leaving home and having to sleep rough.

The Mirror, 4 December 2011



'Bob the cat rescued me...'

James Bowen says beloved feline friend helped him go from a nobody to a somebody – and he's now the subject of an international bestseller

He's Bob the Street Cat, subject of an international bestseller and about to make his first foray into Hollywood movies in the film of his own eventful little life. [...]

The book *A Street Cat Named Bob* and sequel *The World According To Bob* were written by Bob's human, 33-year-old



3.2

1 In pairs, read the *Mirror* article, paragraph by paragraph. Make notes in two columns titled 'What is the homelessness crisis?' and 'What are the causes of the crisis?'

2 What two pieces of information in the second article support the argument that, despite James's individual good fortune, homelessness is generally a serious problem? Add this information to your notes.

How does it work?

Every paragraph in the first article is relevant to your notes about the homelessness crisis, but not every *word* is. You can *paraphrase* and leave words out.

Although homelessness is not the focus of the second story, it still includes relevant information about it.

Now you try it

3 Re-read the inspiring story about Bob and James. List (in note form) three facts or figures that make James a 'somebody' now.

Apply your skills

4 An MP suggests that all homeless people need to do is show initiative, quoting your three facts and figures about James. Write an argument essay for your school magazine summarising James's experience (in one paragraph) and explaining why the MP is wrong (in five paragraphs, using all the facts and figures that you have gathered). Call your essay 'One chance in 1.16 million'.

James Bowen. James had been homeless for more than a decade when he found stray, injured Bob.

The inspiring tale (!) of their unlikely friendship has now sold 750,000 copies in the UK alone, and been translated into 27 languages.

As James tells it: 'Our story seemed to connect with people who were facing difficult times in their lives.'

Polly Hudson, *The Mirror*,
1 July 2013

Check your progress

Some progress

I can select relevant information from a text.

Good progress

I can collect together relevant information to create and sustain a line of argument in my writing.

Excellent progress

I can carefully select facts, figures and relevant details to support a convincing argument.