lilyPD
Grab-N-Go

Credibility Activity: Eliminate the Wishy-Washy

Task: Tighten up your writing to improve your tone and credibility

Instructions:

1. Read through your draft.
2. Strike through any language that is uncertain, wishy-washy, or lacks confidence.
3. Here is a partial list of words / phrases you might remove:

Opinion markers that weaken the claim

- I think / I believe / I feel
- In my opinion / In my view
- It seems to me
- I would argue / I would say (when it's not responding to a specific objection)
- Personally

Hedging verbs and modals

- seems to / appears to / tends to
- might / may / could / would (when the writer actually means "does")
- can be said to
- is somewhat / is kind of / is sort of
- probably / possibly / perhaps / maybe

Vague quantifiers and softeners

- a bit / a little / rather / fairly / quite
- somewhat / to some extent / in some ways
- more or less / for the most part
- some people say / many people believe / it is often said (with no source)

Throat-clearing and false modesty

- It could be argued that
- One might say that
- It is possible that
- This essay will try to / attempt to / hopes to
- In this essay I am going to
- Obviously / clearly (these are often used to cover for weak evidence, so they're a different kind of problem)

Vague filler that avoids committing

- very / really / extremely (intensifiers that add no precision)
- things / stuff / aspects / factors (when a specific noun would do)
- in a way / in a sense
- at the end of the day / when all is said and done
- etc. / and so on

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