



*Workbook:*  
Conditional  
Language in  
Teaching



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A Practical Guide

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# **1. Practice makes (almost) perfect: Practice conditional language**

If you want to get better at consciously using conditional or absolute language, you've come to the right place. Here you will find three exercise texts that you can rewrite – there's no one right way to do this, but you will find a sample solution in the last section.

## **1.1 From an election program**

The following text comes from the election program of a Europe-wide party called Volt<sup>1</sup> – as a political text, it is written in rather absolute language. Rewrite it so that it becomes more conditional. A sample solution can be found in the last section.

In today's world, there is a greater demand for highly skilled and socially engaged people. In the period up to 2025, half of all jobs are expected to require high-level qualifications. Digital technology is making jobs more flexible and complex. People will need to handle complex information, think independently and creatively, use resources (including digital ones), communicate effectively, and be resilient. Creativity and transversality are crucial for personal development and solving societal problems. Every citizen should always have the opportunity to achieve higher levels of education, regardless of the choices they have made at different stages of their lives. Volt aims to revitalise tertiary education with innovative measures to keep pace with new trends.

(Volt, 2023, p. 15)

## **1.2 From a paper**

The following text comes from the abstract of a paper and is accordingly already written rather conditionally. Rewrite it to make it more absolute. A sample solution can be found in the last section.

We surveyed students to better understand why they did not turn on their cameras. We confirmed several predicted reasons including the most frequently reported: being concerned about personal appearance. Other reasons included being concerned about other people and the physical location being seen in the background and having a weak internet connection, all of which our exploratory analyses suggest may disproportionately influence underrepresented minorities. Additionally, some students revealed to us that social norms also play a role in camera use. This information was used to develop strategies to encourage—without requiring—camera use while promoting equity and inclusion. Broadly, these strategies are to not require camera use, explicitly encourage usage while establishing norms, address potential distractions, engage students with active learning, and understand your students' challenges through surveys. While the demographics and needs of students vary by course and institution, our recommendations will likely be directly helpful to many instructors and also serve as a model for gathering data to develop strategies more tailored for other student populations.

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<sup>1</sup> The political texts in this guide are not intended to represent a political opinion of the author or the university; they were chosen only because they serve well as examples of the absolute style of language.

(Castelli & Sarvary, 2021)

### 1.3 From a newspaper article

The following text is taken from a newspaper article and contains a mixture of language styles. Feel free to rewrite it twice—once to make it more absolute, and once to make it more conditional. Sample solutions can be found in the last section.

A rapid reduction in fossil fuels, essential to avoid devastating climate breakdown, would have minimal financial impact on the vast majority of people, new research has shown.

Urgently cutting back on fossil fuel production is essential to avoid the worst impacts of climate breakdown and the economic and social turmoil that would ensue. However, some opponents of climate action claim it is too expensive. They argue that rapidly scaling back fossil fuel production would leave billions of pounds of “stranded assets”, leading to an economic slump that would impoverish the public through a fall in the value of savings and pension funds.

Research published on Thursday finds that the loss of fossil fuel assets would have a minimal impact on the general public.

“We find that the bulk of financial losses associated with rotten, polluting assets is borne by the wealthy,” said the co-author Lucas Chancel, a professor of economics at Sciences Po in Paris. “Only a small share of financial losses is borne by the working and middle class because they have no or relatively little financial wealth.”

(Taylor, 2023)

## 2. Sample solutions

Of course, there are many different ways to rewrite these texts. Hopefully, the following sample solutions will still help you assess the extent to which your rephrasing has been successful. Feel free to critically compare your solution and the sample solution and use this as a further opportunity for reflection.

### 2.1 From an election program

In more conditional terms, the text could read as follows:

In today's world, there is a greater demand for **skilled** and socially engaged people. In the period up to 2025, half of all jobs are expected to require high-level qualifications. Digital technology is making jobs more flexible and complex. People will **probably** need to handle complex information, think independently and creatively, use resources (including digital ones), communicate effectively, and be resilient. Creativity and transversality are **relevant to** personal development and solving societal problems. **More citizens should have** the opportunity to achieve higher levels of education, regardless of the choices they have made at different stages of their lives. Volt aims to **improve** tertiary education with **measures** to keep pace with new trends.

### 2.2 From a paper

In more absolute terms, the text could read like this:

We surveyed students to **understand** why they did not turn on their cameras. We confirmed several predicted reasons including the most frequently reported: being concerned about personal appearance. Other reasons **were** being concerned about other people and the physical location being seen in the background and having a weak internet connection, all of which our exploratory analyses **show** disproportionately **influences** underrepresented minorities. Additionally, **students** revealed to us that social norms also play a role in camera use. This information was used to develop strategies to encourage—without requiring—camera use while promoting equity and inclusion. **These** strategies are to not require camera use, explicitly encourage usage while establishing norms, address potential distractions, engage students with active learning, and understand your students' challenges through surveys. While the demographics and needs of students vary by course and institution, our recommendations **are** helpful to many instructors and also serve as a model for gathering data to develop strategies more tailored for other student populations.

### 2.3 From a newspaper article

In more absolute terms, the text could read like this:

A rapid reduction in fossil fuels, essential to avoid devastating climate breakdown, would have **almost no** financial impact on **almost everyone**, new research has shown.

Urgently cutting back on fossil fuel production is essential to avoid the worst impacts of climate breakdown and the economic and social turmoil that would ensue. However, **opponents** of climate action claim it is too expensive. They argue that rapidly scaling back fossil fuel

production **will** leave billions of pounds of “stranded assets”, leading to an economic slump that **will** impoverish the public through a fall in the value of savings and pension funds.

Research published on Thursday **proves** that the loss of fossil fuel assets **will** have **almost no** impact on the general public.

“We find that **the financial losses** associated with rotten, polluting assets are borne by the wealthy,” said the co-author Lucas Chancel, a professor of economics at Sciences Po in Paris. “Only a **tiny** share of financial losses is borne by the working and middle class because they have **no financial wealth**.”

In more conditional terms, the text could read as follows:

A **reduction** in fossil fuels, **relevant** to avoiding **climate breakdown**, would have minimal financial impact on **the majority of** people, new research **implies**.

**Cutting** back on fossil fuel production is **important** to avoid the worst impacts of climate breakdown and the economic and social **problems** that **might** ensue. However, some opponents of climate action claim it is too expensive. They argue that **scaling** back fossil fuel production **could** leave billions of pounds of “stranded assets”, leading to an economic slump that **might** impoverish the public through a fall in the value of savings and pension funds.

Research published on Thursday **suggests** that the loss of fossil fuel assets **might** have a minimal impact on the general public.

“We **believe** that **many** financial losses associated with rotten, polluting assets are borne by the wealthy,” said the co-author Lucas Chancel, a professor of economics at Sciences Po in Paris. “Only a small share of financial losses is borne by the working and middle class because they **tend to** have no or relatively little financial wealth.”

### 3. References

Castelli, F. R., & Sarvary, M. A. (2021). Why students do not turn on their video cameras during online classes and an equitable and inclusive plan to encourage them to do so. *Ecology and Evolution*, 11(8), 3565–3576.

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