

English: Composition Skills



Lesson 1

Chapter 1

Section 1

Lessons 1-5

THE POWER OF WORDS



While in medical training, surgeons are encouraged to weigh the importance of each word spoken during an operation. As the *anesthetic* is given, a patient may be overcome with a sense of fear if she hears a nurse say, “I’m going to shoot her now.” Even a phrase such as “hook up the monitor” may be interpreted by a drugged patient as sounding like “shake up the monster.” Can you imagine the impact on a half-dazed patient if she hears a doctor say, “This is not my day!”

The same directions given by two different physicians could encourage or discourage a patient, simply by the physician’s *tone* of voice. One doctor’s voice might suggest a prescription will work, while another’s voice might convey *reservations*. Either would drastically affect the *morale* of a patient.

Theodore Roosevelt popularized an expression about the need for clear, *precise* communication. He called words with several possible meanings ‘*weasel words*’—by using them, a speaker might ‘*weasel*’ out of any commitment, claiming a different interpretation of the word. ■ (HB)

VOCABULARY

Anesthetic: a drug that numbs patients before surgery

Tone: manner and emphasis of expression

Reservations: doubts, cautious thoughts

Morale: moral and mental courage to endure hardship

Precise: exact, clearly expressed

Weasel words: words used by an uncharactered person to back out of duty, responsibility or commitment

Weasel: a rodent often referred to when describing sly, sneaky behavior



WORDS

Words are important and powerful! What a person says has impact and influence. On an average, men speak 12,000 words a day, and women speak 24,000 words a day. Many of those words are spoken without careful consideration of their impact. You may encounter harsh words throughout the day. Words that are careless and cruel hurt. However, tender words of love, concern and affection give hope, joy and a desire to succeed.

Some words may change a person's life destiny. Words such as "I do" spoken during a wedding will commit a person to another in a lifetime of marriage. "You are hired" or "You are fired" can direct a person's career. "Run, fire!" or "Help me!" can save someone's life. "I'm sorry, please forgive me" can repair a broken relationship.

Words have changed the course of the world and America. "The Preamble" to the United States Constitution set the course for the United States to become the most powerful nation in the modern world; "No King but King Jesus!" was the battle cry of the American colonists that spurred them on to freedom from British tyranny during the Revolution; "The Gettysburg Address" helped repair the Union; the Presidential Oath of Office directs the United States' most powerful officer; "The Ten Commandments" has been the foundation for law all over the world, from Asia to America, and influenced the men who designed the United States Constitution; the United States' national motto, "In God We Trust," tells the world on whom Americans depend; "Remember the Alamo!" motivated Texans to gain independence; "The Pledge of Allegiance" commits Americans to uphold justice and liberty for all; "I Have a Dream" revolutionized the purpose and lifestyle for many Americans of African descent; "If I perish, I perish" were the brave words spoken by Queen Esther of Persia who saved her people from destruction.

Using the right words when communicating with others is *vitally* important. Through listening to older people, children learn right and wrong words. By the age of two, an average *toddler's* vocabulary includes hundreds of words and may even include sentences. Children entering kindergarten know thousands of words. As you grow, you continually hear new words and learn to use them. Words form in your mind, come out of your mouth in *syllables* and create sentences. Knowledge enters your mind by way of words, either spoken or written. Learning the correct words and rejecting the wrong words is important to communicating properly with others and becoming a master of your language.

TONE

Tone of voice is the manner, pitch and quality of how a person says something. The same words or phrases may have several tones, conveying different meanings. By listening to *how* the speaker *inflects* his voice, a listener may detect different attitudes. The tone of voice may reflect that a person is content, kind, relaxed, gentle, *inquisitive*, factual, commanding, *exclamatory*, puzzled, sarcastic, teasing, bored, excited, angry, loving, sad, frightened, longing, caring, happy, hurt; embarrassed, confident; rude, kind; humble, prideful; defensive, helpful; honest, deceitful; envious, complimentary; sinister, compassionate; pouting, accepting; mysterious,

VOCABULARY

Vitally: very necessary

Toddler: a young child just learning to walk

Syllables: individual sounds of words

Inflect: to cause the voice to rise and fall when emphasizing certain words

Inquisitive: questioning, uncertain, wondering

Exclamatory: forcefully, with energy or strength

bragging; polite or sincere.

In the following examples, the parts of speech that should be inflected are bolded.

<u>Inquisitive</u>	Dad asked Mom, “Do you think I should go to the doctor , Honey?”
<u>Commanding</u>	“Go to the doctor today ,” she said.
<u>Factual</u>	Dad told us at breakfast, “Today I will go to the doctor.” (no inflection)
<u>Exclamatory</u>	“ Go to the doctor! ” we said, surprised and shocked.
<u>Puzzling</u>	“Go to the doctor. . . Hmm. . . I wonder if I should.”
<u>Sarcastic/Teasing</u>	With a wink, Mom said, “ Go to the doctor , Honey; he might be able to find out what is wrong with you.”
<u>Boring</u>	Dad told Uncle Thomas, “Oh, brother, today I have to go to the doctor. ”
<u>Exciting</u>	My little brother yelled, “ Yea! I like to go to the doctor! ”
<u>Angry</u>	Later, I heard Dad say, “I do not want to go to the doctor! ”
<u>Loving</u>	Mom reassured Dad, “I’ll go to the doctor with you , Honey.”
<u>Sad</u>	At lunch I told my friends, “My Dad has to go to the doctor. ”
<u>Frightened</u>	“When we go to the doctor , what if we discover that Dad is really ill? ”
<u>Longing</u>	I thought to myself, “I wish Dad did not have to go to the doctor. ”
<u>Caring</u>	Mom told Dad, “When you go to the doctor, I’ll be right by your side.”
<u>Happy</u>	“ He believes I can become a doctor someday.”
<u>Hurt</u>	“ He said I would never be smart enough to become a doctor. ”
<u>Embarrassed</u>	“I could never become a doctor; I am not smart enough.”
<u>Confident</u>	“I will do my best to be a good student and become a doctor —that is one of my goals in life.”
<u>Rude</u>	“ Don’t even think you can become a doctor; you are not smart enough. ”
<u>Kind</u>	“I believe you can become a doctor ; you are very intelligent.”
<u>Prideful</u>	“ Of course I could become a doctor ; I am an honor student. ”
<u>Humble</u>	“With your help and encouragement , I know becoming a doctor is possible for me.”
<u>Defensive</u>	“ What do you mean I am not able to become a doctor? ”
<u>Helpful</u>	“I will tutor you to bring up your grades. Then, someday, you may become a good doctor.”

Continue to the next page to read more inflections and tones of voice.



<u>Deceitful</u>	“To become a doctor , you might have to cheat on your exams.”
<u>Honest</u>	“I will not cheat. I will become a doctor by honest, hard work .”
<u>Envious</u>	“ He thinks he is smart enough to become a doctor and to get rich .”
<u>Complimentary</u>	“He is intelligent enough to become a successful doctor.”
<u>Sinister</u>	“I will make life so hard on him, he will not be able to become a doctor.”
<u>Compassionate</u>	“His life has not been easy ; I will help him become a good doctor .”
<u>Pouting</u>	“ Life is hard and I am poor ; I cannot become a doctor.”
<u>Accepting</u>	“ Although my life is difficult and I am poor , I will study hard to become a good doctor .”
<u>Mysterious</u>	“An unknown person donated \$1,000 toward my medical school scholarship.”
<u>Bragging</u>	“Someone gave me \$1,000 because they knew I was smart enough to become a doctor .”
<u>Encouraging</u>	“Although you are struggling with your grades now , you will do better .”
<u>Sincere</u>	“I believe that if you really try , you will become a very good doctor .”

As you have just learned, the attitude of the speaker comes through in his tone of voice. Your father or grandmother may have said to you, “Do not use that tone of voice with me!” He or she may have detected a negative tone in your voice. Remember, your choice of words and tone of voice can affect how your meaning is conveyed to your listeners. Be careful! Your words and tone have impact!

Congratulations! Now that you know about the power of words, practice your knowledge in the Activities.

LIFE PRINCIPLE

“Ninety percent of the friction of daily life is caused by the wrong tone of voice.”



—HB