

Lesson 4: A Revising Tool for Repetitive Wording

Instructor Name	Devon Jancin
Lesson Date (hypothetical)	Week 9 “Revising Your Stakeholder Analysis”
Subject Area	English composition and rhetoric
Institutional Level	Mainstream college undergraduate (high proficiency level required)
Activity Topic(s)	A revising tool for repetitive wording
Instructional Group	CO150 International students

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will learn how Compleat Lexical Tutor’s keyword function is a tool that can guide them with the revision process of finding a balance between repetitive wording and clear wording
2. Students will run a keyword analysis on their essay drafts to help them be able to notice repetitive wording
3. Students will self-correct repetitive wording in their drafts to increase the readability of their papers

LEARNER BACKGROUND/PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

At this point in the course students have completed an annotated bibliography on a debatable issue, which is their first real exposure to research. The stakeholder analysis assignment puts the research together and explores four different stakeholders’ various perspectives on one issue. The students stay neutral and learn how to cite sources and integrate research into their writing. American Academic writing encourages direct clarity, yet simultaneously discourages using the same word, favoring more diverse vocabulary usage (for a typical example of these standard values in an institution of higher education, see Whitaker, 2009, p. 19). This is a difficult medium for ELLs to navigate, yet it is important for their development as academic writers.

This activity comes in during the revision process of this assignment, after students have turned in the first draft of their essays for feedback on content, which now allows for more surface-level concerns (i.e. grammar and mechanical conventions). This activity is designed to help students be able to notice needed repetition (for clarity) versus detrimental repetition (redundancy). This tool can act as a clear starting point and guide for self-corrections as they revise their drafts.

MATERIALS

1. Computers with online access for each student (computer lab)
2. Students need an electronic copy of their draft, saved as a .txt file
3. Compleat Lexical Tutor → keywords extractor v.2
4. Keywords Tutorial Handout (see Appendix 4A)
5. Example essay (see Appendix 4B)

ACTIVITY DEVELOPMENT

1. Begin with a pre-assessing, attention-getting poll: *Raise your hand if you are happy with the amount of vocabulary you know* (Expected: very few raise their hands). *Raise your hand if, when you write your essays, you wish you knew more vocabulary because it seems you always just use the same word over and over.* (Expected answer: most people). *Raise your hand if you don't know if you are repeating the same words too much, but you would like it if someone told you* (Expected: everyone).
2. *Well, today we are going to talk about repetition of words in your essays.* (Display on overhead.) *For example, I have this paragraph here from an essay from last year. When I was looking at your first drafts, I noticed that many of you are doing something similar to this:*

There are many different stakeholders involved in this issue. Environmentalists **support** the idea of recycling because it would make our habitat in a healthy shape and reduce pollution. Also, the government **supports** recycling due to its advantages of saving energy and reducing the use of virgin materials. On the other hand, economists do not **support** recycling because it costs more than other waste disposal methods. Waste management workers, who perform recycling, landfilling or combustion, are also different. They may not **support** recycling because it needs more work than landfilling and combustion. Also, consumers of MSW may not **support** recycling if they have to separate recyclable material before throwing them away.

(Direct instruction) *As you can see, this student has a very clear paragraph introducing the different stakeholders and their views on this issue, which is very good. What he could improve on is his repetition of the word 'support'. He has used the word 'support' 5 times in this paragraph. American academic writing encourages you to use a variety of vocabulary. We want to avoid using the same word or phrase over and over.*

3. (Brief whole class discussion) *I know that many of my Chinese students tell me that in Chinese writing, good writing is very beautiful and descriptive and you really shouldn't repeat the same word too much because this is boring. Is this right? What do people say about repeating the same word over and over in your home countries?* (Expected answers: We try to avoid it, using a variety of words would be better, the student should

think of a synonym for 'support').

4. *Ok, so it seems like we are in agreement—this writer should find another word for 'support' to make his paper a little more interesting to read. What words could he use instead?* (Expected answers: argue for, is in favor of, think recycling is good/bad/positive/negative). Model out loud how, after each synonym suggested, you should read the sentence to make sure it fits into the context.
5. *So, how many does the student need to replace?* (Expected answer: 4 out of the 5) *There is no strict rule for how much repetition you can have, but it would be good to alternate between 'support' and a synonym to increase variation in the paper. I would replace 2 or 3 'supports', but replacing 4 is probably too much. It is very difficult to NEVER repeat the same word. It takes a lot of time to find many different synonyms for the same thing and have them all make sense in the context. We want to find a balance between using different words to not be boring, but also still be very clear for our audience. So, which 'supports' do you want to replace here? Which other words do you want to use?* (Class makes suggestions)
6. *Ok, it is VERY important that we only replace a word with something that makes sense. To see if it makes sense, it's good to read the whole paragraph out loud. Have class reread the paragraph with the new changes. Does it still make sense?* (Yes.)
7. *So, this is an example of a word that we could replace pretty easily, right? But not all words are the same. **If your sentence doesn't make sense, it's better to be repetitive than unclear!** For example, another word that is repeated a lot in this paragraph is 'recycling'. Does this mean I need to replace it?* (No, you can't because there is no other word to replace it with/it is the topic, it will be repeated a lot which is ok, because we want to be clear more than worry about every repeated word.)
8. (Hand out Appendix 4A) *Page 2 has some basic questions you should ask yourself so that you can find the balance between using synonyms and being clear.*
9. *Now, we have another tool that can help us to know when we are repeating a word too much- Compleat Lexical Tutor's keywords extractor. We are going to all run our essays through a program that tells us the most frequently used words that are in our essay. Then, using this list and page 2, you can decide if it is a word you can change, or you should keep it the same.*
10. (Take students through the process of running keywords extractor Step by Step as a class):
 - a.) Model for everyone how to convert their .doc files to .txt. (use Appendix 4B)
 - b.) Run essays through keywords extractor v.2 (see Appendix 4A page 1)
 - c.) Show how to use Appendix 4A questions.

Once students get started, walk around the room monitoring their understanding and progress and answering individual questions.

CLOSURE

Encourage students' progress from what you have seen so far. Write a few general things you have observed that the students should continue to do, and a few things to not do/watch out for as they complete the activity for homework.

For homework: *Finish up this activity using the worksheet to guide you. Go through your whole essay, watching for repetition of words based on the Lex Tutor results. Keep track of the changes you make on your worksheet. I will collect the worksheet for homework points next class. Remember, the main objective for this is to 1.) show you a way to check yourself for repetition and 2.) Practice finding a balance between diverse vocabulary usage and still being clear.*