

Lesson 5: Appropriate Word Choice Usage

Instructor Name	Devon Jancin
Lesson Date (hypothetical)	Week 12 “Revising Your Academic Argument”
Subject Area	English composition and rhetoric
Institutional Level	Mainstream college undergraduate (high proficiency level required)
Activity Topic(s)	Appropriate use of word choice
Instructional Group	CO150 International students

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will learn how the Concord Writer dictionary function is a tool that can assist them with the word choice revising process
2. Students will use Concord Writer to self-correct grammatical errors in their drafts to increase the readability and credibility (ethos) of their papers.

LEARNER BACKGROUND/PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

This lesson builds on the base knowledge students’ have of Compleat Lexical Tutor’s concord writer from Lesson 2. Students have been using another part of concord writer— Demo 2, for grammatical phrasing help—for about a month. Students were instructed to focus only on this use of concord writer, but some may have explored further by themselves. For this lesson it is assumed that students understand what concord writer is, but do not know how to use the intended dictionary function. This lesson also builds upon Lesson 4’s repetitive wording focus. Often, it is the experience of myself and other CO150 teachers that a common consequence of this lesson/in-class focus on repetitive wording results in synonym corrections that do not make sense for the particular context.

Currently in Week 9, students have completed the first draft of their academic argument. This assignment is the last paper they must write for CO150. Because students have been practicing writing all semester, receiving lots of rhetorical and mechanical feedback, as well as the fact that this paper is based on research they have been conducting all semester, there is more confidence than with the other assignments. As such, students make interestingly different patterns of error from what they were making at the start of the

term. Word choice (WC) is a very difficult pattern of error for students to notice by themselves (Ferris, 2002). One common error to see at this point is 'word choice' (WC). This is often because students are trying to expand their vocabulary. While before they may have settled for repetitive wording because they were focusing on making their ideas clear, now they want to capture the audience's interest and sound more professional, especially after encouraging this in Lesson 4. From my personal experience, many students have explained to me that they want to diversify their wording so their papers aren't "boring" and "repetitive". While these intentions are good, the result is nonnative speakers are independently looking up synonyms of appropriate words and adding them without fully understanding the meaning of the new words. Often certain words in English are more suitable to a particular context than others, but this is difficult for students to fix independently (Ferris, 2002).

My solution is to use the dictionary function of Lex Tutor's concord writer. I've observed (from CO150 students and working with all levels at the Writing Center) that usually word choice errors occur because the student notices that they have been using the same word several times and then either 1.) right clicks the mouse in Microsoft Word, selects the synonym function, and inserts whichever synonym looks most impressive, or 2.) uses an unreliable electronic translator to find another word. I believe that concord writer plus Lex Tutor's reliable, corpus-based dictionary can help counteract this problem. I hope that being able to read the concordance lines of the selected word and simultaneously using a reliable dictionary can combine to help the student determine the word's appropriateness in a given context. I as the teacher I have marked these occurrences on the students' first drafts so they know where to start, given how difficult word choice issues are for them.

MATERIALS

1. (Teacher pre-planning) Time to review students' first drafts, notice patterns of word choice (WC) errors
2. Computers with online access for each students (class held in a computer lab with ability to project teacher's computer screen)
3. Compleat Lexical Tutor®concord writer v.3
4. How to Use Concord Writer to Help with Word Choice Errors tutorial handout (see Appendix 5)

ACTIVITY DEVELOPMENT

1. Begin by handing back the first drafts of students' papers, praising them for their hard work and reminding them that this is the last major essay assignment, so they really want to make sure to put hard work into it.
2. Explain that this class will be spent focusing on an important convention of writing--

word choice. *Who knows what I mean by 'word choice'?* (Think-pair-share). *Turn to someone next to you and talk about this. You have one minute.* (Expected sharing answers: The kinds of words we pick to use in our essays. The words you choose can depend on your audience, the genre of your writing, and your purpose).

3. *Good, so in the papers I've handed back to you, you will notice that sometimes I've written 'WC' for 'word choice' above a word or phrase. In other classes the teacher might have used "WW" for 'wrong word'. The English department likes to say 'word choice'. Raise your hand if you have had a teacher who used either WC or WW to give you written corrective feedback.* (Expected: Yes students who have gone through INTO and CO130, no direct transfer students).
4. *Ok, someone who has gotten papers with this feedback before please explain to the class what this means.* (Expected answer: It means we used the wrong word for the specific sentence. The meaning of the word might be right, but it isn't right because of how it's being used in the sentence.)
5. *Thank you. Yes, X is right. In English, we have certain words that are better to use for certain things. For example, (write on board) "My friend and I played together today, which was really nice." What does this mean?* (Expected: They played a sport, they met and played games...) *Let's assume, based on the context, that it is not a sport, because it doesn't tell us anything about sports. How old are me and my friend?* (Expected: Young children, college students). *Those of you who say young children-- why?* (Because only young children play together). *Yes, in English, this word 'play' is only used to talk about young children. So, if you use it to talk about college students, you have made a 'word choice' (WC) error. Instead, you have to find another way to say what you mean. Suggestions?* (met, chatted, hung out, etc.) *Good. We are going to do another example in greater detail in just a minute for those of you who are still not sure about WC.*
6. (Direct instruction) *But first, how can you know when a word in English is wrong for the context of the sentence? It's one of the most difficult things for English learners. It takes a lot of time to slowly learn about what word is the best fit for your sentence. Today I'm going to show you a tool on Lex Tutor that can help you with this. However, I do want to add that it may be very frustrating for you to try to correct word choice errors completely by yourself, because it can be difficult to notice them. This is why I have marked them on your papers. This is also a good reason to visit the Writing Center, because native English speakers can help you with this too. I do know that many of you like to know how to improve your writing by yourselves as much as possible, because you are very good students and really want to learn how to write well in Academic English. I also know that in most of your other classes your teachers don't help you with grammar, so you need to help yourselves. Because of these reasons, I want to show you Concord Writer's dictionary function in Lex Tutor.*
7. (Hands-on demonstration) Pass out Appendix 5 and model step-by-step with class (see

Appendix 5)

CLOSURE

Walk around, helping to answer individual questions and check for understanding. *Continue self-correcting your essay's word choice errors using your handout. Most of you only had 1-3 WC errors. If you have more than 3, use Concord Writer to try and fix at least three.*

For homework: *I want everyone to post a comment on the class forum for homework points about this. Remember, the other members of the class can't read what you wrote, just me. I want you to be honest so I know how helpful this tool is for you. The forum will ask you:*

1. Copy and paste the original sentence (with the error), and then copy and paste your new sentence (with the new word) here. If you had a lot of WC errors, just pick 3 that you used Concord Writer to fix.
2. What was one thing you liked about using Concord Writer to help with WC?
3. What was one thing you didn't like about Concord Writer?
4. Will you continue to use Concord Writer to help you with WC? Why or why not?