# How to Utilize Qualifiers

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## What is a Qualifier?

A Qualifier is a word or phrase that is added to another word to modify its meaning, either by limiting it (He was somewhat busy) or by enhancing it (The dog was very cute). Academic writers can use qualifiers to be very specific about whether a claim is certain, likely, unlikely, or false. As a writer, one should use caution with qualifiers so you don't sound completely in doubt of your statements, or promise something that may not be certain.

## The Necessity of a Qualifier

There are times when someone may have to use a qualifier such as when the claim you are making is subject to debate or doubt. A qualifier can help you still make a point while acknowledging it could be proven wrong either by exception or a majority. It can even be needed if there are limitations to your research.
**Here are some words and phrases that can help you indicate uncertainty:**

- Appears
- Seems
- Suggests
- Indicates

Qualifiers also help us avoid making absolute statements when we don't have certain facts. While some things can be said absolutely (We will all die someday) some things we can't say are absolutely true (All of us will die in 10 years). We want to avoid making

claims that infer an absolute when that could be false, especially if we are making generalizations about particular people groups, so as to avoid stereotyping.

## Qualifiers in Action

Let's look at some examples of qualifiers vs. absolutes as well as different qualifiers that can show degrees of doubt or uncertainty you may have in a statement.

| Absolute | Qualifier |
|---|---|
| Students will experience stress. | Students may experience stress. |
| Schools are unprepared. | Schools may be unprepared. |
| All dogs have fluffy hair. | Many dogs have fluffy hair. |
| Every book is boring. | Some books are boring. |
| It never rains in Chico. | It rarely rains in Chico. |
| California is always hot. | California is often hot. |
| None of his articles are shaped well. | Few of his articles are shaped well. |
| I certainly know what I'm doing. | I probably know what I'm doing |
| It is impossible to do it. | It is highly unlikely that it is possible. |

Depending on how much doubt you want to create, or how close to certain you are, you may choose a different qualifier. If you know something is absolutely true, a qualifier is not necessary. Try to avoid qualifiers like "really", "a lot", and "Very" because you can often choose a stronger describing word.

Example: It is really cold in the morning
It is freezing in the morning.

"She was very happy" doesn't capture the nuances that can be expressed by "overjoyed," "thrilled," or "ecstatic." If you are uncertain about the number of qualifiers being used in your paper, it can be helpful to go back through and highlight them. If the majority of your statements are using qualifiers you may consider further researching your topic or changing the sentence structure.