MODALITY

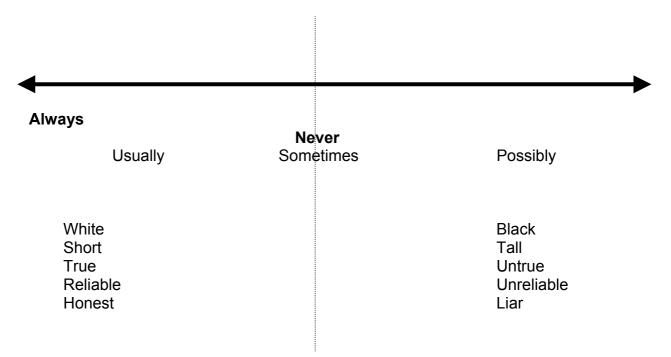
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Students, especially in Stages 5 and 6 should be using language in a more sophisticated manner. One way of demonstrating this is to make them aware of modality in language. This is one of the most frustrating aspects of history for students. For example, many grumble when told that there is no definite answer to a question.

Stage 5 and 6 students must be aware that in History we can rarely be absolute in our use of language. In that case, we cannot use the words "definitely", "never" and other such similar absolutes. Students should be made aware that it is not their role to 'solve' historical problems, especially if these issues have confounded statesmen for decades. Rather, they should be explaining the complexity of these issues.

EXERCISE:

- Draw a line across the board and write the absolutes at either end (e.g. Always Never)
- Work with the students to position words that would come between these absolutes (e.g. possible, usually, sometimes)
- This exercise can work particularly well when you are discussing answers to source questions. Students often fail to express enough sophistication in their answers and a modality exercise can help.



On the other hand, there are times when a student's work is too general and the student will not commit to presenting their argument firmly enough. Discussing modality can help here as well. So, instead of writing "probably" or "possibly", they can phrase their writing with stronger words such as "did", "created", "caused" and "brought about".