

**COURSE IS
KING LANGUAGE
THAT LANDS**

When wording changes perceived quality

THE ASSUMPTION

If two courses offer similar content, similar modules and similar outcomes, how much difference can wording really make?

It's easy to assume that language simply describes what already exists.

We wanted to test that assumption.

Before testing with students, we analysed more than 2,500 undergraduate Business Management course descriptions on UCAS course search for 2026 entry.

A pattern emerged.

Many descriptions included:

- Real-world experience
- Industry links
- Placements
- Professional accreditations
- Digital and analytics language
- Sustainability

There was a formula.

But if many courses use similar language, does the way it is written still matter?



WHAT WE TESTED

We grouped real descriptions into five common approaches:

1. Direct language and ethical angle
2. Employability focused
3. Skills based
4. Named employers and metrics
5. Contemporary issues

We then blind-tested five real Business Management course descriptions.

University branding was removed.

Students rated:

- First impressions
- Appeal
- Further exploration
- Ease of understanding
- Perceived quality
- Future intent

If language made little difference, the results would cluster tightly.

They didn't.

THE PERFORMANCE GAP

Across multiple measures, the highest-performing description significantly outperformed the lowest.

For example:

- First impressions: 84% vs 57%
- Appeal: 84% vs 59%
- High quality: 79% vs 36%
- Future intent: 59% vs 27%

This was not marginal variation.

Students perceived some descriptions as substantially higher quality than others - even though they were reading about the same subject area.

Language alone changed perception.

	FIRST IMPRESSIONS	APPEAL	FURTHER EXPLORATION	EASE OF UNDERSTANDING	USEFULNESS	HIGH QUALITY	FUTURE INTENT
HIGHEST	84%	84%	71%	89%	83%	79%	59%
LOWEST	57%	59%	39%	87%	56%	36%	27%

Highest and lowest of various questions asked about 5 course descriptions.

Min respondent numbers per description: 635 | Max respondent numbers per description: 659

WHAT LANDED, AND WHAT DIDN'T

Certain patterns consistently resonated:

- **Experience-led language** - tangible examples that give students a sense of what they will be doing on the course.
- **Future-facing context** - shows them how they will grow and develop, sustainability appeals to Gen Z priorities.
- **Employment proof** - talking about what and how students will improve their employability.

Phrases that resonated:

1. EXPERIENCE & ACTION PHRASES

- Engage in live project work
- A paid work placement
- Optional placement year
- Meet with business practitioners
- Can be applied to real-world situations

2. OPPORTUNITIES & SKILLS

- The business world is constantly evolving and full of opportunities
- Opportunity to specialise in areas that interest you
- You will learn how to spot opportunities
- You'll be equipped with the skills they need
- Confident

3. FUTURE-FACING OR CONTEXTUAL TERMS

- A global mind set
- Within a global context
- Ethical leadership
- Aware of key sustainability challenges

4. AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE

- You won't just study theory
- With our collaborative approach
- We want you to aim high
- By the time you leave you'll feel inspired

5. EMPLOYMENT-ORIENTATED

- A placement year significantly improves your employability on graduation
- Boost your CV
- #1 most targeted university by top graduate employers
- Gain eligibility for Affiliate member status of the Chartered Management Institute

Students responded to tangible, specific examples.

By contrast, certain patterns consistently underperformed:

1. BUZZWORDS & HYPE ADJECTIVES

Without explanation (fine to use them if its supported), but stand-alone they don't land

- Discover the tools to thrive in today's **dynamic** business world
- Blend **cutting-edge** academic theory with...
- ...and other special events
- With our **prestigious** business degrees

2. VAGUE QUALIFIERS & UNKNOWN LANGUAGE

Raises more questions than it answers

- You'll gain a **broad** understanding of the business world
- **Later**, you'll have the opportunity to specialise
- This course is designed for students wishing to **embark** on a professional career...
- **Triple crown** accredited
- **13th** out of UK institutions

3. MOTIVATIONAL SLOGAN LANGUAGE

- Unlock your potential
- The future of work
- Why do some businesses thrive where others fail?

Students preferred explanation over embellishment.

WHAT THIS TELLS US

Language shapes perceived quality.

In a comparison environment, specificity sustains interest.

Vagueness allows attention to drift elsewhere.

Course descriptions sit at a pivotal conversion moment. If meaning is unclear, students simply move on.

Descriptions that clearly articulate experience, evidence and outcome are more likely to drive further exploration.

WHAT UCAS IS DOING

This research demonstrates the value of testing course language directly with students.

Through the [UCAS Student Panel](#), institutions can:

- Test alternative course descriptions
- Compare positioning approaches
- Support portfolio refresh conversations
- Strengthen differentiation with evidence

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

Discover more insights and actionable recommendations from our Course is King research by reaching out to your Customer Success Manager or email educationservices@ucas.ac.uk.



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