Spoken vs. Written Discourse
The distinction between speech and writing is often referred to as *channel* (D. Hymes) or *medium* as speaking and writing involve different *psychological* processes.

Spoken and written *discourse* differ for many reasons. Spoken discourse has to be understood *immediately*; written discourse can be referred to *many times*.
General Differences between Spoken and Written Discourse

- 1. Grammatical complexity
- 2. Lexical density
- 3. Nominalization
- 4. Explicitness
- 5. Contextualization
- 6. Spontaneity
- 7. Repetition, hesitations, and redundancy
General Differences between Spoken and Written Discourse

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1. Grammatical Complexity

Written discourse is more structurally complex and more elaborate than spoken discourse.

In other words, sentences in spoken discourse are short and simple, whereas they are longer and more complex in written discourse.
1. Grammatical Complexity

**Structurally?**

- Spoken discourse is more fragmented. It contains more simple sentences and coordination words (and, but, so, because, etc.)

- Written texts exhibit a bewildering variety and richness of different structural forms.
1. Grammatical Complexity

- In written discourse we often use passive when we don’t want to specify the agent. In spoken discourse we would use a subject like “people”, “somebody”, “they”, “you”.
2. Lexical Density

It refers to the *ratio* of **content words** (i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) to **grammatical or function words** (e.g. pronouns, prepositions, articles) within a clause.

Spoken discourse is *less lexically dense* than written discourse.

Content words tend to be spread out over a number of clauses, whereas they seem to be tightly packed into individual clauses.
2. Lexical Density

Lexical characteristics?

Spoken discourse has:

- More pronouns (it, they, you, we).
- More lexical repetitions.
- More first person references.
- More active verbs.
3. Nominalization

It refers to presenting *actions* and events as *nouns* rather than as verbs.

a. Written discourse has a *high level of nominalization*: i.e. more nouns than verbs.

b. Written discourse tends *to have longer noun groups* than spoken discourse.
3. Nominalization

Lexical characteristics?

*Spoken discourse* has:

- More verb-based phrases:
  - *having treatment* – *being treated*
  - *hospital care* – *go to the hospital*

- More predicative adjectives:
  - *statistics are misleading* – *misleading statistics*
  - *news is frightening* – *frightening news*
Activity

Study the next written text. Can you identify any ways in which its linguistic features are determined by the context and purpose for which it was produced?
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1. Grammatical complexity

2. Lexical density

3. Nominalization

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1. Grammatical complexity

exhibit a bewildering variety and richness of different structural forms.

Clauses rather than full sentences

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2. Lexical density

Count the ratio of content words versus function words
2. Lexical density

Count the ratio of content words versus function words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONTENT WORDS</td>
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<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUNCTION WORDS</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>95%</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL NO OF WORDS</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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3. Nominalization

nouns used to represent processes
Think...

What other features of written text can you identify?
Think...

What other features of written text can you identify?
Think...

What changes do take place if we want to change this written text into a spoken discourse?