

CREATING EMPHASIS

Writing styles like MLA, APA, and Turabian typically discourage academic writers from using visual cues like italics, boldface, or exclamation marks to indicate emphasis. Instead, they encourage writers to create emphasis through sentence structure.

Remember, most emphasis techniques are most effective when used sparingly!

8 WAYS TO CREATE EMPHASIS

1. **Signify to your readers what is important** – Sometimes, it is most effective to simply and directly tell your audience where you mean to place emphasis.

Less emphasis: George Washington contributed to America's success by leading the fledgling nation and providing a role model for future presidents.

More emphasis: George Washington contributed to America's success by leading the fledgling nation and, most significantly, providing a role model for future presidents.

2. **Use an adverb to introduce an important idea** – Similar to telling your reader what is important, using an adverb to begin a sentence can lend emphasis to what follows.

Less emphasis: The experiment was a success.

More emphasis: Surprisingly, the experiment was a success.

3. **Use punctuation to show emphasis** – Colons and em dashes point to the information that follows them.

Less emphasis: The space probe made a surprising discovery of dry riverbeds on Mars.

More emphasis: The space probe made a surprising discovery: dry riverbeds on Mars.

Less emphasis: We decided to run.

More emphasis: We came to a decision—run.

4. **Create a pattern** – Repeat keywords to emphasize a point.

Less emphasis: Together we advance, achieve, and stand.

More emphasis: Together we advance, together we achieve, together we stand.

5. **Break a pattern** – Repeat keywords, then break the pattern to emphasize a point.

Less emphasis: Together we advance, achieve, and stand, but if we are divided, we will fall.

More emphasis: Together we advance, together we achieve, together we stand, but divided we fall.

6. **Use a short sentence** – Short sentences, used sparingly, can emphasize important points.

Less emphasis: President Woodrow Wilson intended to keep America out of World War I, but he did not.

More emphasis: President Woodrow Wilson intended to keep America out of World War I. He did not.

7. **Arrange the sentence to end with the main clause** – Main clauses are more emphatic than subordinate clauses, so it often makes sense to place the emphatic main clause in the most emphatic position in the sentence. [For an explanation of main and subordinate clauses, see point 2 of our handout “Sentence Variety Guide.”](#)

Less emphasis: She went directly back to her essay after the party.

More emphasis: After the party, she went directly back to her essay.

8. **Place the main ideas at the end of the sentence** – The end of a sentence carries the most emphasis, but the least emphasis is in the middle. Unlike the previous seven tips, this tip cannot be overused. Great writers refrain from burying important points in the middle of their sentences.

Less emphasis: Emphasis can be created by ending a sentence with important information.

More emphasis: Placing important information at the end of a sentence creates more emphasis.

PRACTICE NOW