Visual-Textual Devices for Achieving Emphasis

In the days before computerized word processing and desktop publishing, the publishing process began with a manuscript and/or a typescript that was sent to a print shop where it would be prepared for publication and printed. In order to show emphasis—to highlight the title of a book, to refer to a word itself as a word, or to indicate a foreign word or phrase—the writer would use underlining in the typescript, which would signal the typesetter at the print shop to use *italic* font for those words.

Even today, perhaps the simplest way to call attention to an otherwise unemphatic word or phrase is to underline or italicize it.

<u>Flaherty</u> is the new committee chair, not Buckley.

This mission is extremely important for our future: *we must not fail*!

Because writers using computers today have access to a wide variety of fonts and textual effects, they are no longer limited to underlining to show emphasis. Still, especially for academic writing, italics or underlining is the preferred way to emphasize words or phrases when necessary. Writers usually choose one or the other method and use it consistently throughout an individual essay.

In the final, published version of an article or book, italics are usually used. Writers in academic discourses and students learning to write academic papers are expected to express emphasis primarily through words themselves; overuse of various emphatic devices like changes of font face and size, boldface, all-capitals, and so on in the text of an essay creates the impression of a writer relying on flashy effects instead of clear and precise writing to make a point.

Boldface is also used, especially outside of academia, to show emphasis as well as to highlight items in a list, as in the following examples.

The picture that television commercials portray of the American home is far from realistic.

The following three topics will be covered:

- **topic 1:** brief description of topic 1
- **topic 2:** brief description of topic 2
- **topic 3:** brief description of topic 3

Some writers use ALL-CAPITAL letters for emphasis, but they are usually unnecessary and can cause writing to appear cluttered and loud. In email correspondence, the use of all-caps throughout a message can create the unintended impression of shouting and is therefore discouraged.