

Craft Lesson #3: Emphasizers



One of the main purposes of studying language is to learn how to add emphasis to your pieces. Here are some emphasizeers you can use.

THE COLON

A colon acts as a hard pause. Whatever comes after it gets a lot of emphasis.

Example: *“Days became weeks, and the weather was strange for south Mississippi, for the swampy, water-ridden part of the state I call home: low humidity, cool temperatures, clear, sun-lanced skies.”* —Jesmyn Ward

Key Colon Details:

- ➊ Generally, colons are supposed to come after a complete sentence. However, the text after the colon does not need to be a complete sentence.
- ➋ The choice of whether to capitalize after a colon is up to you, though it is commonly capitalized in U.S. English.

THE DASH

A dash can act as an interruption or take the place of a colon, comma, or parenthesis. In all of these cases, it adds extra emphasis to whatever follows it.

Example: *“A letter, however, had lately reached me in a distant part of the country—a letter from him—which, in its wildly importunate nature, had admitted of no other than a personal reply.”* —Edgar Allan Poe

Key Dash Details:

- ➊ The dash (—) is different from the hyphen (-). When using a dash, make sure you are using the correct symbol.
- ➋ The dash is often connected to both words—like this—but it is OK to make a space between the words and the dash symbol — like this — for stylistic reasons.

The Appositive

An appositive is a noun or pronoun that adds further explanation to another noun or pronoun.

Example: *The squirrels, the destroyers of gardens, are finally finishing off the last kale.*

Key Appositive Details:

- ➊ It generally has commas that bracket it (see example).

OTHERS

There are dozens of other emphasizeers that we use in everything from texting to research papers. What are some of them? [*Teachers: We generally make a list as a class here.*]

YOU TRY

Please write a half-page, double-spaced rant about something that inspires strong feelings in you. In this writing, please use all three of our emphasizeers in a key moment, and use two of our other emphasizeers as well. In each moment that you use an emphasizeer, please label it with a short explanation of the emphasizeer that you used and why you used it there (either using the comment feature or parentheses).

There are no restrictions on approach or style, so make sure to lean into your voice. As I often say, your voice is powerful and is your secret writing advantage.