Many students find that being explicit is their greatest challenge when writing an academic paper. The purpose of academic writing is to present an idea and support it with evidence. It is important to tell your reader exactly what your point is and provide clear markers for your reader to see the point you are trying to prove. Otherwise, he or she will be forced to search for the main idea, and this is the last thing you want!

But remember—there is a difference between being explicit and being repetitive. It is not bad to repeat your main claim, as long as you do so with new evidence or through an elaboration of your ideas. The key to being explicit is to be bold with your argument—you will not offend anyone by standing up for your claim!

Here are a few tips on how to do that.

**When writing your thesis statement:**

Your professor wants to see that you *have faith in your argument*. When writing your thesis, you should clearly state your main argument. Don’t worry that this gives it away. Even if your paper requires a descriptive thesis—such as exploring the pros and cons of an argument—you should still be bold and assert what exactly those pros and cons are up front and at the beginning of your paper.

*Unclear Thesis:* *In analyzing Henry V, we can see that Shakespeare feels very badly about the class conflicts of his time.*

*Clear Thesis:* *In *Henry V*, Shakespeare depicts the struggle of the king in order to highlight the class conflicts of Renaissance England through the social climbing of the dukes, the inspirational speeches, and the skeletons in Henry’s closet.*

The first example is an unclear thesis because it asserts a vague idea without an agenda to prove the claim.

The second statement is much more explicit. It gives us a roadmap of both where we are going and how we will get there.

**When starting a new paragraph:**

Topic sentences are often discussed but rarely explained. Each topic sentence should accomplish:

- An introduction of a topic that you have not previously discussed in its entirety
- An announcement to your reader of exactly what that paragraph will deal with (does not have to be the first sentence of the paragraph if it isn’t a good transition sentence, but it should appear close to the beginning)

Topic sentences serve as signposts through the roadmap of a strong paper. They are also a good tool to use when trying to organize your paper. You should be able to write out each topic sentence on a separate sheet of paper and see the progression of your argument.
When introducing quotations:

When introducing a quotation, you should create phrases to act as “on-ramps” and “off-ramps.” In other words, before the quote, tell readers why this quotation is useful or pertinent to your argument, and after the quote, explain what you have learned from it.

The same is true about paraphrasing. When you paraphrase a primary source, you should make it clear why this plot point or claim from research progresses your argument.

Introduction of evidence: In his book Hamlet in Purgatory, Stephen Greenblatt says that Hamlet progressively forgets his father and his actions become more internal.

Explication: What he means here is that as Hamlet forgets his father, he begins to forget why he set out to murder his uncle, and his actions reflect this lapse in memory. Therefore, one can see how Hamlet’s forgetfulness leads to an increase in action.

When concluding your paper:

If the thesis is a roadmap, then your conclusion is a vacation slideshow of where you have been. Your conclusion

- should restate your argument and the claims you have made throughout your paper
- should not simply repeat word-for-word what you have already said.
- should not introduce anything new.
- should gather together your evidence one last time before your reader reaches the end of the journey.

In your conclusion, you have one last chance to be explicit. Do not hold back in your conclusion, but rather make a lasting impression on the mind of your reader by reasserting your faith in your claim.