

among others, the topic sentence or thesis is usually placed at the beginning of a piece, and it is often restated, or echoed, at the end in a closing statement.

Repetition of Key Words and Important Ideas

Repetition is one of the simplest devices in your writer's toolbox. The words repeated may be single words, phrases, slightly altered sentences, or synonyms. Repetition keeps the dominant subject in the reader's mind and maintains the continuity necessary for a smooth flow of logical thought.

You can use this valuable technique easily. If, as is done in the following example, you are discussing the effects of the school dropout problem, then the word *effect(s)*, along with synonyms such as *result(s)* or *consequence(s)*, and *school dropout(s)*, is likely to be repeated several times. Moreover, phrases giving insight into the issue may be repeated, perhaps with slight variation. Phrases and their repetitions are underlined in this passage:

The causes of the school dropout problem have received much attention recently, but the effects are just as *important*. One *obvious* result is that of unemployment or low-paying employment. The student who drops out of school is likely to be dropping into poverty, perhaps even into a lifelong condition. Another effect is juvenile crime. The young person who has no prospects for a good job and no hope all too frequently turns to illegal activities. A third result concerns the psychological well-being of the dropout. Although withdrawing from school seems to offer a quick, viable solution to perceived problems, it almost immediately has consequences for the dropout's self-esteem. Of course, these effects may also be tied to causes, such as drugs, poverty, crime, or psychological problems, but devastating repercussions are there at the far end of the causes-and-effects continuum, and youngsters who are contemplating dropping out should consider them with *care*.

A word of warning: The effective use of word and phrase repetition should not be confused with an irritating misuse of word repetition. At times we all get stuck on certain words, and the result is a negative response from our audience. Consider this awkward use of repetition:

She looked at him and frowned. He returned the look and then looked away at a stranger looking for his lost keys.

That's too many *look's*. Consider this version:

She looked at him [or, *even better*, She frowned at him]. He glared back and then glanced away at a stranger searching for his lost keys.

The second version preserves the idea of people "looking" by using synonyms. It is more precise and does not grate on the reader's nerves as the first does. But the global use of synonyms, sometimes called *elegant variation*, is widely regarded as the sign of an immature writer, so do not be shy about repeating key words and phrases. Running rampant through your thesaurus in search of longer, more complicated words when you already have simple, direct ones will probably not bring admiring comments from your professor. Reading aloud the passage you write may help you identify problems and make good word choices.