

They Say/I Say Chapter 10
“But Don’t Get Me Wrong”
The Art of Metacommentary

What is metacommentary?

(1) It does not offer new points but instead tells an audience how to interpret them and what they already said or are about to say

(2) Titles are metacommentary because they function rather like carnival barkers telling passersby what they can expect if they go inside

What’s the difference between metacommentary and normal text?

Main text says something; meta-text guides your readers in interpreting and processing what you’ve said

Why should I use metacommentary?

(1) No matter how clear or precise your writing is readers can still fail to understand it in any number of ways

(2) Metacommentary keeps misinterpretations and other communication misfires at bay

(3) Metacommentary will help you develop your ideas and develop more text. It can help you add both length and depth to your writing.

Sample Paragraph

It is my intention in this paper to show that dark chocolate is better than white chocolate. With this view, my task in the *sections ahead* is to demonstrate the numerous health benefits of dark chocolate in comparison to white chocolate. *I must first demonstrate how* dark chocolate improves health. It increases life expectancy by lowering blood pressure, increasing blood flow, cognitive abilities, has antioxidants, and contains theobromine which strengthens your teeth and lowers your risk of getting cavities. *But to avoid the possibility that my analysis will be interpreted as* saying that dark chocolate is a “superfood,” *I will concede that* it is still candy and not always healthy for you. Dark chocolate does have a high amount of sugar and can compromise your health when eaten in excessive amounts.

Example Templates

To ward off potential misunderstandings

This is not to say _____, but rather _____.

To elaborate on a previous idea

In other words, _____.

To provide a roadmap for your text

Having just argued that _____, one could complicate the matter by addressing _____.

To move from a general claim to a specific example

Consider _____, for example.

To indicate that a claim is more, less, or equally important

But above all, _____.

To explain a claim when you anticipate objections

Although some readers may object that _____, I would answer that _____.

To guide readers to your most general point

In short, _____.

Sample Sentences