

Ending the Essay: Conclusions

Conclusions can be very difficult to write, but they are very **necessary**, as they provide part of the **frame necessary for a good essay**, along with the introduction. As such, it is extremely important that you understand how to create an effective conclusion that **ends your discussion** in an **intelligent** and **meaningful way**.

Your **conclusion** should be the place where you have the **last word on your analysis**; the place where you show your reader **why your essay is important** and **why it should matter to them**, especially after they put it down. An effective conclusion will often pass beyond the scope of the question you were responding to, **suggesting broader implications** that might stem from your analysis, or opening up **avenues for further discussion and examination**. A good conclusion will leave your reader feeling glad they read your essay and should convince them to see your point of view.

Now that I've told you **why** a good conclusion is important, here are some ideas about **how** to start structuring a good conclusion:

- Finish up your essay by linking your last paragraph to your first (your introduction) by reiterating or restating a word or phrase you used at the beginning, but be careful not to restate your entire introduction, as that is stale and unproductive.
- Building on my previous point, you can also revisit the themes from your introduction. This strategy brings the reader full circle, provided you don't just restate your introduction. For example, if you begin by describing a scenario, you can end with the same scenario as proof that your essay is helpful in creating a new understanding. You may also refer to the introductory paragraph by using key words or parallel concepts and images that you also used in the introduction
- Keep your language simple: A conclusion is not the place for jargon and massive multisyllabic words, as they create tension in the reader and can cloud comprehension at a time when you want the reader to relax and accept your viewpoint.
- You can also include a very brief summary of your essay's main points, but don't simply repeat the same things that were in your essay. Rather, show your reader how the points you made and the support and examples you used fit together. Pull it all together for the reader, right at the end.
- You can also conclude your essay with a quotation from, or reference to, a primary or secondary source that confirms your main point or puts it in a different perspective. A quotation from the novel or poem you're writing about can add texture and specificity to your discussion, while a critic or scholar can help to confirm or complicate your final point.
- You can also propose a course of action, a solution to an issue, or questions for further study. This can redirect your reader's thought process and help her to apply your info and ideas to her own life or to see the broader implications of your essay.
- On that note, you can conclude by considering the implications of your argument (or analysis or discussion). What does your argument imply, or involve, or suggest?

Now that you have some idea how to structure a conclusion well, here are some tips about how to **definitely not** structure your conclusion:

- Don't start your conclusion with an unnecessary, overused phrase such as "in conclusion," "in summary," or "in closing." Although these phrases can work in speeches, where listeners often appreciate a sign that the speech is coming to a close, they come across as wooden and trite in writing, where the reader can actually see the end of the page.
- Don't just summarize your essay. A brief summary of your argument may be useful, especially if your essay is long (more than about five pages), but shorter essays tend not to require a restatement of your main ideas.
- Never, ever wait until your conclusion to state your thesis! In an academic essay, you need to tell your reader what your argument is all about, up front, so don't "surprise" your reader with the point of the essay right at the end.
- While we're on the topic, you also need to avoid just restating your thesis in your conclusion. This sort of conclusion just restates the thesis and is usually painfully short. It does not push the ideas forward. People write this kind of conclusion when they can't think of anything else to say.
- You should also absolutely avoid introducing a new idea or subtopic in your conclusion. This is never, ever acceptable, as it means that you have simply not bothered to finish off your essay.
- Carrying on from the last "don't", you should also never include new evidence, such as quotes or statistics, in your conclusion. This evidence should **always** be presented in support of statements in the body of your essay.
- You should also avoid making sentimental, emotional appeals when concluding your essay. While this emotion and even sentimentality may be very heartfelt, it is usually out of character with the rest of an analytical paper. A more sophisticated commentary, rather than emotional praise, would be a more fitting tribute to the topic.
- You also need to avoid including extra information in your conclusion that you or thought of but couldn't integrate into the body of your essay. You may find it hard to leave out details that you discovered after hours of research and thought, but adding random facts and bits of evidence at the end of an otherwise-well-organized essay can just create confusion.

If you're well and truly stuck and you feel like your conclusion isn't saying anything new or interesting, read through it slowly and turn it into a series of statements. Whenever you make a statement from your conclusion, ask yourself "So what?" or "Why should anybody care?" Then ponder that question and answer it.