

English 104

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## Writing Good Conclusions

Conclusions are often the most difficult part of an essay to write, and many writers feel that they have nothing left to say after having written the paper. A writer needs to keep in mind that the conclusion is often what a reader remembers best. Your conclusion should be the best part of your paper.

A conclusion should:

- stress the importance of the thesis statement,
- give the essay a sense of completeness, and
- leave a final impression on the reader.

Avoid:

- Ending with a rephrased thesis statement that contains no substantive changes. A conclusion should synthesize, not summarize.
- Introducing a new idea or subtopic.
- Focusing on a minor point in the essay.
- Apologizing for your view by saying such things as "I may not be an expert" or "At least this is my opinion."
- Attempting to make up for an incomplete structure. (If you say you will discuss four books, attempt a complete discussion of two books, do not try to cover the remaining texts in a concluding paragraph. In such a situation, it's best to limit your paper to topics you can realistically cover.)
- Contradicting points you have made.
- Concluding with a cliché ("You can't teach an old dog new tricks").
- Using obvious transition words or phrases such as in conclusion, in summary, and as I have attempted to show. You may, however, use less obvious transition words, such as therefore, finally, and consequently.

Suggestions

- Include a brief summary of the paper's main points. However, don't simply repeat things that were in your paper. They have read it. Show them how the points you made and the support and examples you used were not random, but fit together.
- Answer the question "So What?" Show your readers why this paper was important. Show them that your paper was meaningful and useful.
- Redirect your readers. Give your reader something to think about, perhaps a way to use your paper in the "real" world. If your introduction went from general to specific, make your conclusion go from specific to general. Think globally.

- Create a new meaning. You don't have to give new information to create a new meaning. By demonstrating how your ideas work together, you can create a new picture. Often the sum of the paper is worth more than its parts.
- Use a quotation.
- Evoke a vivid image.
- Make the tone of your conclusion (serious, humorous, clever, straightforward, etc.) consistent with the overall tone of your essay.

The following are a few ideas you can use to close your essay.

## Echoing the introduction

### *Introduction*

From the parking lot, I could see the towers of the castle of the Magic Kingdom standing stately against the blue sky. To the right, the tall peak of The Matterhorn rose even higher. From the left, I could hear the jungle sounds of Adventureland. As I entered the gate, Main Street stretched before me with its quaint shops evoking an old-fashioned small town so charming it could never have existed. I was entranced. Disneyland may have been build for children, but it brings out the child in adults.

### *Conclusion*

I thought I would spend a few hours at Disneyland, but here I was at 1:00 A.M., closing time, leaving the front gates with the now dark towers of the Magic Kingdom behind me. I could see tired children, toddling along and struggling to keep their eyes open as best they could. Others slept in their parents' arms as we waited for the parking lot tram that would take us to our cars. My forty-year-old feet ached, and I felt a bit sad to think that in a couple of days I would be leaving California, my vacation over, to go back to my desk. But then I smiled to think that for at least a day I felt ten years old again.

Echoing your introduction can be a good strategy if it is meant to bring the reader full-circle. If you begin by describing a scenario, you can end with the same scenario as proof that your essay was helpful in creating a new understanding.

## Challenging the reader

Though serving on a jury is not only a civic responsibility but also an interesting experience, many people still view jury duty as a chore that interrupts their jobs and the routine of their daily lives. However, juries are part of America's attempt to be a free and just society. Thus, jury duty challenges us to be interested and responsible citizens.

By issuing a challenge to your readers, you are helping them to redirect the information in the paper, and they may apply it to their own lives.

## Looking to the future

Without well-qualified teachers, schools are little more than buildings and equipment. If higher-paying careers continue to attract the best and the brightest students, there will not only be a shortage of teachers, but the teachers available may not have the best qualifications. Our youth will suffer. And when youth suffers, the future suffers.

Looking to the future can emphasize the importance of your paper or redirect the readers' thought process. It may help them apply the new information to their lives or see things more globally.

## Posing questions

Campaign advertisements should help us understand the candidate's qualifications and positions on the issues. Instead, most tell us what a boob or knave the opposing candidate is, or they present general images of the candidate as a family person or God-fearing American. Do such advertisements contribute to creating an informed electorate or a people who choose political leaders the same way they choose soft drinks and soap?

Posing questions, either to your readers or in general, may help your readers gain a new perspective on the topic, which they may not have held before reading your conclusion. It may also bring your main ideas together to create a new meaning.

## Concluding with a quotation

In his essay "A Collect of Philosophy," Wallace Stevens says that "poets and philosophers often think alike." One may take issue with this claim, especially when trying to read the decidedly unpoetic prose of philosopher Immanuel Kant. But that Stevens the poet thought like a philosopher there is no doubt. Stevens' method of philosophical inquiry was his poetry, and through it he repeatedly wrestled with philosophy's most difficult questions: What is the relationship between the mind and the world? Between imagination and reality? Like Kant, Stevens was aware that there is a difference between things-as-they-appear and the things-in-themselves, and like Kant he also knew that, though our imagination provides us with a remarkable understanding of the world, its ultimate nature—the *ding an sich*—is forever beyond our grasp.