



## ENDING THE ESSAY: CONCLUSIONS

So much is at stake in writing a conclusion. This is, after all, your chance to have the final say on the issues you have raised in your paper, to synthesize your thoughts, to demonstrate the importance of your ideas, and to propel your reader to a new view of the subject. It is also your opportunity to make a good final impression and to end on a positive note.

### Strategies for writing an effective conclusion

- **Return to the theme or themes in the introduction, and frame the final paragraph with the first one.** This strategy brings the reader full circle. 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.
- **Synthesize, don't summarize.** Include a brief summary of the paper's main points, but don't simply repeat things that were in your paper. Instead, show your reader how the points you made and the support and examples you used fit together. Pull it all together.
- **Include a provocative insight or quotation from the research or reading you did for your paper.** Conclude with a quotation from or reference to a primary or secondary source, one that amplifies your main point or puts it in a different perspective. A quotation from, say, the novel or poem you're writing about can add texture and specificity to your discussion; a critic or scholar can help confirm or complicate your final point.
  - For example, you might conclude an essay on the idea of home in James Joyce's short story collection, *Dubliners*, with information about Joyce's own complex feelings towards Dublin, his home. Or you might end with a biographer's statement about Joyce's attitude toward Dublin, which could illuminate his characters' responses to the city. Just be cautious, especially about using secondary material: make sure that you get the last word.
- **Consider the implications of your argument (or analysis or discussion);** What does your argument imply, or involve, or suggest?

- For example, if your paper examines the Greensboro sit-ins or another event in the Civil Rights Movement, you could point out its impact on the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. A paper about the style of writer Virginia Woolf could point to her influence on other writers or on later feminists.
- **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.

### **Strategies to avoid**

- Beginning with unnecessary, overused phrases such as "in conclusion," "in summary," or "in closing."
- Stating the thesis for the very first time in the conclusion.
- Introducing a new idea or subtopic in your conclusion.
- Ending with a rephrased thesis statement without any substantive changes.
- Making sentimental, emotional appeals that are out of character with the rest of an analytical paper.
- Including evidence (quotations, statistics, etc.) that should be in the body of the paper.