

Writing Conclusions

Many writers take the conclusion of an essay for granted and leave it until the last minute; they think that once the paper is written, the conclusion will write itself. In most cases, the result of this thinking is a weak, redundant and rambling conclusion.

For longer papers in which many different ideas are juggled in a long discussion, a summary is a good concluding strategy. But as author Donald Hall says in *Writing Well*, “a short paper rarely profits by summary and often withers by it.” A strategy, then, for a good conclusion is to refer succinctly to the thesis, either through a significant motif or a key word or phrase. The following conclusion is that of a student report about Tracy Kidder’s *The Soul of a New Machine*, an account of the invention of a computer called “Eagle.”

Kidder makes an adventure story out of the unlikely materials, the marriage of business and technology, the inter-relationships of a corporation and its research engineers. Both in this book and in the marketplace, the Eagle flies.

(Writing Well, 46)

The student states her main point, incorporates the key word “Eagle” and ends with a flourish.

Effective strategies for conclusions: Leave an impact on the reader. Just as you want your introduction to grab your reader in the first line, you want the conclusion to ensure that the reader remembers the rest of the essay too. Here are a few of the strategies for accomplishing this impact.

- 1) After presenting two sides to an issue, conclude that one side has more or less merit.

While the debate over gays in the military rages on, one thing is clear — these men and women have been doing and continue to do a fine job protecting our nation.

- 2) Propose ways to implement the thesis.

A friendly hello doesn’t cost anything, and is an easy way to make a dent in the wall of animosity in this community.

- 3) Pose questions to lead the readers into giving the answer you’ve led them to.

Why, then, do students continue to stay out late the night before an exam?

- 4) Lay out directions for future study or project into the future.

Once educators realize the allegorical value of comic books, then schools will begin using them to teach children how to attain global peace.

Ineffective strategies for conclusions: You may grab the reader in the beginning but lose her at the end. Here are a few of the most common ways to lose your reader in the conclusion:

- 1) Cliché expressions: “In conclusion ... ” “To summarize ... ” “Finally ... ”
“In conclusion, I have proven my point.”
- 2) Verbatim restatement of your thesis: this will be a redundant sentence and shows a lack of originality and creativity on your part. Try to express the same ideas, but in a different way.
- 3) Apologies or qualifying statements: these will undermine the argument and lose the reader’s confidence.

“What I have said applies only to people under age 25.”

- 4) Grand-scale generalizations and claims that are not fulfilled by the thesis or the discussion: avoid claims such as “Students who leave their trays in the dining hall for someone else to pick up are adding to the American mindset that college students are lazy and apathetic.” Such claims will have variables involved and cannot be adequately explained so briefly.
- 5) Introduction of new information that will completely alter the course of the argument: if this information is significant enough to be included, then go back and revise the essay to include it earlier.

Long Papers

For longer, more involved arguments and research-style papers, it is necessary to summarize the main points of your discussion. It is possible to summarize with a flourish, as is illustrated in the following example from Toby Fulwiler’s *The Working Writer*:

Ben and Jerry’s is a growing enterprise which shows promising signs of worldwide expansion, not only for its excellent ice cream, but for its responsibility as well. Through caring capitalism Ben and Jerry have gained support of both environmentalists and the business community. We believe Ben and Jerry’s provides a good model of corporate responsibility as America enters the twenty-first century. (356)