

The Portable Editor

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We've all been there. You know that moment where you eagerly race to finish the final paragraphs of an unbelievably suspenseful page-turner only to run smack dab into a completely disappointing dud of an ending. Ultimately, no one enjoys an unsatisfying conclusion and the same can be said with an academic paper. This issue of *The Portable Editor* offers tips and strategies for writing effective conclusions and ensuring readers walk away satisfied.

About Conclusions

Introductions and conclusions can be the most difficult parts of papers to write. While the body is often easier to write, it needs a frame around it. An introduction and conclusion frame your thoughts and bridge your ideas for the reader.

Just as your introduction acts as a bridge that transports your readers from their own lives into the “place” of your analysis, your conclusion can provide a bridge to help your readers make the transition back to their daily lives. Such a conclusion will help them see why all your analysis and information should matter to them after they put the paper down.

Your conclusion is your chance to have the last word on the subject. The conclusion allows you 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.

Your conclusion can go beyond the confines of the assignment. The conclusion pushes beyond the boundaries of the prompt and allows you to consider broader issues, make new connections, and elaborate on the significance of your findings.

Your conclusion should make your readers glad they read your paper. Your conclusion gives your reader something to take away that will help them see things differently or appreciate your topic in personally relevant ways. It can suggest broader implications that will not only interest your reader, but also enrich your reader's life in some way. It is your gift to the reader.

Strategies for Writing an Effective Conclusion

One or more of the following strategies may help you write an effective conclusion.

- Play the “So What” Game. If you're stuck and feel like your conclusion isn't saying anything new or interesting, ask a friend to read it with you. Whenever you

- make a statement from your conclusion, ask the friend to say, “So what?” or “Why should anybody care?” You can also use this strategy on your own, asking yourself “So What?” as you develop your ideas or your draft.
- 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.
 - Propose a course of action, a solution to an issue, or questions for further study. This can redirect the reader’s thought process and help individuals to apply your info and ideas to their own lives or to see the broader implications.
 - Point to broader implications and tie your introduction to your conclusion.

For example:

Introduction: “A critical gap exists in the current delivery system of mental health care for homeless persons. Given this critical gap, social work research should step-up efforts to promote public policy that would increase accessibility...”

Conclusion: “Therefore, researchers should give greater attention to development of public policy that will increase homeless persons’ access to mental health care as a first step in addressing the critical gap in the current delivery system...”

Strategies to Avoid

- Beginning with an unnecessary, overused phrase such as “in conclusion,” “in summary,” or “in closing.” Although these phrases can work in speeches, they come across as wooden and trite in writing.
- 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.

Four Kinds of Ineffective Conclusions

1. The “That’s My Story and I’m Sticking to It” Conclusion.

This 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.

2. The “Sherlock Holmes” Conclusion.

Sometimes writers will state the thesis for the very first time in the conclusion. You might be tempted to use this strategy if you don’t want to give everything

away too early in your paper. You may think it would be more dramatic to keep the reader in the dark until the end and then “wow” him with your main idea, as in a Sherlock Holmes mystery. The reader, however, does not expect a mystery, but an analytical discussion of your topic in an academic style, with the main argument (thesis) stated up front.

3. The “America the Beautiful”/“I Am Woman”/“We Shall Overcome” Conclusion.

This kind of conclusion usually draws on emotion to make its appeal, but 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.

4. The “Grab Bag” Conclusion.

This kind of conclusion includes extra information that the writer found or thought of but couldn’t integrate into the main paper. 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.

Source: The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Need One-on-One Writing Support?

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