



Conclusions

Suggestions for Wowing Your Readers

What is a writer's goal in the conclusion?

Effective conclusions provide completeness and closure for readers. While some papers discover their endings naturally, others, especially longer papers, require formal conclusions. Regardless of a paper's length, however, conclusions should gradually escort readers out of the topic. By signaling that writers are near or at the end of their thoughts, conclusions prepare readers for the final argument and, more important, determine readers' last impressions of the essay.

How long should a conclusion be?

That depends on the topic and the purpose of the paper. However, most conclusions consist of one or two paragraphs that leave the audience with a clear idea of the importance of what the writer has said.

What to Avoid

Remember that the conclusion is not just the end of the paper. It is the point of the paper. To avoid writing a weak conclusion, a writer should steer clear of the following:

- A. **THE ONE-SENTENCE ENDING:** This kind of ending is weak because it suggests that a writer could not think of a better way to conclude.
- B. **THE TACKED-ON MORAL OR LESSON:** Trust readers to get the point of the narrative themselves.
- C. **CONTRIVED ENDINGS:** Don't rely on artificial endings like "I awoke as the light flooded my room; thank goodness, it had only been a dream." These surprise endings are rarely appropriate.
- D. **TRITE CONCLUDING PHRASES:** Avoid mechanical expressions such as "In conclusion" and "To sum up." These endings can seem condescending or boring.
- E. **SELF-CONSCIOUS ENDINGS:** Avoid phrases like "I will now conclude by..." "Now that I have reached the end of this paper," and "The time has come for me to end this." Such phrases call attention away from what the writer is saying.
- F. **INTRODUCING NEW PROBLEMS OR SUBJECTS:** Don't get the reader started thinking about subjects other than the one the paper covers.
- G. **ADDING IRRELEVANT OR UNNECESSARY DETAIL:** The conclusion is not the place to ramble. Be concise and straightforward.

So, how CAN a writer conclude an essay?

Writers conclude their essays depending on the subject and purpose of their papers. To write effective conclusions, consider one or more of the following suggestions:

Suggested Conclusions for Non-Literary Papers

- A. **Discuss implications of the topic, recommend further research, or speculate on possible future applications.**

So, there is still much to be done in the world of science; there is still much to be explained. And it looks as though chaos may well be the medium through which it can be. (Written by Craig Hartman in "Chaos" found on p. 145 in Students Writing Across the Disciplines by Cyndia Susan Clegg and Michael M. Wheeler.)



B. Come full circle and offer a final judgment. Connect the introduction of your paper with its conclusion by referring to your original claim. Reintroduce key terms and agree or disagree with your thesis.

Introductory Paragraph:

Everyone can't be a Jack Nicklaus, a Nancy Lopez, or even a Tiger Woods, but if you're spending your Sundays on the golf course, you may as well try to be. If you're a novice golfer, you know that driving can be especially embarrassing because there are usually people watching you struggle off the first tee. By following five simple steps, however, you can soon end this period of uneasiness and send the ball down the fairway just like the pros.

Conclusion to the same paper:

In sports, good habits can be learned almost as easily as bad ones. This advice is certainly true of driving a golf ball. It may seem awkward at first, but if you will follow these five simple steps, you will master the first stage of the game. Who knows? Maybe you can be the next Jack Nicklaus or Tiger Woods.

C. End with a call to action or change, or offer a solution to a problem.

Yet another option may be making sure that even if kids don't have insurance, they still get care. One possibility, says Health and Human Services Secretary, Donna Shalala, would be to require the 650 federally funded community health centers around the country to locate uninsured kids – then notify their families that the centers are there to provide treatment at nominal costs. That's the sort of common-sense approach that should appeal to both parties – so simple that a child might have thought of it.

(Written by Susan Dentzer in "For mercy's sake, let's cover the kids" found on p. 69 in U.S. News & World Report (October 21, 1996).)

D. Offer a thought-provoking question.

I believe that the controversy surrounding cloning and recombinant DNA technology will continue for a long time. We must ask ourselves a simple question: If penicillin or the polio vaccine were not discovered, where would we be today? When a new technology arises, we must research it and utilize it to help humanity.

(Written by Andrea Jahn in "Is the Research and Development of Cloning and Recombinant DNA Technology Necessary for the Advancement of Humankind" found on p. 149 in Students Writing Across the Disciplines by Cyndia Susan Clegg and Michael M. Wheeler.)

E. Use a final quotation.

All in all, there seems little any one person or group can do about the increasing number of broken marriages except to start taking seriously the century-old wisecrack of Punch magazine: "Advice to those about to marry: Don't."

F. Use a strong send-off. Escort the reader out of your paper by creating a strong, lasting impression.



Cancer research is clearly more intense than ever before with numerous treatment methods presently being studied around the world. Discussed here were only a few of many promising methods under investigation. Evidence suggests that cancer may soon be a manageable condition and not the feared killer it is today. The battle is nearly won.

(Written by Laurie Tennyson in "The War on Cancer is Nearly Won" on p. 194 in Students Writing Across the Disciplines by Cyndia Susan Clegg and Michael M. Wheeler.)

G. Use a summary of the main points in your theme. Summaries are especially useful if the material is long and complex. However, the writer runs the risk of boring the reader.

The evidence points to the fact that playing Dungeons and Dragons or any other fantasy game does not corrupt the player. In many cases, it may improve the player's mind and encourage intellectual growth. Playing the game provides a pleasant emotional outlet and actually lets a person forget reality for a short time. The only problems created by the game are the problems created by other players. Obsession can lead to disastrous results. While used in moderation, it can be fun and helpful.

(Written by Robert Fleischman in "The Realities of Fantasy" on p. 262 in Students Writing Across the Disciplines by Cyndia Susan Clegg and Michael M. Wheeler.)

Suggested Conclusions for Literary Papers

A. Come full circle by returning to the thesis.

The quiet ending of Murder in the Cathedral brings us back to a quiet, everyday world, a world that has yet been transformed, if briefly, into a more perceptive one. In Eliot's view, the awareness of the sense of reality, like Thomas' realization of his role and its effect emotionally and spiritually, is the goal to which the poetic drama strives.

(Written by Nancy S. Hale in "T.S. Eliot's Aims for Poetic Drama and Murder in the Cathedral" on p. 556 in Students Writing Across the Disciplines by Cyndia Susan Clegg and Michael M. Wheeler.)

B. End with a prediction.

What will happen to Celimene in the future? Will her life turn out well or badly? The end of the play does not offer much hope for her. Alceste seems the same as he was at the beginning. And Celimene seems forced to follow the same course she followed up to now. Perhaps as she grows older she will become more mature and will help to stabilize the mercurial Alceste. But if Celimene cannot find a protector, she will ultimately have to discover some means of gaining power other than coquetry, for the strength of her coquetry comes from her beauty, and her beauty will decline as she grows older. Arsinoe is a graphic example of a woman who, because she has lost her youthful beauty, must grasp at power through hypocrisy, subterfuge, and slander. We can only hope that the youthful, charming, and beautiful Celimene will somehow avoid a similar fate.

(Found on p. 251 in Kelley Griffith's Writing Essays About Literature.)

C. End with a quotation that illustrates your point.

Hawthorne leaves us with a question of whether Brown's experience was dream: "Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting?" (90). But the question is probably irrelevant, since the effect on Brown is the same as if his experience had really happened. Brown is a changed man. He has, it seems, in fact taken the final step urged upon him by the devil. He sees all people as hypocrites who pretend



to be good but secretly worship and follow the devil. He even shrinks “from the bosom of Faith,” scowling and muttering when he sees her at prayer. He has become a cold man, just as the forest when he awakens is “chill and damp” and “besprinkled ... with the coldest dew” (89).

(Found on p. 251 in Kelley Griffith's Writing Essays About Literature.)

D. End with a strong contrast.

Jose Donosos and Luisa Valenzuela have created an utter contradiction in their individual concerns with the human body. As “Chattanooga Choo Choo” reveals the insignificance and absence of the human body in an entanglement of physical forms, Other Weapons lauds the presence of the human body as it validates its characters and the actual text.

(Written by Nancy S. Hale in “T.S. Eliot's Aims for Poetic Drama and Murder in the Cathedral” on p. 556 in Students Writing Across the Disciplines by Cyndia Susan Clegg and Michael M. Wheeler.)

E. End by dismissing an opposing idea.

Had Robinson told Cory's story as an omniscient narrator, Winters' complaint about the poem would be justified. The poem would seem to be an attempt to shock us with a melodramatic and too-obvious irony. But Robinson has deepened the poem's meaning by having one of Cory's fellow townspeople tell his story. This presentation of Cory's character, his relationship to the townspeople, and his motives for suicide open the poem up to interpretation that Winters does not acknowledge or explore.

(Found on p. 251 in Kelley Griffith's Writing Essays About Literature.)

F. End with a final illustration of your point.

Although on the surface Oedipus seems a victim of fate, actually he participates in that fate enough to be responsible for it. He is impetuous, proud, violent, unjust, and heedless of the gods. As such, he is to blame for killing his father and committing incest with his mother. He finally and justly recognizes his guilt, accepts responsibility for it, and punishes himself.

(Found on p. 251 in Kelley Griffith's Writing Essays About Literature.)

The examples used for this handout came from the following:

Berke, Jacqueline. Twenty Questions for the Writer: A Rhetoric with Readings. 3rd ed. New York: Harcourt, 1981.

Clegg, Cynthia Susan, and Michael M. Wheeler. Students Writing Across the Disciplines. Fort Worth: Holt, 1991.

Dentzer, Susan. “For Mercy's Sake, Let's Cover the Kids.” U.S. News & World Report. 21 Oct. 1996: 69.

Griffith, Kelley, Jr. Writing Essays About Literature. 3rd ed. New York: Harcourt, 1990.

O'Hare, Frank, and Dean Memering. The Writer's Work: A Guide to Effective Composition. 3rd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice, 1990.

Tibbetts, A.M., and Charlene Tibbetts. Strategies of Rhetoric. Glenview, IL: Scott, 1974.