

The Conclusion

Just as every essay has a clear beginning, it should have a clear ending. The last paragraph, also known as the *conclusion*, should make your essay sound finished.

And 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 summarize 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?" Then ponder that question and answer it. Here's how it might go:

You: *Basically, I'm just saying that education was important to Douglass.*

Friend: *So what?*

You: *Well, it was important because it was a key to him feeling like a free and equal citizen.*

Friend: *Why should anybody care?*

You: *That's important because plantation owners tried to keep slaves from being educated so that they could maintain control. When Douglass obtained an education, he undermined that control personally.*

You can also use this strategy on your own, asking yourself "So What?" as you develop your ideas or your draft.

- Return to the theme or themes in the introduction. 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.
- 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.
- Point to broader implications. 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.

But DON'T

- Begin 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.
- State the thesis for the very first time in the conclusion.
- Introduce a new idea or subtopic in your conclusion.
- End with a rephrased thesis statement without any substantive changes.
- Make sentimental, emotional appeals that are out of character with the rest of an analytical paper.
- Include evidence (quotations, statistics, etc.) that should be in the body of the paper.

And Also Avoid these stereotypical endings:

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. Example: In conclusion, Frederick Douglass was, as we have seen, a pioneer in American education, proving that education was a major force for social change with regard to slavery.
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. Example: (After a paper that lists numerous incidents from the book but

never says what these incidents reveal about Douglass and his views on education): So, as the evidence above demonstrates, Douglass saw education as a way to undermine the slaveholders' power and also an important step toward freedom.

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 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. Example: Because of the efforts of fine Americans like Frederick Douglass, countless others have seen the shining beacon of light that is education. His example was a torch that lit the way for others. Frederick Douglass was truly an American hero.
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. Example: In addition to being an educational pioneer, Frederick Douglass provides an interesting case study for masculinity in the American South. He also offers historians an interesting glimpse into slave resistance when he confronts Covey, the overseer. His relationships with female relatives reveal the importance of family in the slave community.

The concluding paragraph typically has two parts:

1. The *summary statement* is one or two sentences which restate the thesis in a fresh way to reinforce the essay's main idea.
2. The *clincher* is a final thought which should create a lasting impression on the reader.

The Summary Statement

The summary statement is an effective way to start your concluding paragraph because it helps to drive home the ideas you've expressed in your essay.

Look at your thesis statement again and rework it in a new way. Avoid repeating key words and phrases from the thesis statement because you don't want the summary statement to sound boring or repetitive.

Here are some examples of thesis statements and summary statements:

Thesis Statement: Of the many reasons Americans buy Japanese automobiles, competitive pricing, fuel economy, and high resale value are the most compelling

Summary Statement: Reasonable pricing, low miles per gallon, and an attractive resale value have all contributed to the popularity of Japanese automobiles in today's market.

Thesis Statement: San Francisco is by far the most stimulating place to visit in the United States because of its magnificent location, its theaters and art galleries, and its many fine restaurants.

Summary Statement: For the visitor who loves beautiful surroundings, world class theater and art, and exquisite cuisine, then San Francisco is the hands down vacation spot.

The Clincher

The *clincher*, also referred to as the *closer*, is the last opportunity to connect with the reader. One way to make the most of this moment is to return to the technique used for your introduction. Complete the anecdote.

Concluding Paragraph	Introductory Paragraph
<p>Summary Statement It is not too much to ask teachers to be dedicated to their fields of study and to be willing to share their enthusiasm with their students. In order to be effective, teachers should have their eyes focused on the students in their classes and always be searching for ways to bring the curriculum to life.</p> <p>Clincher</p>	<p>When Jonathan Swift described Gulliver's trip to the land of Laputa in Gulliver's Travels, Swift depicted scientists who had one eye turned inward and the other aimed at the stars. In the case of two high school science teachers I had had at this school, life imitates Swift's art. The school district should require all teachers, especially those in science, to have an interest in students as well as expertise and curiosity.</p>

Startling statistics or facts

Concluding Paragraph	Introductory Paragraph
<p>Summary Statement People of all ages can learn about nature, cooking, health, history, and science, to mention just a few subjects, from the comfort and safety of their own homes while watching television. Instead of automatically turning off the "boob tube," it might be worth your while to occasionally sit down with your family and watch some of the fascinating and educational programming currently available on your television set.</p> <p>Clincher</p>	<p>Television is so popular that over 128 million sets are now being used in 98 percent of American households. According to the A.C. Nielsen Company, which takes television surveys, each week the small screen holds the attention of children under five for an average of 23.5 hours and adults for an average of 44 hours. Indeed, the typical viewer spends more time in front of the television set than he or she spends on any other activity except sleep. But far from being the "idiot box" that it is often called, television offers viewers many benefits. Television can be educational, as well as entertaining.</p>

Ask a final rhetorical question

Concluding Paragraph	Introductory Paragraph
<p data-bbox="203 331 365 401">Summary Statement</p> <p data-bbox="378 317 781 541">As the population continues to age, the demand for medical care will only increase. Without the support of the federal government to supply health insurance for its citizens, many people will suffer and die needlessly. Can we let this happen to the people in this country?</p> <p data-bbox="215 464 352 533">Clincher</p>	<p data-bbox="824 310 1406 594">If you became seriously ill and needed to be hospitalized for several weeks, would you be able to afford to pay thousands of dollars for proper medical care? Unfortunately, many Americans have already found out that they cannot. Therefore, the federal government must provide national health insurance for all of its citizens.</p>

Use a new quotation or refer back to the opening quotation

Concluding Paragraph	Introductory Paragraph
<p data-bbox="203 808 365 877">Summary Statement</p> <p data-bbox="378 793 781 1125">I have learned never to go to the DMV without a book, a comfortable pair of shoes, and a lot of patience. Maybe I'll become a better person as I navigate the labyrinth that is the Department of Motor Vehicles. After all, as the philosopher Johann von Schiller once said, "Only those who have the patience to do simple things perfectly will acquire the skill to do difficult things easily."</p> <p data-bbox="215 989 352 1058">Clincher</p>	<p data-bbox="824 787 1438 1113">The writer H.L. Mencken defined Puritanism as "'the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.'" The clerks at the Department of Motor Vehicles must be Puritans. They seem to do their best to see that each person who comes in to get a license or registration, has to wind through a confusing maze of lines, must wait an eternity for help, and has to remain standing the entire time.</p>