

Strategies for Writing a Conclusion

Conclusions are often the most difficult part of an essay to write, and many writers feel that they have nothing left to say after having written the paper. A writer needs to keep in mind that the conclusion is often what a reader remembers best.

A conclusion should

- stress the importance of the thesis statement (without repeating it verbatim),
- give the essay a sense of completeness, and
- leave a final impression on the reader.

Suggestions

Answer the question "So What?"

Show your readers why this paper was important. Show them that your paper was meaningful and useful.

Synthesize, DON'T SUMMARIZE

Don't simply repeat things that were in your paper. They have read it. Show them how the points you made and the support and examples you used were not random, but fit together.

Redirect your readers

Give your reader something to think about, perhaps a way to use your paper in the "real" world. If your introduction went from general to specific (deductive), make your conclusion go from specific to general (inductive). Think globally.

Create a new meaning

You don't have to give new information to create a new meaning. By demonstrating how your ideas work together, you can create a new picture. Often the sum of the paper is worth more than its parts.

Strategies

Echoing the introduction:

Echoing your introduction can be a good strategy *if it is meant to bring the reader full circle*.

If you begin the essay by describing a scenario, for example, you can end with the same scenario as proof that your essay was helpful in creating a new understanding.

Example

Introduction

From the parking lot, I could see the towers of the castle of the Magic Kingdom standing stately against the blue sky. To the right, the tall peak of The Matterhorn rose even higher. From the left, I could hear the jungle sounds of Adventureland. As I entered the gate, Main Street stretched before me with its quaint shops evoking an old-fashioned small town so charming it could never have existed. I was entranced. Disneyland may have been built for children, but it brings out the child in adults.

Conclusion

I thought I would spend a few hours at Disneyland, but here I was at 1:00 A.M., closing time, leaving the front gates with the now dark towers of the Magic Kingdom behind me. I could see tired children, toddling along and struggling to keep their eyes open as best they could. Others slept in their parents' arms as we waited for the parking lot tram that would take us to our cars. My forty-year-old feet ached, and I felt a bit sad to think that in a couple of days I would be leaving California, my vacation over, to go back to my desk. But then I smiled to think that for at least a day I felt ten years old again.

Techniques and examples are adapted from *Basic Writing: A First Course*, by Peter Carino, Harper Collins, 1991. URL: <http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/conclude.html>

Challenging the reader: By issuing a challenge to your readers, you are helping them to redirect the information in the paper, and they may apply it to their own lives.

Example: *Though serving on a jury is not only a civic responsibility but also an interesting experience, many people still view jury duty as a chore that interrupts their jobs and the routine of their daily lives. However, juries are part of America's attempt to be a free and just society. Thus, jury duty challenges us to be interested and responsible citizens.*

Looking to the future: Looking to the future can emphasize the importance of your paper or redirect the readers' thought process. It may help them apply the new information to their lives or see things more globally.

Example: *Without well-qualified teachers, schools are little more than buildings and equipment. If higher-paying careers continue to attract the best and the brightest students, there will not only be a shortage of teachers, but the teachers available may not have the best qualifications. Our youth will suffer. And when youth suffers, the future suffers.*

Posing questions: Posing questions, either to your readers or in general, may help your readers gain a new perspective on the topic, which they may not have held before reading your conclusion. It may also bring your main ideas together to create a new meaning.

Example: *Campaign advertisements should help us understand the candidate's qualifications and positions on the issues. Instead, most tell us what a fool or knave the opposing candidate is, or they present general images of the candidate as a family person or God-fearing American. Do such advertisements contribute to creating an informed electorate or a people who choose political leaders the same way they choose soft drinks and soap?*

Demonstrate the real-life application of your analysis: Sometimes we have to remember that when we write analytical papers, our ideas exist in the real world (not just in the book or in our heads). For instance, if you're writing about *To Kill a Mockingbird*, even though Scout and Atticus aren't real, their feelings, their experiences, and their stories possess some very real truth. Your conclusion can expose that truth for your reader.

Example: *Through the symbol of the mockingbird and the actions of Heck Tate, Atticus, and even Scout, Lee suggests that that innocence should be protected, perhaps at all costs. And she has a point. In the world, there exist people who, like Mayella, are willing to "kill a mockingbird" in order to protect themselves. And although our justice system is designed to protect against such actions, we should not be foolish enough to think that it alone can protect those who need protecting. We cannot rely solely on a flawed system or assume another will lend the needed hand. We must emulate the actions of Tate, and Atticus and stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. We must lend a hand, as Scout does, to those mockingbirds deserving of our compassion and understanding.*