

Writing a Conclusion



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Conclusions can be difficult to write. When you are immersed in all the details of your paper, it can be hard to pull back and write a paragraph that brings your information—and the reader—back to reality. Conclusions are important, however. They are your final opportunity to affect or convince your reader.

Many Kinds of Conclusions

There is no one “best” kind of conclusion. Several types of conclusions can work with each paper. A conclusion could restate or summarize the main points made in your paper. It could involve recommendations for action. Or, in the case of a brief paper, it could merely be a closing comment.

The conclusion for a scientific report will likely contain suggestions for further research. The conclusion for an argumentative paper might include one last attempt to persuade readers.

The old preacher’s guide for writing sermons can apply to writing papers:

In the introduction, tell them what you’re going to tell them.

In the body, tell them.

In the conclusion, tell them what you told them.

What a Conclusion Should Do

Provide a sense of closure. As readers approach the end of your paper, they want closure, and a conclusion should provide it.

Reaffirm the importance of what you have written. Readers shouldn’t finish your paper thinking, “Who cares?”

Link the end to the beginning. This is a satisfying way to end a paper. For example, if you started your paper with a particular image, return to this image at the end. If you started with an anecdote, refer to the anecdote as you close the paper.

A conclusion could involve any appropriate detail, example, image, or anecdote.

What a Conclusion Should Not Do

Do not present a new idea.

Do not apologize for not having enough information or for being too brief. Nor should you apologize for your opinions or for not knowing enough. A conclusion isn’t an apology.

Do not begin your conclusion with “In conclusion.” Try more interesting ways of beginning your paragraph.

Do not contradict anything you’ve written in your paper.

Do not make grandiose statements or state opinions that go beyond what you have presented in your paper.

Strategies for Writing Conclusions

Before you write your conclusion, you may want to put down your draft for several hours or several days. Think about your paper during this time in a general way. Without thinking about any particular passages, assess the value of your paper as a whole. Ask yourself what one or two things your paper accomplished. Ask yourself why your paper matters. Your answer might form your conclusion.

Another useful strategy is to explain your paper to a friend or roommate without reading from it. When we talk to others, we often frame our remarks into stories, providing effective conclusions without really thinking about it. How do you conclude when you describe your paper to someone else?

If you have time after you have written your conclusion, put your finished paper aside. When you come back to it, read it again (aloud, if

possible) and ask yourself, have I concluded this paper effectively?

Accessing More Information

You can find excellent information about writing conclusions from these sources.

- Raimes, Ann. *Keys for Writers*. 5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.
- The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>
- The Writing Centers at the College of St. Benedict/St. John’s University: www.csbsju.edu/writingcenters

Acknowledgments

Information for this brochure was adapted from:

“Conclusions.” The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University. 27 Jan. 2009. <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>>.

“Conclusions.” The Writing Centers at the College of St. Benedict/St. John’s University. 27 Jan. 2009. <www.csbsju.edu/writingcenters>.

Where to Find Help on Campus

Consultants at the **Hamline University Writing Center**, located in the basement of Bush Library, are eager to help you with all stages of your writing. We will work with you whether you have just received an assignment and have no idea how to begin or you have a finished draft and want help with revisions.

You can make appointments online at WC Online. Simply follow the instructions at:

<http://rich37.com/hamline>

We look forward to seeing you!