

## Writing Conclusions

If the introduction of your paper is the first thing your readers see, then your conclusion is the last thing—the thing that will stick in their minds long after your work has been put away. So, like introductions, conclusions matter—a lot. Unfortunately, however, we often put little work into their conclusions—after all, all of the important stuff has been said, right? Yes, but you may also want your reader to remember specific things, be they arguments you have made or the ways in which you have disproved others. Sometimes, you may just want to reiterate the major points in your essay, and, at other times, you may want to connect your research to larger issues.

The truth is that conclusions are often shaped by many factors: trends in various disciplines, submission formats (required guidelines for articles submitted to academic journals, etc.), and sometimes by professors themselves. Therefore, there are few (if any) hard and fast rules to writing conclusions. While you should certainly do what you have been asked to do, or what is expected in a particular field of study, sometimes it simply comes down to how you feel about your paper. Have you said everything that needed to be said? Did you address specific things that you had planned to save for the end of the essay? Did you respond to important counter-arguments, or offer observations on alternative points of view? These are some of the questions you may consider as you write your final paragraph, and below are some suggestions of other things to keep in mind as you draft your closing paragraph(s).

- **Reiterate your thesis.** You may not want to cut and paste it verbatim from the introduction, but, if applicable, you do need to *remind* your readers of what you've talked about in your essay.
- **Take stock of what you've learned.** Sometimes, just reminding the reader of what you said is not enough—you may want to review what you meant to prove, how you did so, and why your method was so effective. This approach is especially useful in argumentative papers and persuasive essays, where the crafting of the argument says as much about the subject as the conclusions you reached.
- **State any final observations you have made about your topic.** This is especially helpful for opinion papers, argumentative papers, or for scientific papers that require you to conduct experiments or other research. Remember, you want to inform your reader throughout the course of your essay, but if your work has led you to make some important conclusions, then say so. If your evidence is relevant, and your research adequately and accurately presented, you should have no qualms about identifying it.
- **Be honest.** If your research has led you to raise questions that should be addressed in another paper, inform your reader about this. If you have successfully discussed your topic in a comprehensive way, then these questions should not be ones that you *should*

have answered; rather, they should provide possible avenues for future scholars to expand on your findings. Also, if there were questions that your required research *could not* answer, then make that clear to your reader as well. After all, good writers and researchers are honest about what they have (or have not) learned during the course of their work. Additionally, your reader may have similar questions, and your willingness to identify them lets him know that they are ones that would be best discussed in a different project, and not in your own.

- **Look at the big picture.** While your essay may not answer some timeless question about mankind, you may want to connect your arguments and/or findings to larger issues. For example, if, in a close reading for your creative writing class, you have argued that the Jamaican poet Una Marson's "To Wed or Not to Wed" is a carefully crafted parody of Hamlet's "To Be or Not to Be;" it may be a good idea to end on some observations about *why* this connection is important. This may require you to answer some questions of your own, like why does Marson, an Afro-Caribbean writer in the twentieth century, choose a passage from a Shakespeare play to discuss women's rights in a British colony? And why does she use the topic of marriage to do so? These inquiries may need additional research, but raising them and identifying the fact that more work can be done by future writers is ok. In fact, proposing avenues for further study does not make your paper look inadequate or incomplete—it actually adds value to your work by showing that you see connections to larger issues. And such final suggestions have led to some groundbreaking work in several fields. Thus, while you may want to remind your readers of what you have said, don't be afraid to leave them with something more to think about.