



Conclusions

Every paper that begins has to end. A conclusion doesn't have to be long, but it should create a sense of completeness. Here are a few ways to wrap up a satisfying (or at least adequate) ending.

Summarizing

This beginner's technique (you may have heard it as "restate your thesis") does not just copy-and-paste the thesis word-for-word but substantially reworks it and shows readers why your ideas matter. Summary conclusions are adequate but can risk sounding monotonous. Even so, we can be okay with adequate, especially when we're on a deadline and the conclusion is the only thing lacking! An article on ways to improve American food consumption ends by summarizing its central idea:

The essential message is this: food and everything surrounding it is a crucial matter of personal and public health, of national and global security. At stake is not only the health of humans but that of the earth (Bittman).

Building "bookends"

This technique treats the introduction and conclusion like bookends—they are made of similar stuff, and they mirror each other. When an author circles back to the beginning like this, he echoes the images or key words of the introduction and produces a sense of unity, completion, and closure. In an essay about encouraging deep reading, Leo W. Banks' introduction refers to "the four most important words." He concludes:

*...I believe the **four most important words** for the resurrection of the culture are...once upon a time.*

Zooming out

When you zoom out (think Google Maps), you connect your point to a larger context. It might be a political or historical context, as in "Food Apartheid" by William Saletan, where he argues that banning fast food franchises in poor Los Angeles neighborhoods is government-enforced, systematic racial discrimination. He concludes by zooming out to invoke the language and images of the Jim Crow South and the American civil rights movement by using the phrases *certain kinds of restaurants, certain kinds of people* and *for their own good*:

*Hey, I'm all for better food in impoverished neighborhoods. Incentives for grocery stores are a great idea. But **telling certain kinds of restaurants that they can't serve certain kinds of people is just plain wrong, even when you think it's for their own good.***

In "Stop Googling, Let's Talk," the author zooms out to connect her issue to a wider cultural context, that technology is lessening our ability to experience and express empathy and intimacy. To conclude, she zooms out to reflect on human nature in general:

*This is our moment to acknowledge the unintended consequences of the technologies to which we are vulnerable, but also to respect the resilience that has always been ours. We have time to make corrections and **remember who we are—creatures of history, of deep psychology, of complex relationships, of conversations, artless, risky, and face to face** (Turkle).*

Making a call to action

A persuasive or argument essay is a good place to use the call-to-action conclusion. In an essay about gender relationships, Roxanne Gay concludes with one:

*I'm not sure how we can get better at having these conversations, but I do know we need to overcome our deeply entrenched positions and resistance to nuance. **We have to be more interested in making things better than just being right, or interesting, or funny** (108).*

Asking a challenging question

While you do not want to bring up new points of discussion in a conclusion, you might want to challenge the reader with a question that personalizes your argument. In an article that criticizes over-protective attitudes toward children, Petula Dvorak compares school-readiness checklists from forty years ago with readiness checklists of today, and concludes,

*Yeah. Life skills, social development. Becoming actual people, not just little graph readers. **We've kind of forgotten about that, haven't we?***

Predicting results, visualizing the future

Particularly if you are proposing a solution, you may write a conclusion that predicts what the future would look like if your proposal were (or were not) made a reality. In an ironic essay proposing a national ban on the English language, Dennis Baron concludes by imagining the effects of his proposal (he also then *zooms out* to connect his plan with child psychology and with Biblical archetypes):

*Prohibiting English will do for the language what Prohibition did for liquor. **Those who already use it will continue to do so, and those who don't will want to try out what has been forbidden.** This negative psychology works with children. It works with speed limits. It even worked in the Garden of Eden (139).*

Warning of consequences

A warning gives readers a reason to care about your topic. Thomas Sowell argues that when the government raises minimum wage, young and minority workers lose their jobs first. He concludes with a warning. Sowell's warning is not only against mandated minimum wage laws; he also *zooms out* to connect to other policies that, while well-intentioned, may have unintended consequences:

*This is **just one of many policies** that allow liberals to go around feeling good about themselves, **while leaving havoc in their wake.***

There are some things you should avoid no matter what type of conclusion you use. First, don't introduce new ideas or subtopics in a conclusion. The conclusion is not a place to dump all your unused material—just let it go. Second, don't focus on a minor point from your essay. If you have more to say about one of your points, and if it falls under the umbrella of your thesis statement, say it in a corresponding body paragraph. If it doesn't connect to your thesis, it doesn't belong in the conclusion, either. And last—don't apologize.

Works Cited

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