



Effective Conclusions

The conclusion of an essay is the reader's last impression of the writer's work and allows the writer to finalize their argument and key issues. An effective conclusion summarizes your thoughts, demonstrates the importance of key ideas, provokes interest, and may call for action or future review from the reader. The length depends on your topic, purpose, audience, and summarizes your thesis statement.

Strategies to get started:

If you are having trouble starting your conclusion, think about your purpose, main idea, and the audience of your essay.

- What are your final thoughts about your topic?
- How can you effectively summarize and address your topic?
- Is your conclusion supported through your main ideas?

Answer the "so what" question:

A conclusion's purpose is to finalize the main argument of your essay, and should answer the question, "Why does this topic matter?" Your conclusion should connect to the whole essay, and should answer why people should care about your topic. You may even ask yourself this question to help create an effective conclusion.

Return to the introduction :

An effective conclusion returns to the themes presented in the introduction. A conclusion should bring readers full circle and should parallel concepts within the introduction. For example, if you begin with a certain idea, you may return back to that same idea in your conclusion.

Synthesize, don't summarize:

Don't repeat your introduction word for word. Instead, show the reader how your main ideas connect to your thesis and your examples.

Strategies to avoid include:

- **Beginning with an overused phrase like "in conclusion" or "to summarize"**
These phrases are often overused in essays and typically should not be used.
- **Introducing a new topic or new evidence**
You should not introduce any new information in your conclusion. All new material should be presented beforehand in the body paragraphs of the paper.
- **Restating your thesis word for word**
Conclusions that only restate the thesis do not push new ideas forward and do connect ideas to the whole.
- **Being overly emotional**
Being overly emotional in your conclusion typically does not parallel the tone of the rest of your paper. It is more fitting to play on sophisticated commentary rather than the reader's emotions.



Here are some examples of effective conclusions (Note: that not all conclusions may follow this format. There are many ways to write effective conclusions).

Example One: Scientific/Psychology Conclusion

In the case of the foster care system, there obviously remains a need to remove children from unhealthy home environments, but the current foster care system now could use an update. With the disruption of critical developmental stages early on, especially that of attachment, and the grim outlook for foster children while both in the system and when they age out, these individuals are set up to have behavior problems and feel the sense of learned helplessness and a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. All this combined leads to not only a poor societal outlook, but also a poor outlook on their psychological stability as well.

Example Two: Compare and Contrast Literary Essay Conclusion

Death is a muse in literature and is used often by poets as the centralized topic of their poems. Although Plath and Eliot did not write during the same era, both “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” and “Lady Lazarus” depict death in similar terms. Both poets use figurative language and allusions to express the effects of death and dying and, through these allusions, death is illustrated as a choice the speaker must make. However, each poet also portrays this decision differently. While Plath’s speaker depicts death as a reoccurrence and her expertise, Eliot’s speaker struggles with the idea of death and whether to live or die. The emotions the speaker of Eliot’s poem expresses makes Eliot’s poem the stronger candidate for the topic of death. Human emotion is the most powerful factor in life; it decides who we are, how we feel, and our decisions. Emotions are the most powerful tool of any human being; they control every situation that surrounds us. Because Plath’s poem refuses to emit emotion, her poem fails to fully grasp death in its entirety. Eliot’s speaker, however, fully grasps his feelings and expresses them through every line of the poem. The speaker in “Love Songs of J. Alfred Prufrock” is strong because of his vulnerability and his illustration of death.

Color Key:

Green: Return to the introduction

Blue: Restated thesis

Purple: Connection to the whole essay

Orange: Answering the “So What” Question

Further Assistance: For more detailed help or if you have questions, visit the Writing Center located in the Lewis University Library, or call 815-836-5427.