



Concluding Paragraphs

Like an introduction, a **conclusion** is best written after you have a rough draft of the body paragraphs. It would be difficult to write a concluding paragraph that made sense before finishing the body of the paper. Since introductions and conclusions are closely connected, examples mirror those used in the Introductory Paragraphs handout.

There are four parts to this handout:

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|-------------|--|
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Purpose of conclusions and effective strategies |
| Part Two: | WRITING CONCLUSIONS: THE PROCESS OUTLINED
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You may go straight to the section that has information you need or read the entire handout for a fuller understanding.

PART ONE

THE BASICS

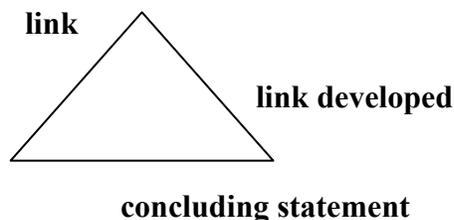
If you don't know how to end a telephone conversation, you're left hanging in mid-air, and so is the person on the other end of the line. The same thing is true for ending an essay or research paper: both writer and reader are uncomfortable without a strong conclusion. Simply restating the thesis or main points is not enough. In a conclusion, the writer often returns to an image or point made in the essay in order to **frame** the essay. Or, the writer may want the reader to take a specific action. Sometimes

the writer may give an opinion or judgment based on the points in the essay. Or, the writer may want to emphasize an insight. These strategies **expand** on ideas in order to form a conclusion. A strong conclusion doesn't merely restate the thesis or the points made in the essay: it goes a step further.

However, you *may* need to **summarize** the main points in the conclusion: when 1) your instructor has told you to do so; or 2) the essay is long and complicated. Then, you need to recap the main points as part of your conclusion. Normally, summary conclusions in short essays insult the reader because you imply that the reader won't be able to recall what she has read. Also, you insult yourself because you imply you're too lazy to think of something else to say.

Conclusions often begin with a specific idea and develop the paragraph to a general idea. This is the reverse of the pattern for introductions. The first sentence of the conclusion **links** it to the main idea of the essay in a specific way. The paragraph **develops the link**, and a **concluding statement** satisfies the reader's need for closure.

Concluding Paragraph



What You Need to Know Before You Write Your Conclusion

Keep in mind your **focus** (main idea) in order to write a successful conclusion. Match the conclusion's **tone** (your attitude toward the subject) to the one used in the paper. Since a college-level paper usually has one of three **purposes**: 1) to **inform or explain**; 2) to **persuade or argue**; 3) to **entertain**, your conclusion needs to help finalize your purpose.

Strategies for Conclusions

Conclusions use three techniques, alone or in combination: frames, expansions and summaries.

The Frame: This conclusion refers to an image, comparison, story, question or quote from the introduction. A frame acts like a bookend since the image or story is referred to in both the introduction and the conclusion. But in the conclusion, the reference gives a new perspective.

The Expansion: This conclusion takes the reader beyond the ideas in the essay. This additional step relates closely to the essay ideas but encourages the reader to think about them differently. Several strategies will do this:

1. reflection: offer a thoughtful statement
2. question: ask a question to make the reader think
3. call to action: suggest reader take action regarding topic
4. judgment: give your opinion about topic
5. illustration: show how topic has affected you

The Summary: This conclusion works well for long, complicated essays. Restating the main points reminds the reader of the ideas covered in the essay. Argument essays or research papers often use summarizing conclusions. Even if a summary is used, the expanded conclusion can give the reader a different perspective.

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As with introductions, some *strategies* for the conclusion will be more effective than others. For example, your essay informs parents how to discuss avoiding drugs with their children. Your introduction related how your father talked about drugs with you. In the conclusion, you could reflect on that story, maintaining the same **tone** used in the introduction and essay. A humorous conclusion would be inappropriate if the essay and introduction have a serious tone.

SAMPLE

One example will put all this together. In the introductory paragraph handout, a brief narrative told how the writer, as a child, nearly fell into the Grand Canyon (the “big ditch”). The thesis statement read, “Protecting children from danger is not easy for parents.” We expect to learn more about this in the essay. Let’s assume the writer has discussed the various ways parents try to protect children in the essay. The writer concludes with this paragraph:

(**link**→) *My parents were visibly shaken when they discovered I had almost fallen into “the big ditch.”* (**development**→) They realized how vulnerable I was yet could not always protect me. Later, family discussions about dangers that children face and how to avoid them helped me understand what I should and should not do. Also, seeing my parents’ worried looks every time I rode my bicycle down the street stuck in my mind. Their admonitions, “Look both ways,” “Don’t talk to strangers,” and “Stay in familiar territory,” kept me safe while I played in my neighborhood. My parents and I learned from this experience, however, that no matter how many rules or safeguards they devised, children can’t be put under a glass case like fragile figurines. (**concluding statement**→) **Children must learn, ultimately, how to protect themselves in an unpredictable world.**

Explanation

In this conclusion, the writer begins by referring to the Grand Canyon as “the big ditch,” the phrase that appeared in the introduction. Linking this image is the first step of the conclusion. The writer develops the paragraph with reasons she thinks her parents’ talks with her were useful. Then, the writer reflects on these talks in the last two sentences, generalizing that there is no sure-fire way to protect children. The concluding statement shifts the reader only slightly and retains the essay’s focus and tone.

PART TWO

WRITING A CONCLUSION: THE PROCESS OUTLINED

OBSERVATION PAPER SAMPLE

- 1) *Assignment:* Suppose you have written about patients waiting in a doctor’s office to explain the different responses of two groups: people who interact with others and people who block others out. In the essay, you describe how these groups cope with crowded environments.
- 2) *Link:* You can link the conclusion to the essay by using a frame. Phrases from the introduction, such as “people who strike up a conversation with anyone” and “others who seem to curl up inside themselves” work as a link: *Whether people strike up a conversation with anyone who will listen, or curl up inside themselves, crowded environments bring out personality traits we can identify in strangers.*
- 3) *Development and Concluding Statement:* A conclusion should do more than merely restate an image or phrase from the introduction, or the reader is left thinking, “So what?” Since the essay describes behaviors, the conclusion might briefly remind us what to expect from people in crowded situations, or may lead readers to consider their own behavior. After making a brief statement and asking a question, you give a general concluding statement.

SAMPLE

(link→) *Whether people strike up a conversation with anyone who will listen or curl up inside themselves, crowded environments bring out personality traits we can identify in strangers.* **(development→)** Understanding that the chatty woman next to us is simply relieving stress by starting a conversation helps us cope with her behavior. Similarly, if we are the chatty ones, we might stop and remind ourselves that the man hiding behind the book in the corner wants to retreat from the crowded situation he's in. **(concluding statement→)** **Our different responses are tools we use to survive the uncomfortable environments we all endure from time to time.**

PART THREE

SAMPLE CONCLUSIONS

REFLECTION PAPER SAMPLE

Your assignment was to recall a childhood experience, think about it as a mature adult, and tell its significance. You decide that your new English Racer bicycle gleaming “freedom blue in the sunlight” will link to the conclusion so that it frames your essay. The thesis statement: “We think the ‘first set of wheels’ we get means freedom, but this is not always what we experience.” In the essay, you discussed how the freedom we are given as we grow up carries unexpected responsibilities. You expand on this idea in the conclusion.

SAMPLE

(link→) *My English Racer gleamed not only freedom blue, but responsibility red.* **(development→)** Wheels meant I could go new places alone, but they also meant I was old enough to take care of my bike. By the time I had my own car, I had assumed many new responsibilities, such as working to pay for the car and gas I used, as well as for repairs and maintenance; I had earned my freedom and had become more independent. My attitude about freedom had changed. **(concluding statement→)** **Freedom is partly a state of mind I achieve by assuming and carrying out my responsibilities as an independent person.**

EVALUATION PAPER

You have evaluated a popular rock band whose new DVD you like. The thesis statement, “This band’s vivid special effects, unique sound, and variety of songs will put their new DVD at the top of the charts very quickly,” previews these criteria to support your opinion. You want your reader to believe this band’s recordings are worth the money, so your link reminds the reader of your excitement when you first watched the DVD.

SAMPLE

(link→) *I can never listen to another rock band without comparing it to The Infernal Machine.* **(development→)** Music that excites the imagination and carries me to another place is my favorite kind, but this band does it better than any other. The next DVD they produce will certainly find its way to my collection. Too many bands rely on their past successes and don’t experiment with something new. Perhaps they’ll realize that fans want a new sound when The Infernal Machine tops the charts. **(concluding statement→)** **Rock bands that want to remain popular need to take artistic risks.**

EXPLAINING CONCEPTS PAPER

In this paper you explain the concept of *sacrifice* by discussing sacrifices that do not benefit us personally, but are morally correct. Since this assignment explores the connotations of a word (the emotional meanings of a word, not just the dictionary definition), you relate experiences you and others have had. You think others might agree with your personal definition, so you use it as your hook. The thesis statement is “Our moral sense often leads us to make sacrifices that have no apparent benefit, but that satisfy some deep need we have to do what is right.” You want the reader to agree that sacrifices based on morally sound reasons give a person satisfaction, so you refer to some of the essay examples in your conclusion, then give a general concluding statement.

SAMPLE

(link→) *Sacrifices we make don’t always make sense until we examine our motives for making them.* **(development →)** The teenage mother who gives up her child for adoption because she knows she is still too immature to raise him, the young man who gets a second job to help his unemployed father get back on his feet, and the sister who donates one of her kidneys for her sick brother are all examples of sacrifices based on benefits for others rather than self. The long-term effects of these actions far outweigh the short-term benefits we often expect when we make sacrifices. **(concluding statement →)** **Our sense of duty to others is a strong motivation, one we may not understand until time has passed and we can look back objectively, satisfied with our choices.**

POSITION or ARGUMENT PAPER

In this assignment, you defend your position for a smoking ban at Meramec. You use an image, the thick smoke outside Communications North, to hook the reader. The essay summarizes your reasons against smoking on campus: the unpleasant smells on clothes and hair, some students' preoccupation to get out of class for a cigarette, and the health risks of second-hand smoke. Your thesis statement is "I support a campus wide smoking ban." You summarize your points to remind the reader of them. However, you want to emphasize that the risk of second-hand smoke to non-smokers is your main objection.

SAMPLE

(link→) *Do some students have the right to intrude on other students by smoking on campus?* **(development→)** The unpleasant smells that cling to clothes and hair, the antsy student fidgeting for a cigarette in the middle of class, and the health risks posed for non-smokers by second-hand smoke are solid reasons for banning smoking on campus. If we could solve the first two problems, second-hand smoke is still unavoidable, even with designated smoking areas. **(concluding statement→)** **The best way to protect the health of all students is to ban smoking campus wide.**

PART FOUR

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- 1) Be direct and confident in the conclusion, not apologetic. Avoid using expressions such as "I don't know if this proves . . ." Such apologies weaken the conclusion.
- 2) Be accurate and avoid using absolute statements which alienate readers who have different opinions from yours. Acknowledge the differences. "Although some people give good reasons for disagreeing with this proposal, I strongly believe we need this change."
- 3) The conclusion should flow smoothly from the essay and reflect what the essay is about. Don't begin a new topic or take the reader into a direction that requires more discussion than that given in the essay.
- 4) The length of the conclusion depends on the length of the essay: short essays usually have short conclusions, while long essays may require longer conclusions.