

The Writing Center at Everett Community College

Effective Conclusions

The concluding paragraph focuses the reader's attention on the purpose, thesis, and subject once again. It explores the implications and general significance of the observations made in the developing paragraphs. In it, you should make certain that the reader is convinced or informed of the idea or purpose that you wish to achieve. Somehow, it should make the reader feel satisfied, better informed than when he began, convinced that he must reexamine his old assumptions or at least be unsettled about them.

The structure of the conclusion for the college essay is usually a kind of inverted funnel. That is, the paragraph begins with an altered or extended statement of the thesis and then traces the implications or consequences of that idea outwardly to broader applications. Finally, the writer should signal the reader that the end of the essay has come.

Generally the conclusion accomplishes these tasks:

- Reminds the reader of main subject or purpose
- Explores greater implications and general significance of the subject
- Satisfies the reader's desire for a new, informed outlook
- Convinces the reader of the subject's value

Just as several ways of beginning an essay suggest different purposes, several ways of ending an essay convey a sense of finality:

- Summary of ideas with suggestions for further study
- Personal evaluation of the presented ideas
- Appropriate quotation and a comment about its significance
- Extension of thesis into a larger truth or universal consideration
- In addition to summarizing or extending to a universal truth, a writer sometimes reinforces the idea with an anecdote or incident. This works well in a personal essay.

You will want to proportion the final paragraph to fit the length of the entire essay. If the essay is short, 500 words, a brief restatement will close the paper simply. If the paper is longer, five or six pages, an extended ending may be necessary to recapitulate the significance and to explore the larger implications.

CONSEQUENCES AND SIGNIFICANCE:

If the conclusion is not simply a summary it usually consists of an exploration of the implications and significance of the main ideas and the evidence used to support these ideas. This conclusion, after all, is the end product of the essay inquiry; it contains the considered judgements about the value, the uses, and the consequences in the lives of human beings of the ideas about the subject of the essay. Consequences, though closely allied with the matter of significance are still somewhat separate in meaning. You can identify the consequences of an idea by asking, "If I think or act like the proposition states—or if other people do—then what will happen? How will lives be affected? Are the possible effects desirable or undesirable?"

Significance, on the other hand, derives from these consequences. On the matter of significance, we might ask, "What does the idea amount to in the long run?" "How

does it affect people's lives and property? Is the idea a significant advance or decline in attitudes or belief?" All this is to say that we generally judge significance by the extent of the intensity of the consequent effects on human lives, property, or values.

CAUTION:

You can spot an overgeneralization when you meet one if you find yourself using words like "absolutely," "always," "never," "truly," or similar superlatives. Review very carefully the accuracy of such wording before committing yourself. Qualifications such as this appear to be true, and provide the necessary halter to runaway generalizations. Your writing is more believable as a result. Besides, you sound wiser in your opinions and judgement.

HOW TO END: A Dozen Suggestions:

The end of a paper, like the beginning, may be thought of in terms of structure of effect. In either case the important thing is to leave the reader with a sense of completeness.

1. With a final paragraph or sentence that completed the logical patten the essay has been developing.
2. With a rephrasing and reassertion of the main thesis.
3. With a concluding opinion supported by the previous discussion.
4. With a speculative question or statement that leaves the reader/subject open to further thought.
5. With musing upon the broader implications of the topic.
6. With a return to the theme, question, or image in the opening paragraph so that the essay is rounded out.
7. With an ironic twist or unexpected turn of thought.
8. With a note of high persuasion or challenge, comparable to the imperatives of a classical oration.
9. With an appropriate anecdote.
10. With a telling quotation.
11. With a descriptive passage, using the setting as a final commentary.
12. With a laugh.

Best avoided:

1. The unnecessary summary.
2. The postscript.
3. The obvious ending. "In conclusion. . ."