

## Concluding Thoughts: How to Write Conclusions

We all must face the end at some point. In writing, this often comes sooner than we would like. Whether it is for a midterm essay or a research paper, conclusions are difficult passages to write. While their finality is intimidating, fear not—good conclusions follow simple guidelines.

### **What Does a Conclusion Do?**

Every essay has three parts: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The introduction outlines your argument. The body provides reasons and evidence for why your reader should be convinced of your argument. The conclusion tells your reader why that argument is significant. Why should someone who might not be interested in your topic care about it? So what?

### **So What?**

Just because your argument is convincing doesn't mean that your reader cares about it. Use the conclusion to make them. Think about the broader implications of your thesis statement. If you used one, try returning to the quote or anecdote from your introduction. What significance should the reader see in it after reading your essay? Reflections like this can give your essay the feeling of closure as well as answer that vital "So what?" question. Remember, too, that explaining a slice of history can be important for better understanding the period in which it existed. Here are some sample questions to help you think about this:

- How does what I claim make us think differently about a past event, figure, or idea?
- What themes do we understand better if your argument is correct?
- Does my paper prompt us to rethink the causes or dynamics of a historical event or process?
- How does your argument connect to the coursework?

### **How Do I Begin to Conclude?**

Signal that your essay is wrapping up. This is important to do because it conveys to the reader that you are going to tell them why what they read matters. Do this by restating your thesis statement. This should be done in the first or second sentence of the conclusion.

### **What *Shouldn't* I Include?**

Don't introduce new lines of argument in the conclusion. Do that in the introduction. For example, if I was arguing that Puritan theology was the most important cause of early American support for public schools, I should not start arguing that the slave trade was also central. Likewise, don't pull new evidence into your conclusion. Do that in the body paragraphs.

### **How Do I Conclude the Conclusion?**

Conclusions should finish strong. The final sentence is the last thing that your reader will read. Make the most out of this. A well-crafted line can help tie together all the major themes and claims of your paper into one eloquent and memorable line that helps the reader process your thoughts. End on a bland or unremarkable note, however, and you will die. And death is a conclusion for which this handout is ill-equipped to prepare you.