

WRITING CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of an essay's conclusion, which may range in length from a sentence to several paragraphs, is to reiterate the main idea and perhaps give the reader something to ponder. Various approaches can accomplish these tasks:

- **Summarize content:** a fairly obvious, straightforward technique, reiterating the point, but not restating the introduction *verbatim*, a mistake some writers make.
Example: *The current debate about whether we should have a national curriculum is phony. We already have a national curriculum locked up in the seven lessons I have just outlined. Such a curriculum produces physical, moral, and intellectual paralysis, and no curriculum of content will be sufficient to reverse its hideous effects. What is currently under discussion in our national hysteria about failing academic performance misses the point. Schools teach exactly what they are intended to teach and they do it well: how to be a good Egyptian and remain in your place in the pyramid.* (John Taylor Gatto, "The Seven-Lesson Schoolteacher")
- **Repeat sentence or slogan or refer to title:** cleverly repeats a catchy phrase or sentence—or, through repetition, creates interest in a phrase or slogan.
Example: *I have one wish for the Web site. In the words of the auctioneer: Going, going, gone!* (Ellen Goodman, "Beauty on the DNA Auction Block")
- **Circle back to introductory example:** a closing technique that brings the piece full-circle, neatly tying beginning and ending.
Example: *After Alexander finished his workout that hot July day, we stopped to get something to drink at the gym's café. "I feel pretty good right now," Alexander admitted, "and I was furious when I went in there."* (Stephen S. Hall, "The Bully in the Mirror")
- **Quotation:** an easy, reliable way to conclude, the quote may come from a song, poem, or other literary work, or from a famous person—or it may simply be a memorable remark from a not-so-famous person.
Example: *"Welcome to the Liberace Museum!" [Liberace] cried to the assembled multitude. "I don't usually wear diamonds in the afternoon, but this is a special occasion!"* (Dave Hickey, "A Rhinestone as Big as the Ritz")
Example: *Because he's a perceptive kid, Alexander recognizes how feckless, how disturbing, how crazy this all is. "I tell you, it's definitely distressing," he said, "the fact that as much as girls get this anorexic thing and they're going through these image things with dolls and stuff, guys are definitely doing the same." True, he admitted, his social life has never been better. "But in a way it depresses me," he said, before heading off to a party; "that I had to do this for people to get to know me."* (Stephen S. Hall, "The Bully in the Mirror")
- **Announce the main point:** effective technique when the writer withholds statement of the main point until the end of the essay.
Example: *I have now, after all, deliberately chosen a "facial flaw," a remarkable aspect of appearance. Somehow, now, the glances of strangers seem less invasive, nothing to incite me to nunhood; a long look is just that—a look—and what of it? I've invited it, I've made room for it, it is no longer inflicted upon me against my will.* (Natalie Kusz, "Ring Leader")
- **Suggest the future for the subject:** technique that attempts to answer questions like "where do we go from here?" or "what's next?"
Example: *Eventually pay phones will become relics of an almost-vanished landscape, and of a time when there were fewer of us and our stories were on an earlier page. Romantics like me will have to reimagine our passions as they are—unmoored to earth, like an infinitude of cell-phone messages flying through the atmosphere.* (Ian Frazier, "Dearly Disconnected")
- **Leave the readers with a question to ponder:** a strategy that gives readers something to stop and consider, asks them to think beyond the subject.
Example: *But a question remains: Now that the shock of Littleton has subsided, will we simply return to a fantasy world where we can pretend that the ways we cohoose to entertain ourselves have no consequences, like some kid zoned out in front of a computer game? If so, game's over.* (Paul Keegan, "Culture Quake")

The essays from which the examples were derived are published in Reading Life.