

Types of Conclusions

Essay conclusions are, as a rule, no more than one paragraph in length. To have a lengthier conclusion is to introduce a new topic or bring in too much information to neatly wrap up the essay. Many students are under the impression that the conclusion should be a summary of the essay, touching on all the points as a reminder to the reader. While this may be true in some disciplines (especially, within the social sciences), it is not the most creative or interesting way to conclude an essay for your English class. Instead, consider one of the following possibilities as you write your concluding paragraph.

The Embedded Conclusion

In some cases, especially with a narrative essay that tells a personal story in chronological order, the conclusion can be the last paragraph of the body. For instance, if you are telling the story of how you learned the English language, and the last paragraph brings us to your current state of increased confidence mixed with lingering cautiousness, then that last paragraph gives us a solid place to part company.

Example:

I am now studying English in an ESL class at Cabrillo College. I know this is not the last leg of my journey, for I have a lot more to learn about American idioms and phrasing. However, even as I struggle, I feel more confidence than ever before. I am so far getting “A” grades on all my written assignments. Still, I will always feel cautious, like I am walking on egg shells, as I try to use a language that is so different from the one I was born into in a land faraway.

The Retrospective Conclusion

For a narrative essay, or for any essay that uses chronology or traces an historic movement, you may want to consider the retrospective conclusion. This concluding paragraph uses “hindsight” to consider what came before with new insight gained from experience.

Example:

Ten years ago, I would never have believed that I would be living in the United States and using English to buy groceries and make new friends. I would have fainted at the thought of writing professional documents in the English language. Nonetheless, here I am, writing an English essay in my first college English class and expecting to receive an “A.” Time will tell how far my English studies will take me.

The Reflective Conclusion

The reflective conclusion is similar to the retrospective kind, but it allows a broader train of thought as one considers the various themes, lessons, or insights that have emerged from the essay writing experience.

Example:

In choosing to approach life's challenges from a passive position, many teens see their bad choices as a result of their circumstances. Whether it's an unwanted pregnancy, a drug addiction, or an abusive relationship, girls especially can make excuses so that they don't have to change. I wish I could tell them that they don't have to be imprisoned by their past choices—it's never too late to take charge of your destiny.

The Projective Conclusion

This type of conclusion works especially well for research papers but can be used for most expository essays and some narrative ones as well. It involves projecting a future outcome of the circumstances you describe. It may project the negative results of a social issue if it remains unresolved or a threat to humanity. In other contexts, this conclusion can state a need for further research in an area to enhance our understanding, or it could predict an interesting, unexpected outcome based on current trends.

Example:

A crisis continues to brew in our school systems where it is no longer the case of just bullies turning to serial violence. As we saw in the Columbine shootings, even victims of chronic bullying, in an attempt to fight back and regain some power or dignity, are taking up arms and gunning down their classmates. Case after case shows us that criminal violence amongst school-aged children in America is not limited to just males or pinned to any one ethnicity or socioeconomic class. It is a crisis of the generation gap increased by rapidly changing technology and a lack of real communication. Unless we start talking to each other, more of our youth will die, and children will be safer on the streets than they are in the schoolyard.

The above four types of conclusions are not meant to limit you but to give you guidance as you apply your own unique stamp of creativity to your essay. The most important factor in writing your conclusion is that you give yourself enough time to experiment with a few possibilities. Don't deny yourself the creative thrill of that final flourish!