Essay Conclusions

**Four Main Types**

Essay conclusions are, as a rule, no more than one paragraph in length. 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 essays (especially within the social sciences or the persuasive essay), it is not the most creative or interesting way to conclude an essay of the personal narrative variety. Instead, consider one of the following possibilities as you write your concluding paragraph.

1. 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 you a solid place to end it. Mostly, it gives the reader a sense of where the experience has led you and gives the paper a sense of finality.

***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.”

**[This conclusion tells the reader where the author is now with the whole situation.]**

2. The Retrospective Conclusion

For a narrative essay, or for any essay that uses chronology or traces a historic movement, you may want to consider the retrospective conclusion. This concluding paragraph takes your current knowledge and uses it to look back at the situation and may offer insight about that look into the past (or at least gives a clear statement about where you are now).

***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 now, 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.”

**[This conclusion looks back at the issue and then brings the reader into the present.]**

3. The Reflective Conclusion

The reflective conclusion is similar to the retrospective kind, but it allows a wider train of thought as you consider the various themes, lessons, or insights that have emerged from the writing of this essay.

***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.” **[This conclusion offers an insight, a lesson learned.]**

4. 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.”

**[This conclusion offers a prediction about the topic if not dealt with.]**

Final Thoughts

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. Give yourself time to experience the creative thrill of that final touch, baby! As with all great conclusions, your conclusion should make the reader feel as though the story is all wrapped up, completely done.