



# Writing the Conclusion of the Essay and Revising

## IN THIS CHAPTER

**Summary:** Refine strategies for effectively concluding the essay

### Key Ideas

- ★ Practice with a variety of concluding techniques
- ★ Examine student samples and commentary
- ★ Practice with your own writing
- ★ Master a method for revision



“Leave ‘em wantin’ more.” That’s a piece of advice most performers are given early in their career. We’d like to give you a similar, yet somewhat different, piece of advice. “Leave ‘em feelin’ satisfied.” You’ve made an assertion and provided support for that assertion in the body of your essay. And, you want the reader to leave your presentation understanding your point of view and accepting your evidence in support of it. You also want your reader to sense a kind of closure and not feel as if left swinging in the breeze. The obvious way to provide this sense of security and closure is to compose an appropriate conclusion.

The old, tried-and-true conclusion is the all too familiar one. It usually begins with “In summary,” or “In conclusion,” or “Finally” followed by a review of the thesis and major points made in the presentation. Although this might be useful in an extended and complex essay, it is not needed, nor is it recommended, for a 500–1000-word presentation in a response to a college-level writing prompt, whether timed or untimed.

*“Writing is easy. All you have to do is sit down in front of the computer and open a vein.”*

—Red Smith

With that in mind, you no doubt are asking yourself, “Okay, if not a summary, what should I write?” You could try one of the following:



- Link your conclusion to something you said in the introduction.
- Link your idea to a more universal point.
- Relate a personal experience or idea to your thesis.
- Link your thesis to the world of your reader.
- Challenge your reader.
- End with a rhetorical question or imperative statement.
- Use an anecdote to reinforce a major point in your essay.
- End with an important line from the original text.

Your conclusion should leave the reader with a sense of you as a person with a voice and a valid, interesting point of view. This is your last chance to make an impression. Don't lose the opportunity. Consider the following samples from students' essays.

## Sample Conclusions

### AP English Language "A Presidential Candidate"

Throughout "A Presidential Candidate," Mark Twain focuses on his negative qualities rather than on the good, which is the usual MO for a political candidate. He enumerates absurdly opposite positions to the usual campaign promises. I only wish every candidate for political office could read this parody. As a matter of fact, I think I will e-mail this to all my representatives who hold national, state, and local offices. Thanks, Mr. Twain.

#### Comments

This conclusion links the final remarks to the more universal point of current politicians needing to reconsider their own approaches to addressing the electorate. The conclusion ends with a personal challenge that the writer makes to himself.

### AP English Literature

#### Sample Conclusion from the "Dover Beach" Prompt

"Ah, love, let us be true," pleads the speaker and we can imagine the lovers, just the two of them, together, in the present, against the dark past and unknown future.

#### Comments

Highlighting the most important line of the poem, this conclusion succinctly summarizes the essential contrasts presented in the introduction to the essay.

## Student Samples

### Student A

*Throughout history, the rich and famous have enjoyed privileges that the common man hasn't been allowed. Many current headline stories reveal the depth to which money and fame can infect*

*the justice system. Meanwhile, those clothed in “rags” continue to get shafted by a system that they do not influence nor control.*

**Comments**

This conclusion aggressively finalizes the writer’s position. With no rehashing of the prompt and no repetition of the thesis, this student leaves his reader with an implied challenge—do you dare to agree or disagree with me?

**Student B**

*In any case, that’s what it comes down to. The Calvinists believed that wealth was a sign from God that a man had been pre-selected to reside in heaven. So, our wealthy folks are really heaven-sent. Perfect angels don’t need laws anyway, right?*

**Comments**

Using a sarcastic rhetorical question to end this essay is a thought-provoking way for this student writer to make his or her own voice and point of view heard loudly and clearly.

**Workout 1**

You’re going to be examining the same three essays you’ve been working with in Chapters 7 and 8 to complete this exercise set.



1. For each of the conclusions cite the transitional element that connects the ending to the body of the essay.

Essay #1: \_\_\_\_\_

Essay #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Essay #3: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What technique(s) did you use to create each of your conclusions?

| <i>Essay</i>            | <i>Technique</i>  |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ | Link your conclusion to something you said in the introduction. |
| 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ | Link your idea to a more universal point.                       |
| 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ | Relate a personal experience or idea to your thesis.            |
| 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ | Link your thesis to the world of your reader.                   |
| 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ | Challenge your reader.  |
| 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ | End with a rhetorical question or imperative statement.         |
| 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ | Use an anecdote to reinforce a major point in your essay.       |
| 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ | Use a quotation from the original text.                         |

3. Have you avoided “In summary,” “In conclusion,” etc., in each of your conclusions?

1 \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no; 2 \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no; 3 \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

4. Select one of your three conclusions and rewrite it using TWO different techniques.

5. I chose the conclusion to essay \_\_\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3.
6. For the conclusion to essay \_\_\_\_\_ I've decided to use the following techniques:  
Technique 1: \_\_\_\_\_  
Technique 2: \_\_\_\_\_
7. On a separate sheet of paper rewrite the conclusion using the two different techniques.
8. Of the three different conclusions, including my original, to essay \_\_\_\_\_, the one I like best is \_\_\_\_\_ the original \_\_\_\_\_ the conclusion using technique 1 \_\_\_\_\_ the conclusion using technique 2.
9. I think my choice is the best conclusion because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

## Revision



The process you just completed is a type of revision. But, this is just one of many ways to go about reworking your essay. To give you an idea of some of these methods, we'd like to examine the real work of revision. To examine the real work of revision (and, as some would say, the real work of writing), we are going to provide you with several different methods that you could employ to revise your essays.

### A Very Simple Method

This is a quick overview that you can do alone or with a peer reader. You should consider and take notes, where and when necessary, as you consider each of the following.

#### RECONSIDER YOUR OPENING PARAGRAPH.

1. Is there a clear thesis statement?
2. Does it somehow grab the interest of your reader?
3. In what tense are you going to present your ideas?

#### ORGANIZATION

1. What is the purpose of your essay?
2. What rhetorical strategies, techniques and devices do you use to achieve this purpose?
3. Is your essay presented as formal or informal?
4. Are there transitional words/phrases connecting the body paragraphs to each other?
5. Do you have an ending that naturally evolves from your essay?

#### SYNTAX

1. Are all verbs in the same tense? Is there a reason for any verb to be a different tense?
2. Do all words/phrases adhere to the essay being formal or informal?
3. Does *each* pronoun have a *clear* antecedent?
4. Is there a clear reason for every comma used in the essay?

5. Examine the beginning of each sentence. Is there an overuse of a type of opening? If there is, work on changing some to achieve variety.
6. Do you have a variety of sentence types? Simple? Compound? Complex? Compound-complex?

### A More Involved Revision Method That Can Provide Valuable Feedback.

1. What is the subject of your essay?
2. What do you hope your reader will come away with after having read your essay?
3. With the answers to the above questions in mind, what is the thesis statement? Quote it exactly.
4. How have you ordered the development of the support for your claim? Is it in chronological order, spatial, least important to most important, etc.? List the major points in your essay in the order that each appears.
5. Do each of your paragraphs, other than the first, have a transitional word or phrase? List them:

| <u>PARAGRAPH #</u> | <u>TRANSITION WORD/PHRASE</u> |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2                  |                               |
| 3                  |                               |
| 4                  |                               |
| 5                  |                               |
| 6                  |                               |
| 7                  |                               |
| 8                  |                               |
| 9                  |                               |
| 10                 |                               |

6. Take a really close look at your introductory paragraph(s). Is it made very clear to your reader what the subject of this essay is? Does it contain the thesis/claim? Does the last sentence of the introduction lead easily to the next section of your essay?
7. Take a close look at your conclusion. Does it bring closure to your essay in such a way that your reader should feel he or she knows your point of view, attitude, and why he or she should care about it?
8. Let's call this next part of the revising process **Coaping**.

**Cut:** bracket all the best or most workable sentences and cut out everything else.

**Order:** put these pieces in the best order, decide what your main point is; put in transitions.

**Add:** do any additional writing that is needed.

**Polish:** make the sentences smooth and readable.

- Cut unnecessary words and phrases
- Clarify anything that isn't clear.
- Combine any sentences that lend themselves to combining, for greater flow and variety.
- Correct typos, spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

9. And last, but most important, **read your essay out loud to someone, and someone must read it out loud to you.** (Do this for your first draft and all other drafts.)
10. As a result of this reading aloud, have you located any major errors that need to be revised? If so, list them.

### A Revision Method for a Writing Assignment Related to Literary Texts

1. The text(s) I am working with is/are \_\_\_\_\_.
2. My essay is \_\_\_\_ formal \_\_\_\_ informal.
3. The thesis/claim of my essay is \_\_\_\_\_.
4. I have made certain to include the title(s) and author(s) of my texts. They are \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
5. The main rhetorical strategy I used to develop my essay is  
\_\_\_\_ contrast/comparison, \_\_\_\_ exposition,  
\_\_\_\_ definition, \_\_\_\_ cause/effect, \_\_\_\_ process,  
\_\_\_\_ classification, \_\_\_\_ analysis, \_\_\_\_ description.
7. I have also made use of the following:  
\_\_\_\_ contrast/comparison, \_\_\_\_ examples,  
\_\_\_\_ definition, \_\_\_\_ cause/effect, \_\_\_\_ process,  
\_\_\_\_ classification, \_\_\_\_ analysis, \_\_\_\_ description.
8. I organized my essay around \_\_\_\_\_ character relationships, \_\_\_\_\_ conflicts,  
\_\_\_\_\_ significance of setting, \_\_\_\_\_ the writer's use of symbols,  
\_\_\_\_\_ the writer's manipulation of his/her point of view, \_\_\_\_\_ the develop-  
ment of imagery.
9. I have made \_\_\_\_\_ specific references to my first text, \_\_\_\_\_ and  
\_\_\_\_\_ specific references to my second text, \_\_\_\_\_.
10. When referring to printed text, each one of my references cites the appropriate **line, paragraph, stanza, or page**, depending on whether it is prose or poetry. Here are my references:

| <u>Reference #</u> | <u>Page #</u> | <u>Paragraph #</u> | <u>Line #</u> | <u>Stanza #</u> |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| _____              | _____         | _____              | _____         | _____           |
| _____              | _____         | _____              | _____         | _____           |
| _____              | _____         | _____              | _____         | _____           |

11. Below are the transition words/phrases I use between paragraphs.

| <u>PARAGRAPH #</u> | <u>TRANSITION WORD/PHRASE</u> |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2                  | _____                         |
| 3                  | _____                         |
| 4                  | _____                         |
| 5                  | _____                         |

6  
7  
8  
9  
10

12. My ending makes a final statement rather than summarizing what I've already said.

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

## Sample Essays

### Essay in Response to the Prompt for Mark Twain's "A Presidential Candidate"

We've all heard the following before, haven't we? "Trust me. I only want to be your public servant. I will always work for the common good of all." It's so familiar and so shallow that the political cynic in each of us responds, "Sure we should. Sure he does. Sure he will." Aware of this cynicism, Mark Twain plays with our political suspicions in "A Presidential Candidate," a parody of the typical campaign speech.

Informal diction contributes to the overall humor of this parody. Most of us expect a modicum of seriousness and dignity from our political candidates. And, we expect this to be evident in their speeches and writing. To the contrary, Twain uses "folksy" and regional words and phrases throughout the essay. In paragraph one, avoiding lofty language, the author writes "pretty much made up my mind" to tell his audience that he has made a decision, and he invites congressional scrutiny with "let it prowl." Paragraph two has Twain's grandfather "bowling up" a tree when he is chased from his house by the narrator. And, in his final paragraph, the author uses his own method to appeal to the common man when says, "If my country don't want me . . ."

Exaggeration also plays a major role in the creation of this humorous takeoff on campaign speeches. The anecdote about the author and his grandfather is in every way over the top. Treeing and shooting his grandfather with buckshot is both ludicrous and highly improbable. The absurdity continues in paragraph four with the tale of his burying his dead aunt "under my grapevine." In paragraph five, Twain takes a wide and caustic swing at political candidates who promise to stand up for the common man. He says, ". . . I regard the poor man, in his present condition, as so much wasted raw material." The author's outrageous suggestion to kill and cannibalize "the poor workingman . . ." and ". . . stuff him into sausages," would have made Jonathan Swift very proud.

Almost all of Twain's selection of details contributes to the irony of this piece. We expect heroic tales of the candidate's war experiences, but this candidate describes and admits his cowardice in the face of battle, even while making a tongue-in-cheek reference to Washington. Instead of claiming to be a financial virgin, as most candidates do, Twain readily characterizes himself as money hungry and willing to get it any way he can. Adding to the irony that is the basis for the announcement, Twain makes references to the U.S. Constitution and asks rhetorical questions about both his fitness for the presidency and his being a "victim of absurd prejudices."

Throughout “A Presidential Candidate,” Mark Twain focuses on his negative qualities rather than on the positive which is the usual MO for a political candidate. He enumerates absurdly opposite positions to the usual campaign promises. I only wish every candidate for political office could read this parody. As a matter of fact, I think I will e-mail this to all my representatives who hold national, state, and local offices. Thanks, Mr. Twain.

### Essay in Response to the Prompt for “Dover Beach”

From “calm to clash, from light to darkling, from sea to land,” Matthew Arnold’s poem, “Dover Beach” is a study in contrast. This contrast, developed throughout the poem by a progression of increasingly negative examples, is necessary to convince his love to be true. In addition, poetic devices and techniques enable Arnold to encourage his love to see the urgency of his desire and passion. Metaphors, allusions, organization, and appeals to the senses reinforce his argument, that love and lovemaking are the only things of certainty in an ignorant and hostile world.

This contrast is a subtle way to persuade his love to his point of view. By gradually leading her to realize that life is, and always has been, filled with “misery and uncertainty,” he establishes his argument that only their commitment to one another can counteract the inevitable struggle and disillusionment of life.

Drawing his images from nature, Arnold creates a romantic scene that will later be contrasted in the final stanza. As he implores his love to look from the window at the world beneath them, the poet introduces the sea and the land, and the diction positions them as the dominant contradictory symbols of the poem. Although it is night, “moon, fair, light, gleams, and glimmering” all illuminate the “calm, full, and tranquil bay.” And yet, in his description of the “sweet night,” Arnold includes the word, “only” to imply something other than the idyllic vision. This change in mood is meant to make his beloved uneasy, so she will be receptive to him later when he proposes an antidote to the ensuing negative examples.

To further his position, Arnold juxtaposes the sea and the “moon-blanch’d land,” light and dark, and seeing and hearing. Now he orders his love to “Listen!” as well as look. This imperative is also for the reader, and we can hear, through onomatopoeia, the “grating roar” of the pebbles breaking the quiet tone. The following lines, 10–14, depend on sound devices and punctuation to develop contrast. A succession of caesuras breaks the iambic meter and makes the speaker and reader start and stop and start again, much like the rhythm of the waves themselves, which “begin, and cease, and then again, begin.” Perhaps, Arnold is using this pattern as a parallel to the lovers’ relationship. It, too, may have its high and low tides.

Allusions to Sophocles and the Aegean allow Arnold to move from the immediate and specific images of the first stanza to a more general argument. Like the eternal sea, human misery is a common experience, and this example from the past will make his argument for loyalty and love more poignant and universal. His diction now is negative; the sea is “turbid, distant and northern.” It is possible his love has also been remote and cold. Again, one can infer that the “ebb and flow” may refer to inconstancies the lovers have endured.

The third stanza introduces a more abstract metaphor, linking religion and nature. This “Sea of Faith” reveals the speaker’s loss of belief and his disillusionment. With this negative example, Arnold contrasts the once “bright girdle furled with full faith” and the now “melancholy, drear, and naked” beaches swept by the “breath of night wind.” This analogy seems developed to elicit both empathy and response on the part of his beloved. He has lost everything—God and Nature, but she can be his salvation because, by implication, he still believes in her. She will be his faith, his light, his constant sea.



As the poem reaches its climax, the speaker again moves from the general to the specific. He returns to the present and implores his beloved to accept his fervent plea: "Ah, love, let us be true to one another!" Arnold emphasizes this assertion by contrasting it with the concluding lines of the poem. Only this line is a simple direct imperative. The rest of the stanza is a complex set of similes that reiterate the major points of the speaker's argument.

In the first stanza, the couple was literally on the land, but, now, the world is "like a land of dreams." Repetition reinforces what the dream may be: "so various, so beautiful, so new." Immediately, this line is contrasted with a negative series focusing not on the dream, but on the reality: "neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain." The final simile, "as on a darkling plain, where ignorant armies clash by night," is a direct contrast to the first stanza's softly lit sea, solitude, and serenity. Arnold puts the final touch on his argument by implying that they, the lovers who are true, therefore, must be everything positive and enlightened because they are in sharp contrast to the negative images and techniques presented throughout the poem.

"Ah, love, let us be true," pleads the speaker, and we can imagine the lovers, just the two of them, together, in the present, against the dark past and unknown future.