

Strategies for concluding an essay

Whatever concluding strategy you choose, avoid introducing wholly new or unrelated ideas at the end of an essay. Also avoid apologies and other limp, indeterminate endings. Do not become discouraged if the perfect conclusion eludes you at the rough-draft stage. Because the conclusion is so closely tied to the rest of the essay in both content and tone, you may well decide to rework it (or even replace it) at a later stage.

TIP: Because your ideas will evolve as you draft your essay, you may find that your draft conclusion contains a statement of your thesis that is more developed than the thesis in your original introduction. If this is the case, make sure that your introduction reflects the revised thesis.

Good conclusions generally use at least one of these strategies; the strategies can also be combined.

Summarize your essay's key points.

While it's not necessary to revisit every point in an essay, it can be useful to summarize your main points, especially if you have made a complex argument. A brief summary also allows you to create continuity between your introduction and your conclusion by bringing your ideas full circle.

Propose a course of action or offer a recommendation.

Where appropriate, consider proposing a course of action for your readers. For example, if you have argued that advertising snack foods on television contributes to obesity in children, you might conclude by suggesting that parents restrict the hours of television their children watch.

Discuss the wider significance or implications of your essay.

The conclusion is an appropriate place to put your ideas into a larger context. At the end of an essay about online voting technology, you might suggest that simplifying the voting process could strengthen American democracy by empowering a new generation of voters.

Offer advice to your readers.

Where appropriate, conclude by offering advice to your readers. If you have written a personal essay about working with children with special needs, for example, you might conclude by giving some general tips on how to interact with such children.

Pose a question for future study.

Sometimes in the process of exploring a question, other, more complex questions that are beyond the scope of your essay will occur to you. If your essay explores the benefits of organic produce, for example, you might conclude by suggesting that a study of organic farming and its economic impact on conventional farmers would add to our understanding of this issue. Make sure that any question you pose in your conclusion is a natural extension of the ideas you've discussed in your essay rather than a completely new idea.