

## CONCLUSION IDEAS

How To Close Your Paper Without Sounding Repetitive

Conclusions pose something of an impossible situation, because your task is to restate your argument and your argument's significance without sounding repetitive, dull, or melodramatic. If you find yourself staring at the final paragraph with a sense of exhaustion or defeat, try one of these techniques:

1. **The Bookend: Recollect an Early Example.** Recall a scene, image, or quotation that you mentioned early in the essay. This could be material that you used for your opener, or it could be an example that you analyzed in an early body paragraph. How does the evidence appear different or more complicated, in light of your evolved thesis? This is a common strategy in journalism. Writers will often open and close a piece by putting a human face on the topic or problem.
2. **Words of Wisdom: Close with a Meaningful Quotation.** This move can go wrong, so execute it carefully. You don't want your readers to think that you've ceded authority in the final moments of your paper. Still, if you make your voice prominent early in the concluding paragraph, and then set up and frame the quotation properly, this move can help to end your paper on a poignant, witty, or thought-provoking note.
3. **The Prism: Conclude with a Brief Piece of Analysis.** Conclusions are not the place for in-depth close reading, nor – at this stage in the essay – should you present evidence that further complicates or changes the argument. However, you can incorporate one small piece of evidence that allows you to recapitulate your argument – essentially offer a thumbnail sketch of your thesis. In other words, you can repeat your argument without sounding repetitive by filtering the thesis through one last striking image or quotation.
4. **The Prescription: End with a Rousing Call to Arms.** Argumentative essays frequently encourage you to embrace complexity – to look at a situation from multiple angles and consider different interpretations. Nevertheless, after demonstrating your willingness to engage multiple perspectives, it can be immensely powerful to end with a clear and confident prescription. Doing so shows that you can not only take a situation apart and analyze its many facets but also put that situation back together and recommend the best path forward.

5. **The Yellow Card: Close with a Warning.** This is a variation on the above strategy (the prescription). Rather than envisioning the best of all possible worlds, warn us of what might happen if the current reality goes unchallenged.
6. **The Twist.** This can be hard to pull off, but when it works, it can leave your reader with a great impression. Some examples:
  - An ironic treatment of a cliché
  - A famous saying or quotation that clearly echo your paper's project
  - A play on words (but don't be gimmicky)

Credit: Adapted from Kay Chubbuck's "It's a Wrap!" by Cory Elizabeth Nelson, University of Southern California Writing Center, 2017.

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