

The Last Word

A good conclusion leaves your reader feeling satisfied. You've fulfilled the promise of your thesis statement by interpreting substantial evidence that supports it and addressing evidence that does not. You've synthesized research on locomotion in bivalve mollusks, applied theories of identity and agency to understand the audience for local news shows, or debunked the myth that 16th century Mexicans thought that the conquistadors were divine.

A *great* conclusion leaves your reader feeling satisfied yet hungry at the same time. You've whetted their appetite to know more. Your conclusion that evolutionary pressures led *P. maximus* to become a rare swimmer among bivalve mollusks causes a reader to wonder about the evolution of exceptional species in other classes of marine life.

So how do you accomplish a great conclusion? Use the tips below before you write or as an assessment of what you have written. Stuck? Read a few conclusions of other essays, and assess whether and how they do the following:

- Before you start the conclusion, collect the important threads of your argument. Know that you need to weave them all back in.
- Give yourself over to the paper. Don't write what you already knew before the paper; wherever the paper leads you, write from there.
- Bring home your thesis. Don't just repeat it. Let the accumulated evidence fill out what you proposed to argue.
- Conceive of reasonable next steps for research or practice, remembering your readers and which will be more relevant to them. Most academic papers conclude with implications for research and understanding, rather than action.
- Don't get carried away. It is tempting in the conclusion to suggest implications like an end to violence in the media or a new paradigm for understanding the settlement of the Americas. Don't do it. You can ruin a perfectly sound argument by blowing it out of proportion.
- Give special attention to the last word. A noun or verb precisely suited to your message can leave a strong impression in your reader's mind.