WRITING CONCLUSIONS: THE LASTING IMPRESSION

We're all familiar with the importance of first impressions, and it's no different when it comes to writing. But while a strong opening line or paragraph should compel your reader to keep reading, a conclusion is your chance to leave a lasting impression. It's where you take all the threads of the thesis you have woven together and tie them up in a neat little bow.

I know: It's harder than it sounds. Especially when you've worked hard on a long paper with many sources, it can be tempting to send it off without really considering the importance of those parting thoughts. But without a cohesive conclusion, you've short-changed yourself.

Here's how I like to approach it:

Take a step back, maybe walk away from your paper for a bit, or even just pause and take a deep breath. Then, briefly look back over your paper and consider everything that you've written. Often, you can transition into the conclusion by tying it back into the introductory paragraph, and then synthesizing everything you've said in the body.

The final sentence or two should bring it all home. I like to think of this as the big picture moment. How does this particular piece of writing relate to the broader worldview? Don't go off in an entirely different direction, but show your reader why what they read was meaningful. The reader should leave with the feeling that what they have read has reached its ultimate ending, and can apply what they've read to their own world in some way.

Often, when I've written a good conclusion, it helps me focus so much on what the paper is ultimately about that I end up changing my

opening sentence(s) in a way that better prepares the reader to accept the premise and want to know more -- like an appetizer at the beginning of a meal. Alternately, the last paragraph of a written work should leave the reader satisfied. If your paper is as successful as a well-seasoned entree, your conclusion is the dessert.

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