Conclusions

Writing a conclusion can be difficult when you’re feeling the relief that comes after the bulk of your paper is written. It often seems that you’ve said your piece, and a conclusion is redundant. But just as an introduction is necessary to guide readers into a paper, a conclusion is necessary to guide them back out. Here are some tips:

- Sum up your argument, but avoid repeating verbatim what you said in your introduction.
- Don’t leave open ends! The conclusion is not a place to introduce theories or questions that you won’t have adequate time to answer.
- Take time to discuss why your argument is important to your field or in general. After all, you’ve written a paper about it, so you should have something to say about its larger implications. However, be careful not to overstate its significance (e.g. don’t conclude with “obviously, understanding Shakespeare’s tragedies is the key to world peace”).
- Avoid vacillation; it weakens your argument. There are always possibilities for people to critique your work, but you don’t need to point them out (e.g. saying something like “it’s possible that Republicans will not approve of my pro-choice stance in this paper”). Besides, if you’ve explained yourself thoroughly, you shouldn’t feel as if you have to be defensive without provocation.
- Try not to use obvious transitions. If your conclusion begins “in conclusion,” it’s almost certain to your readers that you’re fishing for things to say. It also undermines their intelligence; when they see that they’re on the last paragraph, they’ll clearly know that you’re concluding your argument.

If you’re having trouble, take a break from your paper for a while. You might be too involved in it to write an effective conclusion immediately. Sometimes you need distance to consider what points you’d like to really stress to the reader in your conclusion. If you’re still having trouble, visit the Writing Center for more guidance.