Forming Effective Conclusions

Congratulations! After lots of time, dedication, and energy, you’ve finally reached the end of your paper. Some of us like to end on a flowery note, using lots of lofty language in hopes of applying our ideas to the “larger” picture. Others of us like to get to the point and write conclusions just a little longer than “The End.” Whatever your style, there are some important points to remember in writing your conclusion. An effective conclusion is one that leaves your reader with a clear understanding of your main points. Here are some suggestions for making your conclusions clear and effective:

1. Summarize
   - Restate your main arguments, but be sure to vary the wording and sentence structure.
   - Avoid introducing new ideas and arguments in your conclusion. [see #4 below]

2. Suggest a Solution or a Call for Action
   - Think of a creative solution that you believe could change a current situation. Let’s take the case of public policy on ozone layer depletion. One possible conclusion may begin, “Environmentalist organizations must continue to pressure Congress to make and enforce policies that protect the ozone through lobbying efforts, protests, and grassroots organization.” The writer has a specific idea of what needs to be done in order to prevent further harm to the ozone.
   - Or maybe you don’t have a specific idea of a solution of how to prevent ozone layer depletion. You may want to suggest a call to action or an attitude change. In our ozone paper, another conclusion might read, “There is a great need for the non-governmental organizations and Congress to work together to seek a solution that will prevent further depletion of the ozone.” This writer might not have specifics in mind, but presents a call to action that makes for a clear conclusion.

3. Put Your Thoughts into Perspective
   - Writers who like lofty conclusions would be fans of this approach. In your conclusion, try to answer the questions:
     - Why is what I said important?
     - Is there a larger meaning?
     - How can I move from the specifics to deeper concerns?

4. Suggest Future Directions
   - What are some of the limitations in your research? What issues remain?
   - What ideas in the paper merit further investigation?
   - What direction is the research on this topic headed?
   But be careful: in pointing to the future, you do not want to open up a whole new paper/ topic!

4. Above all cement the significance of your argument, the idea you presented in this paper.
   - Often such a sentence begins with “It is important to (consider? Note? Think about?)…”
   - Remind readers what you claimed in your opening paragraph, what you “set up” for this essay.
   - Confirm how this paper “fits” in the academic “conversation” about this topic.