

The thesis is important to both the writer and the reader. It is important to the writer because it is the guiding focus for the essay—everything you write must relate to the thesis and help prove or explain it. The thesis is important to the reader, who develops expectations for your essay according to what your thesis promises your essay will be about.

Because the thesis is so important, you should not begin a first draft without one. However, first drafts are tentative, so thesis statements in first drafts can be equally tentative. In fact the early version of your thesis—the one that guides and focuses your first draft—is often a **preliminary thesis** because, like everything else in a first draft, it is subject to change.

The Qualities of an Effective Thesis

1. State your topic and your opinion on that topic. Consider this thesis:

More and more high school students are working while they attend school, but this trend is not a healthy one.

Both the topic and the writer's opinion are clear.

Topic: high school students who work

Writer's opinion: It is not healthy for high school students to work.

Here is another example. This thesis includes the topic, the writer's opinion, and a preview of the main points to be covered.

More and more high school students are working while they attend school, but this trend is not a healthy one because students are distracted from their studies, unable to participate in normal teenage activities, and jeopardizing their health.

Be sure your opinion is clearly and directly stated, so your reader knows exactly what your view is.

Unclear opinion: Although there are pros and cons on both sides of the issue, I have decided how I feel about affirmative action.

Unclear opinion: A number of states are reevaluating their affirmative action laws, creating a great deal of public debate.

Better: Although there are pros and cons on both sides of the issue, I am convinced that affirmative action laws do more harm than good.

Better: States that have eliminated their affirmative action laws undermine the goals of equal rights initiatives.

2. Limit your thesis to one topic and one opinion. A thesis with two topics or two opinions will force you to write about too much. The result could be a superficial treatment of both topics or both opinions, which your reader will find unsatisfying.

Two topics: The violence on television has an adverse effect on children, as does the blatant sexuality on MTV.

Better: The violence on television has an adverse effect on children.

Better: The blatant sexuality on MTV has an adverse effect on children.

In the Classroom

As you encourage students to consider diverse resources and alternative viewpoints on their topic, try an exercise in "reverse testing" their preliminary thesis statements. Have two or three students write their preliminary thesis statements on the board. Now, working as a class, write the reverse (or alternate) of each thesis statement on the board. For example:

- Because some on-campus organizations promote politically unpopular or controversial actions, students on our campus should be able to select which student organizations they want their student services fees to support. (Preliminary thesis)

services fees
are equally
ed to all on-
organizations,
ise that are
y unpopular or
rsial, because as
nstitution our
has a duty to
free speech and
: (Reverse thesis)

g the alternate, or
esis helps stu-
top more com-
s that anticipate
e opposing points

Two opinions: Divorce would be less traumatic if custody laws were revised and if attorneys counseled their clients more carefully.

Better: Divorce would be less traumatic if attorneys counseled their clients more carefully.

Better: Divorce would be less traumatic if custody laws were revised.

3. Avoid broad statements. A thesis that is too broad will force the writer into a vague, superficial discussion that will never satisfy a reader because it will never get beyond obvious statements. The following thesis statement is too broad:

The role of women has changed drastically in the last 50 years.

Fifty years is a long time; to discuss in depth all the changes in that time span would require more pages than the typical college essay runs. If the essay were to be a more manageable length, the writer could do little more than skim the surface and state the obvious. Below is a more suitable thesis, one that is sufficiently narrow.

The leadership role of women in state politics has changed drastically in the last 10 years.

4. Express your opinion in specific words. The reader relies on the thesis for a clear indication of what the essay is about. Consider this thesis:

It is interesting to consider the various meanings of love.

The word *interesting* is vague, so the reader cannot be sure what the writer's opinion is. In the following revision, the opinion is stated in specific words, so the reader has a clear sense of the focus of the essay.

Better: We apply the word *love* to a broad spectrum of emotions.

5. Avoid factual statements. Factual statements do not make suitable thesis statements because they leave the writer with nothing to say.

Factual statement: The water department is considering a rate increase.

Better: The water department's proposed rate increase is unnecessary.

6. Write your thesis so it is not an announcement. A thesis such as "This paper will show why I have always hated team sports" is an announcement. In some disciplines, particularly some of the sciences and social sciences, the announcement is acceptable, but in English classes and many of the humanities, it is considered poor style.

Announcement: I will explain why our board of education should consider magnet schools.

Better: Our board of education should consider magnet schools.

Announcement: The next paragraphs will present the reasons Americans value youth.

Better: Americans value youth for surprising reasons.

In the Classroom

Point out the different patterns of development Aaron Palumbo uses in the draft on pp. 71–72: description, narration, exemplification.

First impressions often dictate our responses. Have you ever dropped a course after attending only one class session? Have you ever made an excuse to walk away from a person you just met? Have you ever selected a restaurant on the basis of its name? We do such things in response to first impressions. Because first impressions are so important, the introduction of your essay must be carefully crafted. In addition to creating a first impression that will engage your reader's interest, the introduction can serve another purpose. It can tell your reader what your essay is about by including your thesis. If you need to review the purpose and qualities of a thesis, return to page 51.

To decide how to create interest in your topic, consider your audience and purpose. For example, if your purpose is to inform your reader about dangerous e-mail spam, you will not begin with a humorous anecdote about a piece of unsolicited pornographic e-mail you received. However, your introduction might tell a story about a time pornographic spam reached a child. If you are writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, you will not open with a graphic description of a pornographic spam, but you might do so for the customer service representative of your Internet provider.

Below are some ways to stimulate a reader's interest in your topic. Each approach is illustrated with an introduction from a student essay, and the thesis is underlined as a study aid. These approaches are possibilities. As you draft, you may find a different, more suitable strategy.

Provide Background Information ✓

Rick was always taking crazy chances. Even in elementary school, he was the one to lock himself in the teacher's supply closet or lick a metal pole in the dead of a subzero winter. By high school, Rick had moved on to wilder things, but his drinking was the biggest concern. I guess that is why no one was really surprised when he drove off the road and killed himself the day after his 18th birthday.

Tell a Pertinent Story

Last winter while home alone, I tripped on the garden hose and fell in my garage while the door was down. The pain was excruciating, and I could not move. I lay there for two hours, sobbing, until my son came home. Now, I am not an old woman; I am just 45. However, that experience made me feel fearful of growing old and living alone.

in the Classroom

Ask students to link each paragraph for stimulating interest to a specific purpose and audience. For example, explaining why the topic is important can be effective when informing an audience who knows little about the essay topic. Find common ground is a useful strategy when trying to persuade a reader who is strongly opposed to the writer's view.

Explain Why Your Topic Is Important

The recent tuition hike proposed by the Board of Trustees has serious implications for everyone on this campus, students, faculty, and staff alike. If tuition goes up 45 percent as expected, fewer students will be able to attend school, which will mean fewer faculty and staff will be employed. Once the cost of school becomes prohibitive for all but the wealthy, then this university will begin a downward spiral that will eventually mean its demise. There is only one way to solve our economic woes. We must embark on an austerity program that makes the tuition hike unnecessary.

in the Classroom

Students may be asked if the thesis statement is always at the first or the last sentence of the first paragraph. While it may seem so from these examples, a thesis statement can appear anywhere in the introductory paragraph (or anywhere, for that matter, in the essay—but that discussion for another time). Be sure students understand the underlined sentences in these examples are thesis statements.

Present Some Interesting Images or Use Description

It was a cool, crisp October morning. Sunrise was complete, the countryside awake and responding to another day. As I turned and slowly made my way into the woods, I had no idea what lay ahead on the path I was to follow that day.

Present an Intriguing Problem or Raise a Provocative Question

Are you a Dr. Jekyll who transforms into Mr. Hyde the minute you get behind the wheel of a car? Are you a kind little old lady who becomes Mario Andretti's pace car driver the instant you hit the freeway? Are you an Eagle Scout by day and a marauding motorist by night? The chances are

good that you are because people's personalities change the moment they strap on that seat belt and head out on the highway.

Present an Opposing Viewpoint

People opposed to putting warning labels on CDs with sexually explicit or otherwise offensive lyrics have their reasons. They cite free speech, and they say teens will be encouraged to buy the CDs with the advisory labels. Even so, I favor warning labels on certain kinds of CDs.

Establish Yourself as Someone Knowledgeable About the Topic

Believe me, racial prejudice is still a fact of American life, no matter what you hear to the contrary. You see, I am what is known as an "army brat." My dad is a career army man who gets moved from post to post. Since he takes his family along with him, I have lived in eight cities over the course of my 19 years. I have known small towns and large, northern cities and southern, rural environments and urban centers. And no matter where I have lived, as an African-American, I have encountered prejudice.

Open with an Attention-Grabbing Statement

What your family doctor does not know may surprise you—or it may kill you. We assume our doctors are smart and caring, that they will do whatever it takes to keep us well. We put our trust in them and never question their advice or decisions. Unfortunately, such trust is often misplaced. For the best health care, we need to learn to question our doctors carefully.

Explain Your Purpose

All students should contact the Dean of Academic Affairs to protest the cancellation of the artist-in-residence program. If enough students express their unhappiness, the dean will be forced to reinstate the program.

Find Some Common Ground to Establish a Bond With Your Reader

None of us goes through life without doing something that we later regret. In fact, we often have many regrets. Fortunately, we are often given second chances and we redeem ourselves. It should not be any different for people released from prison after serving their sentences. These people should not be denied their second chances. Convicted felons who have served their sentences should be allowed to vote.

Provide an Interesting Quotation

Mark Twain said, "Man is the only animal who blushes—or needs to." I take comfort in that statement when I recall the most embarrassing night of my life.

Define Something

A good teacher is someone who sees what students can do, rather than what they cannot do. A good teacher shares knowledge, helps students achieve their potential, and fosters self-esteem. Without a doubt, Dr. Sorenson is a good teacher.

Give Relevant Examples

Sometimes telling a lie is better than telling the truth. When a friend asks you what you think of the hideous glasses he just paid a great deal of money for, when your grandmother asks you what you think of the rubber chicken she lovingly prepared for your birthday, when your girlfriend asks if her dress makes her look fat, it is best to lie.

In addition to knowing some strategies for engaging your reader's interest, you should be aware of some strategies to avoid.

Avoid opening with dictionary definitions. This approach is overused and likely to be boring.

Avoid opening with tired expressions. Expressions like "It's always darkest before the dawn" and "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread" are overused and should be avoided. For an explanation of overused expressions (clichés), see page 133.

Avoid apologizing. Statements like "I really don't know much about this topic" or "I doubt that anyone can understand this issue" will cause your reader to lose confidence in what you have to say.

Process Guidelines**Drafting Introductions**

If you have trouble drafting your introduction:

- Skip it and come back to it after drafting the rest of your essay, but jot down your preliminary thesis to guide and focus your draft.
- Keep it simple, even just one or two sentences to create interest and then your thesis.
- Try explaining why your topic is important, or try giving background information.

EXERCISE ► The Introduction**In the Classroom:****Activity**

Discuss these hypothetical introductions and suggestions in class. Be sure that students understand the reasoning behind each suggestion. Have students choose one example for revision, and take 10 or 15 minutes of class time to let them work. Then, share the revisions out loud. (Alternatively, you can post this exercise on the class website and have students post and comment on revisions.)

Exercise: The Introduction

Responses will vary.

1. Read three selections in newsmagazines or newspapers. Do the introductions engage your interest? Explain why or why not.
2. Below are three introductions written by students, each in need of revision. Revise each introduction so that it stimulates interest and has a suitable thesis.

It was snowing when I boarded the plane. But I was terrified. I have always been afraid of air travel, and hopefully I will someday overcome this fear.

Some suggestions for revision: Create some images. Describe the weather in more detail. Specify the kind of airplane and explain more carefully the feeling of terror. Also, does the thesis present one or two opinions? It should only present one.

I set the alarm two hours earlier than usual and spent the morning cleaning like crazy. At 11:00 I went to the grocery store and bought all the necessary food. All afternoon I cooked; by 5:00 I was dressed and ready; but still the first meal I cooked for my in-laws was terrible.

Some suggestions for revision: Be more specific. What time did the alarm go off? Give an example or two of the cleaning you did. What food did you buy? Was it expensive? What did you cook? How bad was it? Can you find a word or words more specific than *terrible*?

Does crime pay? Does justice win out? Do the police always get their man? The day I shoplifted a box of candy I learned the answers to these questions.

Some suggestions for revision: Substitute more interesting questions for these trite, rather boring ones—perhaps some questions that focus on the writer's feelings, such as "Have you ever wondered what a criminal feels when he or she gets caught?" Create some interest by naming the brand or type of candy and giving its price and by giving the name of the store.

3. *Collaborative Activity.* With a classmate, select one of the thesis statements you shaped when you responded to number 6 on page 56. Establish an audience and purpose and write an introduction for an essay that might use that thesis. Feel free to alter the original thesis.

Body Paragraphs

Body paragraphs present details that support the thesis with explanation or evidence to defend, prove, describe, illustrate, or otherwise develop its topic and opinion. Your body paragraphs are the real core of your essay, for here you convince your reader of the validity of your thesis.

A typical body paragraph has two parts:

the topic sentence: The **topic sentence** provides focus by presenting the main idea that the body paragraph will discuss. This main idea will be something that supports the essay's thesis.

supporting details: **Supporting details** are the information that explains, demonstrates, or otherwise develops the idea given in the topic sentence.

Placement of the Topic Sentence

The topic sentence presents the main idea of the body paragraph. The topic sentence often appears first, announcing the paragraph's focus. When the topic sentence comes first, the supporting details that follow prove, explain, or otherwise develop the topic sentence idea. Here is an example from "Portrait of an Achiever." The topic sentence is underlined as a study aid.

thesis: The key to Hugh's ability to overcome everyday problems is his determination.

One of my brother's biggest problems was learning to tie his shoes. He would sit for hours trying to tie the knot that was so simple, yet so impossible. No matter how hard he tried, he just could not get it right. After seven years of practice and frustration, Hugh was finally able to tie that knot with one hand. The astonishing movements of his fingers as he tied the knot were almost miraculous. It took him seven years to train his fingers, but he never gave up, no matter how frustrated he became.

When you want to begin a body paragraph with a sentence or two of transition, your topic sentence can come *near*—rather than *at*—the beginning of the paragraph. In this case, the supporting details come after the topic sentence. The following revision of a body paragraph from "Portrait of an Achiever" is an example. The transitional sentences are double-underlined, and the topic sentence is underlined.

Learning to tie his shoe, throw a baseball, and hammer a nail were, indeed, remarkable accomplishments. However, they were not his biggest challenges. Hugh's inability to swim was yet another problem that he had to overcome. For years, he thought that he could not swim with one arm, so he never tried. It was not until I was drowning in Lake Erie that Hugh decided he would learn to swim. Much to his own surprise, he found that he could stay afloat. It was his determination to overcome fear that gave him the confidence to jump in the water and save my life that day. Of course, once he realized that he wouldn't drown, Hugh went on to practice his swimming techniques with the same determination he brings to every challenge. Now he swims farther and faster than I do.

You can also begin with your supporting details and place your topic sentence at the end of the body paragraph. In this case, the topic sentence draws a conclusion from the supporting details, as this rewritten example from "Portrait of an Achiever" illustrates. The topic sentence is underlined as a study aid.

In the Classroom

Review transitional words and phrases, such as "however" in this example. (See p. 99.)

In the Classroom

Be sure that students understand why the writer chose to place the topic sentence at the end of this paragraph, rather than at the beginning. Ask a student to read the paragraph out loud, this time placing the topic sentence at the beginning. Is the effect any different?

Hugh loves baseball. He spent an entire summer in the backyard devising a method that allows him to play with one hand. With one lightning speed motion, he can catch the ball in the glove, toss both the glove and the ball a few feet into the air, retrieve the ball from the air, and throw it to another player. Hugh also enjoys building objects out of wood. The first problem he encountered with the hobby was how to hold the nail while hammering. The solution was another exercise in determination: Hugh taught himself to steady the nail between his toes while he hammered in into the wood. At first the method was literally painful, but perfection came after months of practice (and several smashed toes). Hugh's interests may seem to conflict with his abilities, but he always finds a way to overcome the obstacles.

Rather than write out your topic sentence, at times you may want to imply it instead. When a topic sentence is **implied** rather than stated, the details in the paragraph must clearly suggest the main idea of the paragraph. Here is an example of a body paragraph with an implied topic sentence. The paragraph is taken from "That Street Called Cordova" on page 88. Its thesis idea is that something was always happening on Cordova, the street the writer grew up on.

In the Classroom

Ask students what they think is the implied topic sentence in this paragraph. Why?

Two hours later, I was back outside, looking for all the kids, and I ran into Ms. Berry. "What are you doing outside, Boy?" she asked. "Haven't you had enough drama today to last you a lifetime?" I had a quick flashback to this morning. "Haven't you had enough of boyfriends to last you two lifetimes?" I replied. Her mouth dropped as she raised her hand. I don't know what I was thinking. I could do nothing but brace myself for the impact. SLAP! "Don't you ever disrespect your elders again. Now go tell your mama that I smacked your mouth, and then tell her why." My mother and Ms. Berry were like sisters, and my mother had given Ms. Berry permission to whoop us kids if she ever caught us getting out of line when she wasn't around. I felt like crying, but Ms. Berry would have slapped me again. So I ran. I ended up at the candy lady's house for something to take my mind off the sting. Some Now & Laters did it.

Qualities of an Effective Topic Sentence

An effective topic sentence accurately states the main idea of the body paragraph, states only one main idea, and states an idea related to the thesis.

Accurately state the main idea of the body paragraph. If your topic sentence indicates one main idea for the paragraph, but the supporting details go in a different direction, your reader can become confused. To state the main idea as accurately and precisely as possible, be specific.

vague: One of my brother's biggest problems was not a problem for most people.

specific: One of my brother's biggest problems was learning to tie his shoes.

The second topic sentence gives the reader a clearer sense of the what the paragraph is about.

State one main idea. A topic sentence that presents more than one main idea splits your focus and gives you too much to do in a single paragraph.

split focus: Online shopping offers convenience and affordability.

one main idea: Online shopping offers convenience.

one main idea: Online shopping offers affordability.

The first topic sentence requires you to include supporting details about two things: convenience and affordability. The next two topic sentences are better because each focuses on only one main idea.

State a main idea related to the thesis. The topic sentence idea must be clearly related to both the topic and opinion stated in your essay's thesis, or your essay will wander off course.

thesis: Men and women communicate differently.

related topic sentence: Men speak directly, and women speak indirectly.

unrelated topic sentence: Men are concerned with action, and women are concerned with feelings.

The first topic sentence is acceptable because it focuses on both the topic (the communication styles of men and women) and opinion (the styles are different). The second topic sentence is unacceptable because it does not focus on the topic of communication.

thesis: Oprah Winfrey has made an impact on American literary culture.

related topic sentence: Thanks to Oprah's book club, more Americans are buying and reading books.

unrelated topic sentence: Her magazine, however, is not universally appreciated. In addition, when Oprah endorses a movie, ticket sales increase.

The first topic sentence is acceptable because it focuses on both the topic (Oprah Winfrey) and opinion (she has made an impact on American literary culture). The second topic sentence is unacceptable because it does not focus on the opinion that Oprah has affected American *literary* culture; it focuses on a different aspect of American culture.

Effective Supporting Details

You cannot expect your reader to believe your topic sentence just because you write it on the page. A discerning reader requires evidence, ideas, information,

and examples that demonstrate the truth of the idea given in the topic sentence. That is where your supporting details come in. Your supporting details are the evidence you provide to demonstrate the truth of the topic sentence. To be effective, your supporting details must be adequate and relevant.

Provide adequate supporting details. Supporting details are **adequate** when there are enough of them to demonstrate the validity or truth of the topic sentence. To provide adequate detail, remember to *show* as well as *tell*. For example, reread the following body paragraph from an early draft of "Portrait of an Achiever."

Hugh's interests always seem to conflict with his abilities, but not for long because he does not allow this fact to stand in his way. He always finds some way to overcome his disability and eliminate the interest-ability conflict. No matter how big the problem, Hugh finds a solution. He may have to labor for months or years to overcome the conflict, but time and again he has shown that he will do it. That's why he learned how to play baseball and engage in woodworking.

Notice that the supporting details are not adequate. They do not demonstrate the truth of the topic sentence because they *tell* without showing. As a result, readers are unlikely to believe that topic sentence. In revision, the writer added more supporting details.

Hugh's interests always seem to conflict with his abilities, but not for long because he does not allow this fact to stand in his way. He always finds some way to overcome his disability and eliminate the interest-ability conflict. For example, Hugh loves baseball. He spent an entire summer in the backyard devising a method that allows him to play with one hand. With one lightning speed motion, he can catch the ball in the glove, toss both the glove and the ball a few feet into the air, retrieve the ball from the air, and throw it to another player. Hugh also enjoys building objects out of wood. The first problem he encountered with the hobby was how to hold the nail while hammering. The solution was another exercise in determination: Hugh taught himself to steady the nail between his toes while he hammered in into the wood. At first the method was literally painful, but perfection came after months of practice (and several smashed toes).

First the writer *tells* in the topic sentence: Hugh does not let his disability stand in the way of his interests. Then the writer *shows* us what he means in the supporting details: two specific examples *demonstrate* that Hugh overcame obstacles to pursue his interests.

As you work to include adequate supporting details, avoid repeating the same idea in different ways. Such repetition makes a paragraph look longer, but it

does not contribute to adequate detail. Here is an example of the kind of repetition to avoid. (The underlined sentences are repetitious.)

Weightlifting is an excellent physical activity for women. It increases bone density and thus wards off osteoporosis. It really does women a great deal of good. However, weightlifting helps more than women's bones, for it also builds muscle, which increases metabolic rate. The increase in metabolic rate is good because it means that more calories are burned. The protection afforded bones, though, is the big benefit. Still another advantage to weightlifting is the fact that muscles are strengthened and thus better able to protect various body parts. A woman's stronger muscles are far better able to protect various parts of the anatomy.

You might be wondering from where your adequate supporting details come. The answer is that they come from the idea-generation techniques you learned in Chapter 2.

Provide relevant supporting details. Sometimes writers are so concerned with supplying adequate detail that they overlook the need to include the *right* detail. In addition to being adequate, your supporting details must be **relevant** or clearly and directly related to the main idea expressed in the topic sentence. If you veer away from the main idea expressed in your topic sentence, your essay will be frustrating to read. Consider this paragraph from an early draft of "Portrait of an Achiever":

Hugh's inability to swim was yet another problem that he had to overcome. For years, he thought that he could not swim with one arm, so he never tried. It was not until I was drowning in Lake Erie that Hugh decided he would learn to swim. Much to his own surprise, he found that he could stay afloat. It was his determination to overcome fear that gave him the confidence to jump in the water and save my life that day. Of course, once he realized that he wouldn't drown, Hugh went on to practice his swimming techniques with the same determination he brings to every challenge. Now he swims farther and faster than I do. Hugh can also beat me in any short distance race, which is a further indication that his disability does not stand in his way.

Did you notice the irrelevant sentence? The last sentence does not belong in the paragraph because it is about running—and the topic sentence focuses on swimming. In revision, the writer deleted the last, irrelevant sentence.

When to Begin a New Paragraph

Begin a new paragraph each time you begin discussing a new point to develop the thesis, with the following exceptions:

In the Classroom

As you review these approaches to drafting a conclusion, remind students that they should keep their audience and purpose, as well as their pattern of development, in mind.

The conclusion of an essay is important because it influences your reader's final impression. Have you seen a movie that starts out strong and then fizzles at the

end? As you walked out of the theater, you probably talked about the disappointing ending, not the strong beginning or middle. Writing works the same way. Even if an essay has a strong introduction and body, an essay with a weak conclusion will leave your reader feeling let down.

When you draft your conclusion, be sure to consider your body paragraphs, audience, and purpose. Should you summarize your main points? That depends on your body paragraphs and audience. If you made many points, your reader may find a summary helpful, but if you made only a few, your reader may find a summary unnecessary and even patronizing. Should you end by asking your reader to take a specific action? That may depend on your purpose. If your goal is to convince your reader to do something, such as start a recycling program on campus, a call to action is appropriate.

The length of your conclusion will vary from essay to essay. Sometimes a single sentence ties everything up perfectly. Other times, you need a paragraph of several sentences. A long essay or research paper may require a conclusion of more than one paragraph. No matter what the length, keep your conclusion in proportion to the rest of your essay. Short essays have short conclusions, and longer essays can have longer conclusions.

Regardless of the length of your conclusion, you should generally avoid these expressions: "in conclusion," "in summary," "to conclude," "to summarize," and "in closing." They are overused and, therefore, flat and lifeless.

If a suitable conclusion does not immediately occur to you, try one or more of the following approaches:

Leave the Reader with an Overall Reaction

With this approach, you extract from the essay an overriding impression, observation, or reaction to leave the reader with a final sense of how you feel about things. Here is an example for an essay with the thesis "Ability grouping is harmful to many students":

Clearly, ability grouping causes many students to feel unsuccessful, and it damages their self-esteem. That fact, alone, should be enough to prompt educators to discontinue this harmful practice.

Summarize the Main Points of the Essay

Use a summary conclusion for when a brief review would help the reader. If you have written a relatively short essay with easily understood and easily remembered ideas, your reader does not need a summary and may grow annoyed by the repetition. On the other hand, if your essay has many ideas, some of which are complex, your reader may appreciate a final summary.

Introduce a Related Idea

An effective conclusion can include an idea not appearing elsewhere in the essay. However, the idea must be clearly and closely related to the ideas that appear in the body, so the reader is not caught off guard by an idea that seems to spring

out of nowhere. Here is an example for an essay with the thesis "With so much discussion of the advantages of computers, we tend to overlook the fact that these machines have serious disadvantages as well":

If we overlook the drawbacks of computers, we risk becoming enslaved by these machines. Certainly this happened with the automobile. We routinely drive even short distances, never even considering walking instead. As a result, our physical fitness suffers and we have fewer opportunities to enjoy the splendor of a beautiful day.

Make a Determination

Frequently, the ideas in the body lead to some significant point or determination. When this is the case, you can use the final paragraph(s) to state and explain that point. Here is an example for an essay with the thesis "Co-workers should never attempt to become friends outside of the workplace":

Co-workers who socialize outside of the workplace do not remain friends for long. I regret the strain my socializing created on the relationship I had with my colleagues at work, and I regret having to quit my job. Next time, I will know better.

Restate the Thesis

Restating your thesis can emphasize your overriding point, but it can also seem dull and uninspired, so use this approach cautiously. If you restate your thesis, use different language to restate the thesis idea in a new way. Or combine the restatement with another approach, as this revised conclusion of "Portrait of an Achiever" does.

Thesis: The key to Hugh's ability to overcome everyday problems is his determination.

Determination can be born of challenge, but it isn't always so. Some people who face problems give up, wallow in self-pity, or rely on others to solve problems for them. Hugh refuses to do that. We can all draw inspiration from his ongoing determination to meet every problem head on and solve it.

Explain the Significance of Your Topic

This approach is particularly effective when your essay tells a story and you want to note why that story is important. Here is an example from an essay that tells the story of the time the author's house burned down.

Although young people generally think they are immortal, as a result of that fire, I no longer take my safety for granted. Wherever I live, I plan an escape route in the event of fire. I have two smoke detectors, and I keep a chain ladder by my second-story bedroom window.

Make a Recommendation or Call Your Reader to Action

This approach is often appropriate for persuasive essays. Here is an example for an essay with this thesis: "Because there are too few organs for all the patients needing transplants, federal laws should govern how the limited number of organs are allocated."

It is time that we began a letter-writing campaign to urge our representatives and senators to support organ allocation legislation. If enough people write, we can have equitable distribution of organs.

Explain the Consequences of Ignoring Your View

This approach also works well for persuasive essays. Here is an example for the thesis used in the previous example.

If we do not legislate the allocation of transplant organs, then we cannot be sure that the sickest patients will be first on the list. Instead, the wealthy and the famous will use their influence to get organs that more appropriately belong to others.

Combine Approaches

You can also combine two or more strategies. You can restate the thesis and then summarize. You can make a determination and then give an overall reaction. A related idea can appear with a restatement. Any combination of approaches is possible.

EXERCISE ► The Conclusion

Exercise: The Conclusion
Responses will vary.

1. Locate three essays with formal conclusions. You might check the library for books of essays, weekly newsmagazines, and newspaper editorial pages. Read the essays and answer the following questions.
 - a. Does the conclusion bring the essay to a satisfying close? Explain.
 - b. What approach is used for the conclusion? Is this approach effective? If not, explain why.
 - c. Is the length of the conclusion appropriate? If not, explain why.
 - d. Does the conclusion leave you with a positive final impression? If not, explain why.
2. *Collaborative Activity.* Below is a clever essay written by a student. The conclusion has been omitted, so with two classmates write your own. In class take turns reading your conclusions and note the variety of approaches. You will find it interesting to see how many different ways the conclusion can be handled.

Relationship Signaled addition	Transitions That Signal the Relationship also, and, and then, too, in addition, furthermore, moreover, equally important, another, first, second, third . . .	Example The mayor fully expects the city council to approve his salary recommendations for city employees. <i>In addition</i> , he is certain he will gain support for his road-repair program.
time sequence	now, then, before, after, afterwards, earlier, later, immediately, soon, next, meanwhile, gradually, suddenly, finally, previously, before, next, often, eventually	<i>Before</i> an agreement can be reached between the striking hospital workers and management, both sides must soften their stands on the economic issues.
Relationship Signaled spatial arrangement	Transitions That Signal the Relationship near, near to, nearly, far, far from, beside, in front of, next to, beyond, above, below, to the right, to the left, around, surrounding, on one side, inside, outside, across, opposite to, far off, behind, alongside, there	Example As you leave the fair grounds, turn right on Route 76. <i>Just beyond</i> the junction sign is the turnoff you need.
comparison	in the same way, similarly, just like, just as, in like manner, likewise	The current administration must not abandon its commitment to the poor. <i>Similarly</i> , it must not forget its promise to the elderly.
contrast	but, still, however, on the other hand, yet, on the contrary, nevertheless, despite, in spite of	<i>In spite of</i> the currently depressed housing market, there is still money to be made in real estate.
cause and effect	because, since, so, consequently, hence, as a result, therefore, thus, because of this	<i>Because of</i> this year's frost, almost 30 percent of the state's fruit crop was lost.
purpose	for this purpose, so that this may occur, in order to	<i>In order to</i> pass the school levy, the school board must make clear just how desperately additional money is needed.
emphasis	indeed, in fact, surely, undoubtedly, without a doubt, certainly, truly, to be sure, I am certain	Adolescence is not the care-free time some adults view it to be. <i>In fact</i> , it can be the most unsettled period in a person's life.
illustration	for example, for instance, as an illustration, specifically, to be specific, in particular	Most of the parents complained that the schools were not tough enough. They said, <i>for example</i> , that their children were rarely assigned homework.
summary or clarification	in summary, in conclusion, as I have shown, in brief, in short, in other words, all in all, that is	The used car Joshua bought required brake pads, shocks, and a fuel pump. <i>In other words</i> , it was in terrible shape.
admitting a point	although, while this may be true, granted, even though, while it is true that	<i>While it is true that</i> too many Americans cannot read and write, this country's literacy rate is among the best in the world.

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR WRITERS

1. Avoid the passive voice whenever possible. Use the active voice instead.
Not: *The car was driven by John.*
But: *John drove the car.*
 - ◆ When you do use the passive voice, have a reason for doing so.
2. Think twice before beginning sentences with *there is, there was, there were, etc.*
Not: *There will be a meeting of the club tomorrow.*
But: *The club will meet tomorrow.*
Substitute vague description for action.
3. Don't use too many *to be* verbs—*is, am, are, was, were*. Use strong, vivid verbs.
Vague: *He is a big eater.*
Vivid: *He eats (gobbles up, stuffs down, stows away, etc.) three huge meals a day and snacks between them.*
 - ◆ Make most of your verbs assert action rather than tell a condition.
4. Avoid wordiness (clutter, verbosity, excess words). Unnecessary words, circular construction, pompous frills, and meaningless jargon weaken sentences.
 - ◆ Eliminate every element that's not doing useful work.
5. Avoid intensifying adverbs like *very, really, and real*. They often weaken rather than strengthen a statement.
 - ◆ Don't use an adverb that carries the same meaning that's already in the verb.
6. Be concrete. Use precise, vivid adjectives instead of vague, wimpy ones like *nice, good, bad*. Ex. *She's a nice person. The food was good. It was a bad movie.*
 - ◆ Be economical with adjectives. Make them do work that needs to be done. The adjective that exists solely as decoration is a self indulgence for the writer and a burden for the reader.
7. Avoid cozy hesitators like *"Well, ..."*, and humble qualifiers like *"I think..."*, *"In my opinion..."*, *"It seems to me..."*
Not: *To me, Mark Twain's writing is funny, but I think it is also bitter.*
But: *Mark Twain's writing is funny but bitter.*
 - ◆ If a writer signs his/her name to an article, every reader with common sense will understand that the assertions in the article represent the writer's opinion and not some universal truth carved in stone by the almighty finger of God.
8. The second person (You) and first person (I) should be used sparingly, even in informal writing. Don't use these words indiscriminately.
9. Be clear. Avoid jargon. Simplify.
Ask yourself, "What am I trying to say?" Then look at what you have written and ask, "Have I said it?"
10. Respect and care deeply about words. They are your only tools.
Relax and enjoy the process. Be true to yourself.
 - ◆ Use a dictionary and a thesaurus.
 - ◆ Read. A good writer is a good reader.

Top Twelve Writing Errors

1. Subject / Verb Agreement	The girl have a good job. My brother live with me.	The girl <i>has</i> a good job. My brother <i>lives</i> with me.
2. Correct Verb Form	I am write this letter to explain what happened.	I am <i>writing</i> this letter to explain what <i>happened</i> .
3. Correct Pronoun Form	I gave she the money to buy some new books.	I gave <i>her</i> the money to buy some new books.
4. Correct Part of Speech	We celebration his birthday last week.	We <i>celebrated</i> his birthday last week.
5. Capitalization and Punctuation	My friend worked every Monday in June we had juice cereal and toast for breakfast	My friend worked every <i>Monday</i> in <i>June</i> . We had <i>juice, cereal, and toast</i> for <i>breakfast</i> .
6. Possessives	Jason borrowed Mary car last Friday.	Jason borrowed <i>Mary's</i> car last Friday.
7. Word Order	I gave to Mary the letter. We have a cat black.	I gave <i>Mary</i> the letter. We have a <i>black</i> cat.
8. Run-on Sentences	My sister had the flu she went to the doctor he gave her some medicine now she's feeling better.	My sister had the flu, so she went to the doctor. <i>He</i> gave her some medicine; now she's feeling better.
9. Sentence Fragments	I had a good time. When I went to the beach with Tom.	I had a good time, when I went to the beach with Tom.
0. Parallel Structure	Nancy likes swimming, skiing, and to play baseball.	Nancy likes swimming, skiing and <i>playing</i> baseball.
1. Wrong Word	The soldiers rose the flag early yesterday. The passengers were reading there books.	The soldiers <i>raised</i> the flag early yesterday. The passengers were reading <i>their</i> books.
2. Missing Subject	Tom left because didn't like the music. Is raining out today.	Tom left because <i>he</i> didn't like the music. <i>It</i> is raining out today.

EST. COMPOSITION PROFILE

STUDENT _____

DATE _____

TOPIC _____

SCORE LEVEL CRITERIA COMMENTS

CONTENT		ORGANIZATION		VOCABULARY		LANGUAGE USE		MECHANICS	
30-27	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: knowledgeable • substantive • thorough development of thesis • relevant to assigned topic	20-18	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: fluent expression • ideas clearly stated/ supported • succinct • well-organized • logical sequencing • cohesive	20-18	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: sophisticated range • effective word/idiom choice and usage • word form mastery • appropriate register	25-22	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: effective complex constructions • few errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, prepositions	5	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: demonstrates mastery of conventions • few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing
26-22	GOOD TO AVERAGE: some knowledge of subject • adequate range • limited development of thesis • mostly relevant to topic, but lacks detail	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE: somewhat choppy • loosely organized but main ideas stand out • limited support • logical but incomplete sequencing	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE: adequate range • occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage but meaning not obscured	21-18	GOOD TO AVERAGE: effective but simple constructions • minor problems in complex constructions • several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, prepositions, pronouns, but meaning seldom obscured	4	GOOD TO AVERAGE: occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing but meaning not obscured
21-17	FAIR TO POOR: limited knowledge of subject • little substance • inadequate development of topic	13-10	FAIR TO POOR: non-fluent • ideas confused or disconnected • lacks logical sequencing and development	13-10	FAIR TO POOR: limited range • frequent errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage • meaning confused or obscured	17-11	FAIR TO POOR: major problems in simple/complex constructions • frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, prepositions, pronouns, and/or fragments, run-ons, deletions • meaning confused or obscured	3	FAIR TO POOR: frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing • poor handwriting • meaning confused or obscured
16-13	VERY POOR: does not show knowledge of subject • non-substantive • not pertinent • OR not enough to evaluate	9-7	VERY POOR: does not communicate • no organization • OR not enough to evaluate	9-7	VERY POOR: essentially translation • little knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms, word form • OR not enough to evaluate	10-5	VERY POOR: virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules • dominated by errors • does not communicate • OR not enough to evaluate	2	VERY POOR: no mastery of conventions • dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing • handwriting illegible • OR not enough to evaluate

TOTAL SCORE READER COMMENTS