5.4 Transitions

The best essay in the world needs proper words. Readers need to be able to move easily from one idea to the next. Each type of essay may call for different transitional words.

While we don’t want students to overuse transitional tag words (they need to appear naturally), we are doing them a disservice not to show them the words that will help them connect their ideas/sentences. Student Handout 5.4a: “Transitions” will help students as they write various types of essays.

Transitions Activity

Level: Foundational

Suggested Timeline: 20 minutes to review and discuss

Materials:

- Student Handout 5.4a: “Transitions”
- Student Handout 9.7b: “Charles Darwin: Fateful Voyage”
- Student Handout 9.7e: “Forging New Trails”
- text from core classes (student supplied) or an article from a magazine

AVID Methodologies (WICR) Used: Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Reading

Purpose: To build student understanding of transition words and when to use these

Activity *(30 minutes):* Either ask students to bring in a text from one of their core classes, an article from a magazine (you could provide a copy) or distribute Student Handout 9.7b: “Charles Darwin: Fateful Voyage” or Student Handout 9.7e: “Forging New Trails.” Have them scan the piece and highlight or note these transition words they find. Based on the type(s) of transition words present, have them predict the purpose of the piece or various sections of it. Most expository text will have several structures (purposes). For example, a section of a textbook may first be descriptive, then present a time sequence, and end with a contrast to some other element of the general subject being discussed. Seeing that writers use these kinds of connecting words will reinforce the students’ understanding of real world application. This process will also help students to understand text structure when reading non-fiction text.
They can pair-share what they discover or work with a partner for this activity.

Extension: You may want to have students refer to Student Handout 5.4a when they are revising a process-writing piece for their AVID class or for a content area class.

Transitions

To show...	Use...
Addition	again, also, and, besides, equally important, first, further, finally, furthermore, in addition, additionally, last, moreover, next, other, second, still, too
Comparison	also, in the same way, likewise, similarly, while
Concession	granted, naturally, of course
Contrast	although, at the same time, but, despite, even so, even though, however, in contrast, instead, nevertheless, on the other hand, still, though, yet
Emphasis	certainly, especially, for this reason, indeed, in fact, of course, truly
Example or illustration	after all, even, for example, for instance, in conclusion, indeed, in fact, in other words, of course, specifically, to illustrate, thus
Summary	all in all, altogether, because, finally, in other words, in particular, in summary, on the whole, therefore, to summarize
Time sequence	after a while, afterward, and then, before, earlier, eventually, finally, last, meanwhile, next, shortly, since, soon, still, suddenly, then, today, until, when

Other ways to show transition:

- repetition of key words and phrases (this helps link paragraphs as well as sentences)
- pronoun reference (this works only if the reference is clear—using “they say” when the antecedent of “they” is not clear only confuses the reader)

4.11 Developing an Introduction

Level: Foundational

Rationale: While students might struggle to articulate a specific thesis statement, they often struggle even more trying to develop an entire introduction around that thesis. Students need clear direction about—and practice with—pulling together a cohesive and engaging introduction. This lesson helps students to uncover the elements of an introduction and then apply that knowledge to their own work.

Suggested Timeline: Approximately 60 minutes for the activity; additional time for application to students' own writing (see "How to Use This Book" for additional guidelines).

Materials:

- highlighters
- pens/pencils
- copies of sample introductions
- students' own drafts of introductions
- Student Handout 4.11a ("Opening Sentence Techniques: Capturing a Reader's Attention")
- Student Handout 4.11b ("What Is an Introduction")

Assessment Options

- Observation while students work
- Application in own writing
- Application to future writing

AVID Methodologies Used (WICR): Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Reading

Steps

1. Gather and copy several sample introductions from different types of essays (or from one type of essay if students are all writing a particular type of paper). Arrange students into tri- ads; give each student a highlighter and an introduction.

For essay ideas, ask colleagues to suggest individual essays (or essay anthologies) they find interesting within their content areas. You might also find essay anthologies in your school's textbook room or the school library.

2. Have students work in their triads to review the introduction and highlight what they believe to be the thesis statement. Define *thesis*, if needed.
3. Have triads share their thesis statements and write them on the board. Project a copy of one of the introductions. Discuss, as a class, whether or not the thesis has been accurately identified. Ask students to determine if the thesis is one or more sentences; discuss the options of confining the thesis to one sentence or expanding it to two or more. Once the class has identified the correct thesis, highlight it on the overhead, and move on to Steps 4, 5, and 6. (Repeat this step for as many introductions as desired.).
4. Define *opening sentences* and *forecast* for students and briefly explain their role in an introduction. Ask students to return to their sample introductions and do the following:
   - Find and underline the opening sentences, the sentences that lead into the thesis.
   - Find and circle the forecast, the sentences indicating what will follow in the body of the essay. (*Tip:* Not all introductions will have a forecast. This is covered in more detail in the handout.)

   Have groups share their findings and arrive at a consensus about the opening sentences and the forecast.

5. Ask students: “What do the opening sentences accomplish? What is their purpose?” Discuss students’ ideas and determine the method used in the opening sentences.

6. Ask students: “What does the forecast accomplish? What is its purpose?” Discuss students’ ideas and determine whether the forecast is needed. Could the introduction work without it? If so, why include it? Why might a writer choose not to include it? (Repeat steps 3–6 for other introductions.)

7. On the board, write OPENING SENTENCES, THESIS, FORECAST. In their triads, have students generate definitions, in their own words, for each term. Have triads share definitions; discuss and arrive at a class consensus. Write the final definitions on the board and have students write them in their notes.

8. Give the class a topic that will be interesting and easily accessible to them. (For example: school dress codes, favorite fast food restaurant, teenage curfew.) With this topic in mind, have each student generate an opinion about it. For example: Dress codes are ridiculous. My favorite fast food restaurant is Rubio’s. Teenage curfews don’t work.

9. Using their opinions as a starting point, have students develop their ideas into thesis statements by adding an answer to “why?” or “who cares?” For example: “Dress codes are ridiculous.” becomes “Dress codes are rejected by most teenagers because they inhibit personal self-expression.” “My favorite fast food restaurant is Rubio’s.” becomes “Rubio’s is the best fast food restaurant because it has tasty food at good prices.” “Teenage curfews don’t work.” becomes “As a deterrent to crime, teenage curfews don’t work even though adults often feel placated by the existence of a curfew.”

10. Using their thesis statements, have students create one or two sentences that would forecast the ideas to be developed in the rest of the essay. For example, using the dress code example above, the thesis and forecast might look like this:

    Dress codes are rejected by most teenagers because they inhibit personal self-expression. They turn expressive teenagers into generic students and fashion “clones.” Dress codes deny students the opportunity to use dress as a way to communicate who they are and what they stand for.

11. Share a few forecasts; highlight one or two strong forecasts, discussing what makes them effective.

12. Distribute Student Handout 4.11a (“Opening Sentence Techniques”) to each student. Review and discuss the various methods described on the handout. Have students read the examples aloud to intensify the difference in tone and voice that is created with each opening.

13. Using the handout as a reference and their thesis statements as the focal point, have students create opening sentences to hook readers and lead into their thesis statements.

    Variation: Arrange students into small groups and give each group a different technique (one group has “anecdote” another has “definition,” etc.). Each student in the group then works to create an effective opening using their designated technique. Have students share some of their openings aloud; discuss how different techniques influence things like tone, attitude, voice, etc.

14. Using one student’s work, write an entire introduction on the board or overhead transparency; review its parts as a class. Guide students to identify the opening sentences, thesis, and forecast. Discuss each element; make revisions, as needed, and write them on the draft. If the technology is available, you might want to type this on a computer and project it for the class. (This way, it will be easier and quicker to incorporate students ’ideas.)
15. Distribute Student Handout 4.11b (“What Is an Introduction”) as a backup to the focus lesson.
16. Have students work on their current writing projects. Tell them to swap their introduction drafts with a partner and examine them in the same way they just did with the samples: highlighting the thesis, underlining the opening sentences, and circling the forecast. Have partners evaluate and revise their introductions together, using information from the focus lesson.
17. Share and discuss the changes students made; read a few introductions aloud (both the early drafts and the revised drafts).

Opening Sentence Techniques: Capturing a Reader's Attention

Anecdote

One way to get a reader's attention is to use an anecdote. This is a story that will interest your reader and lead to the point you want to make. Here is a sample introduction that includes an anecdote and the writer's thesis about whether or not lying is ever justifiable:

On a cold winter evening, Mom and I were baking cookies. We were laughing and carrying on when I asked, "Mom, what would dad say if I wanted to go out with a black guy?" Mom retorted, "Don't even think about mentioning that to your father! He'll kill you! I can't imagine why you'd actually think about doing such a thing..." It was evident to me that I would be forced to keep my relationship with Andre a secret. It was at that moment I knew that my relationship with my parents would change forever. I used to believe that lying to my parents was never acceptable. However, now, I strongly believe lying is justified to protect or support your belief system.

Dialogue or Quotation Related to Topic

Another way to get a reader's attention is to use dialogue or a quotation that will interest your reader and lead to the point you want to make. When you use a quotation from the text about which you are writing, be sure to include the speaker and the circumstance somewhere in a follow up sentence so your reader understands the use of the quotation. When you use dialogue, you indent each time another person speaks. Dialogue should bring out the speaker's true voice in order to sound as authentic as possible. Here is a sample introduction that includes dialogue:

"I can't believe I failed my English class! What am I going to tell my parents?"

"Linda, just hide your report card and tell them that you lost it."

While I value my friendship with my best friend, I no longer value her advice when it comes to my grades. Brenda's words haunt me as I replay the events of the last week. It seemed so easy; just tell my parents I lost my report card. How could such a simple lie turn into such horrible drama?

Startling Information

A third way to get a reader's attention is to use startling information that will interest your reader and lead to the point you want to make. This could be an incident, a statistic, or a "sound." Here is a sample introduction that includes a startling opener:

Brrrring! Brrrring! The telephone startled me out of my sleep at 11:30 p.m. My mother and I both picked up the phone at the same time. Unknown to her, I listened to the man's voice which casually, without emotion, described my father's fatal accident. After a few seconds of cold silence, I heard the phone crash to the floor as my mother's screams pierced the house. My body instantly filled up with intense fear.

Opinion

A fourth way to get a reader's attention is to write an all-commentary introduction that will interest your reader and lead to the point you want to make. Here is a sample introduction that uses opinion:

Like so many homeless teens, Roger, in the story "Thank You Ma'am," was never taught right from wrong. Not having a parent around to teach a child love and respect causes a kid to grow up with no moral consciousness; this, in fact, was Roger's greatest flaw. Roger consequently makes a bad decision to steal Mrs. Jones's purse. However, little does he know that his run-in with her would change his life forever.

Controversial or Provocative Question

A fifth way to get a reader's attention is to pose a question that you know will inspire disagreement or at least curiosity. Here is a sample introduction that uses a question:

Are you a liar? Are we all liars? Can you honestly say that you have never lied? Can any of us? Such questions remind us that morality and ethics are not black and white; there is a lot of gray area in how we interpret what is right and what is wrong. It is in hindsight that I ponder these questions as I sit in my room eeking out the final days of my restriction for, you guessed it, lying! With this hindsight I have learned that lying to protect myself from consequences I actually deserve is much different than lying to maintain a belief system that will be compromised if I tell the truth. I used to believe that lying to my parents was never acceptable. However, now, I strongly believe lying is justified to protect or support my belief system.

Definition

Still another way to get a reader's attention is to start with a definition, especially if your topic is centered on a key term or concept that is complex or unique. Here is a sample introduction that uses definition:

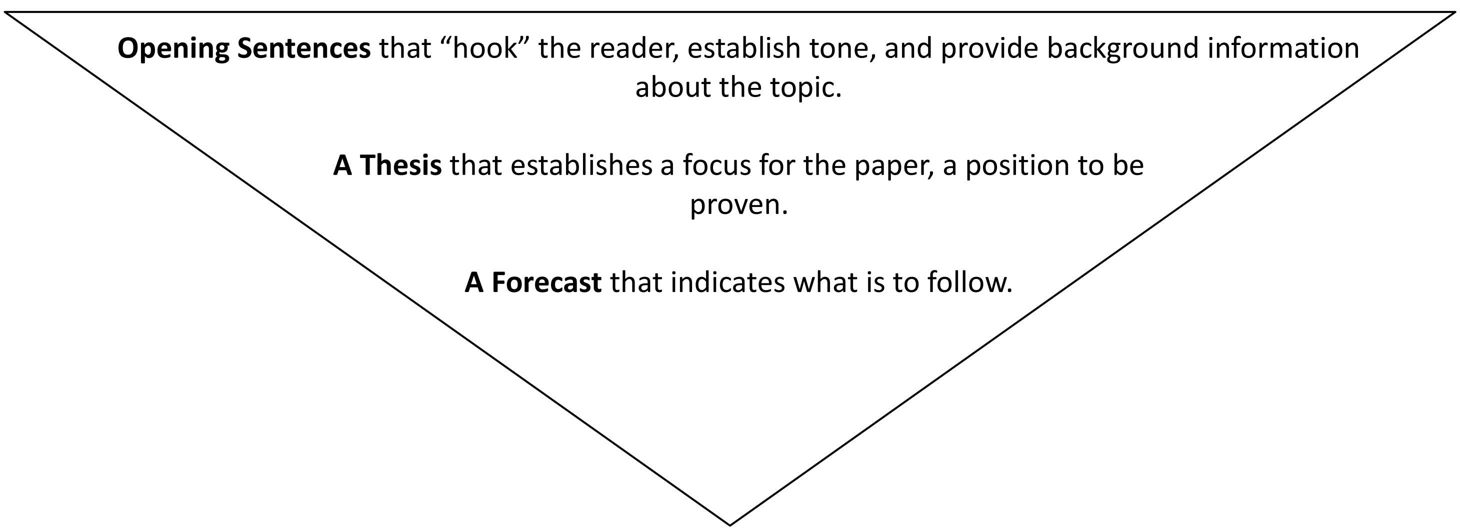
To understand the intricacies of the rise and fall of communism in the Soviet Union, one must first under- stand Karl Marx's perspective of communism. Before the Russian Revolution began, Marx encouraged workers to revolt against the noble classes and to start a communist society. A communist society is a system without a government and social classes. Marx suggested that "after classes had been eliminated, everyone would live in peace, prosperity, and freedom. There would be no more need for governments, police, or armies, and all these institutions would gradually disappear." (Urban 890) Given this definition, the revolution should have, ideally, created equality and economic security. However, true communism was never fully achieved in the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution because of the brutal and harsh dictatorship of Joseph Stalin.

What Is An Introduction?

Whether a single paragraph—as some audiences will request—or more, an introduction has many purposes. It should:

- Capture the reader's attention and keep it, through the use of interesting, unique, or creative words and ideas.
- Set a tone and communicate information that will help the reader understand the purpose of the paper.
- Provide general background information the reader may need in order to understand the thesis.
- Assert a thesis which provides focus and direction for readers.
- Indicate what is to follow in the body of the essay.

A common way to represent a typical introduction is through an upside down triangle, with the wide end of the triangle representing *general* information and the narrow end representing *specific* information:



Opening Sentences

As revealed in the diagram above, opening sentences "hook" the reader, establish the tone, and provide background. Given this model, your first concern as a writer should be to capture the attention of your reader— to "hook" your reader into your paper and make him/her want to read it. For ideas about how to accomplish this, see Student Handout 4.11a ("Opening Sentence Techniques: Capturing a Reader's Attention").

In addition to capturing your reader's attention, the opening sentences of your essay should set a tone and communicate information that will help your reader understand the purpose of the paper. To accomplish this, you might consider following your "hook" with information about the general topic and then narrowing the ideas toward your precise topic. For example:

- The opening sentences of an essay about the effects of a lightning-induced brush fire on a particular stretch of land might include the broad observation that nature produces cycles of destruction that lead to renewal.
- The opening sentences of an essay about the effects of Caesar Chavez's hunger strikes on the unionizing efforts of the United Farm Workers might include a statement about the power of individual actions to shape social change.
- The opening sentences of an autobiographical essay about how you came to appreciate your brother's humor might include a broad observation that we often misunderstand or misjudge people when we use, as a basis for our judgment, our reactions to their humor.
- The opening sentences of a biographical essay about a local artist might include an explanation of the role artists play in communities.

As you craft your introduction and work to include general topic information, remember that your reader will stay more engaged if you use interesting, unique, or creative ideas rather than clichés and generalizations. Essays that begin with phrases like, "Throughout history, there have been conflicts..." or "Science helps us understand the world..." or "According to Webster's Dictionary..." don't get much mileage toward developing a topic or capturing the reader's interest.

In addition to engaging your reader, the opening sentences should provide some detailed background information about the subject of the essay. Including this type of information provides a smooth, natural progression, or movement, from the general topic to your specific thesis. Using the same essay examples listed above, the following might be included as background information:

- Brush fire essay: background information might include facts about how many times the land has been burned and/or facts about the most recent burn.
- Caesar Chavez essay: background information might include how and why Caesar Chavez became involved with the United Farm Workers and undertook hunger strikes as a means of protest.
- Autobiographical essay: background information might include your brother's name and a few significant lines of a joke (or jokes) he told and your initial reactions of impatience and disgust.
- Biographical essay: background information might include the author's name and age and some enticing facts about how many shows she has had and which art pieces are prominently displayed in the community.
- As the opening sentences lead toward your thesis, a common understanding should start to emerge between you and your reader. Your reader should have a sense of what you're trying to prove and how it is related to more general background information.

Thesis

A thesis statement is a clearly worded answer to a question and/or a clearly worded declaration of the view(s)/ideas you will substantiate, assert, or prove in your paper. It has a definite subject and an opinion. For example:

Thesis: Artist Dorothy Hahn has been a vital member of the Carlsbad community and has contributed to the intellectual and aesthetic well-being of its citizens.

Subject	=	Dorothy Hahn
Opinion	=	Has been a vital member of our community and has contributed to our well-being.

Often, audiences will anticipate a single sentence thesis, which will require you to use precise words to communicate your ideas, no matter how complex. Sometimes, you will be granted the liberty to expand intricate, complex thesis ideas into two or more sentences; doing so will enable you to more clearly state what you hope to prove. While a specific audience may determine the length of a thesis statement and its placement in the introduction of an essay, your reader will expect your thesis statement to clearly identify the argument you plan to advance in your essay.

Your thesis—and by extension, your essay—should articulate an insight or position valuable enough to write about. You should not assert a position that is already accepted as true by you and your reader—why would you need to prove such a statement? A strong thesis captures your unique insight or approach to a topic and is persuasively supported by the evidence and analysis that follow in the paper.

Forecast

A forecast statement lays out the subtopics/subdivisions of support that will follow in your essay and does so in the order in which they will appear. Although you may decide to edit out your forecast statement in the final stages of the writing process, including an orderly forecast, early on, can assist you as you are feeling your way along in the organizational scheme and planning the direction of your proof. If left in your paper, a well-stated forecast can aid your reader in anticipating the direction your essay will take and help him/her to follow your logic and reasoning. An essay proving the claim that Dorothy Hahn has been a vital member of the community might include a forecast such as:

> **Forecast:** She has used her art to create natural gathering places and to inspire further personal expression. She has also used her artwork as a tool for social commentary, helping us to consider our opinions about important topics of the day.

This forecast tells the reader that the essay will first talk about the impact Dorothy Hahn has had on the community by establishing gathering places for people and ways for people to express themselves. Secondly, the essay will talk about how she has used her art to express her opinions about socially relevant topics.

Your forecast should not be overly detailed or awkward: it should simply notify your reader, in a concise and manageable statement, of what is to come.

A Complete Introduction

Using the examples above, a complete introduction to a biography about Dorothy Hahn might read like this:

Lewis Mumford suggests that “the artist has a special task; that of reminding men of their humanity and the promise of their creativity.” If Mumford’s words are true, then artists play an important role in their communities, inspiring creativity and connecting citizens to their own humanity. Local artist Dorothy Hahn has risen to this “special task.” The 63-year-old artist is being remembered this month in a special tribute and gallery display hosted by the Downtown Art Gallery. An artist for over 40 years, Hahn has spent most of her life creating art in the Carlsbad community. Over the years, she has had ten shows at various local galleries, created the annual KidsART program that runs every August, and secured prominent homes for her sculptures and mobiles in most of the city’s public buildings and recreational facilities. Dorothy Hahn has been a vital member of the Carlsbad community and has contributed to the intellectual and aesthetic well-being of its citizens. She has used her art to create natural gathering places and to inspire further personal expression. She has also used her artwork as a tool for social commentary, helping us to consider our opinions about important topics of the day.

Developing a Conclusion

Level: Intermediate

Rationale: As they prepare to write conclusions, students often complain that they have nothing more to say. In an attempt to help the struggling masses, teachers say: "Summarize, tie back to your thesis, and state a universal." (Not bad advice!) Confused and uncertain about what these words of wisdom mean, and with a certain degree of desperation, students simply repeat the thesis, word-for-word, and call it a wrap. The result? A paper that seems to lose "steam" and fizzle out. This lesson is designed to help teachers clarify the ambiguity surrounding the writing of a conclusion; it is designed to give students concrete methods for developing more deliberate and creative conclusions—conclusions with steam!

Suggested Timeline: Approximately 45–60 minutes; additional time for optional extension activity and for application to students' own writing (see "How to Use This Book" for additional guidelines).

Materials:

- Student Handout 4.14a ("What Is a Conclusion?")
- Student Handout 4.14b ("Closing Sentence Techniques: Leaving a Reader Fulfilled")
- Student Handout 4.14c ("Sample Conclusions")
- paper
- pens/pencils
- sample essays (optional)

Assessment Options

- Observation while students work
- Application in own writing
- Application to future writing

AVID Methodologies Used (WICR): Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Reading

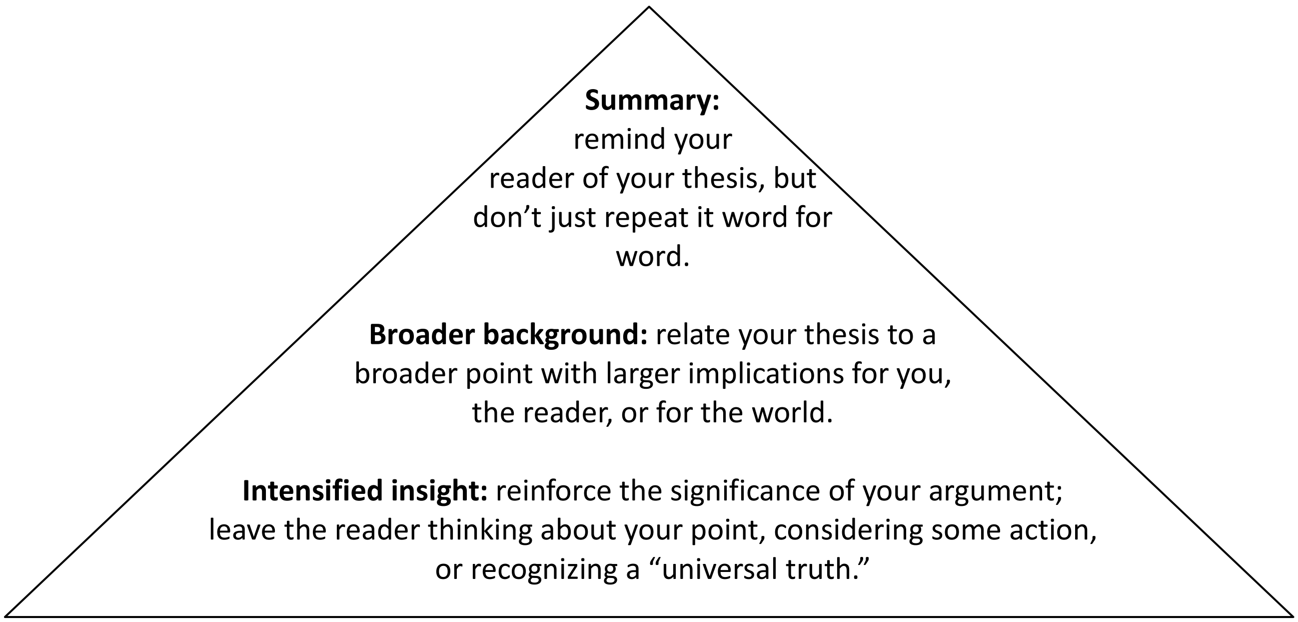
Steps:

1. Review Student Handouts 4.14a ("What is a Conclusion?") and 4.14b ("Closing Sentence Techniques") with the class. Clarify, as needed, to make sure students understand the purpose of essay conclusions.
2. Distribute Student Handout 4.14c ("Sample Conclusions") or some short essays that will hold student interest. (The one-page "My Turn" essays from Newsweek can be very useful for activities like this.)
3. If using the student handout, the thesis and conclusion are given for four sample essays; if using the full text of short essays, have students highlight the thesis statements and conclusions in each essay so they stand out. (This can be a review for thesis statements, as well.)
4. In small groups, looking at one sample at a time, have students read the thesis statement and find where in the conclusion reference is made back to it. Key question: "How did the writer summarize the thesis?" Have students discuss how the writer referenced the thesis without restating it directly. Have a class discussion on the methods used by each writer—what is different and what is the same?
5. Have students look at each sample again and identify how the writers related their thesis to a broader point (if they did). For those who didn't, ask students how that could have been accomplished. As a whole class, compare the approaches used by each writer.

6. Have students look at each sample again and identify the "intensified insight" made by each writer. Key question: "How did the writer answer the 'so what' of his/her main point?" As a class, compare the methods used by each writer.
7. Have students review each sample one last time and identify the technique each writer used in his/her closing sentences. Did he/she use a vivid image, a quotation, a call for action, or something else? Discuss as a class.
8. Working in the same groups, have students craft a new conclusion for one of the samples that uses different techniques than the one in the original. (Groups can each work on a different sample.) All conclusions should include the three elements of a conclusion: summary, broader background, and intensified insight. Have groups share their new conclusions and discuss the techniques employed.
9. Have students work on their own current writing projects. Tell them to swap their rough drafts with a partner and examine them in the same way they just did with the samples, highlighting thesis statements and parts of the conclusion. Partners should then evaluate and revise their conclusions together, using information from the focus lesson. If students have not written conclusions yet, they might choose a technique (vivid image, quotation, or call to action) and then work with a partner to begin drafting it.
10. **Optional Extension:** Using their own rough drafts, have students "play around" with their conclusions by trying each of the different techniques (vivid image, quotation, or call to action). Working in small groups, they can then evaluate the different options and help each writer choose the most effective approach for his/her essay.

What Is a Conclusion?

In the concluding paragraph, you wrap things up and leave your reader with something to think about. It is the place to say “good-bye” gracefully. A common way to represent a conclusion is to invert the introduction triangle so the narrow end, representing your specific focal point (your thesis), is on top and the wide end, representing significant implications to the greater society, is at the bottom.



While the introduction is the place to hook your reader, establish a tone and background knowledge, and assert your point, the conclusion is the place to reinforce your point and help the reader to understand why it matters in the grand scheme of things (answering the “so what?”).

It is often effective to create a “circle” between your introduction and conclusion—a circle that connects the conclusion back to where you started in the introduction. For example, if you introduce a powerful image or metaphor in the introduction, continue with the image or metaphor in the conclusion. If you start with a quotation or dialogue in the introduction, revisit it again in the conclusion by extending it, paraphrasing it, or using part of it again. The reader experiences a sense of coherence when you tie the conclusion back to the introduction.

Closing Sentence Techniques: Leaving a Reader Fulfilled

A good conclusion wraps up an essay in a memorable and powerful way. In doing so, a strong conclusion reminds readers of the gist of the essay and leaves them feeling that they know a good deal more than when they began. Effective strategies for an essay include vivid images, quotations, and calls for actions:

Concluding With a Vivid Image

It is, in any case, finally that I end up having to trust not to laugh, not to snicker. Even as you regard me in these lines, I try to imagine your face as you read. You who read "Aria," especially those of you with your theme-divining yellow felt pen poised in your hand, you for whom this essay is yet another "assignment," please do not forget that it is my life I am handing you in these pages—memories that are as personal for me as family photographs in an old cigar box.

—RICHARD RODRIGUEZ
from a postscript to *Aria: A Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood*

Concluding With a Quotation

Despite the celebrity that accrued to her and the air of awesomeness with which she was surrounded in her later years, Miss Keller retained an unaffected personality, certain that her optimistic attitude toward life was justified. "I believe that all through these dark and silent years God has been using my life for a pur- pose I do not know," she said. "But one day I shall understand and then I will be satisfied."

—ALDEN WHITMAN
Helen Keller: June 27, 1880–June 1, 1968

Concluding With a Call for Action

It is now almost 40 years since the invention of nuclear weapons. We have not yet experienced a global thermonuclear war—although on more than one occasion we have come tremulously close. I do not think our luck can hold forever. Men and machines are fallible, as recent events remind us. Fools and madmen do exist, and sometimes rise to power. Concentrating always on the near future, we have ignored the long- term consequences of our actions. We have placed our civilization and species in jeopardy.

Fortunately, it is not yet too late. We can safeguard the planetary civilization and the human family if we so choose. There is no more important or urgent issue.

—CARL SAGAN
The Nuclear Winter

The concluding paragraph provides the last opportunity for you to impress the message of an essay on your readers' minds and to create effects you desire. As such, it is well worth your time and effort.

Sample Conclusions

Sample 1
THESIS: I may or may not get married some day, but that's a decision for me—and my potential partner—to make. I have the freedom to choose, and I can't understand why any of my fellow citizens would be denied that same freedom.
CONCLUSION: "The contract of marriage is most solemn and is not to be entered into lightly," I told each couple, reading the introductory remarks for all city-hall weddings. But they all had known that long before I told them. "You've restored my faith in the institution of marriage," I told two beautiful, beaming women after I had proclaimed them spouses for life.
(By Sean Captain, "Proud Bachelor Turned Marrying Man—Sort Of," *Newsweek*, March 8, 2004)

Sample 2
THESIS: In my family, living with five siblings proved to be a hands-on educational experience.
CONCLUSION: It will be my turn to move on and leave home next year, and I imagine our experiences will help me survive and succeed out in the real world. After all, though the sophisticated lessons provided us with an undeniable edge at school, our home-school experiences ultimately provided us with much more than decent grades. Our full house brought out the very best in us, as we transformed perceived disadvantages of our family's size into gifts, building creativity, tolerance, and self-confidence. We were just lucky, I guess.
(By Jane Chong, "Making a Full House an Educational Experience," "My Turn" essay contest, 2004)

Sample 3
THESIS: Fortunately, it's the federal standards and state MCAS test that are inadequate, not Brookline's schools.
CONCLUSION: My guess is the School Committee majority will avoid an unambiguous response. The state legislature remains a lost cause. Federal honchos like our own senators Ted Kennedy and John Kerry, who helped George Bush pass ESEA despite its inherent problems, still don't admit they were wrong. Only parents, students, and teachers can lead the way from capitulation to resistance.
(By Dennis Fox, *Leaving Children Behind Locally,* published online: www.dennisfox.net, February 26, 2004)

Sample 4
THESIS: This past month a disproportionate number of headlines have revolved around anthrax. Is our fear of anthrax fact based or media created?
CONCLUSION: Franklin Roosevelt said it best when he said we have nothing to fear except fear itself. Where is the headline that reads 285 million people in the United States *don't* have anthrax and 668 million pieces of mail get delivered *safely* every day (McQuaid)? The media is feeding us fear dressed in the costume of news. Just as our government has an obligation to protect our freedom, the media has a responsibility to report morally. When it doesn't, we the consumers need to differentiate between fact and media manipulation.
(By Jeni Cormano, student writer)