
In Conclusion | Tips to create a memorable ending

Think about what you want your reader to take away from your story. What feeling, emotion, question do you want to leave your readers with? Choose a type of ending that best suits your written piece.

Typically, if you've done your job showing the event or experience throughout the narrative, the conclusion will come naturally. Then, think about how you can best *SHOW* it, not just tell it.

Avoid saying things like "I learned that..." or "As a result of this experience..."

Barry Lane said it best in his book *Reviser's Toolbox*: "Don't write endings, find them... Endings grow from beginnings and reveal themselves through clues within the story, characters, or ideas."

Don't TELL your audience what to think or how to feel, SHOW them! 😊

End with an Image

When nature essayist Scott Russell Sanders was in Omaha to talk to writing students, he said one of the most common problems for beginning writers when crafting a narrative essay is conclusions. He said his advice is always the same: if in doubt, end on an image. It's foolproof. *Showing* an image prevents you from *telling* your feelings.

In the essay "Buckeye," Scott Russell Sanders uses the image of a grazing deer to conclude his narrative:
. . . within a few paces of a grazing deer, close enough to see the delicate lips, the twitching nostrils, the glossy, fathomless eyes.

This lyrical conclusion comes from "Bathing," as writer Kathryn Winograd shows the last moments of her bath:
The wind sings through the window like a siren, and the steam floats from my skin like milk.

End with Action

Show yourself in action. Move. Do something, anything, to avoid telling the reader how happy, or sad, or hopeful you are in the end. Look at something, and walk away, as Edward Hoagland does in "The Courage of Turtles":

But since, short of diving in after him, there was nothing I could do, I walked away.

Or look at something, and become mesmerized.

End with Dialogue

Dialogue can be tricky to conclude with, but can work if it avoids a message or moral. You'll only want to use this concluding technique if it has been maintained in the narrative; you probably don't want to throw in spoken word if we haven't heard anyone speak up until that point.

David Sedaris, in his essay, "Cyclops," ends with the voice of his father, who is the main character in this essay:
"I don't know where you got it from, but in the end, it's going to kill you."

The following brief reply, taken from Jo Ann Beard's "The Fourth State of Matter," shows an image, followed by unquoted dialogue. Beard uses italics instead:

Around my neck is the stone he brought me from Poland. I hold it out. *Like this?* I ask. Shards of fly wings, suspended in amber. *Exactly,* he says.

Another example below comes again from Scott Russell Sanders, this from "Cloud Crossing," as his toddler son babbles:

"Moon," he is piping from the back seat, "moon, moon!"

End with Reflection

When used well, reflection is a great way to convey feelings without *telling* the reader *how* you felt – or how they should feel. Reflection offers the writer's thoughts about what is happening or has happened. Reflection can include thoughts about the moment or thoughts looking back, about the experience. Reflection can add clarity, as we see the writer thinking through the experience.

This concluding moment is from James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son":

. . . I wished that he had been beside me so that I could have searched his face for the answers which only the future would give me now.

Bret Lott, in his short essay, "Brothers," reflects on childhood memories of his family, taking him into the present with his own two sons:

What I believe is this: That pinch was entry into our childhood; my arm around him, our smiling, is the proof of us two surfacing, alive but not unscathed. And here are my own two boys, already embarked.