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# Chapter 11

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## Concluding with Power

### Almost to the Finish Line

When reading a great novel, many people just can't wait to get to the end of the book. Some people will actually jump ahead hundreds of pages and read the last chapter just to see what happens. Humans have an innate desire to "get to the end." Imagine reading a novel and finding that the author just stopped writing five or six chapters from the end—how satisfied would you be with that author? In the same way, when a speaker doesn't think through her or his conclusion properly, audience members are often left just as dissatisfied. In other words, conclusions are really important!



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## 11.1 Why Conclusions Matter

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the basic benefits of a strong conclusion.
2. Explain the serial position effect and its importance on public speaking.

As public speaking professors and authors, we have seen many students give otherwise good speeches that seem to fall apart at the end. We've seen students end their three main points by saying things such as "OK, I'm done"; "Thank God that's over!"; or "Thanks. Now what? Do I just sit down?" It's understandable to feel relief at the end of a speech, but remember that as a speaker, your conclusion is the last chance you have to drive home your ideas. When a speaker opts to end the speech with an ineffective conclusion—or no conclusion at all—the speech loses the energy that's been created, and the audience is left confused and disappointed. Instead of falling prey to emotional exhaustion, remind yourself to keep your energy up as you approach the end of your speech, and plan ahead so that your conclusion will be an effective one.



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Of course, a good conclusion will not rescue a poorly prepared speech. Thinking again of the chapters in a novel, if one bypasses all the content in the middle, the ending often isn't very meaningful or helpful. So to take advantage of the advice in this chapter, you need to keep in mind the importance of developing a speech with an effective introduction and an effective body; if you have these elements, you will have the foundation you need to be able to conclude effectively. Just as a good introduction helps bring an audience member into the world of your speech, and a good speech body holds the audience in that world, a good conclusion helps bring that audience member back to the reality outside of your speech.

In this section, we're going to examine the functions fulfilled by the conclusion of a speech. A strong conclusion serves to signal the end of the speech and to help your listeners remember your speech.

## Signals the End

The first thing a good conclusion can do is to signal the end of a speech. You may be thinking that showing an audience that you're about to stop speaking is a "no brainer," but many speakers really don't prepare their audience for the end. When a speaker just suddenly stops speaking, the audience is left confused and disappointed. Instead, we want to make sure that audiences are left knowledgeable and satisfied with our speeches. In [Section 11.2 "Steps of a Conclusion"](#), we'll explain in great detail about how to ensure that you signal the end of your speech in a manner that is both effective and powerful.

## Aids Audience's Memory of Your Speech

The second reason for a good conclusion stems out of some very interesting research reported by the German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus back in 1885 in his book *Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology*. Ebbinghaus, H. (1885). *Memory: A contribution to experimental psychology* [Online version]. Retrieved from <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Ebbinghaus/index.htm> Ebbinghaus proposed that humans remember information in a linear fashion, which he called the **serial position effect**<sup>1</sup>. He found an individual's ability to remember information in a list (e.g., a grocery list, a chores list, or a to-do list) depends on the location of an item on the list. Specifically, he found that items toward the top of the list and items toward the bottom of the list tended to have the highest recall rates. The serial position effect basically finds that information at the beginning of a list (**primacy**<sup>2</sup>) and information at the end of the list (**recency**<sup>3</sup>) are easier to recall than information in the middle of the list.

So what does this have to do with conclusions? A lot! Ray Ehrensberger wanted to test Ebbinghaus' serial position effect in public speaking. Ehrensberger created an experiment that rearranged the ordering of a speech to determine the recall of information. Ehrensberger, R. (1945). An experimental study of the relative effectiveness of certain forms of emphasis in public speaking. *Speech Monographs*, 12, 94–111. doi: 10.1080/03637754509390108 Ehrensberger's study reaffirmed the importance of primacy and recency when listening to speeches. In fact, Ehrensberger found that the information delivered during the conclusion (recency) had the highest level of recall overall.

1. The notion that when items are presented in a linear fashion people remember the items at the beginning of the list and at the end of the list.
2. Information that is presented first.
3. Information that is presented last.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A strong conclusion is very important because it's a speaker's final chance to really explain the importance of her or his message and allows the speaker to both signal the end of the speech and help the audience to remember the main ideas. As such, speakers need to thoroughly examine how they will conclude their speeches with power.
- The serial position effect is the idea that people remember ideas that are stated either first (primacy) or last (recency) in a list the most. It is important to speech conclusions because restating your main ideas helps you to take advantage of the recency effect and helps your audience remember your ideas.

### EXERCISES

1. Think about a recent speech you heard either in class or elsewhere. Did the speaker have a strong conclusion? List the elements of the conclusion that were particularly effective and ineffective. Identify two ways you could have made the speaker's conclusion stronger.
2. After listening to a speech or class lecture, close your eyes and say aloud the main points you remember from the presentation. Does your memory follow what you would expect according to the serial position effect?

## 11.2 Steps of a Conclusion

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Examine the three steps of an effective conclusion: restatement of the thesis, review of the main points, and concluding device.
2. Differentiate among Miller's (1946) ten concluding devices.

In [Section 11.1 "Why Conclusions Matter"](#), we discussed the importance a conclusion has on a speech. In this section, we're going to examine the three steps in building an effective conclusion.



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### Restatement of the Thesis

Restating a thesis statement is the first step in a powerful conclusion. As we explained in [Chapter 9 "Introductions Matter: How to Begin a Speech Effectively"](#), a thesis statement is a short, declarative sentence that states the purpose, intent, or main idea of a speech. When we restate the thesis statement at the conclusion of our speech, we're attempting to reemphasize what the overarching main idea of the speech has been. Suppose your thesis statement was, "I will analyze Barack Obama's use of lyricism in his July 2008 speech, 'A World That Stands as One.'" You could restate the thesis in this fashion at the conclusion of your speech: "In the past few minutes, I have analyzed Barack Obama's use of lyricism in his July 2008 speech, 'A World That Stands as One.'" Notice the shift in tense: the statement has gone from the future tense (this is what I will speak about) to the past tense (this is what I have spoken about). Restating the thesis in your conclusion reminds the audience of the major purpose or goal of your speech, helping them remember it better.

### Review of Main Points

After restating the speech's thesis, the second step in a powerful conclusion is to review the main points from your speech. One of the biggest differences between written and oral communication is the necessity of repetition in oral communication. When we preview our main points in the introduction, effectively discuss and make transitions to our main points during the body of the speech, and

finally, review the main points in the conclusion, we increase the likelihood that the audience will retain our main points after the speech is over.

In the introduction of a speech, we deliver a *preview* of our main body points, and in the conclusion we deliver a *review*. Let's look at a sample preview:

In order to understand the field of gender and communication, I will first differentiate between the terms biological sex and gender. I will then explain the history of gender research in communication. Lastly, I will examine a series of important findings related to gender and communication.

In this preview, we have three clear main points. Let's see how we can review them at the conclusion of our speech:

Today, we have differentiated between the terms biological sex and gender, examined the history of gender research in communication, and analyzed a series of research findings on the topic.

In the past few minutes, I have explained the difference between the terms "biological sex" and "gender," discussed the rise of gender research in the field of communication, and examined a series of groundbreaking studies in the field.

Notice that both of these conclusions review the main points originally set forth. Both variations are equally effective reviews of the main points, but you might like the linguistic turn of one over the other. Remember, while there is a lot of science to help us understand public speaking, there's also a lot of art as well, so you are always encouraged to choose the wording that you think will be most effective for your audience.

## Concluding Device

The final part of a powerful conclusion is the concluding device. A **concluding device**<sup>4</sup> is essentially the final thought you want your audience members to have when you stop speaking. It also provides a definitive sense of closure to your speech. One of the authors of this text often makes an analogy between a gymnastics dismount and the concluding device in a speech. Just as a gymnast dismounting the parallel bars or balance beam wants to stick the landing and avoid taking two or three steps, a speaker wants to "stick" the ending of the presentation by ending with a concluding device instead of with, "Well, umm, I guess I'm done." Miller observed that speakers tend to use one of ten concluding devices when ending a speech. Miller, E. (1946). Speech introductions and conclusions. *Quarterly*

4. The device a speaker uses at the end of a speech to ensure that the audience is left with a mental picture predetermined by the speaker.

*Journal of Speech*, 32, 181–183. The rest of this section is going to examine these ten concluding devices.

### Conclude with a Challenge

The first way that Miller found that some speakers end their speeches is with a challenge. A **challenge**<sup>5</sup> is a call to engage in some kind of activity that requires a contest or special effort. In a speech on the necessity of fund-raising, a speaker could conclude by challenging the audience to raise 10 percent more than their original projections. In a speech on eating more vegetables, you could challenge your audience to increase their current intake of vegetables by two portions daily. In both of these challenges, audience members are being asked to go out of their way to do something different that involves effort on their part.

### Conclude with a Quotation

A second way you can conclude a speech is by reciting a quotation relevant to the speech topic. When using a quotation, you need to think about whether your goal is to end on a persuasive note or an informative note. Some quotations will have a clear call to action, while other quotations summarize or provoke thought. For example, let's say you are delivering an informative speech about dissident writers in the former Soviet Union. You could end by citing this quotation from Alexander Solzhenitsyn: "A great writer is, so to speak, a second government in his country. And for that reason no regime has ever loved great writers." Solzhenitsyn, A. (1964). *The first circle*. New York: Harper & Row. Cited in Bartlett, J., & Kaplan, J. (Eds.), *Bartlett's familiar quotations* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Co., p. 746. Notice that this quotation underscores the idea of writers as dissidents, but it doesn't ask listeners to put forth effort to engage in any specific thought process or behavior. If, on the other hand, you were delivering a persuasive speech urging your audience to participate in a very risky political demonstration, you might use this quotation from Martin Luther King Jr.: "If a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live." King, M. L. (1963, June 23). Speech in Detroit. Cited in Bartlett, J., & Kaplan, J. (Eds.), *Bartlett's familiar quotations* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Co., p. 760. In this case, the quotation leaves the audience with the message that great risks are worth taking, that they make our lives worthwhile, and that the right thing to do is to go ahead and take that great risk.

### Conclude with a Summary

When a speaker ends with a summary, he or she is simply elongating the review of the main points. While this may not be the most exciting concluding device, it can be useful for information that was highly technical or complex or for speeches

5. Call to engage in some kind of activity that requires a contest or special effort.



lasting longer than thirty minutes. Typically, for short speeches (like those in your class), this summary device should be avoided.

### Conclude by Visualizing the Future

The purpose of a conclusion that refers to the future is to help your audience imagine the future you believe can occur. If you are giving a speech on the development of video games for learning, you could conclude by depicting the classroom of the future where video games are perceived as true learning tools and how those tools could be utilized. More often, speakers use visualization of the future to depict how society would be, or how individual listeners' lives would be different, if the speaker's persuasive attempt worked. For example, if a speaker proposes that a solution to illiteracy is hiring more reading specialists in public schools, the speaker could ask her or his audience to imagine a world without illiteracy. In this use of visualization, the goal is to persuade people to adopt the speaker's point of view. By showing that the speaker's vision of the future is a positive one, the conclusion should help to persuade the audience to help create this future.

### Conclude with an Appeal for Action

Probably the most common persuasive concluding device is the appeal for action or the call to action. In essence, the **appeal for action**<sup>6</sup> occurs when a speaker asks her or his audience to engage in a specific behavior or change in thinking. When a speaker concludes by asking the audience "to do" or "to think" in a specific manner, the speaker wants to see an actual change. Whether the speaker appeals for people to eat more fruit, buy a car, vote for a candidate, oppose the death penalty, or sing more in the shower, the speaker is asking the audience to engage in action.

One specific type of appeal for action is the **immediate call to action**<sup>7</sup>. Whereas some appeals ask for people to engage in behavior in the future, the immediate call to action asks people to engage in behavior right now. If a speaker wants to see a new traffic light placed at a dangerous intersection, he or she may conclude by asking all the audience members to sign a digital petition right then and there, using a computer the speaker has made available (<http://www.petitiononline.com>).

Here are some more examples of immediate calls to action:

- In a speech on eating more vegetables, pass out raw veggies and dip at the conclusion of the speech.
- In a speech on petitioning a lawmaker for a new law, provide audience members with a prewritten e-mail they can send to the lawmaker.

6. When a speaker asks her or his audience to engage in a specific behavior or change in thinking.

7. When a speaker asks the audience to engage in a specific behavior immediately following the conclusion of a speech.

- In a speech on the importance of using hand sanitizer, hand out little bottles of hand sanitizer and show audience members how to correctly apply the sanitizer.
- In a speech asking for donations for a charity, send a box around the room asking for donations.

These are just a handful of different examples we've actually seen students use in our classrooms to elicit an immediate change in behavior. These immediate calls to action may not lead to long-term change, but they can be very effective at increasing the likelihood that an audience will change behavior in the short term.

### Conclude by Inspiration

By definition, the word **inspire**<sup>8</sup> means to affect or arouse someone. Both affect and arouse have strong emotional connotations. The ultimate goal of an inspiration concluding device is similar to an "appeal for action" but the ultimate goal is more lofty or ambiguous; the goal is to stir someone's emotions in a specific manner. Maybe a speaker is giving an informative speech on the prevalence of domestic violence in our society today. That speaker could end the speech by reading Paulette Kelly's powerful poem "I Got Flowers Today." "I Got Flowers Today" is a poem that evokes strong emotions because it's about an abuse victim who received flowers from her abuser every time she was victimized. The poem ends by saying, "I got flowers today... / Today was a special day—it was the day of my funeral / Last night he killed me." Kelly, P. (1994). I got flowers today. In C. J. Palmer & J. Palmer, *Fire from within*. Painted Post, NY: Creative Arts & Science Enterprises.

### Conclude with Advice

The next concluding device is one that should be used primarily by speakers who are recognized as expert authorities on a given subject. **Advice**<sup>9</sup> is essentially a speaker's opinion about what should or should not be done. The problem with opinions is that everyone has one, and one person's opinion is not necessarily any more correct than another's. There needs to be a really good reason your opinion—and therefore your advice—should matter to your audience. If, for example, you are an expert in nuclear physics, you might conclude a speech on energy by giving advice about the benefits of nuclear energy.

### Conclude by Proposing a Solution

8. To affect or arouse someone.

9. A speaker's opinion about what should or should not be done.

Another way a speaker can conclude a speech powerfully is to offer a solution to the problem discussed within a speech. For example, perhaps a speaker has been discussing the problems associated with the disappearance of art education in the

United States. The speaker could then propose a solution of creating more community-based art experiences for school children as a way to fill this gap. Although this can be an effective conclusion, a speaker must ask herself or himself whether the solution should be discussed in more depth as a stand-alone main point within the body of the speech so that audience concerns about the proposed solution may be addressed.

### **Conclude with a Question**

Another way you can end a speech is to ask a rhetorical question that forces the audience to ponder an idea. Maybe you are giving a speech on the importance of the environment, so you end the speech by saying, “Think about your children’s future. What kind of world do you want them raised in? A world that is clean, vibrant, and beautiful—or one that is filled with smog, pollution, filth, and disease?” Notice that you aren’t actually asking the audience to verbally or nonverbally answer the question; the goal of this question is to force the audience into thinking about what kind of world they want for their children.

### **Conclude with a Reference to Audience**

The last concluding device discussed by Miller (1946) was a reference to one’s audience. This concluding device is when a speaker attempts to answer the basic audience question, “What’s in it for me?” The goal of this concluding device is to spell out the direct benefits a behavior or thought change has for audience members. For example, a speaker talking about stress reduction techniques could conclude by clearly listing all the physical health benefits stress reduction offers (e.g., improved reflexes, improved immune system, improved hearing, reduction in blood pressure). In this case, the speaker is clearly spelling out why audience members should care—what’s in it for them!

### **Informative versus Persuasive Conclusions**

As you read through the ten possible ways to conclude a speech, hopefully you noticed that some of the methods are more appropriate for persuasive speeches and others are more appropriate for informative speeches. To help you choose appropriate conclusions for informative, persuasive, or entertaining speeches, we’ve created a table ([Table 11.1 "Your Speech Purpose and Concluding Devices"](#)) to help you quickly identify appropriate concluding devices.

Table 11.1 Your Speech Purpose and Concluding Devices

Types of Concluding Devices	General Purposes of Speeches		
	<i>Informative</i>	<i>Persuasive</i>	
Challenge		x	x
Quotation	x	x	x
Summary	x	x	x
Visualizing the Future	x	x	x
Appeal		x	x
Inspirational	x	x	x
Advice		x	x
Proposal of Solution		x	x
Question	x	x	x
Reference to Audience		x	x

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- An effective conclusion contains three basic parts: a restatement of the speech's thesis; a review of the main points discussed within the speech; and a concluding device that helps create a lasting image in audiences' minds.
- Miller (1946) found that speakers tend to use one of ten concluding devices. All of these devices are not appropriate for all speeches, so speakers need to determine which concluding device would have the strongest, most powerful effect for a given audience, purpose, and occasion.

## EXERCISES

1. Take the last speech you gave in class and rework the speech's conclusion to reflect the three parts of a conclusion. Now do the same thing with the speech you are currently working on for class.
2. Think about the speech you are currently working on in class. Write out concluding statements using three of the devices discussed in this chapter. Which of the devices would be most useful for your speech? Why?

## 11.3 Analyzing a Conclusion

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. See what a full conclusion section looks like.
2. Distinguish among the three parts of a conclusion.

So far this chapter has focused on how to go about creating a clear conclusion. We discussed why conclusions are important, the three steps of effective conclusions, and ten different ways to conclude a speech. In this section, we're going to examine an actual conclusion to a speech. Please read the sample conclusion paragraph for the smart dust speech.



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### Sample Conclusion: Smart Dust

Today, we've explored how smart dust may impact all of our lives in the near future by examining what smart dust is, how smart dust could be utilized by the US military, and how smart dust could impact all of our lives sooner rather than later. While smart dust is quickly transforming from science fiction to science fact, experts agree that the full potential of smart dust will probably not occur until 2025. While smart dust is definitely coming, swarms of smart dust eating people as was depicted in Michael Crichton's 2002 novel, *Prey*, aren't reality. However, as with any technological advance, there are definite ethical considerations and worries to consider. Even Dr. Kris Pister's Smart Dust Project website admits that as smart dust becomes more readily available, one of the trade-offs will be privacy. Pister responds to these critiques by saying, "As an engineer, or a scientist, or a hair stylist, everyone needs to evaluate what they do in terms of its positive and negative effect. If I thought that the negatives of working on this project were larger than or even comparable to the positives, I wouldn't be working on it. As it turns out, I think that the potential benefits of this technology far outweigh the risks to personal privacy."

Now that you've had a chance to read the conclusion to the speech on smart dust, read it a second time and try to find the three parts of an introduction as discussed earlier in this chapter. Once you're finished analyzing this conclusion, take a look at [Table 11.2 "Smart Dust Conclusion"](#), which shows you how the speech was broken down into the various parts of a conclusion.

Table 11.2 Smart Dust Conclusion

Parts of a Conclusion	Analysis
<p>Today we've explored how smart dust may impact all of our lives in the near future by</p>	<p><i>Restate Thesis</i></p> <p>The first part of the conclusion is a restatement of the thesis statement.</p>
<p>examining what smart dust is, how smart dust could be utilized by the US military, and how smart dust could impact all of our lives in the near future.</p>	<p><i>Review Main Points</i></p> <p>Following the thesis statement, the speech briefly reiterates the three main points discussed in the speech.</p>
<p>While smart dust is quickly transferring from science fiction to science fact, experts agree that the full potential of smart dust will probably not occur until 2025. While smart dust is definitely in our near future, swarms of smart dust eating people as was depicted in Michael Crichton's 2002 novel, <i>Prey</i>, isn't reality. However, as with any technological advance, there are definite ethical considerations and worries to consider. Even Dr. Kris Pister's Smart Dust Project website admits that as smart dust becomes more readily available, one of the trade-offs will be privacy. Pister responds to these critiques by saying, "As an engineer, or a scientist, or a hair stylist, everyone needs to evaluate what they do in terms of its positive and negative effect. If I thought that the negatives of working on this project were larger than or even comparable to the positives, I wouldn't be working on it. As it turns out, I think that the potential benefits of this technology far outweigh the risks to personal privacy."</p>	<p><i>Concluding Device</i></p> <p>In this concluding device, we see not only a referral to the attention getter (Michael Crichton's book <i>Prey</i>), we also see a visualizing of some future oriented factors people need to consider related to smart dust, which is then followed by a direct quotation.</p> <p>Notice that in an informative speech this type of conclusion is appropriate because we are</p>

Parts of a Conclusion	Analysis
	trying to inform people about smart dust, but would you want to end a persuasive speech in this fashion? Definitely not!
	However, you could create an entire persuasive speech advocating for smart dust (its many applications are more important than the loss of privacy) or against smart dust (privacy is more important than its many applications).

### Your Turn

Now that you have seen the above analysis of a speech conclusion, we encourage you to do a similar analysis of the conclusions of other speeches. Listen to a speech in your class or online. Does it end with a restatement of the thesis, a review of the main points, and a concluding device? Can you suggest ways to improve the conclusion?

Here is another exercise to try. Consider the specific purpose and three main points of a hypothetical speech. Based on those components, develop a conclusion for that speech.



## 11.4 Chapter Exercises

### SPEAKING ETHICALLY

Tika's speech on death camps in Africa was a real flop, and she knew it. The speech was quickly prepared, inadequately researched, and not very logical. Thankfully, Tika knew she had an ace in her back pocket. She planned on ending her speech with a video showing mass graves that she knew would make people sick.

She thought, *Who cares if your speech sucks as long as you get them in the end!*

1. Would you say that Tika's approach to public speaking is ethical? Why or why not?
2. Which type of concluding device is Tika planning to use? Is this device appropriate to her speech? Why or why not? If you conclude it is not appropriate, which devices would be better approaches? Why?
3. Is it ever ethical to rely heavily on an emotional conclusion to persuade one's audience? Why?

## END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

1. Karla knows that people tend to remember the information at the beginning of a speech and at the end of a speech. What is this process called?
  - a. serial position effect
  - b. central limit theorem
  - c. law of position effect
  - d. law of limits theorem
  - e. serial limits theorem
  
2. Which of the following best explains why conclusions are important?
  - a. primacy
  - b. recency
  - c. closing stages
  - d. predominance
  - e. speech finish
  
3. What is the device a speaker uses at the end of a speech to ensure that the audience is left with a mental picture predetermined by the speaker?
  - a. recency device
  - b. predominance device
  - c. finishing device
  - d. concluding device
  - e. finalizing device
  
4. At the end of her speech, Daniel asks his audience to sign a petition helping a candidate get on the ballot in his state. By having the audience members sign the petition right after the speech, what is Daniel engaging in?
  - a. a call to public service
  - b. a call to civic duty
  - c. a proclamational appeal
  - d. an appeal to one's general sense of right and wrong

- e. an immediate call to action
5. Miller's (1946) concluding device "reference to audience" can best be summed up by which phrase?
- a. A good or a bad audience is still receptive.
  - b. It's all about me.
  - c. Don't forget to love your audience.
  - d. What's in it for me?
  - e. A suffering audience is a persuaded audience.

**ANSWER KEY**

- 1. a
- 2. b
- 3. d
- 4. e
- 5. d