

variety here. Plain words are usually the best choice. Steer clear of frilly modifiers. “Go easy on the adverbs,” he opined emphatically.

**TIME SCHEDULE FOR MONTHS 3–5
(OR MONTHS 3–6, DEPENDING ON YOUR SCHOOL SCHEDULE):
WRITING AND REVISING THE MIDDLE SECTIONS**

Reading:	Focused research and planning
Writing:	Prewrite middle sections of thesis Write and revise the middle sections Prewrite the introduction and conclusion

CHECKLIST: EFFECTIVE WRITING

- Write with plain, unaffected language.
- Use the active voice.
- Cut excess words.
- Write brief, coherent paragraphs, each based on a topic sentence.
- Use examples, stories, and quotes to enliven your text.
- Proofread each version of your text for spelling and grammar.
- Above all, make sure your ideas come through clearly.

Now that we’ve discussed writing in general, let’s consider two areas where good writing is vital: the introduction and conclusion. They are the most important pages in your thesis, and they should be the best written. The opening section should entice readers and pose your main questions directly; the final section should state your answers firmly and clearly. The next chapter discusses how you can write strong introductions and conclusions—and drive home your major ideas.

10 EFFECTIVE OPENINGS, SMOOTH TRANSITIONS, AND STRONG CLOSINGS

Now that we have covered some general writing issues, let’s turn to a couple of specific tasks: writing your paper’s introduction and conclusion. (We dealt with the middle sections in chapter 8, on prewriting.) Your opening and closing sections will be read more carefully than any others, so it’s crucial to make them your best. Begin by taking control of the subject matter. Raise the questions *you* want to raise, say why they are important, and state your argument. Then, after developing your argument and evidence in the middle sections, bring your paper to a strong conclusion by drawing together your answers, insights, and judgments.

GOALS OF YOUR INTRODUCTION

The introductory section of the paper should do three things:

- Entice the reader into the subject matter, beginning with a compelling anecdote, concrete example, real-life puzzle, or powerful overview, which should come in the first paragraph.
- Explain the topic you are studying, the material you will cover, and your argument about it; this overview of the project should come soon after the opening paragraphs.
- Orient your reader by giving a “road map” for the overall paper, explaining briefly the order of upcoming sections and what each will do; this should come at the end of the introductory section.

Let’s see how these goals are accomplished. How can you do them well? How can you avoid the pitfalls?

YOUR OPENING PARAGRAPHS

The first page of your thesis should draw the reader into the text. It is the paper's most important page and, alas, often the worst written. There are two culprits here and effective ways to cope with both of them.

First, the writer is usually straining too hard to say something terribly BIG and IMPORTANT about the thesis topic. The goal is worthy, but the aim is unrealistically high. The result is often a muddle of vague platitudes rather than a crisp, compelling introduction to the thesis. Want a familiar example? Listen to most graduation speakers. Their goal couldn't be loftier: to say what education means and to tell an entire football stadium how to live the rest of their lives. The results are usually an avalanche of clichés and sodden prose.

The second culprit is bad timing. The opening and concluding paragraphs are usually written late in the game, after the rest of the thesis is finished and polished. There's nothing wrong with writing these sections last. It's usually the right approach since you need to know exactly what you are saying in the substantive middle sections of the thesis before you can introduce them effectively or draw together your findings. But having waited to write the opening and closing sections, you need to review and edit them several times to catch up. Otherwise, you'll putting the most jagged prose in the most tender spots.

Tip: Edit and polish your opening paragraphs with extra care. They should draw readers into the paper.

After you've done some extra polishing, I suggest a simple test for the introductory section. As an experiment, chop off the first few paragraphs. Let the paper begin on, say, paragraph 2 or even page 2. If you don't lose much, or actually gain in clarity and pace, then you've got a problem.

There are two solutions. One is to start at this new spot, further into the text. After all, that's where you finally gain traction on your subject. That works best in some cases, and I occasionally suggest it. The alternative, of course, is to write a new opening that doesn't flop around, saying nothing.

What makes a good opening? Actually, they come in several flavors. One is an intriguing story about your topic. Another is a brief, compelling quote. When you run across them during your reading, set them aside for

later use. Don't be deterred from using them because they "don't seem academic enough." They're fine as long as the rest of the paper doesn't sound like you did your research in *People* magazine. The third, and most common, way to begin is by stating your main questions, followed by a brief comment about why they matter.

Tip: Good openings take several forms. Some use illuminating stories or quotes. Some raise hard questions. Others simply state the subject matter and the argument, saying why they are important and worth studying.

Whichever opening you choose, it should engage your readers and coax them to continue. Having done that, you should give them a general overview of the project—the main issues you will cover, the material you will use, and your thesis statement (that is, your basic approach to the topic). Finally, at the end of the introductory section, give your readers a brief road map, showing how the paper will unfold.

EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE OPENINGS

Quotes, anecdotes, questions, examples, and broad statements—all of them have been used successfully to begin academic books and articles. It's instructive to see them in action, in the hands of skilled academic writers.

Let's begin with David M. Kennedy's superb history, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945*. Kennedy begins each chapter with a quote, followed by his text. The quote above chapter 1 shows President Hoover speaking in 1928 about America's golden future. The text below it begins with the stock market collapse of 1929. It is a riveting account of just how wrong Hoover was. The text about the Depression is stronger because it contrasts so starkly with the optimistic quotation.

"We in America today are nearer the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land."—Herbert Hoover, August 11, 1928

Like an earthquake, the stock market crash of October 1929 cracked startlingly across the United States, the herald of a crisis that was to shake the American way of life to its foundations. The events of the ensuing decade opened a fissure across the landscape of American history no less gaping than that opened by the volley on Lexington Common in

April 1775 or by the bombardment of Sumter on another April four score and six years later.

The ratcheting ticker machines in the autumn of 1929 did not merely record avalanching stock prices. In time they came also to symbolize the end of an era.¹

Kennedy has exciting, wrenching material to work with. John Mueller faces the exact opposite problem. In *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War*, he is trying to explain why Great Powers have suddenly stopped fighting each other. For centuries they made war on each other with devastating regularity, killing millions in the process. But now, Mueller thinks, they have not just paused; they have stopped permanently. He is literally trying to explain why “nothing is happening now.” That may be an exciting topic intellectually, it may have great practical significance, but “nothing happened” is not a very promising subject for an exciting opening paragraph. Mueller manages to make it exciting and, at the same time, shows why it matters so much. Here’s his opening, aptly entitled “History’s Greatest Nonevent”:

On May 15, 1984, the major countries of the developed world had managed to remain at peace with each other for the longest continuous stretch of time since the days of the Roman Empire. If a significant battle in a war had been fought on that day, the press would have bristled with it. As usual, however, a landmark crossing in the history of peace caused no stir: the most prominent story in the *New York Times* that day concerned the saga of a manicurist, a machinist, and a cleaning woman who had just won a big Lotto contest.

This book seeks to develop an explanation for what is probably the greatest nonevent in human history.²

In the space of a few sentences, Mueller sets up his puzzle and reveals its profound human significance. At the same time, he shows just how easy it is to miss this milestone in the buzz of daily events. Notice how concretely he does that. He doesn’t just say that the *New York Times* ignored this record-

1. David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 10.

2. John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 3.

setting peace. He offers telling details about what they covered instead: “a manicurist, a machinist, and a cleaning woman who had just won a big Lotto contest.” Likewise, David Kennedy immediately entangles us in concrete events: the stunning stock market crash of 1929. These are powerful openings that capture readers’ interests, establish puzzles, and launch narratives.

Sociologist James Coleman begins in a completely different way, by posing the basic questions he will study. His ambitious book, *Foundations of Social Theory*, develops a comprehensive theory of social life, so it is entirely appropriate for him to begin with some major questions. But he could just as easily have begun with a compelling story or anecdote. He includes many of them elsewhere in his book. His choice for the opening, though, is to state his major themes plainly and frame them as a paradox. Sociologists, he says, are interested in aggregate behavior—how people act in groups, organizations, or large numbers—yet they mostly examine individuals:

A central problem in social science is that of accounting for the function of some kind of social system. Yet in most social research, observations are not made on the system as a whole, but on some part of it. In fact, the natural unit of observation is the individual person . . . This has led to a widening gap between theory and research . . .³

After expanding on this point, Coleman explains that he will not try to remedy the problem by looking solely at groups or aggregate-level data. That’s a false solution, he says, because aggregates don’t act; individuals do. So the real problem is to show the links between individual actions and aggregate outcomes, between the micro and the macro.

The major problem for explanations of system behavior based on actions and orientations at a level below that of the system [in this case, on individual-level actions] is that of moving from the lower level to the system level. This has been called the micro-to-macro problem, and it is pervasive throughout the social sciences.⁴

Explaining how to deal with this “micro-to-macro problem” is the central issue of Coleman’s book, and he announces it at the beginning.

3. James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 1–2.

4. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, 6.

Coleman's theory-driven opening stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from engaging stories or anecdotes, which are designed to lure the reader into the narrative and ease the path to a more analytic treatment later in the text. Take, for example, the opening sentences of Robert L. Herbert's sweeping study *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society*: "When Henry Tuckerman came to Paris in 1867, one of the thousands of Americans attracted there by the huge international exposition, he was bowled over by the extraordinary changes since his previous visit twenty years before."⁵ Herbert fills in the evocative details to set the stage for his analysis of the emerging Impressionist art movement and its connection to Parisian society and leisure in this period.

David Bromwich writes about Wordsworth, a poet so familiar to students of English literature that it is hard to see him afresh, before his great achievements, when he was just a young outsider starting to write. To draw us into Wordsworth's early work, Bromwich wants us to set aside our entrenched images of the famous mature poet and see him as he was in the 1790s, as a beginning writer on the margins of society. He accomplishes this ambitious task in the opening sentences of *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s*:

Wordsworth turned to poetry after the revolution to remind himself that he was still a human being. It was a curious solution, to a difficulty many would not have felt. The whole interest of his predicament is that he did feel it. Yet Wordsworth is now so established an eminence—his name so firmly fixed with readers as a moralist of self-trust emanating from complete self-security—that it may seem perverse to imagine him as a criminal seeking expiation. Still, that is a picture we get from *The Borderers* and, at a longer distance, from "Tintern Abbey."⁶

That's a wonderful opening. Look at how much Bromwich accomplishes in just a few words. He not only prepares the way for analyzing Wordsworth's early poetry; he juxtaposes the anguished young man who wrote it to the self-confident, distinguished figure he became—the eminent man we can't help remembering as we read his early poetry.

5. Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 1.

6. David Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1.

Let me highlight a couple of other points in this passage because they illustrate some intelligent writing choices. First, look at the odd comma in this sentence: "It was a curious solution, to a difficulty many would not have felt." Any standard grammar book would say that comma is wrong and should be omitted. Why did Bromwich insert it? Because he's a fine writer, thinking of his sentence rhythm and the point he wants to make. The comma does exactly what it should. It makes us pause, breaking the sentence into two parts, each with an interesting point. One is that Wordsworth felt a difficulty others would not have; the other is that he solved it in a distinctive way. It would be easy for readers to glide over this double message, so Bromwich has inserted a speed bump to slow us down. Most of the time, you should follow grammatical rules, like those about commas, but you should bend them when it serves a good purpose. That's what the writer does here.

The second small point is the phrase "after the revolution" in the first sentence: "Wordsworth turned to poetry after the revolution to remind himself that he was still a human being." Why doesn't Bromwich say "after the French Revolution"? Because he has judged his book's audience. He is writing for specialists who already know which revolution is reverberating through English life in the 1790s. It is the French Revolution, not the earlier loss of the American colonies. If Bromwich were writing for a much broader audience—say, the *New York Times Book Review*—he would probably insert the extra word to avoid confusion.

The message "Know your audience" applies to all writers. Don't talk down to them by assuming they can't get dressed in the morning. Don't strut around showing off your book learnin' by tossing in arcane facts and esoteric language for its own sake. Neither will win over readers.

Bromwich, Herbert, and Coleman open their works in different ways, but their choices work well for their different texts. Your task is to decide what kind of opening will work best for *yours*. Don't let that happen by default, by grabbing the first idea you happen upon. Consider a couple of different ways of opening your thesis and then choose the one you prefer. Give yourself some options, think them over, then make an informed choice.

USING THE INTRODUCTION TO MAP OUT YOUR PAPER

Whether you begin with a story, puzzle, or broad statement, the next part of the introduction should pose your main questions and establish

your argument. As earlier chapters noted, this is your thesis statement—your viewpoint along with the supporting reasons and evidence. It should be articulated plainly so readers understand full well what your paper is about and what it will argue.

After that, give your readers a road map of what's to come. That's normally done at the end of the introductory section (or, in a book, at the end of the introductory chapter). Here's John J. Mearsheimer presenting such a road map in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. He not only tells us the order of upcoming chapters, he explains why he's chosen that order and which chapters are most important:

THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

The rest of the chapters in this book are concerned mainly with answering the six big questions about power which I identified earlier. Chapter 2, which is probably the most important chapter in the book, lays out my theory of why states compete for power and why they pursue hegemony.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I define power and explain how to measure it. I do this in order to lay the groundwork for testing my theory. . . .⁷

As this excerpt makes clear, Mearsheimer has already laid out his "six big questions" in the introduction. Now he's showing us the path ahead, the path to answering those questions.

Tip: At the end of the introduction, give your readers a road map of what's to come. Tell them what the upcoming sections will be and why they are arranged in this particular order.

MAKING TRANSITIONS BETWEEN SECTIONS OF THE PAPER

After the introduction come the substantive middle sections of the thesis. In them, you explain your methods, present your data or textual materials, and interlace it all with your analysis and interpretation. We discussed these sections in chapter 8.

Here, I only want to mention a few more items to include as you write

7. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 27.

these middle sections. First, give each section a title, or subhead. It provides a useful guidepost to readers. If you want some examples, look at any chapter in this book. The sections within them all have descriptive subheads. Second, introduce each new section as you reach it. You can do that briefly, saying why it is important to your overall argument and why it comes next. A sentence or two will do the trick, usually at the beginning of the new section. Third, ease the transition between sections. Most should conclude with a few summary remarks and a transition, smoothing the way for the next section. Occasionally, it makes more sense to put this transition material at the beginning of the new section. Wherever it goes, the transition should lead comfortably into the next topic. It should tell the reader why you are tackling the upcoming topic, how it matters to your overall argument, and why it logically comes next in your paper.

Tip: Give each section a subhead (that is, a descriptive title). As you reach each new section, introduce it and explain why it is important. Later, as you edit, create smooth transitions between sections.

TWO ISSUES IN MAKING TRANSITIONS

There are two distinct issues in making strong transitions:

- Does the upcoming section actually belong where you have placed it?
- Have you adequately signaled the reader why you are taking this next step?

These issues correspond to the two types of editing discussed in the next chapter.

The first is the most important: Does the upcoming section actually belong in the next spot? The sections in your paper need to add up to your big point (or thesis argument) in a sensible progression. One way of putting that is, "Does the architecture of your paper correspond to the argument you are making?" Getting this architecture right is the goal of "large-scale editing," which focuses on the order of the sections, their relationship to each other, and ultimately their correspondence to your thesis argument.

It's easy to craft graceful transitions when the sections are laid out in the right order. When they're not, the transitions are bound to be rough. This difficulty, if you encounter it, is actually a valuable warning. It tells you that something is wrong and you need to change it. As one experienced thesis adviser told me: "If the points in the paper do not in fact add up to the big picture that the student wants to draw, then the transitions will be very hard to write and will likely look sloppy. Forcing students to make the transitions stronger is an important step in forcing them to be clear about what they really mean. This pays off . . ." That's exactly right, and it's wise advice. If the transitions are awkward and difficult to write, warning bells should ring. Something is wrong with the paper's overall structure.

After you've placed the sections in the right order, you still need to tell the reader when he is changing sections and briefly explain why. That's an important part of line-by-line editing, which focuses on writing effective sentences and paragraphs.

Tip: Good transitions between sections of your paper depend on

- Getting the sections in the right order
- Moving smoothly from one section to the next
 - Signaling readers that they are taking the next step in your argument
 - Explaining why this next step comes where it does

EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONS

Effective transition sentences and paragraphs often glance forward or backward, signaling that you are switching sections. Take this example from J. M. Roberts's *History of Europe*. He is finishing a discussion of the Punic Wars between Rome and its great rival, Carthage. The last of these wars, he says, broke out in 149 B.C. and "ended with so complete a defeat for the Carthaginians that their city was destroyed . . ." Now he turns to a new section on "Empire." Here is the first sentence: "By then a Roman empire was in being in fact if not in name."⁸ Roberts signals the transition with just

8. J. M. Roberts, *A History of Europe* (London: Allen Lane, 1997), 48, for both quotations.

two words: "By then." He is referring to the date (149 B.C.) given near the end of the previous section. Simple, smooth.

Michael Mandelbaum also accomplishes this transition between sections effortlessly, without bringing his narrative to a halt. In *The Ideas That Conquered the World: Peace, Democracy, and Free Markets*, one chapter shows how countries of the North Atlantic region invented the idea of peace and made it a reality among themselves. Here is his transition from one section of that chapter discussing "the idea of warlessness" to another section dealing with the history of that idea in Europe.

The widespread aversion to war within the countries of the Western core formed the foundation for common security, which in turn expressed the spirit of warlessness. To be sure, the rise of common security in Europe did not abolish war in other parts of the world and could not guarantee its permanent abolition even on the European continent. Neither, however, was it a flukish, transient product . . . The European common security order did have historical precedents, and its principal features began to appear in other parts of the world.

PRECEDENTS FOR COMMON SECURITY

The security arrangements in Europe at the dawn of the twenty-first century incorporated features of three different periods of the modern age: the nineteenth century, the interwar period, and the Cold War.⁹

It's easier to make smooth transitions when neighboring sections deal with closely related subjects, as Mandelbaum's do. Sometimes, however, you need to end one section with greater finality so you can switch to a different topic. The best way to do that is with a few summary comments at the end of the section. Your readers will understand you are drawing this topic to a close, and they won't be blindsided by your shift to a new topic in the next section.

Here's an example from economic historian Joel Mokyr's book *The Lever of Riches: Technological Creativity and Economic Progress*. Mokyr is completing a section on social values in early industrial societies. The next section deals with a quite different aspect of technological progress: the role of property rights and institutions. So Mokyr needs to take the reader across

9. Michael Mandelbaum, *The Ideas That Conquered the World: Peace, Democracy, and Free Markets* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), 128.

a more abrupt change than Mandelbaum did. Mokyr does that in two ways. First, he summarizes his findings on social values, letting the reader know the section is ending. Then he says the impact of values is complicated, a point he illustrates in the final sentences, while the impact of property rights and institutions seems to be more straightforward. So he begins the new section with a nod to the old one, noting the contrast.

In commerce, war and politics, what was functional was often preferred [within Europe] to what was aesthetic or moral, and when it was not, natural selection saw to it that such pragmatism was never entirely absent in any society. . . . The contempt in which physical labor, commerce, and other economic activity were held did not disappear rapidly; much of European social history can be interpreted as a struggle between wealth and other values for a higher step in the hierarchy. The French concepts of *bourgeois gentilhomme* and *nouveau riche* still convey some contempt for people who joined the upper classes through economic success. Even in the nineteenth century, the accumulation of wealth was viewed as an admission ticket to social respectability to be abandoned as soon as a secure membership in the upper classes had been achieved.

INSTITUTIONS AND PROPERTY RIGHTS

The institutional background of technological progress seems, on the surface, more straightforward.¹⁰

Note the phrase, “on the surface.” Mokyr is hinting at his next point, that surface appearances are deceiving in this case.

WRITING THE CONCLUSION

Your paper should have a strong, succinct concluding section, where you draw together your findings. Think of it as a conclusion, *not* a summary. The difference is that you are reaching overall judgments about your topic, not summarizing everything you wrote about it. The focus should be on

10. Joel Mokyr, *The Lever of Riches: Technological Creativity and Economic Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 176.

- Saying what your research has found, what the findings mean, and how well they support the argument of your thesis
- Establishing the limits of your argument: How widely does it apply? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your method? How clear-cut are your findings?
- Explaining how your findings and argument fit into your field, relating them to answers others have given and to the existing literature

You may also want to add some concise comments about possible future developments or what kind of research should come next, but don't lay it on too thick.

Tip: Your final section should offer conclusions and major findings; not a summary of all that came before it. The section should

- Highlight your main findings
- Show how they support your argument
- Say how your argument and findings bear on larger issues

The place of honor goes to your own explanation. Don't spend too much of your final section criticizing others. Don't introduce any big new topics or ideas. You certainly don't expect to see new characters in the last scene of a movie. For the same reasons, you shouldn't find any big new topics being introduced in the last paragraphs of a thesis.

Your concluding statement should focus on what your findings mean. How do you interpret them? Are they just as easily explained by alternative theories or other perspectives? Here, you are returning to the questions that first animated you and answering them, based on your thesis research. You not only want to give the answers; you also want to explain their significance. What do they mean for policy, theory, literary interpretation, moral action, or whatever? You are answering the old, hard question: “So what?”

Be wary of overreaching. You really need to do two things *at the same time*: explain the significance of your findings and stake out their limits. You may have a hunch that your findings apply widely but, as a social scientist, you need to assess whether you can say so confidently, based on your current research. Your reader needs to know: “Do these findings apply to

all college students, to all adults, or only to white mice?" White mice don't come up much in the humanities, but the reader still wants to know how far your approach reaches. Does your analysis apply only to this novel or this writer, or could it apply to a whole literary genre?

Tip: In your conclusion, explain both the significance of your findings and their limits.

Make it a priority to discuss these conclusions with your adviser. In my experience, the main danger here is that students finally reach this final section with only a week or two left before the due date. They don't have enough time to work through their conclusions and revise them. That leaves the paper weakest at the end, precisely where it should be strongest, nailing down the most significant points.

The solution: Begin discussing your major findings with your adviser while you are still writing the heart of the paper. Of course, your conclusions will be tentative at that stage, but it helps to begin talking about them. As always, a little writing helps. You could simply list your main findings or write out a few paragraphs about them. Either would serve as a launching pad for meetings with your adviser. You will find these discussions also shed light on the research that leads to these findings. That, in turn, will strengthen your middle sections. Later, when you draft the conclusion, review your notes on these talks and the short documents you wrote for them. They will serve as prewriting for the final section.

Tip: Discuss your conclusions with your adviser well before the paper is due. It helps to write down a few major conclusions for these preliminary discussions.

EXAMPLES OF STRONG CONCLUSIONS

As an example of how to end your paper, let's turn again to John Dower's splendid book on postwar Japan, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. In the final pages, Dower pulls together his findings on war-ravaged Japan and its efforts to rebuild. He then judges the legacies of that

period: its continuing impact on the country's social, political, and economic life. Some insights are unexpected, at least to me. He argues that Japan has pursued trade protection as the only acceptable avenue for its persistent nationalism. America's overwhelming power and Japan's self-imposed restraints—the intertwined subjects of the book—blocked any political or military expression of Japan's nationalist sentiment. Those avenues were simply too dangerous, he says, while economic nationalism was not. Dower ends with these paragraphs:

The Japanese economists and bureaucrats who drafted the informal 1946 blueprint for a planned economy were admirably clear on these objectives [of "demilitarization and democratization"]. They sought rapid recovery and maximum economic growth, of course—but they were just as concerned with achieving economic demilitarization and economic democracy. . . . Japan became wealthy. The standard of living rose impressively at every level of society. Income distribution was far more equitable than in the United States. Job security was assured. Growth was achieved without inordinate dependence on a military-industrial complex or a thriving trade in armaments.

These are hardly trivial ideas, but they are now being discarded along with all the deservedly bankrupt aspects of the postwar system. The lessons and legacies of defeat have been many and varied indeed; and their end is not yet in sight.¹¹

Remember the anecdotal opening of Herbert's book *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society*, with Henry Tuckerman's 1867 arrival in a much-changed Paris? Herbert strikes a completely different tone in his conclusion. It synthesizes the art history he has presented, offers a large judgment about where Impressionism fits among art movements, and suggests why exhibitions of Monet, Manet, and Renoir are still so popular. He manages to do all that in a few well-crafted sentences:

Although we credit [Impressionism] with being the gateway to modern art, we also treat it as the last of the great Western styles based upon a perception of harmony with natural vision. That harmony, long since lost to us in this century of urbanization, industrialization, and world

11. John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 563–64.

wars, remains a longed-for idea, so we look back to Impressionism as the painting of a golden era. We flock into exhibitions of paintings that represent cafés, boating, promenading, and peaceful landscapes precisely because of our yearning for less troubled times. The only history that we feel deeply is the kind that is useful to us. Impressionism still looms large at the end of the twentieth century because we use its leisure-time subjects and its brilliantly colored surfaces to construct a desirable history.¹²

Robert Dallek offers similarly accessible, powerful judgments in his conclusion to *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973*:

[Johnson's] presidency was a story of great achievement and terrible failure, of lasting gains and unforgettable losses. . . . In a not so distant future, when coming generations have no direct experience of the man and the passions of the sixties are muted, Johnson will probably be remembered as a President who faithfully reflected the country's greatness and limitations—a man notable for his successes and failures, for his triumphs and tragedy.

Only one thing seems certain: Lyndon Johnson will not join the many obscure—almost nameless, faceless—Presidents whose terms of office register on most Americans as blank slates. He will not be forgotten.¹³

Some writers not only synthesize their findings or compare them to others; they use the conclusion to say what their work means for appropriate methods or subject matter in their field. That is what Robert Brueggemann does in his final statement in *The Architects and the City: Holabird & Roche of Chicago, 1880–1918*. His conclusion goes beyond saying that this was a great architectural firm or that it designed buildings of lasting importance. Brueggemann tells us that Holabird & Roche helped shape modern Chicago and that its work, properly studied, helps us understand “the city as the ultimate human artifact”:

Traditional architectural history has tended to see the city less as a process than as a product, a collection of high art architectural objects in a setting dominated by mundane buildings of little interest. This tended

12. Herbert, *Impressionism*, 306.

13. Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 628.

to perpetuate a destructive and divisive attitude about the built environment, suggesting that only a few buildings are worthy of careful study and preservation while all others are mere backdrop. I hope that these explorations in the work of Holabird & Roche have shed light on parts of the city rarely visited by the architectural historian and on some little explored aspects of its history. If so, perhaps it has achieved its most basic goal: providing an insight into the city as the ultimate human artifact, our most complex and prodigious social creation, and the most tangible result of the actions over time of all its citizens.¹⁴

These are powerful conclusions, ending major works of scholarship on a high note.

What concluding paragraphs should *never* do is gaze off into the sunset, offer vague homilies, or claim you have found the meaning of human existence. (If you discover it, please write me directly.) Remember the perils of the Very Important Graduation Speech as you write your conclusion as well as your introduction. Be concrete. Stick to your topic. Make sure your conclusions stand on solid ground.

Tip: Avoid vague platitudes in your conclusion. Your goal should be reaching strong, sound judgments, firmly grounded in your readings and research.

Better to claim too little than too much. Best of all, claim what you've earned the right to say: what your research really means.

TIME SCHEDULE FOR WRITING THE INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION

You should begin drafting the introduction and conclusion only after you have written at least a rough draft of most of the thesis. That will probably be the fifth or sixth month of your thesis project, although (naturally) individual schedules vary. By then you'll have a full overview of the project,

14. Robert Brueggemann, *The Architects and the City: Holabird & Roche of Chicago, 1880–1918* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 443.

so you can give it a sharp, clear opening and draw together your major findings in the conclusion. As you write these crucial sections, you'll return to other sections and revise them in light of your introduction and conclusion. Working back and forth like this will produce a stronger, more tightly integrated work.

**TIME SCHEDULE FOR MONTHS 3-5
(OR MONTHS 3-6, DEPENDING ON YOUR SCHOOL SCHEDULE):
WRITING THE INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION**

Reading:	Focused research and planning
Writing:	Prewrite middle sections of thesis Write and revise middle sections of thesis Prewrite the introduction and conclusion

CHECKLIST: OPENINGS, TRANSITIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Remember to edit your introduction and conclusion several times. They are the last written but the most carefully read.

In the introduction do the following:

- Entice your reader into your subject.
- Explain
 - Why your topic is important;
 - What methods you will use to investigate it;
 - What texts or evidence you will rely on.
- Define your key terms and use them consistently as a "core vocabulary."
- State your thesis argument.
- Provide a road map for the overall paper.

In the middle sections of your paper

- Make sure the order of the sections is right, matching your argument;
- Smooth the transitions between sections;
- Show (briefly) why the next section comes where it does.

In the conclusion

- Highlight your main findings;
- Show how they support your thesis statement;
- Explain the range and limits of your findings and any generalizations;
- Connect your findings to larger issues.

11 GOOD EDITING MAKES GOOD WRITING

In 1776 the Continental Congress made a fateful decision to issue a statement declaring America's independence and explaining its reasons. To draft it, they formed a small committee, including John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. The committee asked Jefferson to produce an initial version. He worked quickly to convey their common ideas, thinking of himself more as a draftsman than as an original author.

Jefferson borrowed freely from the Virginia Constitution he had written earlier and from George Mason's draft of a Virginia Declaration of Rights, both based on the English Bill of Rights (1689). It was Mason, for example, who had declared that "all men are born equally free and independent" and "all power is vested in, and consequently derived from the people."¹ If those phrases are familiar, it's because Jefferson borrowed them. If they don't sound quite right, it's because Jefferson edited them to make them more compact and resonant.

Jefferson's version is the one we know. Mason had written: "standing armies, in time of peace, should be avoided." Jefferson dropped the passive voice: "There shall be no standing army but in time of actual war."² Mason had written that all men had natural rights to "the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety." Jefferson cut it once and then a second time, producing one of the most compelling lines in American history: "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."³ He returned with a powerful, eloquent document, fusing reason and passion. All in all, good enough for government work.

Now it was the Drafting Committee's turn to edit. Most of the changes

1. I have modernized the spelling. Jefferson also drew heavily on Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*. Quoted in Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 104, 124-27.
2. Quoted in Maier, *American Scripture*, 128.
3. Quoted in Maier, *American Scripture*, 134.