

Conclusions

Since readers don't enjoy being dropped suddenly at the end of an essay, a primary goal of your conclusions is to provide closure for your readers. However, contrary to what you may have been taught, you do not simply want to restate what has already been said in the essay (the reader can remember what has just been said.) Better choices would include challenging the reader to think or to act or projecting the paper's topic into the future. (Other choices are listed below.) Bear in mind that your conclusion is your last chance to impress your message on the reader's mind, so don't waste the opportunity.

First imagine that your instructor has assigned the following essay topic:

Should Congress pass laws that ban or place restrictions on violent television shows?

Here is the outline of an essay written to this question:

- I. Introduction and thesis
 - a. Freedom of expression constitutional right--on what basis set restrictions?
 - b. To protect freedom of expression and variety in programming, the responsibility to restrict any TV shows must rest with individuals--not government.
- II. Some violent shows may be instructive
 - a. real-life police and rescue shows
 - i. viewers can see what police and rescue workers have to go through
 - ii. help viewers avoid such dangerous situations
- III. Restrictions would take away individual's right to decide what to watch
 - a. Parent denied possibility to show children how to make own decisions
 - b. Encourage discussion of issues between parents and children
- IV. Some people argue that government must act as parent
 - a. First amendment more important
 - b. Individual citizens must pressure television stations and producers for changes

Now, imagine that this essay is still lacking a conclusion. Here are some strategies for completing this essay, and essays in general, with examples based on the above outline.

- **Narrative** My heart swelled with pride on my twelfth birthday when my parents presented me with a small black-and-white TV, and capped my joy by allowing me to stay up until 9 o'clock to watch Gilligan's Island. While encouraging me to make my own decisions, my parents took the time to discuss with me the programs available on TV and their good and bad points. This process of learning to make my own decisions under my parents' guidance has been invaluable to me. The government is neither the most appropriate nor the most capable entity to make these kinds of decisions.

- **Provocative question** Certainly, those who would like to see more government control of television programming have legitimate concerns. However, congressional legislation is not the answer.

Once command over programming is granted to the government, the limits of this authority may be difficult to contain. How can Americans be sure that one act of Congress won't open up a Pandora's box of restrictions that seriously limit the breadth of information that television provides?

- **Prediction** Recently a conservative religious coalition demanded that the networks ban Sesame Street for showing a woman carrying a briefcase, stating this image undermined the traditional role of women as wife and mother. Should decisions about television programming be left in the hands of any small group, our children may wake up, not to Big Bird, Burt and Ernie, but to blank-eyed images of Stepford wives reflecting the values of a politically powerful minority.
- **Quotation** Though the often horrifying images of scenes in Bosnian war camps may be offensive to some, television serves a unique and critical function by making people aware of human suffering and injustice in the world. As Dr. Martin Luther King said "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."
- **Vivid image** The flames shot into the night sky, glazing it dull red; the wooden boards crackled and spit as they crashed to the ground. A woman sobbed softly nearby as a man's arm circled her shoulder, his gaze on his church. While this image of the destruction of Black churches in the US is violent and disturbing, it communicates the reality of this crime to the public. This type of broadcast should be protected.
- **Recommendation** Every effort must be made to protect the free flow of ideas and information; therefore, the responsibility for guiding television programming content must rest with individuals. Citizens should work together to put pressure on television stations and networks to curb needless violence in these programs.
- **Warning based on history** If we allow congress to restrict violence in television programs there is no assurance that they won't also restrict other material they find objectionable. Government control of the media is a dangerous proposition, as the book burnings and iron control the Nazi government exerted over the arts in Hitler's Germany show.