Writing Introductions & Conclusions for Historical Essays

**Writing an introduction:**

* Establish the issue (background)
* Include a time frame reference
* Use one or two pieces of specific evidence to set the time period (contextualization)
* Incorporate thesis statement (one or two sentences) that directly addresses the prompt, takes a stand (historical claim), and gives support categories

**Writing a conclusion:**

One or more of the following strategies may help you write an effective conclusion:

* Play the “So What” Game. If you’re stuck and feel like your conclusion isn’t saying anything new or interesting, ask a friend to read it with you. Whenever you make a statement from your conclusion, ask the friend to say, “So what?” or “Why should anybody care?” Then ponder that question and answer it. Here’s how it might go: You: Basically, I’m just saying that education was important to Douglass. Friend: So what? You: Well, it was important because it was a key to him feeling like a free and equal citizen. Friend: Why should anybody care? You: That’s important because plantation owners tried to keep slaves from being educated so that they could maintain control. When Douglass obtained an education, he undermined that control personally. You can also use this strategy on your own, asking yourself “So What?” as you develop your ideas or your draft.
* Synthesize, don’t summarize. Include a brief summary of the paper’s main points, but don’t simply repeat things that were in your paper. Instead, show your reader how the points you made and the support and examples you used fit together. Pull it all together.
* Point to broader implications. For example, if your paper examines the Greensboro sit-ins or another event in the Civil Rights Movement, you could point out its impact on the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. A paper about the style of writer Virginia Woolf could point to her influence on other writers or on later feminists.

Strategies to avoid

* Beginning with an unnecessary, overused phrase such as “in conclusion,” “in summary,” or “in closing.” Although these phrases can work in speeches, they come across as wooden and trite in writing.
* Stating the thesis for the very first time in the conclusion.
* Introducing a new idea or subtopic in your conclusion.
* Ending with a rephrased thesis statement without any substantive changes.
* Making sentimental, emotional appeals that are out of character with the rest of an analytical paper.
* Including evidence (quotations, statistics, etc.) that should be in the body of the paper.