



THE ENDING

Your story is written, but you're not sure how to end it. If you want your readers to feel satisfied after reading your story, a well-written ending is essential.

Checklist for a Good Ending

Your ending needs a few ingredients to be really satisfying. Ask yourself these questions to make sure it contains all of them:

- **Is the main conflict resolved?**

By the end of your story, your conflict should be resolved in some way. Even if it's not a happy ending, the most pressing conflict should be over for the most part. In "Frog," the conflict is that the frog is in the house and Bree wants him gone. By the end of the story, she has gotten the frog out. That conflict has been resolved.

- **Are the other loose ends tied up?**

Other things might happen in your story that need to be wrapped up by the time you're done. In "Frog," Bree makes a mess in several rooms of her house, so it's important to mention that she cleaned this up. If she didn't clean it up, that would be okay, too, but the story should then include the parents' reaction when they saw the mess. We can't just have her mess up the house and then drop that detail completely before the story is over. The same should be true of your story: Make sure your reader isn't going to have any unanswered questions by the time the story is over.

- **Do we get a glimpse of how things will be different now?**

In a good story, something should change by the end; make sure your readers can tell what that is. The story "Frog" was about more than just a frog: Bree wanted her independence. By the end of the story, she has gotten it, but she realizes that it comes with bigger responsibilities than she'd expected. We needed that last scene to see that Bree has grown to appreciate her parents more, but she also realizes that she's strong enough to handle tough situations.

Types of Endings

Just like with openings, there are a lot of different ways to end a story. The five types listed here are just some options. For more choices, look at other short stories and novels and explore the different ways they end. Also, look through the story you already have written: You might find that there's a section in the middle that you want to move to the end.

1. Summary

One way to end your story is to summarize the situation or what the character has learned. This is not the most creative or moving type of ending, but it gets the job done. Here is a different way "Frog" could have ended if it used this type:

After that night, my parents felt more comfortable leaving me at home for longer periods of time. And even though my battle with the frog made me appreciate it more when they were around, I knew that even when things got a little scary and I could act like a big fool, in the end I could take care of things myself.

2. Description

If you end by describing something—an object, a person, a crowd—you can create a mood or suggest the character's state of mind without having to explain it. Suppose that instead of showing that Bree was feeling confident by the end of "Frog," we want to show that she really didn't want to be left alone anymore. We could have ended that story with a description of her parents sitting beside her:

While Dad went into his room to change, Mom kicked off her shoes, took her earrings off, then snuggled up next to me on the couch. I pulled my blanket over her knees and leaned into her, inhaling her perfume. My father joined us a few minutes later and curled up on the other side, the three of us like a sandwich.

Although Bree's description doesn't come right out and say it, it shows us how happy and safe she's feeling to have her parents back home. If we end the story there, the reader is left with a strong sense that Bree is mostly relieved to have her parents home and isn't thinking much about having time to herself anymore.

3. Gesture

Another way to finish the story is to have your main character do something that shows something has changed. This is how "Frog" ends. When Bree lifts the remote

and puts on another episode of *Arthur*, it's a way of showing that she's comfortable with her decision:

For a second, I pictured myself on the floor of the hall, the trash can on its side, that little buffalo wing torturing me for half the night. Then I glanced past her and saw the tennis racket leaning in the corner.

I looked back at her. "That sounds great."

I snuggled deeper into the blanket, lifted the remote, and clicked Next.

4. Dialogue

You could also end your story with a direct quote from one of the characters. In the example above (the real ending of "Frog"), if we just took off the last line, we could end the story with the quote instead.

5. Interior Monologue

Finally, a story could be ended with a few lines of interior monologue, where we hear a character's closing thoughts. If we wanted to do this with the original ending, we could remove the last two lines and instead, add a line of interior monologue:

For a second, I pictured myself on the floor of the hall, the trash can on its side, that little buffalo wing torturing me for half the night. Then I glanced past her and saw the tennis racket leaning in the corner.

I would be just fine.

What to Do Now

- Read your story or have someone else read it and go through the Checklist for a Good Ending to make sure your ending meets all of those items.
- Try some of the five ending styles with your own story until you find one that you like best. If you want more ideas, look at other stories and see how the authors chose to end them.
- Your ending might already be somewhere else in your story; you might just need to move it to the end.