Task: Writing Conclusions (Alternate Method)

Situation: This is a drafting/revision task, for clients who have an argument (or some other kind of draft) but who are looking for a way to bring it to a close.

Instructions: This advice is based on the assumption that the best way to bring any academic work to a close is to state what it is that the writing has helped the writer to learn, to figure out, to understand, to realize, etc. The first question for the client, then, is simply, “what have you learned about the topic in the process of writing this draft?” Work with the client to hone a statement of new understanding that seems appropriate to the draft.

When the client has a statement of understanding with which to close, try to work next on finding some evidence that will allow the client to test or demonstrate the new understanding. You can explain that while it’s good to be able to state what you’ve learned, it’s better to be able to prove it by putting that new learning to work. There are infinite ways to do this, so there’s no template for this kind of conclusion (that’s why conclusions are so hard to write). The best way to approach it is probably to find the evidence first, and then talk with the client about how the new understanding helps him or her to see it in a new way. During these conversations, of course, the client should be taking notes.

When you have a statement of understanding, and some evidence to test it against, give the client 10 minutes or so to draft a rough conclusion.

Outcome: Ideally, the client will have something better to write for a conclusion than the standard summary or restatement of the thesis; but it is also to be hoped that he or she will have discovered something about how writing can be a powerful tool for learning.