

Conclusions

Conclusions can best be described as complementary to the introduction. Conclusions, like introductions, can often be difficult to write because both paragraphs are concerned with the essay as a whole more than any one part. Conclusions are designed to move readers out of the specific ideas and/or argument and back into the world outside the paper. Therefore, a concluding paragraph provides a space for the final word on a subject, whether it's tying up loose ends, reiterating the importance of the topic, or broadening the topic's focus to the reader's daily life.

Typical Conclusion Elements

While each conclusion you write will be different depending on the paper topic and genre, there are three main objectives that a conclusion should seek to accomplish:

1. provide readers with an understanding of the whole paper while accentuating the significance of the thesis statement
2. bring a sense of completeness and closure to the various points in the essay
3. offer readers a lasting final impression, discuss future implications, and consider real world applications, especially with research

General Conclusion Suggestions

1. Answer the “so what” question: As you work to conclude your paper, your readers will be looking for reasons why your chosen topic and the paper are important. Be sure to show them why your ideas were meaningful and why they could be useful to readers.
2. Synthesize, don't summarize: Often we hear that conclusions are a mere summary of everything that has already been written in the paper. However, your readers have been paying attention and they have read your paper. Synthesize means to combine a number of elements into a coherent whole. Your conclusion is a great place to show readers that you selected relevant supporting research and examples that fit together to create a larger picture.
3. Move your readers back into the world with something to think about: Your audience will need to be transitioned back into the world after reading your essay. Give your readers something to think about and possibly even a way to use your research, materials, and argument in the larger world.
4. Create new meanings and connections: Not all papers are traditional arguments. Consider ways that you might offer new meanings and connections that have not previously been suggested. This is your opportunity to provide a larger picture for the reader moving forward.

Examples of Different Conclusion Types

There are several different ways that you might think about structuring your conclusion. Below are some of the different conclusion types available to you. Be sure to check with your instructor or review disciplinary conventions to ensure that you are using an appropriate conclusion for your discipline.

Triangle (sometimes called The Inverted Funnel)

One of the most common, and probably most familiar, methods of structuring a conclusion is the triangle method, sometimes called the inverted funnel method. In this method, ideas move from *specific* to *general*. This type of conclusion typically restates the thesis and then moves out to broader ideas. When restating the thesis you should be adding perspective based on what you have argued and developed in the body of your paper, meaning you will need to go beyond a simple paraphrase of your original thesis statement.

Consider the following example:

Thesis

Over the past thirty years, punk music has developed into not only the voice of a disenfranchised youth culture, but the voice of many political ideologies as well.

Conclusion

Though it has undergone many transformations in terms of both ideology and presentation over the past thirty years, punk music has been, and will continue to be, directly connected to the modern socio-political situation of our world. The genre evolves and diversifies with each new generation of people that discover and contribute to punk music. This adaptability has allowed punk music to continue to act as a bridge between that particular sub-culture and mainstream society. Instead of clinging blindly to outdated ideals, the punk community has come to terms (though sometimes grudgingly) with the fact that change is inevitable, and in the end it is how a person (or group of people) effects that change that makes the biggest difference. It is through this evolution that the genre has maintained its position as a definitive voice of not only youth culture, but as a legitimate means of rhetorical expression as well.

Simple Summary

Though a simple summary is often frowned upon because it can be dull for readers, there are certain occasions where it might be appropriate. Summarizing your findings for a long, complex, or technical project may be necessary to ensure that your readers are taking away the information they need. Additionally, an instructional text that focuses on concepts may also require a simple summary as a conclusion.

Consider the following example:

The conventions of structure, language, and reference in Schultz et al.'s "The Mysteries of Mammatus Clouds: Observations and Formation Mechanisms" adequately illustrate the conformation of a natural science text into its disciplinary writing style. By building a trustworthy author and exploiting an appropriate, critical diction, Schultz et al. are able to control the precision, accuracy, and flow of information and ideas that they wish to impart to their audience. By understanding the mechanics that Schultz et al. utilize, anyone interested in a scholarly, scientific article can grasp the authors' rhetorical purpose to the fullest extent due to their use of Linton, Madigan, and Johnson's fundamental ideals underscored in this rhetorical analysis.

Callback (sometimes called Echoing the Introduction)

The callback approach references the hook used in the essay's introduction to create a sense of completion. This hook may be an anecdote, question, or quotation with which you began. These vivid illustrations are ripe for continued exploration in the conclusion and can also help you indicate the significance of the issue to the reader. (See our handout on *Introductions* for more about creating a hook.)

Consider the following example:

Introduction

This summer, I imagine I'll find myself back at my local Cumberland Farms grabbing a quick drink on the go as I run late for work. I'll get my fix of Minute Maid lemonade and feel my heart swell with pride as I contribute to the reduction of Concord's carbon footprint by not purchasing bottled water. Then I'll finish the tangy lemonade and mindlessly chuck the bottle in the trash, effectively forgetting that I can reduce carbon emissions by reducing the amount of plastic waste I produce. Somewhere, Jean Hill, a local activist trying to ban plastic water bottles, weeps.

Conclusion

Other towns in Massachusetts and New England have ridiculed Concord's fight against plastic water bottles. While it would appear that banning water bottles is positive, it would be ineffective in the long run, and our energies could be put to better use aiding other towns in the Commonwealth. And come next January, while Jean Hill surveys the fruits of her labor, she might just realize something. There will still be plastic littering the alleys of Concord Center and the dump will still be overflowing with garbage bags. And I will still throw away my lemonade bottle without thinking about it.

Wider Significance

Examining the wider significance and implications of a topic involves making connections and applying various parts and themes of the topic to outside events, arguments, literary works, and a host of other materials available to you. This makes the reader consider how a topic is relevant outside of an essay.

Consider the following example:

It is a tragic reality that the beautiful city of Venice will not be around forever. It offers a vibrant and unique culture that no other place in the world does. It is in the world's best interest to have everyone take a part in the fight against climate change to save Venice. Unfortunately, that will be a very daunting task, considering that during the last two years the world has consistently and significantly overshot safe levels of carbon dioxide. Venice itself has taken a valiant effort to fight its impending death, with raising itself up, and taken on an enormous engineering project called MOSE. It has to since the city faces both rising sea levels since the city is in a lagoon, one that was initially seen as a haven. Now that haven poses a threat to Venice. Venice cannot win this fight against Mother Nature, nonetheless, hold out that long if it faces the fight alone. But, if there is a serious global effort to address climate change, then Venice is sure to not be lost sooner rather than later.

Call for Action or Call for Future Study

A call for action can also be considered a proposal conclusion since these conclusions state the action that needs to be taken and briefly explain its advantages over alternative actions and/or describe its beneficial consequences. A call for future study is also a proposal conclusion but it is often the step that takes place prior to a call for action. A call for future study indicates what else needs to be known or resolved before a call to action proposal can be offered. Calls for future study often occur in scientific writing.

Consider the following examples:

Call for Action

Making a secondary offense law for not wearing your seat belt in New Hampshire is the most realistic way to reduce the amount of traffic fatalities in the state. Since we both want less traffic fatalities to happen in New Hampshire then we need to consider this feasible solution. Instituting a law won't completely erase the amount of car accidents, but it can get more drivers to reduce their chance of being fatally injured. Drivers who get pulled over for speeding or running a red light will have to learn to wear their seat belt unless they want to pay more on their ticket. This is the best and most realistic way to bring the number of car accident fatalities down. The goal of creating a seat belt law in New Hampshire is to not take away freedom from its drivers, but to encourage safer driving and to reduce fatal car accidents.

Call for Future Study

This study suggests that eye contact greatly influences the first impression one makes in a business situation, based on perceptions of a population of students at North Carolina State University. In a larger study, this result might change due to a larger amount of diversity reflected by the larger group of respondents. Future research should test to see if there is such a thing as too much eye contact and if my research is an accurate depiction of the entire population at North Carolina State University, or if results may vary. First impressions are crucial in the business world, and students at North Carolina State University perceive eye contact to be an important factor in making a lasting one.

Scenic or Anecdotal

Scenic or anecdotal conclusions are most often seen in popular writing and provide a scene or brief story to show the theme of an essay rather than stating it outright. These scenes often provide emotional weight to the topic and allow the reader to discuss issues that affect real people in the world community.

Consider the following example:

I sit in the backseat of my father's Honda Accord. He, my Uncle Tommy, and I are driving back from McDonald's—a staple in my uncle's Saturday afternoon diet. My father is serenading us with a dreadful rendition of "Yesterday" by The Beatles. My uncle laughs. He knows why my dad sings. It's an admission that their shared memories matter, an admission that a life that has probably felt alone on more than one occasion is very much not alone. I ask my dad "Why do you think it matters that you have a connection to Uncle Tommy through music?" He notes that *what* and *how* lead to answers, but knowing *why* is what really gets people to move. "Music is a great connector," he replies, "it transcends. Music therapy wasn't as prevalent when Tommy was a kid, and Tommy just about devised a music therapeutic routine of his own. But I can't help but think a professional could have used music to better his childhood. I'd like to think that everyone should get a shot at crafting that sort of bond—with themselves and with other people." Yeah. I'd like to think we can make that happen too.

Posing Questions

Posing a question offers a way for the writer to pose various questions to their reader so that they can gain a new perspective, possibly one that they had not considered before reading your conclusion. Additionally, it may help readers create new meaning and possibly move them toward their own call to action.

Consider the following example:

By manipulating the elements of character voices, camera angle, background music, and variations of light exposure, the trailer for *Catching Fire* conveys the theme and concept that even the smallest amount of hope is able to overcome and conquer any fear. Because of inspiring films like *Catching Fire* and courageous characters like Katniss Everdeen, we, as a society of individuals, are reminded to never lose hope in what is right. For if Katniss, a young girl from District 12, can go on to lead a rebellion that completely changes her society then who is to say anyone else cannot do the same?

Delayed Thesis

In a delayed thesis conclusion, the thesis is stated for the first time in the final paragraph. These conclusions are often exploratory in nature, providing an introduction that states the problem rather than taking a stance. Delayed thesis can be appropriate if you are writing about a divisive or complex topic and you don't want to argue for a particular side of the argument until you present it in its entirety. As a caution, be wary of these conclusions if your instructor or the essay genre require the thesis in the introduction.

Consider the following example:

The argument that Lewis attempts to convey is easily relatable to modern music listeners. It is only realistic that everyone has tuned into a country station or network at some point in his or her life and then had an opinion about it. Personally, I agree with Lewis' argument that country music has lost its genuine sound and emotion. Much of the more modern country music has indeed failed to adhere to the stereotypical format; however, the lyrics are much more free willed and lively than the traditional sound. Modernized country has aligned itself with the youth's preferences of the twenty-first century, and due to its recent success, I don't perceive that changing anytime soon.

Common Conclusion Pitfalls to Avoid

There are seven common mistakes that can derail your conclusion. Be sure that you are considering your conclusion carefully so that you can avoid these.

1. Offering additional support in the conclusion: Introducing new information or a subtopic in your conclusion means that your readers will want more information. It is unlikely that your readers will feel a sense of closure. Additionally, these conclusions can feel a bit jumbled as if you're saying, "I found some really great information, but I didn't know where to fit it other than the conclusion." If you find yourself saying this about your conclusion, you may need to integrate some of your ideas into the rest of the paper. If the facts don't fit, it can be hard to leave them out when it took you a great deal of time to do the research, but it's better to have a paper that is organized and coherent for the reader.
2. Ending with a generality or cliché: Consider the fact that you have spent a great deal of time constructing a paper or argument and now you are leaving your reader with your final thoughts. If your final thought is a generality or cliché that they could have gotten without reading your paper, your readers might be annoyed and wonder why they took the time to read your essay. These endings tend to undermine your credibility and essay very quickly.
3. Announcing what your paper has done or shown: It's natural to feel like perhaps your conclusion should end with phrases like, "In summary," "In conclusion," "In closing," or "In this paper, I have shown," but these phrases are best left out. They often come across as a bit stiff. Additionally, these phrases are more appropriate for speeches or oral presentations since listening audience members don't have the ability to see that you are coming to a close given that they don't have the full text in front of them.
4. Apologizing for the shortcomings of your paper: This is where revision can be your friend. If you feel like you have not stated your points adequately, be sure to revise your essay until it is strong enough for you to feel comfortable sharing with the intended final audience. Otherwise, you risk creating annoyed readers who feel like they have read a paper that wasn't ready and should not have been given to them.

5. Repeating your introduction and thesis without any substantive changes: The callback technique does allow you to return to anecdotes, statistics, or quotes that were used in your introduction to help make the significance of your paper clear. However, if you repeat exactly what you have said before your audience may feel a bit insulted. They don't want to read the same text a second time. Additionally, conclusions where the thesis and/or introduction are copied and pasted word-for-word are typically short and don't move ideas forward. These types of conclusions are often written because the writer can't think of anything else to say. Be sure to consider all your points carefully and offer a new idea, perspective, or proposal that readers can take with them.
6. Relying on sentimental, emotional appeals that don't fit the tone of the rest of the paper: Certain issues are divisive and are bound to get writers and readers fired up. However, if you have been using an analytical tone throughout the rest of your paper, you may want to offer more sophisticated commentary rather than an emotional argument. An emotional argument doesn't work as a substitute for broadening perspective.
7. Stating the thesis for the first time (for many genres): Remember that the expectations of certain genres require that you state your thesis early in your introduction. It can be very tempting to hold back and amaze your readers with your profound insight on a topic after thoroughly exploring various pieces of an argument. However, if your reader is familiar with the genre and it requires a thesis in the introduction, they don't expect to have to hunt down clues like Sherlock Holmes just to figure out what you're arguing. Make sure your thesis is stated early and that the rest of your essay adheres to what you're seeking to argue or prove. Some genres do, however, allow you to state your thesis in the conclusion. For example, exploratory or I-search essays are two such genres. See the delayed thesis conclusion above for more about how you might construct a thesis in your conclusion for exploratory essays, I-search essays, and other similar genres.