

Conclusions: How to End Your Academic Essays

This is it! You have finally reached the end of the paper that you have spent countless hours thinking about, writing, and revising. Now, you just have to write your conclusion. But what is left to say?

Although many people believe that the conclusion paragraph of an essay basically entails restating the introduction with a few minor changes or paraphrasing, the conclusion can be so much more....

Here are some helpful strategies when dealing with conclusions:

✎ **The “Who Really Cares?” Approach:** By asking yourself some questions about the information you present in your conclusion, you can come up with more concise ideas than you may have already generated. Try asking yourself “so what?,” “who really cares?,” or “why is this important in people’s lives?” You may be able to frame your final thoughts in a way that you had not thought of previously and make your point relevant to the reader’s experiences.

Remember: Sometimes, it is helpful to go back to the introduction and look at how you set up the purpose of the paper. Did your essay make your points? Maybe in the conclusion, you can return to your theme and propose a new course of action that could be taken in the future.

✎ **The “Curtain Closes” or “Full Circle” Approach:** If you proposed a certain theme or scenario in the introduction of your paper, then you may wish to return to that idea in the final paragraph as a way of enforcing your point. This type of conclusion works much like the first and last scene of a play, where the writer provides the resolution to the questions presented in the first part.

Remember: When using this approach, make sure your introduction and conclusion are not too similar. The conclusion should offer your “final” statement on the matter (at least until your next essay!)

✎ **The “Food For Thought” Approach:** You could also try leaving your reader with a provocative question or problem at the end of an essay, so that he or she will continue to think more about your ideas long after the actual reading of the paper.

Remember: Although asking a question may be interesting, make sure that it is pertinent to the matter at hand. You might also want to avoid asking a question that is so general it seems overwhelming and beyond the paper’s scope. For instance, if you were writing a paper about the conservation of forests, you would probably want to avoid a question about the future of all environmentalism.

✎ **The “Quotable Conclusion” Approach:** If you are able to find a quote or a piece of information that fits very nicely in with your ideas or makes a final point about your paper, you may wish to use it in the conclusion.

Remember: Although it may be helpful to use a quote that summarizes your ideas, your own thoughts are just as useful and may be even more effective in your conclusion. Any quotes given should be extremely relevant to the paper’s topic and other research.

Things to Avoid in Conclusions of Academic Essays:

✗ **Avoid the “Summary” Approach:** We have all read these before, and many of us are guilty of also writing them. Although it may be tempting to simply summarize all of the information that you have just provided to the reader in the conclusion, this kind of closing does not provide any new thoughts, and so it may be a bit tedious to read. Try synthesizing, instead of summarizing. What are the broader implications of the ideas that you have presented?

Remember: In a longer paper, it is okay to go back to some main ideas and remind the reader of your theme, but try to frame your ideas in new ways, so that the conclusion does not seem like a regurgitated introduction.

✗ **Avoid the “Who Done It?” Approach:** As many of us know, in any kind of crime or mystery-related show, you find out who committed the crime in the last ten minutes of the program, with few exceptions. So how does this relate to writing? Some writers feel that if they save their thesis statement until the very last paragraph, they will dazzle their readers with the interesting placement of their main ideas. In American writing, this often frustrates the reader. If you save all of your main points until the last paragraph, your reader may be left a little baffled, and may feel the need to go back to re-read the entire paper, just to make sure it actually ties together.

Remember: Since the introduction helps the reader to set a certain expectation for the paper as a whole, by the conclusion you should have already fully explored the ideas of your paper.

✗ **Avoid the “Bonus Feature” Approach:** You might have found some really interesting tidbit of new information over the course of your researching travels, but the conclusion is not the place to put that information. If you can work it into a body/central paragraph, great; if not, then chances are, you might not be able to use it in that paper at all.

Remember: The conclusion is the time to wrap things up, so if you present too many new ideas at the end, the reader may wonder why you did not address those thoughts earlier in the paper.

✗ **Avoid the “Bleeding Heart” Approach:** Although you may feel strongly attached to and influenced by your paper, using one’s emotions for writing an analytical or research paper may not be the best guide. This approach is otherwise known as the “America the Beautiful” Approach, because it draws on widely known or felt ideas, but fails to create any kind of real sentiment.

Remember: You can convey your thoughts very powerfully just through your word choice and style, so there is no need to write the conclusion in a way that seeks to manipulate the reader into feeling overly emotional. By using more sophisticated tactics, you can make a point in an academic manner.

✗ **Avoid the “Society is Doomed!” or “It Doesn’t Really Matter” Approach:** For persuasive essays or those on controversial topics, avoid ending the essay by concluding nothing can be done and all efforts are futile; likewise, don’t conclude that your topic really doesn’t matter to society. This may make the reader of your paper wonder why they bothered to read your essay.

Remember: It’s okay to take a stand; to make it more honest you can show the complexity of the issue throughout your paper rather ignoring key information in your essay or conclusion.

For more information on conclusions, please feel free to visit:

✗ “Conclusions” by the Writing Center at the University of North Carolina:
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/conclusions.html>

✗ “How to Write a Conclusion,” by Rachel Scott, on www.suite101.com:
http://essay-writing.suite101.com/article.cfm/how_to_write_a_conclusion

✗ “Ending the Essay: Conclusions,” by the Writing Center at Harvard University:
<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Conclusions.html>

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