

How to Write an Effective Conclusion

Many students find concluding paragraphs difficult to write for several reasons. The conclusion is typically created at the end of the writing process, when you are tired and your creativity is running low. You may have been taught conflicting approaches to writing conclusions, with some suggesting a simple inversion of the introduction (thesis → generalizations), and others emphasizing that you should avoid this approach at all costs. While there is no one right way to construct a concluding paragraph, there are some general guidelines that can help you end your paper on a strong note.

Some Tips On What You Can Do In Your Conclusion

1. Implicitly restate your thesis/position.

While it is not advisable from a stylistic standpoint to simply copy your thesis and paste it at the end of your paper, restating your argument in a more general form is important because it shows the reader you have a cohesive argument that is evident in your work from start to finish. Think of it this way: in a general sense your thesis states “I **will** argue that...”, while your conclusion should emphasize “I **have** argued that...” The thesis is meant to establish the direction of your essay; the conclusion should make it clear to the reader that you have kept on track and supported your argument.

2. Emphasize the importance of your subject by placing it in a larger context.

This does not mean stating “in the history of the world, my topic is the most important”; it does mean answering the “so what?” question that all readers of academic writing ask. Essentially, why was it important that you wrote your paper on

this subject? What meaning does it have in your field of study, or even in society as a whole? State the significance of your argument by relating it to these larger areas of inquiry.

Show how your argument might advance knowledge in a discipline, take a position in a larger debate, or provide solutions to a problem.

3. Offer suggestions for the future based on what you have argued.

In a similar vein to offering context for your argument, projecting what you have argued into the future allows the reader to see the meaningfulness of your argument. Assuming that you have made your point effectively, the reader is likely to take your predictions seriously and thus see additional relevance in what you have argued up to this point. Looking to the future can also make your reader consider your argument long after they have finished with your paper.

4. End on a relevant and powerful quote or anecdote that serves to “sum up” your paper.

If you can, end your conclusion (and thus, your paper) on a succinct quote or illustrative example of your argument. Academic readers like to see essays ended in a concise and meaningful way. Quotes, anecdotes or examples can allow you to do end your essay in a way that both gets your main point across and is stylistically effective.

Some Tips On What *Not* To Do In Your Conclusion

1. Do not bring in new material.

The conclusion is your space to wrap up your paper, not throw in any additional points that you were not able to work into your body paragraphs. It is one thing to generalize or place your argument in a broader academic context, but it is quite another to introduce a whole new idea that you do not have room to develop. If you find yourself mentioning additional ideas in the conclusion, do your reader and yourself a favour – add in another body paragraph and expand on the new idea in an effective way.

2. Do not weaken your position by apologizing for what you have already argued.

If your paper has followed the conventions of academic writing—if you have created a thesis and given evidence to support your position—then you have met the reader’s expectations. Ending your essay by apologizing for your stance detracts from the argument you should actually be emphasizing.

3. Do not end on a “cliff hanger,” leaving the reader feeling unsatisfied

Remember, your paper is meant to provide evidence to support your thesis, so your goal should be to conclude it in such a way that the reader feels all questions have been addressed. A paper that hints at further information, or that promises to resolve an issue but never does, will not help you make your argument. Your goal is to create a self-contained argument within the essay, not leave the reader waiting for a sequel.

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