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Conclusions

Make Your Last Words Count

What makes an effective conclusion depends on the particular needs of your paper or writing task. A conclusion can be one or two paragraphs, and depending on the length of your paper, several paragraphs. Or in a thesis, dissertation, or book, an entire chapter.

Some professors or employers will think of them as a significant part of your paper, and others will think of them as merely an endpoint to an assignment or piece of writing. Regardless of the assignment, in a well-crafted conclusion you can provide the final word on the value of your analysis, research, or paper. **Complete your conclusions with conviction!**

To Summarize or Not to Summarize: That is the Question

Ineffective conclusions tend merely to repeat an introduction. Sometimes, they recount the main points in a paper without recasting these points in light of the intellectual work accomplished by the writer over the course of the paper.

Effective conclusions take the time to bring your paper to a meaningful and purposeful ending. Depending on the length or complexity of the paper some summary of the key points will remind readers of the ground you've covered. However, as a basic guideline, in a concluding paragraph, the summary should only

represent a small fraction, typically no more than 1/5th, of the whole paragraph. In other words, effective conclusions take the paper beyond summary and can be effective in many ways. They demonstrate a further appreciation of the paper's argument and its significance, in other words, why it works, why it is meaningful, and why it is valuable.

The Purpose of a Conclusion

However, the **purpose** of the conclusion is to give readers a sense of the use value of the completely developed argument or thoroughly answered question. Consider the conclusion from the reader's perspective. At the end of a paper, a reader wants to know what your analysis or argument means, or how to benefit from the work you accomplished in your paper. Here are **four ways to think about the purpose of a conclusion**.

The purpose of a conclusion can be:

- To **make a connection** between the paper's completely argued or explained findings and another related, sometimes larger, context (like another discipline).
- To **offer a policy or plan** that could benefit from your work.
- To **set up future work** by suggesting ideas for further research or questions to explore.
- To **recast, or further explain, the thesis or purpose statement** in a way that benefits from the improved understanding provided in the paper.

When you take time to think about and write a strong, purposeful conclusion, you are investing in the overall quality of your paper.

How to Write a Purposeful Conclusion: Some Practical Advice

Make a Connection: to write a purposeful conclusion, show how the work you accomplished in one paper can help us to think about another subject or discipline. For example: In an anthropology paper exploring the way people treated their domestic farm animals in 19th-century London, a writer could draw a connection that shows how based on the attitudes Londoners had toward their beasts of burden these attitudes greatly influenced how they treated children.

Londoners' actions to protect their animals early on caused them to see the value of preserving their animals from unnecessary harm. These actions directly led to the establishment of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. And it is because of those steps that Londoners later on formed the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. As such, were it not for the ways the British treated their animals, seeking to protect this resource necessary to their agricultural economy, this may have delayed their first efforts to protect their next important resource, Britain's children. Thus, in order to better understand how a people relate to their most vulnerable members, consider first how they treat their animals in different aspects of their society.

Offer a Policy or Plan: depending on the paper or project, a writer can offer a way to convert the work of an argument or research into a policy or plan to demonstrate a practical use or application for the ideas argued in the paper.

Set Up Future Work or Writing Projects: a writer can also suggest, in a conclusion, that the work completed in a paper is in fact necessary in order to complete the next phase of a project, to further the research which is now possible because of this paper's argument. For example: the findings of one experiment or of a research project inevitably suggest new lines of research for the future, new questions to pursue, or new methods to try.

Recast or Further Explain the Thesis or Purpose Statement:

given the time you will likely devote to writing a paper, it seems reasonable for a reader to expect you to have something significant to say at the end of a paper. After all, when readers have invested their time considering your argument, they expect some form of dividend for their efforts. Remember to keep implications or ideas for future research limited and fairly brief.