

Conclusion

The conclusion is a formal consideration of the strength of your position. Like a lawyer addressing the jury for the last time before a verdict is rendered, you must be at your most lucid and your most persuasive.

The chief difference between the introduction and the conclusion is that the former concentrates on the **topic** of your paper and the latter on the argument your paper presents. You must briefly sum up the strength of your case and the weaknesses of your opponent's case, you must remind your audience of your most telling pieces of evidence, and you must do still more: You must explain the implications of your argument.

Never rush your ending; if you do, expect your audience to read your conclusion with the same attention that you devoted to composing it. Your conclusion is not simply a summary that adds the emphasis and clarification needed after a long and complex discussion; it is also an important part of your argument.

1. Conclusions: The Four R's

Remember the *four R's* of the complete conclusion: **reiterate**, **reply**, **recommend**, and **reflect**. You may not always *perform* all four tasks, but you should always *consider* them.

Reiterate Once you have proven your point, restate your thesis with suitable emphasis and conviction. Do more than this: Repeat the best points of your argument. Remember, your thesis is a proposition weighing and assessing a set of facts; your conclusion, in reiterating that proposition, weighs and assesses your argument. While the content is largely the same, the orientation is quite different: The introduction deals with the subject, the conclusion with the achievement of the paper.

Reply You must reply to any objections your opponents raise (or may raise). It is easy to win in the absence of an active opponent; to be truly convincing you must anticipate counter arguments and dispose of them. Do not abandon your own case to argue your opponent's, but give the opposition at least the appearance of a fair hearing. This is a useful device, but be sure that you use it to further your argument. Always consider the relation of your current task to your thesis. If exploring counter-arguments supports your thesis, it is worth doing.

Recommend Proving your thesis should suggest some course of action; something should follow from what you demonstrate. Ask yourself a serious question at the end of your paper: "So what?" Something should follow from your argument. The presence of recommendations is largely a question of subject matter. Literary criticism ranges from technical analysis to praise or condemnation, but it rarely endorses a course of action. Business reports, on the other hand, are usually prepared to determine appropriate action.

Reflect Ending with a reflection may not always be appropriate, but a single argument can often urge the re-examination of a whole question or at least contribute to our general understanding of an area of study. This is precisely how the third sample conclusion (below) works: It offers a general reflection on the whole discipline of engineering. The suggestion that a conclusion ought to engage in some broad speculation or extrapolation is dangerous; beware of massive generalizations. This passage, for example, should not conclude a short essay examining Antigone's motives:

Thus, we can see from *Antigone* that Sophocles is a great and influential writer.

This may be true, but it hardly follows from a brief discussion of a single play; indeed, the essay is irrelevant to the truth of the statement. This is hardly an appropriate relationship for a paper to bear to its own conclusion!

2. Writing a Strong Conclusion: Examples

The length of your reiteration depends upon the length and complexity of your argument. It will be a very brief matter in a short paper and a long, careful section in a lengthy dissertation. Notice that each of the sample conclusions at the end of this section repeats its thesis and briefly sums up its major points.

These conclusions are markedly different in other ways. The first passage judges the role of television in violent behaviour. It makes no recommendations but apportions blame, presumably in response to a contrary interpretation. The second conclusion argues for a particular course of action. The third analyzes a situation and interprets the event. It does not decide the cause of the disaster; it merely examines the implications of this conclusion, which was reached by the investigators of the bridge's collapse.

FIRST EXAMPLE:

Violence was not created by television. The links between television and juvenile violence are clear, but we must beware of drawing false conclusions from this correlation. If television is permitted to be the sole influence on a child and if there is no context within which the child views television, the consequences can be damaging and indeed grotesque. The television does not, however, corrupt the child unaided; that process begins earlier and is instigated by the forces that make television the child's guardian and moral arbiter -- roles for which it is completely unsuited. Clearly, television does not seek to be a universal nanny; relatively little thought and money is applied to children's programming. That it becomes one is a tragic and dangerous outcome, but one for which television itself is not to blame.

SECOND EXAMPLE:

Theatre cannot survive if it does not compete with its rivals. Ignoring the cinema, ignoring television, and ignoring the potent combination of the two in video tape and laser disk entertainment has cost the theatre its audience. It is no longer possible for the theatre to consider itself a world apart. Every venture of this kind has failed, from the American Laboratory Theatre to the modern collectives

nurtured by the State in good times and discarded in the bad. No argument for an eclectic or elite theatre has managed to deal with the questions of audience and funding; none will. Theatre must rise and face the competition squarely. It must, in short, do what every other industry has done: enter a world market place with no protection for stragglers and weaklings.

THIRD EXAMPLE:

Neither the live load on the bridge nor the dead weight of the road surface was responsible for the structure's collapse. Instead, it was the degeneration of the eyes of several flawed links of the forged support chains, accelerated by temperature cycling on that unusually cold December morning. Because of their susceptibility to this type of failure, chain suspension systems are not used in new constructions. Since 1971 the Department of Highways has been replacing the older structures, but, for the present, the danger remains. The collapse of the Wannasakase Bridge from a series of minor and unpredictable failures is a reminder of the limitations of engineering standards and of inspection procedures.