

Writing a conclusion

You might feel that there is nothing more you can say on the topic by the time you reach the conclusion of your assignment, yet it is important to put effort into writing it. The conclusion is the last section that your lecturer or tutor will read, and you need to leave the impression that you are confident about your thesis and are able to bring your points together at the end in a smooth, logical and convincing manner. Even if you write a competent, strong essay, a weak conclusion will diminish its effect. Your conclusion is your last chance to persuade your lecturer to your point of view.

Structure – If you imagined the structure of your introduction as a funnel (where you start with the general context and move to more narrow and specific information and to your thesis) you could imagine your conclusion as an upside-down funnel.

This means that it would be good to **start the conclusion with your main thesis/argument**. This way you are linking your conclusion back to your essay question. It wouldn't be phrased exactly the same – in the introduction you posed your argument for which you were going to give evidence, supporting material and analysis. Now, you are repeating your argument in the light of everything you have analysed or discovered.

When you have summed up your argument and the main points that you covered, you should **move into the more general area – the wider context**. You could use a quotation from a primary or secondary source that expands or reinforces your argument, or even complicates it further (however, don't just leave the quotation there on its own, without introducing it or saying something about it). You could also comment on how your argument fits into a bigger picture (for example, if your essay was on 'The rhetoric of President Reagan and the impact of his inaugural speech' you could pose questions in general about the use of public speaking to promote a political agenda, or you might link it to the most recent presidential speeches).

You could finish by making predictions or by **pointing to further study or further research** that could be done in the area.

Conclusions should be neither too short nor too long. If the conclusion is very short, it leaves the impression that you ran out of time or haven't been able to bring your points together to a logical end. If the conclusion is too long, it leaves the impression that you are disorganised, trying to fit in the material that should have been in the body of the essay.

The conclusion is usually about 10-15% of your paper (e.g. around 250 words in a 2,000 word essay).

What to avoid in your conclusion:

- Don't use phrases like 'in conclusion', 'to summarise', 'to conclude', 'in brief' etc. They are unnecessary, overused and they break the flow.
- Don't just summarise your essay. Rather, remind your lecturer of the key ideas and most important points of your essay and why they are significant or useful, or how they challenge or compare to the established or prevailing ideas in the field.
- Don't simply repeat what you said in your introduction.
- Don't introduce any new ideas or points that you haven't discussed in the body.
- Don't end on a weak note. Remain confident and avoid phrases like 'this is just one opinion' or 'there are better ways to analyse this'. This approach will undercut your argument and your authority and will make the essay less persuasive.