UCLA UNDERGRADUATE WRITING CENTER

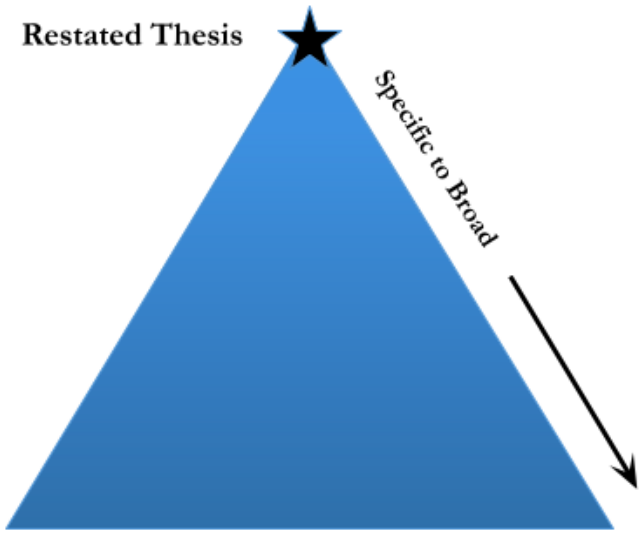
Is Your Conclusion "Done"?

The hardest part of a conclusion is often knowing when to put your pencil down or lift your fingers from the keyboard. There aren't any hard and fast rules for knowing when your conclusion is "done", but in this handout you will find some **guidelines** to follow for knowing that you've created a great concluding paragraph **without** writing too much (or too little).

NOTE: This handout is geared towards conclusions for **3-15 page essays and assignments** rather than research papers and other larger assignments. You might find some of this advice helpful, but more complex and specialized writing assignments usually have different rules and expectations for their conclusions.

Structure & Length of a Conclusion

Your conclusion will probably be shorter than most or all of your body paragraphs and closer to the length of your introduction paragraph, if not shorter. The general structure for your conclusion will start specific and then become more broad by the end, like you see in this visual.



The sentence structure can roughly be broken down like this:

- **2-4 sentences**: synthesize thesis and main points of your body paragraphs
- **1-3 sentences**: write about the significance of these ideas, sometimes called the "so what" of your paper or argument
- TOTAL: your conclusion should probably be about **5-7 sentences**

As you can see, part of how a conclusion works is that you don't really need to read the whole paper to follow along because conclusions already summarize your main argument and ideas.

Tips for Writing a Conclusion[1]

Do this!!	**Do not do this[2]**
Look outwards from your main argument towards the broader implications of your ideas.	Introduce a totally new topic, idea, or argument.
Leave your reader with an idea to think about and expand on in their own time with your conclusion. Body paragraphs are for answers and explanations, but conclusions are for further thought--you don't have to give your reader all the answers!	Focus on a minor point in your argument from one body paragraph (if you find yourself doing this in your conclusion, it might be a sign that this idea should be part of your argument!).
Make sure you are bringing your argument in with new and interesting wording that really shows your reader how these ideas all connect.	Give your reader a word for word restatement of your thesis and main ideas.
Think of the purpose of your conclusion as the "so what" or "why does this matter" of yyour essay.	Start with "In summary…" or "In conclusion…" unless your professor specifically asks for it → your reader should be able to tell that this is your conclusion **without** these words.

[1] Information and activities in this section adapted from Indiana University Bloomington Writing Center: https://wts.indiana.edu/writing-guides/writing-conclusions.html

[2] Information and activities in this section adapted from University of Richmond Writing Center: http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/conclude.html

What the "So What" Looks Like in Different Types of Papers

The **"so what"** for an argument often changes depending on the subject of the paper you're working on. You bring this "so what" into the conclusion in those **last 1-3 sentences** to help broaden the meaning of your paper or apply it to the real world. Below, you'll find a table with **brainstorming tips** for different types of papers. These are **NOT** hard and fast rules, but they're helpful for brainstorming the last few sentences of your paper.

Type of Essay	Brainstorming a "So What" in your conclusion
Analyzing a novel or literary work (usually **English** or **English composition** essays)	- Brings your argument out of the literary world and into the real world - Does your argument have something to say about reality?
Analyzing historical events or trends (usually **history** essays)	- Discuss how these events or trends impact today or how they impacted an event or trend later on
Analyzing current events or trends (usually **social science** essays)	- Delve into how these events or trends may impact the future or other areas of life - If you're talking about a problem, you could also bring in an idea for how to help fix or reduce this problem
Analyzing data, findings, and experimental research (usually **science** essays or any paper that's **reporting research**)	- Look at where future research should go - Explain some of the holes in current knowledge - Consider some of the limitations of the research, unless you already have a "limitations" paragraph or section earlier in the paper

As you write the "so what" of your conclusion you can also think about answering one of the questions below. If you've already written your conclusion, see if it answers at least one of these questions:

- Does it tell your reader why this matters **in the real world** or in today's world?
- Does it **connect to a larger theme** from the course?
- Does it **pose a new research question** or something that needs to be looked into further based on your argument or findings?
- Does it address the **limitations of your argument**

Examples of Ineffective Conclusions

Description	Example
The "That's My Story and I'm Sticking to It" Conclusion: This conclusion just restates the thesis and is usually painfully short. It does not push the ideas forward.	In conclusion, Frederick Douglass was, as we have seen, a pioneer in American education, proving that education was a major force for social change with regard to slavery.
The "Sherlock Holmes" Conclusion: Sometimes writers will state the thesis for the very first time in the conclusion. The reader, however, does not expect a mystery, but an analytical discussion of your topic in an academic style, with the main argument (thesis) stated up front.	(After a paper that lists numerous incidents from the book but never says what these incidents reveal about Douglass and his views on education): So, as the evidence above demonstrates, Douglass saw education as a way to undermine the slaveholders' power and also an important step toward freedom.
The Pep Talk Conclusion: This kind of conclusion usually draws on emotion to make its appeal, but while this emotion and even sentimentality may be very heartfelt, it is usually out of character with the rest of an analytical paper. A more sophisticated commentary, rather than emotional praise, would be a more fitting tribute.	Because of the efforts of fine Americans like Frederick Douglass, countless others have seen the shining beacon of light that is education. His example was a torch that lit the way for others. Frederick Douglass was truly an American hero.
The "Grab Bag" Conclusion: This kind of conclusion includes extra information that the writer found or thought of, but couldn't integrate into the rest of the paper. You may find it hard to leave out details that you discovered after hours of research and thought, but adding random facts and bits of evidence at the end of an otherwise-well-organized essay can just create confusion.	In addition to being an educational pioneer, Frederick Douglass provides an interesting case study for masculinity in the American South. He also offers historians an interesting glimpse into slave resistance when he confronts Covey, the overseer. His relationships with female relatives reveal the importance of family in the slave community.

Examples of Effective Conclusions

Description	Example
Women & Gender Studies Essay: Notice how the conclusion briefly summarizes the writer's article's main claims before turning to the consequences of her strongest claims. The first statements of the conclusion, a restatement of the thesis, synthesizes the main points previously discussed.	While there are still many questions left unanswered about the McKoys, and many possible truths to be drawn from their lives, I have aimed in this article to establish that at least two things are not true: the tale of the beneficent and beloved slave owners and the resigned, downcast expression on Millie's face in the altered picture. Moreover, I contend that turning away from historical legacies keeps us from being able to understand them and to imagine different futures. We need to develop paradigms of analysis that allow us to perceive and interpret both the radical empowerment of the McKoys' lives and the oppressions that are no less fundamental to their story. Such an analysis must allow for dissonance, contradictions, and even discomfort in its gaze. Only then can we move forward with the work of shaping new representations and new possibilities for extraordinary bodily experience.
Mechanical Engineering Essay: Notice how the author explains the limitations of their findings, and identifies specific future developments that would make their proposal more accurately testable. The first statement of the conclusion, a restatement of the thesis, reiterates the paper's main purpose and findings.	The horizontal whiffle tree mount should have performed the best considering the kinematics of the 16 support points, as well as theoretically displaying the least amount of gravitational distortions. However, due to possible friction at the pivoted joints and the current tolerances on the whiffle tree system, there were difficulties in using this mount. At this time, the process of averaging the measurements taken at four vertical orientations appears to be the best approach.

Check out the presentation that goes along with this handout by clicking here!