

CONCLUDING PARAGRAPHS

You've just written the last body paragraph of your paper—now what? Now that you've reached the conclusion, should you just restate your thesis and summarize everything you discussed in your essay, or should you do something else? Conclusions are tough to write because they feel so important. They're the last words we leave our readers thinking about.

To some extent, the answers to the questions above depend on the kind of paper you are writing and the requirements of your assignment. If your instructor has provided you with specific information about how your conclusion should be structured and what it should include, you should follow their guidance.

In most cases, however, there are a number of ways you can approach writing a conclusion.

In general, you never want a reader to finish your essay and think “so what?” Every part of your essay should develop your main point in a way that shows your readers why your argument is an important one to consider. The conclusion is the place where you can really drive home the purpose of your essay. **As you write your conclusion, think about these questions:** So what? Why have you made this argument? Why should your readers agree with what you've said and the way you've said it? Why does what you've written about *matter*? Use your answers to these questions to help you write a strong conclusion. Leaving your readers with a sense of the importance and implications of your argument and analysis is a good way to reinforce the thesis and purpose of your essay.

Here are some other important questions to ask yourself to make sure you stay on the right track:

- 1. Is my conclusion repetitive?** Though it's often a good idea to summarize or restate key parts of your argument, you shouldn't use the exact same wording in your conclusion as in another part of your essay. By paraphrasing the arguments you've made in the body paragraphs, you'll find new ways to write about your points in your conclusion. The entire conclusion should not just be summary. If you answer “yes” to this question, it's time to rethink your conclusion.
- 2. Have I introduced entirely new material?** If your answer is “Yes,” you need to revise your conclusion. In a conclusion, you don't want to present irrelevant material *or* important evidence that has not already been discussed. If you find yourself including evidence that you haven't mentioned before but which is important to supporting your main points: stop! Go back into the body of your paper and find a place for it there.
- 3. Does my conclusion feel balanced?** The purpose of a conclusion is to end your argument/analysis in a way that leaves readers feeling satisfied. Readers should feel as though you've taken them on a journey and left them in a place where the journey feels complete. The best way to achieve this is for your conclusion to summarize the body of your essay, synthesize your larger points, *and* also give your readers ideas to continue thinking about when they have finished reading.

EXAMPLES

1. The simplest way to conclude your paper is to **review its major ideas**, but the *entire* conclusion should not just be review. The following sentence concludes a paper in which the writer explains why he belongs to a book club:

“Convenience, variety, and economy—these were my reasons for joining a book club. I have not been disappointed.”

2. Some conclusions merely **restate the thesis** although in **different words to avoid monotony**. For a paper with this thesis—“A city like Bellingham can reduce three hazards that accompany airport expansion by using a careful planning system”—the conclusion might begin something like this:

“While there is no doubt that expanding an airport can have negative repercussions, there is also no doubt that those repercussions can be all but eliminated with careful, systematic planning.”

3. Some conclusions **interpret the significance** of the material presented in the body of the paper. The conclusion of the paper on airport expansion might include this statement of significance:

“In Washington State alone, four other cities like Bellingham have attempted airport expansion in the last ten years. All four projects have been stalled by lawsuits protesting the same three hazards that my proposed planning system could have eliminated.”

4. Other conclusions **make predictions** based on the material in the body of paper:

“Pollution is a major world-wide problem against which many powerful interests are being marshaled. From the private citizens who are concerned with the type of detergent or pesticide they use to the leaders of great nations, all thinking people are involved in the environmental crisis. There is still time for humanity to resolve this problem, as people are creative, inventive, and ambitious. These qualities, which are responsible for precipitating this crisis, will be the very means for humanity’s salvation.”

5. An **anecdote** sometimes effectively concludes a paper. Below is part of the conclusion to a paper about the rewards given to Dr. Jonas Salk for his polio vaccine:

“Probably the greatest tribute Dr. Salk has received was unwittingly paid by a small boy whose father, having shown his son the research center, told him that Dr. Salk invented the polio vaccine. The boy, looking puzzled, said, ‘Daddy, what’s polio?’”