

Conclusions

What is a conclusion?

A conclusion can and often should be more than a repetition of the introduction and/or of the ideas that you presents in your paper. A conclusion also synthesizes (brings together) your ideas in a way that allows your readers to understand your argument in a broad context. When your readers reach your paper's conclusion, they are more educated than they were before they read your paper; this means that you can use your conclusion to convey your argument in a more complex and insightful way to than you could earlier in the paper.

So what?

An effective conclusion prepares your readers to apply your argument to other examples, studies, and theories. You can presume that your readers are ready for you to point out why your argument is important. A complete conclusion ensures that your readers are not left with the question "so what?" unanswered. So as a writer, you can ask *yourself* "so what?" to generate your conclusion. For example, try asking:

So... how do all the ideas in the paper work together to make one encompassing set of arguments?

So... why were my topic and the investigation that I carried out important?

So... which findings were most important, expected, and/or unexpected in my field of study, and why?

So... what are the implications of my arguments and findings?

To expand your conclusion, try making observations about your paper's implications for you, your course, your field of study, and/or what others have written about similar topics.

Are there different types of conclusions?

Yes. Depending on the topics, arguments, structure, and/or academic disciplines associated with the paper, you might be expected to address different issues in your conclusion. To think about the range of possibilities and approaches, recall the conclusions in the sources that you read to prepare for writing your paper. This should give you clues about which types of conclusions are common in the field that you are writing in. Not all conclusions address all the questions below, so think about your field and the specific type of paper you are writing, and decide which type of conclusion and which question(s) from the list would be appropriate to consider.

What other resources might the reader be interested in if s/he wants to apply your ideas?

What are the limitations of your findings and why? (Was the sample size too small? Are some sources unreliable? unverifiable? unavailable? non-original? inadequate? limited? If so, what were the impacts?)

What are possibilities for related, important, future research topics that are outside the scope of your paper?

How do the definitions and categories that emerged in your paper apply elsewhere?

What are the implications of your argument for different parts of your paper's audience?

Which trends might influence the long-term applicability of your findings?

Some longer papers might address more than one of the questions above during the conclusion.

Revising and reorganizing conclusions

Conclusions need to be reread and revised after any significant change to any other part of the paper, so that the conclusion actually concludes the paper that precedes it. After drafting your conclusion, reread your entire paper to determine if the conclusion is complete.