

# What should be included in my conclusion?

STEP

20

*'All stories ... begin with the end.'*

John Berger

## A Reflection

Tick the statements which are true for you.

- ☐ My conclusions are extremely detailed.
- ☐ My conclusions do not use a range of **LINKING DEVICES**.
- ☐ My conclusions repeat what I have said in the introduction.
- ☐ My conclusions use exactly the same language as other parts of my essay.
- ☐ My conclusions sound different from the rest of my essay.

## B Contextualization

The following conclusion is directly related to the essay discussed in Step 19:  
'What are the characteristics of good academic writing?'

- From this model, identify as many key characteristics of a conclusion as you can.

In short, it can be seen that there are four major characteristics of good academic writing: it is objective, complex, has a formal structure and uses good referencing. A good writer has to be competent at every level – macro (i.e., overall structure), meso (i.e., paragraphs) and micro (i.e., sentence). If just one of these areas is weak, the whole essay will be weakened as a result. Although this essay has only focused on academic writing in certain subject areas, the study has been wide-ranging enough to identify characteristics which are generally applicable. It is hoped that some of these recommendations may be used at the classroom level.

Characteristic 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Characteristic 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Characteristic 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Characteristic 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Characteristic 5: \_\_\_\_\_



## C Analysis

### What are five key characteristics of a conclusion?

A conclusion can have a number of different purposes, depending on the content, audience, type and function of the piece of writing. In certain subjects, your essays may not have a conclusion (they may have a **DISCUSSION SECTION** instead), or else the conclusion may be very brief. The following list identifies five features which are commonly found in conclusions. You do not necessarily need to cover all these features in every conclusion but, as indicated below, the first two aspects are extremely important.

#### Your conclusion must answer the question.

...there are four major characteristics of good academic writing: it is objective, complex, has a formal structure and uses good referencing.

The most important function of your conclusion is to demonstrate that you have fully understood and responded to the question. A full and detailed understanding of the title (see Step 13) is necessary. Ensure, therefore, that you are clear about *exactly* what the title is asking you to do.

The most common way of answering the question is to provide a summary of the key points. Your essay has a number of places which represent its 'skeleton', and these should be closely referred to when writing a conclusion. They are:

- your introduction (presents a general overview of the essay)
- your **THESIS STATEMENT** (identifies your specific focus/area of investigation)
- your topic sentences (provide an overview of the focus of each paragraph)

The summary approach is a particularly useful strategy in a longer piece of writing, where it is necessary to remind the reader of the points you have made. In a shorter piece of writing (and specifically in exam essays) you should keep your conclusion brief and focused.

This essay/paper/dissertation  
has argued that ...  
has investigated ...  
has demonstrated ...  
has explained ...

#### Your conclusion must link back to your introduction.

A good writer has to be competent at every level – macro (i.e., overall structure), meso (i.e., paragraphs) and micro (i.e., sentence). If just one of these areas is weak, the whole essay will be weakened as a result.

The **THESIS STATEMENT** (see Step 15) in your introduction sets out the main focus of your essay. It is important that in your conclusion, you refer back to it. You need to demonstrate to the reader that you have done what you said you were going to do. In addition, this can create a satisfying 'full circle' effect.

The focus of this essay was ...  
The purpose of this study was ...  
Returning to the question asked  
at the beginning, it is possible to  
argue ...

#### Your conclusion should leave the reader with a positive impression.

In practical terms, the impact of a conclusion can be very significant. A well-written conclusion can turn an average essay into a good essay, or indeed a good essay into an excellent one. The conclusion is the last thing which the marker will read; if it is well written, he or she may think it deserves a good mark. When writing your conclusion you should ask yourself: *if there is one thing I want the reader to understand from reading this essay, what is it?* Build your conclusion around this idea.



### Your conclusion may refer to the practical application of your work.

It is hoped that some of these recommendations may be used at the classroom level.

Depending on the type of essay which you have written (see Step 16), there may be practical applications for some of your findings and you may wish to identify these.

The results of this research suggest that ...  
The findings indicate a need for ...

### Your conclusion may acknowledge limitations or make recommendations for future study.

Although this essay has only focused on academic writing in certain subject areas, the study has been wide-ranging enough to identify characteristics which are generally applicable.

As has been noted elsewhere, it is not a sign of failure to admit it if your essay has certain limitations. It is much better to highlight these weaknesses and answer any potential criticism, rather than to ignore them (see Step 25). Additionally, you may want to identify areas where further study and investigation would be beneficial.

This investigation was limited by ...  
One source of weakness was ...  
A further study would ...  
It is recommended that ...

## What are five common problems associated with conclusions?

As the statements in part A indicate, there are certain things which a conclusion should *not* do:

### Your conclusion should not go into too much detail.

Similar to an introduction, a conclusion tends to be c. 5–10% of the overall essay length. So, in a typical 1,500-word essay, this equates to around 75–150 words. The main body of your essay is the place to introduce and discuss issues, not your conclusion. The main purpose of the conclusion is to answer the initial question rather than to add new ones.

### Your conclusion should use a range of linking devices.

Many conclusions use *therefore* several times. It is better to use a range of linking devices, such as: *in conclusion*, *to conclude*, *on the whole*, *altogether*, *in all*, *to sum up*, *on balance* and *thus*.

### Your conclusion should not repeat what you said in your introduction.

As noted, your conclusion should refer back to your introduction. However, these parts of the essay have a different function. The introduction *predicts*; the conclusion *summarizes*; the introduction *analyzes* the question; the conclusion *answers* the question.

### Your conclusion should not use exactly the same language as other parts of the essay.

You should not simply copy and paste phrases from other parts of your essay. However, paraphrasing or summarizing what you have written elsewhere is good practice.

### Your conclusion should not sound different from the rest of your essay.

Your conclusion should be the natural end point of the essay – it should not feel different from what has come before. It should be written in clear, simple, direct language, and be full of **CONTENT** words (like the rest of your essay).



## D Activation

Write a conclusion based on the following essay. Certain key information is provided for you.

Essay title (length)	— ‘The English language no longer belongs to the English.’ Do you agree with George Lamming’s assertion? (1,500 words)
Thesis statement	— This essay strongly argues that ‘English’ English no longer exists, and that it is now an international language; this phenomenon has been caused primarily by the rapid advance of globalization.
Topic sentences	— <b>Para 1.</b> The rise of English as the global lingua franca now seems unstoppable. <b>Para 2.</b> In the modern world, it is impossible to say who ‘owns’ English; a system of ‘protection’, as attempted by the French government, would be impractical. <b>Para 3.</b> Since the majority of people use English to talk to other non-native speakers, these questions of accuracy and standardization are unimportant. <b>Para 4.</b> English is the global language of business. <b>Para 5.</b> The globalization of culture has lead to English-language TV programmes, films and books being distributed throughout the world. <b>Para 6.</b> Although globalization is not a new phenomenon, the electronic revolution has rapidly increased the rate of change.

## E Personalization

- **Examine one of your conclusions from a recent essay.**
  - Go through the five key characteristics of a conclusion in part C and decide whether you are meeting these goals.
  - See how long it is: is it 5–10% of the essay, or considerably more or less? If shorter, what could you add; if longer, what could you delete?
- **Compare the introduction and conclusion from a recent essay.**
  - Are they just paraphrases of each other, or do they have their own identity?
  - Are they linked together?
- **Read conclusions from texts in your subject area and analyze how they are written.**

## F Extension

- **Step 18** considers the elements of the paragraph, including the **topic sentences**. Since topic sentences for each paragraph together provide an overview of the essay as a whole (a ‘skeleton’), they can be useful when you want to summarize the main points of your essay.
- **Step 19** focuses on key aspects of the **introduction**, which many students confuse with the conclusion.
- **Step 49** tells you what should be included in the **abstract**, a text which has many similarities to a conclusion.
- **Appendix 3, Step 20** provides sample conclusions from different academic disciplines. These conclusions come from the same source as the introductions in the previous step.