

Campus Academic Resource Program

Last But Not Least: How to Write an Effective Conclusion

Approaching the end of an essay can be daunting. After developing a thesis, gathering evidence and crafting an organized argument to prove the thesis, most students are exhausted and ready to be done with their essay. However, there is still the matter of wrapping up the paper---the conclusion. Don't panic; just as there is a process to writing the rest of a paper, there is a process to writing a conclusion.

To help guide you in this process, the following steps are given:

1. Coming up with a conclusion
2. Avoiding re-statement of the thesis and main points
3. Avoiding new main points or irrelevant information

1. Coming up with a conclusion

If you don't have a conclusion yet, don't worry; it is easier to write a conclusion from scratch than to re-write one. The first step is to identify what a conclusion is supposed to do.

The purpose of a conclusion **is not**:

- To restate the thesis
- To summarize the paper's main points
- To introduce a new main point or a tangent

The purpose of a conclusion is to affirm the importance of the thesis.

In a strong thesis, something should be at stake. The conclusion is your chance to explain to the reader what is at stake, and why your thesis being true is important.

The following is a list of commonly-used strategies for affirming the importance of your thesis. Use this list to practice writing a conclusion, or devise your own strategy.

Affirm the importance of the thesis by:

- Explaining some broader implications of the thesis
- Proposing a call to action
- Using what has been proven in the body paragraphs to suggest a larger truth or theme
- Explaining how the truth of your thesis changes existing knowledge about your topic
- Asking a question

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Here are some examples of the above strategies, all using the same thesis:

Thesis	Claim to the Importance of the Thesis	Type of Claim
<p>“Human expansion has been the leading cause for the shrinking of narwhal habitats in the Arctic.”</p> <hr/>	<p>“In five to ten years, we could see a permanent seventy-five percent decline in the narwhal population.”</p> <hr/>	<p><u>Explain Implications:</u></p> <p>If X thesis is true, then Y implications will result.</p> <hr/>
<p>“Human expansion has been the leading cause of the shrinking of narwhal habitats in the Arctic.”</p> <hr/>	<p>“If we want to stop the shrinking of narwhal habitats, we must change our habits, reducing waste, increasing reuse and recycling, and eliminating our dependency on fossil fuels.”</p> <hr/>	<p><u>Propose a Call to Action:</u></p> <p>If X thesis is true, then we/you/they must do Y about it.</p> <hr/>
<p>“Human expansion has been the leading cause of the shrinking of narwhal habitats in the Arctic.”</p> <hr/>	<p>“This is another example of mankind’s desire to dominate and control the natural environment leading to the destruction of an innocent species.”</p> <hr/>	<p><u>Explain a theme in the thesis:</u></p> <p>If X is true, then it just goes to show you how Y always seems to happen.</p> <hr/>
<p>“Human expansion has been the leading cause of the shrinking of narwhal habitats in the Arctic.”</p> <hr/>	<p>“In the past, scientists could not establish a definite connection between human expansion and the destruction of a species. This study has shown that there is a definite connection.”</p> <hr/>	<p><u>Explain how the thesis changes existing knowledge:</u></p> <p>Before X, people thought Y; but now, since X is true, Z replaces Y</p> <hr/>

Notice how many different strategies can be used to show the importance of a single thesis.

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2. Avoid re-statement of the thesis and main points

When writing conclusions, some students revert to the advice they've been given in previous classes: to restate their thesis and main points. However, we know that the purpose of a conclusion is not to re-state what has already been said, *but to affirm the thesis*.

How do you know if your conclusion is restating your thesis and main points? Ask yourself these questions:

- “How does the information in my conclusion differ from my thesis statement?”
- “What does my conclusion add to my thesis statement?”
- “Have I already talked about this somewhere else in the paper?”

By looking over your conclusion and comparing it to the rest of your paper with these questions in mind, you should be able to determine if you are re-stating your thesis or main points.

Here is an example of a “restatement” conclusion:

Thesis
<p>“Through his lack of internal awareness, his cyclical relationships, his cynical outlook on the world, and his tendency to omit parts of his story, Jake Barnes of <u>The Sun Also Rises</u> constitutes an archetype of the Modernist narrator, on whom other Modernist narrators are based.</p>

Conclusion
<p>“It is clear that Jake Barnes, the protagonist of Hemingway’s <u>The Sun Also Rises</u>, is an archetype for the Modernist narrator. In Modernist books that followed, the narrators showed traits similar to Barnes’--a tendency to admit parts of their story, a tendency to lie, cyclical relationships that usually end in disaster, and a fatalistic outlook on the world.”</p>

Although the conclusion is phrased differently from the thesis, it is clear that they are saying the same thing. Does this writer use any of the strategies from Section 1 to affirm the importance of their thesis? If so, which ones? If not, what strategy/strategies could they use?

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3. Avoid introducing a new main point

It is not uncommon for a student to reach the end of their paper and discover a new, exciting idea that could be used to further support the thesis. However, **the place for ideas that support the thesis is in the body paragraphs, not in the conclusion.** Although rigid, this rule of structure has the benefit of making papers easier to read and understand.

You might be thinking, “Wait a minute...What happened to affirming the thesis? Shouldn’t there be a new main point in the conclusion, a main point that affirms the thesis?”

The answer is no. There is a difference between a **main point** and an **affirmation of the thesis.**

Main point: Helps prove that the thesis is true

Affirmation of the thesis: Shows why it is important that the thesis is true

Here is an example of a new main point being introduced in a conclusion

Thesis	Main Points (Used to prove the thesis)	Conclusion
“The television show ‘Scooby Doo’ is beneficial to children’s development”	1. S.D. encourages critical thinking	“Knowing that Scooby Doo is beneficial to children’s development, <i>why do we not reinstate the cartoon in prime-time children’s programming?</i> After all, this show encourages children to use their imaginations, which is beneficial to the development of their brains. ”
	2. S.D. encourages non-violence	
	3. S.D. encourages cooperation and teamwork	

The italicized statement in the conclusion proposes a call to action, phrased as a question: “Because the thesis is true, why don’t we?”

The bolded statement is an idea that supports the thesis being valid. This *could* become a main idea, but it would need to fit into the body paragraphs or become the topic sentence of its own body paragraph.

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