

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion is the last piece of your paper that a reader will encounter, so it's important that it leaves a positive, lasting impression. Strong conclusions synthesize the main contributions of the paper and highlight the broader significance of the paper's arguments.

However, it's important to remember that no single method will automatically produce the perfect conclusion for every paper. The type of paper, assignment instructions, and discipline-specific writing conventions must all be taken into account when crafting your conclusion. Only by observing the following guidelines in combination with these factors will you be able to write a strong conclusion that keeps your reader thinking long after the paper has ended.

Did you know different disciplines of writing have different conclusion styles? For example, while STEM conclusions focus more on condensing and recapping the paper's content, Humanities conclusions focus more on the implications of the thesis. When writing a conclusion, always pay attention to the genre of your paper, the assignment instructions, and the customs of your academic discipline.



How do I write a conclusion?

There are a few steps you can take to begin writing your conclusion:

- 1 Read conclusions from the same **genre** and **academic discipline** as your assignment to gain an understanding of the writing conventions you should be following. Still unsure? You can speak with your Professor, Teaching Assistant, or instructors at the Writing and Communication Centre about the specific genre conventions and expectations for your assignment.
- 2 Throughout your writing process, **take note** of any interesting ideas you come up with that **don't fit** into the body of your paper. These could include insights about the topic's importance, questions that remain unanswered, potential applications of your idea in other contexts, or areas for further research. When it comes time to write your conclusion, these notes can help inform the **content** of your closing paragraph(s).
- 3 Reflect back on the themes of your **introduction**; returning to issues raised at the start of the paper can help your reader consider the paper as a whole, and create the impression that your argument has come full-circle.
- 4 For a smooth transition out of the body of the paper and into the conclusion, begin with the most narrow/specific ideas related to the paper's thesis at the top of the conclusion, then gradually extend out to your broader discussion at the bottom. One way to visualize this is to think about your conclusion's structure as a **pyramid**.

- 5 Take extra care with the paper's **final sentence**. This is the very last statement your reader will take away from the paper, so it is important that it offers a strong closing thought and signals to the reader that the paper is complete.
- 6 You may have heard that it is wise to **summarize** the body of your essay in the conclusion, but try to **synthesize** rather than summarize the content. While summary is about condensing and restating information that has already been given, synthesis is about restating only the most important pieces, and demonstrating how they can come together to create new understandings.



Note: In some STEM disciplines, it is common to simply summarize the paper's content in the conclusion rather than offer synthesis or further commentary. As previously mentioned, always consult the assignment instructions and conventions of your academic discipline when writing your conclusion.

- 7 Pay attention to **length**. Depending on your paper's genre and length overall, your conclusion may be one paragraph, two paragraphs, or for very long papers, several pages. In general, you should aim to write a conclusion that makes up about **10-15%** of the paper.



What should my conclusion include?

Your paper's conclusion may include any number of the following, depending on the topic and genre of writing:

- + **Impact:** compelling fact, quotation, or statistic that highlights the impact of the topic or argument you have just presented.
- + **Synthesis:** an account of the paper's most important arguments, how they connect, and why these connections are significant.
- + **Applications:** potential uses of your findings in other contexts.
- **Implications:** broader effects or consequences of the thesis. For example, if your paper argues that the drinking age in Canada should be lowered to 16, the conclusion might point out the consequences of this decision on a national or global scale.
- + **Proposal:** a proposed course of action or resolution to the problem presented in the body of the paper. This type of conclusion is especially popular in policy briefs.
- + **Remaining questions:** questions that remain unanswered post-analysis, or avenues for further study.
- + **Other:** any other information that helps the reader understand the significance of the paper in terms of your course's content, your academic discipline, or current issues in the field.

What are the differences between strong and weak conclusions?



A weaker conclusion...

Sythesis: Summarizes all arguments and evidence from the body of the essay without further commentary (with the exception of certain STEM disciplines).

Scope: Introduces new arguments or pieces of evidence that work to prove the paper's thesis (note: these belong in the body of the paper).

Argumentation: Mentions the paper's primary argument for the first time at the end of the paper.

Length: Is either far too long or far too short when compared with the length of the paper as a whole.



A stronger conclusion...

Synthesis: Synthesizes only the paper's key arguments, shows how they connect, and expands on their significance .

Scope: Highlights the significance of the paper's thesis, which has already been proven in the body of the essay.

Argumentation: Reflects back on the paper's primary argument, defined in full in the paper's introduction.

Length: Comprises an appropriate fraction of the paper – not too long and not too short (10-15% of the overall length is a good benchmark to strive for).