

Writing the Conclusion

An effective research paper does not just stop. You must summarize what you had to say and tie all of your ideas together to come to a logical conclusion. Your conclusion, however, should not be merely a dull restatement of your introduction. It must leave your reader not only with a sense of completeness, but also a feeling that you have kept the promise you made in your thesis. In the conclusion, you can add emphasis to your key ideas to clarify the importance of your point(s) and/or establish the implications of your thesis.

Two popular techniques for concluding your research paper are:

(a) Summarize

You restate your thesis and summarize the main points you used to support it (or vice versa). This is like a quick review, but shouldn't simply restate your introduction.

(b) Interpret

You offer your final perspective or interpretation of the information you have discussed in the body of your paper and/or reflect on why your thesis is important. While you may provide new insight, make sure the focus is still on your original thesis.

These are not the only techniques possible.

Other elements of conclusions could be:

- Use a famous quotation (related to the content of your research) and make an analogy.
- Use an effective quote that may not be famous but relates to topic.
- Return to a theme question or image in your introduction.

- Finish with an anecdote or appropriate brief narrative.
- Mention the broad or long-term implications.
- End with a hypothetical question related to your research—a question that requires further thought.
- End with an ironic twist or an unexpected turn of thought.
- Offer a directive.
- End with a call for action urging the reader to respond in some way.
- End on a note of high persuasion or challenge to the reader.
- Compare past to present.
- Offer a solution.

What to avoid:

- Repeating word for word the thesis statement.
- Introducing new information or different ideas (afterthoughts). If the ideas are important, they should be worked into the body of the paper where they can be fully discussed and proved. If they are not important enough for the body, then leave them out—the danger is that the reader will be left with unproven, unsubstantiated ideas as the final impression of your work.
- Offering just a vague generalization (or obvious statement) like, “As one can see, alcoholics have many problems.”
- Offering a vague moral: “We should all be kind to one another.”
- Beginning with “thus,” “finally,” “in conclusion,” or “to summarize” (unless your conclusion runs several paragraphs and you need this phrase as a signal to your reader).
- Questions that raise new issues, but rhetorical questions that restate the issues are acceptable.
- Stopping at an awkward spot or trailing off into meaningless or irrelevant information.