

Quick guide to Writing Conclusions

The conclusion comes at the end of your essay and should make up around 10% of your overall word count. A key part of the conclusion is to summarise your main argument by reminding the reader of the key points you made throughout your assignment. As the final part of your essay, it is important that you leave your reader with a good impression that wraps up the key tenets of your work.

What can I include in my conclusion?

Remind the reader of the main argument you presented throughout.

Summarise the main points, evidence, theories and/or research you used to support your argument.

Return to the 'bigger picture' of the essay – what larger contribution has your essay made to your topic?

Outline any limitations to your essay or areas you did not cover.

Discuss what future research could be done in your topic area.

An example of a conclusion

Topic: Music and gender politics in nineteenth century Germany

This essay has argued that Clara Schumann was a musician of exceptional talent, with a 'blazingly successful career as a concert pianist that lasted over sixty years' (Reich, 2001b, p. 167). Her performing career was achieved alongside a sizeable compositional output, all produced within the societal constraints of nineteenth century Germany. By exploring Clara's diary entries and accounts of critical reception, it can be seen that she not only managed the expectations of a family life alongside her performance and composition, but produced performances and compositions that were, and remain, highly regarded. This has broader implications for it is apparent that today, women continue to be marginalised in some areas of music, with few seen directing large record companies from the boardroom. This is perhaps a reflection of modern society's wider gender issues as reflected in, for instance, the lack of any female composers in the UK A-Level music syllabus. However, despite the focus of this essay on one particular composer, Clara's story represents the compelling need for further academic study in both current and historical gender-based musicology.

Source: Adapted from – Pidgeon, C. (2016) 'The Forgotten Art of Clara Schumann: German Society's Influence on a Female Composer', SURJ: Surrey Undergraduate Research Journal, 2(1), pp.1-10

1. Summarise your main argument

Whilst you have outlined your main argument in the introduction, you should restate this in your conclusion. What is the central line of thought that ties everything together in your essay? Here, we can see that not only was Clara Schumann argued to be a “musician of exceptional talent” but she achieved this “within the societal constraints” of the period and this main argument is restated to the reader at the start of the conclusion.

2. Summarise the main points of your essay

This part of the conclusion is an opportunity to remind the reader of what key points you made in your essay to develop your argument or findings and what evidence, concepts or research you used for support. In the example provided, we can see that the author has used the “diary entries” and “accounts of critical reception” to support the discussion on the “expectations of a family life alongside her performance” which was a key point in the essay.

3. Return to the ‘bigger picture’ of the essay

In your essay, you have examined a specific topic in depth. The conclusion is a good opportunity to ask the question ‘so what’? Why does this matter? What broader implications does this have? How does this topic feed into wider issues and debates? In the example provided, we can see that, in using Clara Schumann as a case study, the topic has touched upon the broader issue of gender politics and music, specifically the marginalisation of women. This means that the essay has contributed to this broad area.

4. Briefly outline any limitations

Whilst you have raised a number of important points in your essay, there will inevitably be things that you could not cover; perhaps this is due to the angle you took on the topic or a particular period you were concerned with. Now is your chance to justify the focus of your essay and inform of key areas that you did not discuss. This is not viewed negatively in any way; in fact, it shows the reader that you are aware of other avenues to explore but chose to focus on a specific area.

5. Suggest avenues for future research

Having discussed the limitations of your argument (above), now is a good opportunity to suggest how future research might further investigate particular areas of your topic or fill in gaps that you have identified in your essay. This way, it turns potential limitations into areas that can be looked at in future.

Tips and Strategies for writing your conclusion

- It can be useful to signal your conclusion by using phrases such as 'in conclusion' or 'in summary' (although do not overuse these phrases as they can sound artificial).
- Do not use your conclusion to add any new ideas or evidence, especially long quotations. However, you may wish to summarise the key evidence you used in your essay to support your central argument.
- Do not simply summarise your essay in the conclusion. It could be useful to restate your main argument but do not repeat all your ideas in the conclusion.
- Consider dividing your conclusion into 2 paragraphs: the first to summarise your main argument and ideas and the second to discuss the broader implications of your topic, any limitations you have identified and avenues for future research.



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