

# Conclusions

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the topic of conclusions, which are the ways writers can bring their arguments and essays to a close. We will discuss three different approaches to conclusions: the summary approach, the expansion approach, and the hybrid approach, and will explore examples of each.

Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Conclusions
2. The Summary Approach
3. The Expansion Approach
4. The Hybrid Approach
5. The Wrong Approach: Example

## 1. Conclusions

The first thing that should be noted when beginning a discussion about conclusions is that after the introduction, the conclusion is the most important part of an essay. It's the last point, the last idea, the very last words -- words that will be rattling around in your readers' heads when they put your text down and are sitting and thinking about what they just read. Therefore, it makes sense for you, or any writer, to pay special attention to how the last paragraphs and sentences of a text come together.



### HINT

Remember that a conclusion doesn't have to be just one paragraph. Rather, the writer should find whatever approach works best for a particular project.

Besides putting a physical end to the text, the conclusion needs to wrap up the essay and give readers a feeling of cohesion and closure. One way writers do this is by referring back to the introduction, to create a sense of circular motion.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** If, for example, a particular technique was used in the first paragraph -- like an anecdote or definition, or a quotation -- revisiting or mentioning it at or near the end of a text is often a good idea.

However, even if a technique was not used earlier, you can still include it in the conclusion. After all, a

conclusion is always more than just a summary of what's come before it.

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## 2. The Summary Approach

That being said, summaries are a big part of many highly-effective conclusions. This approach entails briefly noting the essay's major points, and restating the thesis -- in different words than before, of course. This is a fairly basic form of conclusion. However, it can be particularly useful in essays that espouse a long, complicated, or multi-part argument. Here's an example of an effective summarizing conclusion:

Before that night, I never thought much about what it means to be male. Before then, I never worried about the ways I might be perceived as a threat to women. I knew, as you saw, that I had no ill intentions, but before that night I never thought about how little we know about the intentions of others. Before that night, I thought all that mattered was that I was a good person, and that I acted like it, because before that night I didn't understand the hundred and thousand ways that all of us are already part of a bigger system, and that our actions, and our inactions, are only part of the problem.


Though you don't have the rest of the essay, suffice it to say that just about all of the points here were raised earlier in the body of the essay, though not in so close a context, and never with the refrain "before that night" to build momentum. Even though this is an example of what's generally considered to be a basic form of conclusion, as you can see, summaries can do a lot of work for an argument when they're structured effectively.

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## 3. The Expansion Approach

Another approach to conclusions is to expand the discussion beyond the scope of the essay's thesis. These types of conclusions work most often by raising questions that still need answers, or which are not possible to answer in the time and space allowed. Sometimes they list work or research that still needs to be done, or even bring up related ideas that weren't able to be incorporated into the text, due to space and time constraints.

This kind of conclusion has the advantage of being able to up the ante of the main points, by gesturing toward the urgency or importance of your ideas, as well as showing that you know more, and have thought more about your topic than can be incorporated in the space allowed. You can also stake out territory for research or thinking that you might want to do later. This is particularly common in subject-specific arguments.

 **EXAMPLE** For example, a graduate student's first research paper about a subject he or she might want to pursue is a dissertation later.

The expansion approach is also common in arguments trying to persuade readers to take a specific action, as it can gesture toward other, broader reasons for doing so, without actually having to go into detail about them. As an example, this conclusion below, taken from an essay about evolution and technological development, gestures toward a broader argument:

In many ways, we are the ultimate specialists, though our specialization -- tool using -- has allowed us to spread across more of the planet than any other large animal in Earth's history. But the tools we now use are so complicated and diverse and all-encompassing, that virtually none of us are capable of understanding or using -- much less building or maintaining -- every piece of technology that impacts our lives. Taken to this extreme, our specialization is, like in the plants and animals we try so hard to separate ourselves from, as much a weakness as it is a strength. We owe it to ourselves to learn to grow plants, to raise crops and livestock, to survive in wild lands without packaged food. We don't have to actually do this, but if we did have to, we should be able.

As you can see, this conclusion isn't restating the argument, but rather brings up a broader topic, one beyond the scope of the essay itself.

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## 4. The Hybrid Approach

In modern academic essays, it's very common for conclusions to incorporate some elements of both the summary and expansion approaches, taking advantage of the strengths of both. The following hybrid example does just this, first by summarizing the main claims that the earlier argument made, and then expanding upon it, to perform a call to action while gesturing toward the many other aspects of modern life that, like the blue roses this essay is about, are more illusion than reality:

We like our flowers to be big and unblemished, to last long in a vase, and we like them to come in just the right color. We don't want to think about what has to happen first. We don't want to think about the natural borders that have to be crossed, and we don't want to think about all the work that has to be done to produce the perfect bloom. And we especially don't want to be told that something isn't possible. After hundreds of years' worth of selective breeding, after decades of research and manipulation, after all of our high-tech tricks, the closest thing to a truly blue rose you're likely to see will have been created by a very simple, very old trick. I find this to be a comfort: to make a blue rose yourself, put a plain white rose in a vase of blue dye, and in doing so get yourself a little closer to the process.

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## 5. The Wrong Approach: Example

Now that we've read three conclusions that wrap up their essays fairly effectively, let's take a look at one that doesn't do so well, shown below:

This essay revealed that there are more problems with the Fifth Amendment than I thought. If I were able to study this subject again, I would focus on other things like terrorism. My research emphasized some of the problems with the Fifth Amendment and some of the ways it can be improved. I discovered in my research that it is a good idea and can help lots of people if administered properly. There will always be people saying bad things. We can't fix everyone with this, but we can make a difference with some people if we make it work correctly.

As you can see, this essay's conclusion was working with the summary approach. However, since it was so vaguely stated -- for example, we don't see what, if anything, the essay is actually arguing about the Fifth Amendment -- it doesn't have the power to do much more than remind the reader of what they just read. If you had actually just read the essay, you'd have no need to read this, too, which is always a sign of an incomplete, or incompletely realized, conclusion.



## SUMMARY

Today we learned about conclusions, which serve to wrap up an essay and give readers a feeling of cohesion and closure. We learned about the three primary approaches that writers take in crafting conclusions: summary, expansion, and a hybrid of both. We also learned how *not* to write a conclusion, by reading an example of one that is incomplete and vaguely stated.

Source: Adapted from Sophia Instructor Gavin McCall