

## UNIT 5: THE CONCLUSION

### OVERVIEW

The Conclusion is retrospective, not prospective. Its primary task is to restate and consolidate the argument the paper has made. It returns to the question or problem raised in the Introduction and shows, through the weight of the preceding argument, what can now be said.

The corpus contains 72 articles with an explicit Conclusion heading, with a mean length of 588 words, approximately 8% of the typical humanities paper. The Conclusion is the shortest major section.

Several features common in science and social science conclusions are absent from this corpus. The phrase ‘this study contributes to’ does not appear. ‘Future research’ and ‘future work’ do not appear. ‘In conclusion’ and ‘in sum’ do not appear. ‘It is recommended that’ does not appear. Humanities writers do not close their papers with these formulas.

What the corpus shows instead is a consistent pattern: the Conclusion restates the argument in broader terms, draws out its significance, and closes with an evaluative or resonant final statement. It is the argumentative close of the paper, not a meta-commentary on what the paper did.

### WHAT THE CORPUS SHOWS

The dominant linguistic feature of the Conclusion is hedging. Modal verbs (*may*, *might*, *could*) appear at 51.0 per 10,000 words, the highest rate of any section in the paper. This is the inverse of what intuition might suggest: conclusions become more hedged, not less, as the argument reaches its most interpretive and significant claims. The contrastive *however* (7.1/10k) and inferential *thus* and *therefore* (6.6 and 5.0/10k) create the argumentative texture: contrasts are drawn and conclusions are inferred, but with caution.

The word *reveal* is notably prominent (6.6/10k) indicating that Con-

clusions announce what the analysis has uncovered. Retrospective restatement constructions appear consistently: *I have argued* (1.9/10k), *this paper has* (2.1/10k), *we have argued* (0.5/10k). These signal the retrospective character of the conclusion.

## THREE MOVES IN THE HUMANITIES CONCLUSION

### MOVE 1: RESTATE

The Conclusion typically opens by restating the central argument in broader, more consolidated terms than it was stated in the Introduction. This is not repetition: it is the argument as it now stands, after the full weight of the analysis has been brought to bear on it. The restatement often names what the paper has done and what it has shown.

The most common constructions are *I have argued, in this article/paper* + past tense summary, and *we have shown*. These constructions signal that the paper is drawing its threads together, not opening new ground.

### Corpus examples

*In this paper, I have challenged the prevailing view that reactive feelings such as personal disappointment and betrayal are inherent to trust, showing how it faces serious difficulties, primarily in accounting for cases where trust exists without those feelings and vice versa. As an alternative, I have advanced a relational account of trust where trust is directed toward norms constitutive of our relationship.*

*In this article, we have argued that the genesis of that line of research -- called the pharming project -- and its transition from animal transgenesis to human regenerative medicine can only be fully captured by looking at how the Edinburgh scientists worked across mice and sheep during the last quarter of the twentieth century.*

*Epistemic alienation is the problematic separation of inquirers from important aspects of their intellectual lives. The division of cognitive labor is perhaps the single biggest source of our epistemic alienation. It is also one of the primary drivers of our epistemic progress.*

*Beach and Pedersen's account of theory-building process-tracing is an*

*attempt to specify how new middle-range theories about causal mechanisms may be developed through case studies. In this paper, I not only identified some ambiguities and problems in their notions of causal mechanisms and middle-range theories. I also showed how they can be resolved by clarifying and elaborating these two concepts.*

Writer's note: The restatement is not a summary of the paper's contents. It is a statement of the argument's conclusion — what the paper has established, not what each section covered. If you find yourself writing 'the first section examined... the second section argued...' you are writing a table of contents, not a conclusion.

## MOVE 2: CONSOLIDATE AND BROADEN

After restating the argument, the Conclusion draws out its broader significance. This move lifts from the specific case or analysis to the larger question or field. It shows why the argument matters beyond the particular texts, events, or problems the paper examined.

The verb *reveal* (6.6/10k) is the most characteristic verb of this move: the analysis has revealed something that was not previously visible. Other common verbs are *demonstrate* (4.5/10k), *suggest* (2.4/10k), and *highlight* (1.7/10k). All are more confident than the hedging that surrounds them; the conclusion consolidates what the argument has established, even while remaining appropriately qualified about its scope.

### Corpus examples

*“Populations” were not simply given, but were produced during the sequence of practices for their collection, collections that varied according to the institutions and people recruited to them.*

[The conclusion draws out the broader theoretical implication of the archival analysis]

*Carroll envisions an intricate portrayal of a new humane framework, reliant on the acceptance of new subjectivities where children are considered capable of forming moral judgments, and animals may move beyond their usual didactic roles.*

[Broader significance of the literary argument]

*Our story is thus one of opportunistic innovation within a broader, enabling policy environment.*

[The historical case is consolidated into a general claim]

Writer's note: The broadening move is where many conclusions become vague: writers make very general claims about 'our understanding of X' without specifying what precisely has changed. The strongest conclusions name a specific insight that the paper has produced — something that can be stated in one sentence and that could not have been said without the preceding analysis.

### MOVE 3: CLOSE

The final sentences of a Conclusion carry particular weight. They are the last thing the reader encounters, and they set the register for how the paper will be remembered. The corpus shows several closing strategies.

**Evaluative close:** the writer states, with appropriate hedging, what can now be said about the subject. Often uses *ultimately* (1.4/10k) or *thus* as the closing signal.

**Return to the opening:** the conclusion echoes the introduction: returning to the figure, event, text, or question that opened the paper and showing what can now be said about it. This creates a satisfying structural symmetry.

**Broader significance:** the writer connects the specific argument to a larger intellectual or social issue, suggesting what the paper's findings mean beyond the immediate case.

### Corpus examples

*When Mivart died in the year 1900 he seems to have taken the relativity view (or anything like it) with him to his grave. At least for all I can see, there has not been a single attempt to revive it since then.*

[Returns to the opening problem; closes with a quiet observation that the argument is complete]

*While the typical Victorian humane education remained ineffective at*

*best and violent at worst, Carroll's animal advocacy may remain his greatest legacy.*

[Evaluative close with appropriate hedging: 'may remain']

*We should put RATH on the smorgasbord, because it can be defended from the various objections that explicate its widespread dismissal.*

[Direct evaluative claim closing a philosophical argument]

Writer's note: The closing statement is obviously not the place for new evidence or new argument. It is the place to let the argument rest. The best closings are usually short: one or two sentences that distil what the paper has done into a clear, resonant statement.

## WHAT HUMANITIES CONCLUSIONS DO NOT DO

It is worth being explicit about what is absent from the corpus, because the conventions of science and social science writing are so widely taught that they can feel universal.

**Call for future research.** The phrases 'future research should', 'future work could', and 'further studies are needed' do not appear in the corpus. Humanities conclusions do not end with a research agenda. If the argument is complete, it does not require a call for someone else to continue it.

**Claim contribution in formulaic terms.** 'This study contributes to' does not appear. Contribution is implicit in the argument: if the paper has shown something new, the reader understands its contribution without being told. Formulaic contribution claims sound hollow in humanities writing and are largely absent from it.

**Summarise the paper section by section.** Conclusions that walk through each body section ('the first section examined... the second argued...') are structural summaries, not argumentative conclusions. The Conclusion synthesises; it does not repeat.

**Open with a signpost phrase.** 'In conclusion', 'in sum', and 'to summarise' are effectively absent (1 occurrence combined across 72

conclusions). Humanities conclusions begin directly with the argument; typically not with a signal that the conclusion is beginning.

## A NOTE ON STRUCTURED PAPERS

For writers of structured papers, those with explicit Methods, Results, and Discussion sections, the Conclusion may operate somewhat differently. Where a Discussion section already synthesises findings and positions them in relation to existing work, the Conclusion can be briefer: it states the main finding, names the contribution, and closes. Implications and limitations, if not already addressed in the Discussion, may appear briefly here.

Even in structured papers, however, the formulaic constructions absent from the pure humanities corpus ('this study contributes to', calls for future research) are rare. The corpus shows only 1.7 instances of 'contributes to' per 10,000 conclusion words across all 72 conclusions, and these are predominantly in the Elsevier/STS articles rather than the pure humanities papers.

## BEFORE YOU WRITE

Before drafting the Conclusion, complete these steps.

**Step 1: Return to your Introduction.** What question or problem did you open with? What did you promise the reader? The Conclusion answers that question and delivers that promise.

**Step 2: State the argument in one sentence.** Write the single sentence that best captures what this paper has established. This sentence will be the core of your restatement move.

**Step 3: Identify the broader significance.** Why does this argument matter beyond the specific case? What does it reveal about a larger question? Write one or two sentences on this. Be specific: not 'this advances our understanding of X' but 'this reveals that X cannot be understood without accounting for Y'.

**Step 4: Draft the close.** How do you want the paper to end? Consider returning to your opening, making an evaluative statement, or lifting to a broader significance. The close should feel earned by the preceding argument, not appended to it.