

# **Conclusions**

# This workshop will:

- Discuss the function of a conclusion
- Explore the features of an effective conclusion
- Offer tips on pitfalls to avoid when writing conclusions

# Teaching points:

- 1. Basic functions of a conclusion
- 2. The features of an effective conclusion
- 3. Tips for writing conclusions
- 4. What not to do when writing conclusions



#### 1. Basic functions of a conclusion

Effective conclusions are just as important to a written assignment as introductions. Without them, readers have no 'punchline' to explain either the writer's assessment of the various opinions in a debate, or his/her own position.

A conclusion needs to mirror an introduction; this may seem repetitive but it reminds the reader of the various points made and a marker will expect this format of coming full circle with everything in its appropriate place. The conclusion is one of the 'book ends' to the written assignment, helping to hold the main body together.

Put simply, the function of an effective conclusion is to present a clear impression of your argument or assessment of a debate, i.e.:

- A. what it (the debate or argument) was about
- B. what you believe
- C. why you believe this

These functions also double up as features of a conclusion.

#### 2. The features of an effective conclusion

There are four main features, i.e. elements students should include in their conclusions.

Providing summary of argument or debate

Stating conclusion and why reached

Pointing to importance or significance Linking back to the question/task

- A. **Summary** of the argument/debate with its main points: this is more than a simple list of what has been written but a synthesis to develop your own opinions.
- B. State the general conclusions indicating why this **position** has been taken: what is your stance? What **evidence** has been presented in the written assignment to support the position taken?



#### **Academic Skills Advice**

- C. Make it clear whether those conclusions are **important or significant** or not: your conclusions may point to **wider implications** or **future trends** within a discipline, especially if you have highlighted any problems that are not currently being resolved.
- D. In the last sentence, sum up the argument very briefly, linking it to the title/question: this will help you to **answer** the question/task and ensures the marker's expectations of a relevant answer are met.

# TALKING POINT

Together we will read the conclusion and look for all four features in the text.

Question: Should acupuncture be recommended as a treatment for asthma? Discuss. n.b. The KRI Respiratory Clinic is the writer's placement company.

In conclusion, the McCarney et al. systematic review has been critically analysed to allow consideration of whether acupuncture would be useful treating asthma at the KRI Respiratory Clinic. The background, rationale and efficacy of the alternative treatment have been reviewed and it has been suggested as a treatment option at the Clinic. Further research is needed into the area along with analysis of the treatment's adverse effects in relation to chronic asthma. Acupuncture may have a role in the health care system as there were some positive findings in the review. Whether these are purely placebo-based may have to be further researched, so more funding will be needed.

A.	Summary	of the	argument	/dehate:
<b>/</b> 1.	Juli III II II y	or arc	argument	, acbatc.

- B. General conclusions and why:
- C. Are conclusions are important or significant or not:
- D. Link to the title/question:



## 3. Tips for writing conclusions

- ✓ A conclusion should be no more than 10% of the total word count
- ✓ It may seem odd, but try writing the conclusion before the main body of the assignment. It can be useful to be reminded of the main points that will be included in the text; what the chosen position will be and why; and to constantly check relevance to the set question/task is maintained.
- ✓ Like the rest of academic writing, the conclusion should be written in a formal and detached style, even in a reflective paper. The conclusion would only include the 1st person if instructed by your tutor, so please check.
- ✓ You do not always have to have come to a definite position on one side or the other of a debate. However, your tutor may stipulate this in your marking criteria or task information: if in doubt, check.
- ✓ Quotations can be an excellent way of ending an essay. Ensure the quote is relevant to the subject and possibly summarises the debate or position taken. A good quote creates an impact that will last after the tutor has finished reading the text.
- ✓ Make sure there is a definite indication and sense that you have reached the end of the essay. Markers will expect this and need a sense of 'closure' when the finish reading.
- ✓ Check that the claims you make in your conclusion are justified by your arguments and evidence. If not, edit your text to change either the arguments or the conclusions you are drawing.

## 4. What not to do when writing conclusions

- X Do not introduce anything new (points or evidence) into a conclusion. All the information the reader requires to understand the argument or debate should be in the main body of the assignment.
- X Try not to begin with overused phrases such as "in conclusion," "in summary," or "in closing." Although these phrases can work in speeches, they come across as wooden and trite in writing.
- X Do not forget the tone of the text should be detached and formal, so making sentimental, emotional appeals that are out of character with the rest of an analytical paper is unacceptable.
- X Do not 'hide' the conclusion from the reader revealing it only in the conclusion. The marker does not want to solve a mystery but expects a critically analytic discussion on a topic in an academic style, so give it to them.



## **Activity 1: Playing tutor**

Read the three conclusions below which are in response to the question:

Examine the sociological evidence of stereotypes of social groups in the mass media. What are the causes of stereotyping in the mass media and to what extent do they influence social attitudes? Word limit: 2000 words

In pairs, assess each conclusion and provide comments on each in the space provided. Give each a pass or fail.

#### Conclusion 1

My essay has looked, therefore, at the problems caused by racial stereotyping, focussing on the lack of ethnic minorities working in the mass media. It has been seen that this bias causes a parallel bias in the interpretation of events. Indeed, the problem is even more acute in the United States. According to a survey conducted by the Pocock Institute (1998), only 7% of newspaper staff are black or hispanic, which is totally unrepresentative of the population as a whole.

Your comments:

#### Conclusion 2

I have done my best to show in this essay that the mass media, and particularly television, strengthens the various stereotypes in society, although at times in very subtle, implicit ways. Several examples have been analysed, although one or two of these were somewhat out of date. The essay also suggested ways of overcoming this problem, although it is not clear if it is the media which creates these stereotypes, or if it is merely reflecting the way society already sees itself. The media is of course a part of society as a whole. The question of positive discrimination was discussed and it was decided that in the long run this has a negative effect. Things will change, but only slowly.

Your comments:



#### Conclusion 3

It has been shown, therefore, that stereotypes have always existed in society, and probably will always do so. The mass media is a relatively recent phenomenon, which is one reason for the widely differing views on its role in creating and fostering stereotypical images. The actual causes of stereotyping in the mass media have been shown to be surprisingly diverse, although there can be no argument that any form of it which leads, albeit indirectly, to suffering in any form must not be allowed to take place. It is society itself which must stop this from happening, as laws and regulations are often ineffective. Things are changing, though, and in some areas very quickly; some commonplace stereotypes of only twenty years ago are today virtually taboo. It is society which must indirectly control the mass media, not vice versa. However, in an increasingly 'global' world, controlled by fewer and fewer corporations and individuals eager to please the governments of the major world powers, and, in the mass media, who are more than willing to use stereotyping as a tool in the control of society, we must be more and more vigilant to avoid this cynical manipulation.

Your comments:

#### References

Cottrell, S. (2013) *The study skills handbook*. 4th ed. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Greetham, B. (2013) *How to write better essays*. 3rd ed. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Morley, J. (2014) *Academic phrasebank*. Manchester, University of Manchester. http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/ Accessed 19 September 2014

Neville, C. (2009) How to improve your assignment results. Maidenhead, OUP

Redman, P. (2001) Good essay writing. 2nd ed. London, Sage Publications Ltd.

#### **Academic Skills Advice**



The Write Site. (2014) *Writing your conclusion*. Sydney, The University of Sydney. http://writesite.elearn.usyd.edu.au/m3/m3u3/m3u3s3/m3u3s3\_1.htm Accessed 24 September 2014

The Writing Centre. (2014) *Conclusions*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina. http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/conclusions/ Accessed 24 September 2014

#### **Answers**

## **TALKING POINT**

#### Four features.

- A. Summary of the argument/debate: Yes, unsure whether 'positive findings in the review...are placebo-based' or real.
- B. General conclusions and why: Yes, 'acupuncture has been suggested as a treatment' following critical analysis of systematic review and reviewing 'the background, rationale and efficacy' of acupuncture, i.e. research evidence found to support the suggestion.
- C. Are conclusions are important or significant or not: Has included that 'acupuncture may have a role in the health care system', therefore relating the topic to a broader environment. Note the word 'may' there is no definite position presented (which is not always a requirement). Also includes a suggestion for further research and funding.
- D. Link to the title/question: Yes, 'it has been suggested as a treatment option at the clinic'.

#### **Activity 1:** Playing tutor

#### Conclusion 1

It is likely the rest of the assignment has been in the same vein, so a tutor would be expecting a conclusion which shows no indication that the main body has answered the question. The word 'stereotype' has been picked up on, and narrowly interpreted as meaning racial stereotype. But even then there is no attempt to focus on the actual question, and most of what is said is irrelevant. In addition, the text opens with 1<sup>st</sup> person: academic writing should be formal and detached in style. New information introduced and is too short. Probably a fail.

#### Conclusion 2

Too short and not very well written (inconsistency of tenses: strengthens/have been) and, like the first conclusion, opens with too casual a writing style (I have done my best). This



#### **Academic Skills Advice**



is also an attempt at emotional blackmail in the hope the marker will allot grades with no regard to appropriate academic content. There is no attempt to put the question into some sort of context. There is an admission that some of the evidence used is invalid (out of date). The last part, however, does provide some points for further discussion (does the media create or reflect stereotypes in society) and a conclusion (the media has a negative effect).

Depending on what went before, the essay might just scrape a pass.

#### Conclusion 3

This is a very good conclusion. It is about the right length (c10%); gives a little relevant background and context, indicating that the writer has thought about what a stereotype is in its broadest interpretation; makes some initial references to sources; and finally focuses precisely on the question, showing the reader that it has been fully understood and that it will be answered. The conclusion mentions the early discussion of causes of stereotyping in the mass media, and also comes to a definite viewpoint that it is society that should 'control' the media and be vigilant when it is being manipulated. This piece of text is also appropriately academic in style.

If the essay was written to this standard, it should get an excellent mark.