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Writing a Strong Conclusion

Most readers look at the conclusion of an article right after the abstract, which means that you need to write a strong conclusion to draw your readers to the article.

Conclusions entail a summary of your findings (e.g. any ambiguous or conflicting data) and state the significance of your research. Finally, conclusions recommend further research. In this module, you will learn:

1. The overall framework of a conclusion section.
 2. How to give closure to your article.
 3. What not to do in a conclusion section.
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1. General Framework

1. Check the journal's guidelines for conclusions. Sometimes they will be combined with the discussion section, and sometimes they stand alone.
2. Begin with specific statements and move towards more general statements at the end of the conclusion.
3. Restate the thesis, driving questions, or purpose of your research.
4. Then elaborate with a statement about your primary findings.
5. Explain the significance and noteworthiness of your research.

2. Give Closure

1. Link the last paragraph of your manuscript to the very first paragraph of your manuscript by reiterating a statement that you made.
2. Close your conclusion with a compound sentence. A compound sentence combines two or more independent clauses, which can connect a result with an implication.
3. Make your argument without making a totalizing statement.

Example 1: A compound sentence to end a conclusion

The importance of co-curricular activities for creativity cannot be denied; however, we conclude that they are not the only way to promote creativity.

3. Synthesize, Don't Summarize

1. Build an argument from the pieces of your article—don't just restate the main idea from each section.
2. A summary will sound redundant to your readers, but a synthesis will bring everything together and highlight the main points you want to make with your article.

4. State the Implications

1. Implications can point to new directions and thereby expand upon the ideas already presented, but they are not entirely new ideas.
2. Offer new ways to frame and/or contextualize the research problem
 - a. Implications for research
 - b. Implications for practice
 - c. Implications for theory

5. Give Recommendations

1. Point out opportunities for future research based on your findings. This will be even stronger if you can pull in findings and/or recommendations from other studies as well.
2. Provide recommendations for how to improve upon your study (address the limitations you found).

6. What NOT to do

1. Do not sound apologetic for any unforeseen results or limitations of your research.
2. Do not show any data.
3. You can make claims about and expand upon the research problem, but don't bring in entirely new concepts, evidence, or arguments.
4. Do not just mirror the abstract that you wrote. Your conclusion has a completely different purpose than your abstract.
5. Do not go on and on about your conclusions. Be concise and to the point. Conclusions do not need to be long sections of your article (USC Libraries).

7. Examples of Strong Conclusions

Example 2: Strong conclusion from a social science article

Altered excerpt from Hinrichs, C. (2010). Sustainable food systems: Challenges of social justice and a call to sociologists. *Sociological Viewpoints*, 26(2), 7-18.

This, then, is the call to sociologists: Consider how the agricultural and food system can be the setting or subject for sociological inquiry, learning and practice. We began with blighted tomatoes, a biologically struggling Chesapeake Bay, the conundrum of farm and food policies, and the many faces of hunger. They all signal complex social problems that need sociological attention. Social movements for sustainable food and agriculture and new social enterprises and businesses that seek to be a constructive part of food system change also offer promising sociological opportunities. Overlooked until recently, this new arena for sociology has the potential to inspire and engage students, to enrich our ongoing research agendas, and to stimulate our creativity and commitment in applying sociological tools and insights to enhance local development and well-being in our communities of place. Organizing and working for more sustainable food systems will encounter social justice challenges, not only in the infrastructures and interactions of the existing mainstream food system, but within the deliberations, design and rippling impacts of emerging alternatives as well. These challenges are where today's sociologists (not only rural sociologists) can work as researchers, teachers, learners and community members to make important contributions.

In his recent book, *Closing the Food Gap*, Mark Winne, the longtime director of the Hartford Food System in Hartford, Connecticut, concludes with some useful advice, as well as some caveats for practitioners and citizens in the agricultural and food system:

No matter where you live, there are plenty of opportunities to make a difference. That is what is so enjoyable and interesting about the food system work. There are hunger and poverty initiatives, local and state food policy campaigns, local food and farming endeavors—to say nothing of tending your own garden—all of which offer anyone with a modicum of interest the opportunity to contribute in multiple ways. But it's important to remember that because the food system is so diverse and complex, it has many interconnected parts, none of which can be ignored for too long before the system falls out of balance. Focus too intently on hunger, and you'll lose sight of its cause. Devote yourself too narrowly to agriculture, and you'll forget about the consumer. Care too much about your own food, and you'll forsake food justice. There are larger purposes in life when all our interests come together. Closing the food gap is one of them (Winne 2008: 193).

It is my hope that more sociologists, from a range of specialties, will find that sustainable food systems are indeed relevant for both their professional and personal lives.

Thesis Statement

Tie Paper Together & Establish Significance

Implications

Support Claims with a Quote

Author Gets Final Word

Hinrichs uses a quote to offer a new way to frame the problem, but still asserts her final thought at the end. Since this is a sociological manuscript, the conclusion is personal and a direct call to action that leaves an impact on the reader.

Example 4: Strong conclusion from a humanities article

Lugli, A. et al. (2011). The medical mystery of Napoleon Bonaparte: An interdisciplinary exposé. *Advances in Anatomic Pathology*, 18(2), 152-158.

In this brief exposé we have summarized the viewpoints of clinicians, clinical epidemiologists, pathologists, toxicologists, nuclear physicists, and forensic pathologists. After weighing the available evidence, we conclude that Napoleon Bonaparte died of natural cause. Some of his supporters were planning to spirit him away from his South Atlantic exile and reestablish his empire in France or to make him the King of Louisiana. Even if any of these improbable plans had succeeded, the course of history would have remained largely unchanged. Before long the once powerful Emperor would succumb not to battle wounds inflicted by gallant rivals or to the toxic schemes of vile adversaries, but to gastric cancer, an enemy that still remains unconquered two centuries later.

← Restate purpose and primary finding

} Link significance to present day

This conclusion is from an article synthesizing historical and medical information. You can see it is slightly different than the previous two, but still follows general conventions. First, it restates the purpose and findings of the study, and then ends with an assertion about its significance.

Source and Additional Resources:

1. San Francisco Edit: Twelve Steps to Writing an Effective Conclusion
 2. USC Libraries: Research Guides
 3. University of Wisconsin-Madison: The Writer's Handbook
 4. Walden University: Conclusions
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