

Writing Conclusions

A good conclusion should:

- ☛ be more than just a summary of the essay. It should be a good end to your piece of writing
- ☛ emphasise or reinforce your main ideas, but restate your ideas in a new way; avoid using the same language as in your essay
- ☛ fit in with the rest of the assignment. Refer back to your introduction and remind your reader that you did answer the question

A good conclusion should not:

- ☛ introduce any new ideas or information. This will only confuse your reader and leave them wondering why you are mentioning new arguments right at the end of your essay
- ☛ be too short. Aim for about 15% of your word count, so 300 words for a 2000 word essay
- ☛ focus on minor points. Only include the points that you think are the most important from your discussion

Keeping in mind the advice on writing conclusions, look at these three attempts and make comments on them.

Essay title: *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

Example 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.

Example 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 Several examples have been analysed, although one or two of these were somewhat out of date.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.

Example 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 and 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.

Exercise adapted from: <http://library.bcu.ac.uk/learner/writingguides/>

Feedback on the conclusions:

Example 1

The writer breaks the number one rule for writing conclusions which is not to introduce any new information; this confuses your reader and leaves them wondering why this new information was not explored in full in the main section of the essay. The conclusion finishes with what appears to be research not previously discussed fully in the essay and this does not bring the essay to a good end. Whilst the use of English is adequate, there are a number of repetitions within the conclusion which should be avoided. The author only mentions one aspect of stereotypes which gives the impression that their main discussion of the relevant issues was limited and key issues have not been addressed. The conclusion is far too short. If the main body of the essay was written in this very broad manner with little evidence to support the arguments made, this essay is likely to fail.

Example 2

This conclusion is also too short. The use of English is questionable, particularly with the opening phrase "I have done my best" which does not meet the requirements for formal academic writing. The writer is clearly not confident about the analysis they have presented and the tutor will wonder why, if they have admitted their evidence is not current enough, the writer has not addressed this by seeking more up-to-date research. Whilst the writer does re-iterate a number of points from their discussion, they also include recommendations which was not a requirement for the essay question. Depending on the content presented in the main discussion, this essay may just pass.

Example 3

This is a nice example of a clear, well structured conclusion with a good academic writing style. The writer reminds the reader of how they have answered the question set, in addition to presenting their main arguments from their discussion. Providing that the main body of this essay offered a detailed discussion of relevant research, this essay would achieve a good mark.