

Writing a Conclusion

In scholarly publications, the final sections of a manuscript often discuss the results of your data-gathering and data-analyzing practices. These sections typically explain how your methodology was able to elicit particular results and, furthermore, the ways in which your findings can benefit other researchers. Having a well-crafted explanation of your research findings/results can highlight the impact and relevance of your investigations. In doing so, you can reinforce your own position as a contributor to an on-going scholarly conversation. Conversely, a poorly-written methods conclusion can make it difficult to understand how your scholarship can benefit other researchers.

This worksheet will help you draft a conclusion section for a journal article, academic essay, or book chapter. To clarify, this worksheet is not an "instruction set" that will help you write a perfect methods section every time. Rather, the questions below are designed to foster a critical awareness of how you plan to narrate the rationale guiding your data-gathering and data-analyzing procedures. Lastly, please be as specific as possible when answering the following questions. The more specific you are, the easier it will be to write and revise.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the single most important or interesting finding that you discovered while analyzing your evidence/data?

Remember, you want to avoid simply listing all findings or results. Listing every single interesting/important finding can over-saturate your reader with too much information.

2. Personally speaking, why do you think the finding you identified in Question One is interesting or important?

When answering this question, it would be useful to circle back to your initial research question and explain how this important/interesting finding interacts with your research question. For example, does your important/interesting finding answer your research question in a definitive manner? Does your important/interesting finding modify or change your research question in unexpected ways?

3. Identify one limitation in your research.

Remember, a "limitation" does not mean that your research is invalid. Instead, think of a "limitation" as a variable that is out of your control. This variable can be located in the methods you used to analyze data or in the data that was available to you.

4. How does the limitation you identified in Question Three influence your findings?

For example, does a limitation mean that your methods/findings are only applicable in certain situations? Does a limitation mean that your methods/findings are only useful in small- or large-scale scenarios?

5. In future scenarios, how might you adapt your methods in order to negotiate the limitation you identified in Question Four?

In many cases, limitations cannot be fully avoided or resolved. However, we can modify the methods we use to gather, organize, and analyze our data/evidence in order to mitigate a limitation as much as possible. Hence, when answering this question, it is perfectly fine if you cannot think of ways to "fix" this limitation. Instead, use this question as an opportunity to speculate how you might be able to navigate this limitation in the future.

6. Based on your answers to the previous questions, what is one research question that other scholars might be able to explore? Why do you think this potential question is interesting or useful?

Remember, a conclusion can function as a "road map" or outline that explains how your audience might begin their own investigations based on your findings. Offering a substantial research question (and explanation of why this question can benefit other researchers) can help your audience build upon your findings in productive ways.