

1.23 Writing conclusions

Just as your introduction is the first impression your reader will have of your writing, your conclusion is the last. A good conclusion will show that you have successfully answered the question or completed the task set.

A good conclusion should:

- Be more than just a summary. You need to bring your ideas together, choose your best information and evidence and answer the question.
- Emphasize or reinforce your main ideas, but with your ideas restated in a fresh way: don't use the same language again.
- Fit in with the rest of the assignment. Different types of writing require different types of conclusion. A short piece will probably not require extensive restatement of your main points, whereas a longer piece probably will.
- If appropriate, suggest results or consequences (check your guidelines).
- Make predictions or suggest solutions, again if appropriate.

A good conclusion should NOT:

- Include completely new ideas. If they're important, include them in your main text.
- Be apologetic! Be confident with what you say: avoid phrases such as: "I may not be an expert." or "At least this is my opinion"
- Focus on minor points or miss your main points.

Many tutors/lecturers would argue that the conclusion is the most important part of your writing. It is where you can demonstrate once and for all that you are in control of your ideas and material and that you have thought of the implications and issues involved. Don't worry if writing your conclusion leads you to re-writing other parts of your text. This is, in fact, a good sign! Check that your conclusion fits your argument through your essay - you may have changed your mind about the situation as you gained more information while writing and researching.

Examples of mistakes to avoid

An example 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?

Conclusion 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.

Comments:

- It does not answer the question
- It contains irrelevant information (the reference is not about stereotyping)
- It is too short and does not contain the main points of the essay
- It also uses personal language (my). Do not use this unless your lecturer/tutor/guidelines state that you can.

Conclusion 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.

Comments:

- It does not answer the question
- It does talk about stereotypes but it is not answering the question - check your question very carefully. The question asks for two things "What are the causes of stereotyping in the mass media?" and "to what extent do they influence social attitudes?" - this conclusion fails to answer either of these.
- It describes without explaining "Several examples have been analysed" - What was found? Why is this important? How does this answer the question?
- It's apologetic - "I have done my best"

Conclusion 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 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.

Comments:

- It does not answer the question
- "The actual causes of stereotyping in the mass media have been shown to be surprisingly diverse" - it refers to the topic - stereotyping - but note that it does not say what these causes are which is what the question asked for. If the information is in the main body but not in the conclusion then the essay will lose marks.
- "It is society itself which must stop this from happening, as laws and regulations are often ineffective" - this point, and others in the conclusion, do not explain to what extent stereotypes influence social attitudes. Be very careful with to what extent questions - make sure you have identified the extent.