

Conclusions: Coming to a Close

A key to writing good conclusions is to not think of them merely as an exercise in going through the motions of recapping everything you've just written. Your conclusion should be **connected** to the argument you've just developed but it should not simply rephrase it in the same terms as your introduction. You've worked hard in your analysis and interpretations, so give your ideas their due! Your conclusion should **demonstrate** that you've gotten somewhere in your paper, that some question or problem has been **considered or analyzed** as fully as possible, and that **other questions or problems about your subject have opened up**. *One of the best things your conclusion can do for your reader is to leave them with something to think about.*

Some things to do in your conclusion:

✓ **Come full circle** by returning to the questions you brought up in your intro in a meaningful way. What's changed and shifted since the beginning of your paper? It's a good test of the coherence of your paper if by the time you've finished writing your body paragraphs you're ready to revisit the very first points you've raised *in a new way*.

✓ **Acknowledge the limitations and possibilities of your interpretation** by bringing up **questions** you haven't been able to answer. If you're truly grappling with a text, you won't be able to get to every aspect of possible analysis in a short paper or answer every single question the text generates for you. Feel free to include further questions in question form. Some examples:

- While/if _____, what might this mean for _____?
- What might this text, then, imply/tell us/illuminate/problematize about _____?
- How does the _____ in this text impact/complicate/correspond to _____?

✓ **Make connections**, to other related parts of the text and/or to wider issues. This means you can actually include **an additional quote from the text** in your conclusion if it's relevant to what you've been discussing. As for wider issues, if you decided to write about, say, the critique of gender roles in a short story or the intersectional implications of a speech, this is the part of your paper where you can move *slightly* farther away from your text and discuss gender more broadly or intersectionality as it's been treated in other works of literature or historical events.

Some things to **not do** in your conclusion:

✗ Don't **recycle your introduction or recap your entire paper** paragraph by paragraph. Do not feel compelled to bring up the specific points you raised in the body of your paper, instead, trust your reader to remember what you said there.

✗ Don't **get grandiose or zoom out too much**. You want your conclusion to give the sense that what you've written about matters but don't want it to suggest that you've figured out what the very essence of a work of literature is. And even if you do zoom out, don't leave the text behind. In fact, it's almost paradoxical, but making claims that are still tied closely to the text will actually help your reader make even wider connections on their own.

Read each example conclusion with a critical eye using the checklist. What has each one done well? What could be revised? Note down the strengths and weaknesses of each one.

Example 1:

The Trial is preoccupied with sex from its opening chapter to its conclusion. By drawing parallels between K.'s and the court's attractions, with a pervasive use of rhetoric of domination and erotic attraction, *The Trial* initially suggests that K. is on trial for his sexuality. But in an ironic contradiction, *The Trial's* legal system, too, is sensual, sexual, even obscene. An exploration of said contradiction and a close reading of the text reveal incongruous and bizarrely direct parallels between K.'s wrongdoing and the court's response: both are explicitly sexual and both employ erotic use of submission and ownership. How can the text reconcile such a foundational hypocrisy, a failure of the legal system's ability to pass unbiased judgment? With an extensive investigation yielding no clear results, the implications are staggering: the contradiction itself defines *The Trial* at its most fundamental.

Example 2:

Shakespeare thus suggests an answer to the question that the play's shifts in power structures ask: perhaps man's ultimate goal is not to rule absolutely. Despite the fact that many of Prospero's relationships with the play's other characters carry strong colonial undertones, it is insufficient to read *The Tempest* as an allegorical critique of colonialism. The play instead establishes a more complex dynamic in which both the

instinct to rule and to be ruled can be harnessed as a means of manipulating power. By acknowledging that power can be wielded even in the absence of a system where one party holds absolute sway over the other, Shakespeare questions whether or not it is necessary for absolute authority to be man's primary objective. Through Prospero's final soliloquy, Shakespeare suggests a possible answer: perhaps freedom, not total control, is the motivation behind his characters', and mans', manipulation of power.