What exactly is the conclusion chapter?

The conclusion chapter is typically the final major chapter of a dissertation or thesis. As such, it serves as a concluding summary of your research findings and wraps up the document.

1. Difference between the discussion and the conclusion chapter?

The two chapters are quite **similar**, as they both discuss the key findings of the study. However, the conclusion chapter is typically **more general** and high-level in nature. In your discussion chapter, you typically discuss the **intricate details** of your study, but in your conclusion chapter, you take a **broader** perspective, reporting on the **main research outcomes** and how these addressed your **research aim** (or aims).

A core function of the conclusion chapter is to **synthesise all major points** covered in your study and to tell the reader Basically, you need to tell readers what you **found**, why it is **valuable**, how it can be **applied**, and what **further research** can be done.

Whatever you do, don't just copy and paste what you've written in your discussion chapter.

2. What should I include in the conclusion?

In general, a good dissertation conclusion should achieve the following:

- Summarise the **key findings** of the study
- Explicitly **answer** the research question(s) and address the research aims
- Inform the reader of the study's main **contributions**
- Discuss any **limitations** or weaknesses of the study
- Present recommendations for **future research**

Therefore, your conclusion needs to cover these core components. Importantly, you need to be careful not to **include any new findings** or data points. Your conclusion chapter should be based purely on data and analysis findings that you've **already presented** in the earlier chapters. If there's a new point you want to introduce, you'll need to go back to your results and discussion chapters to weave the foundation in there.

In many cases, **readers will jump** from the introduction chapter directly to the conclusions chapter to get a quick overview of the study's purpose and key findings. Therefore, when you write up your conclusion chapter, it's useful to assume that the reader **hasn't consumed** the inner chapters of your dissertation or thesis. In other words, craft your conclusion chapter such that

there's a strong **connection** and smooth **flow** between the introduction and conclusion chapters, even though they're on opposite ends of your document.

3. How to write the conclusion ?

Now that you have a clearer view of what the conclusion chapter is about, let's break down its structure so that you can get writing. Keep in mind that this is merely a **typical structure** – it's not set in stone or universal. Some universities will prefer that you cover some of these points in the **discussion chapter**, or that you cover the points at different levels in different chapters.

Step 1: Craft a brief introduction section

As with all chapters in your dissertation or thesis, the conclusion needs to start with a brief introduction. In this introductory section, you'll want to tell the reader **what they can expect** to find in the chapter, and in **what order**. Here's an example of what this might look like:

This chapter will conclude the study by summarising the key research findings in relation to the research aims and questions and discussing the value and contribution thereof. It will also review the limitations of the study and propose opportunities for future research.

Importantly, the objective here is just to give the reader a **taste** of what's to come (a roadmap of sorts), not a summary of the chapter. So, keep it short and sweet – a paragraph or two should be ample.

Step 2: Discuss the overall findings in relation to the research aims

The next step in writing your conclusion is to discuss the **overall findings of your study**, as they relate to the research **aims** and research **questions**. You would have likely covered similar ground in the discussion chapter, so it's important to zoom out a little bit here and focus on the **broader findings** – specifically, how these help address the **research aims**.

In practical terms, it's useful to start this section by **reminding your reader** of your research aims and research questions, so that the findings are well contextualised. In this section, phrases such as, "This study aimed to…" and "the results indicate that…" will likely come in handy. For example, you could say something like the following:

Step 3: Discuss how your study contributes to the field

Next, you'll need to discuss how your research has contributed to the field – both in terms of **theory** and **practice**. This involves talking about what you achieved in your study, highlighting why this is important and valuable, and how it can be used or applied.

In this section you'll want to:

- Inform the reader on just how your research **solves your research problem**, and why that matters

- Reflect on **gaps in the existing** research and discuss how your study contributes towards addressing these gaps
- Discuss your study in **relation to relevant theories**. For example, does it confirm these theories or constructively challenge them?
- Discuss how your research findings can be **applied in the real world**. For example, what specific actions can practitioners take, based on your findings?

Be careful to strike a careful balance between being **firm but humble** in your arguments here. It's unlikely that your one study will fundamentally change paradigms or shake up the discipline, so making claims to this effect **will be frowned upon**. At the same time though, you need to present your arguments with confidence, firmly asserting the contribution your research has made, however small that contribution may be. Simply put, you **need to keep it balanced**.

Step 4: Reflect on the limitations of your study

Now that you've pumped your research up, the next step is to **critically reflect on the limitations** and potential shortcomings of your study. You may have already covered this in the discussion chapter, depending on your university's structural preferences, so be careful not to repeat yourself unnecessarily.

There are many potential limitations that can apply to any given study. Some common ones include:

- Sampling issues that reduce the **generalisability** of the findings (e.g., non-probability sampling)
- Insufficient **sample size** (e.g., not getting enough survey responses) or limited data access
- Low-resolution data **collection or analysis** techniques
- Researcher **bias** or lack of experience
- Lack of access to research **equipment**
- **Time constraints** that limit the methodology.

Step 5: Make recommendations for future research

Next, you'll need to make recommendations for future studies. This will largely be built on the **limitations** you just discussed. For example, if one of your study's weaknesses was related to a specific data collection or analysis method, you can make a recommendation that future researchers undertake similar research using a more sophisticated method.

Another potential source of future research recommendations is any data points or analysis findings that were **interesting or surprising**, but not directly related to your study's research aims and research questions. So, if you observed anything that "stood out" in your analysis, but you didn't explore it in your discussion (due to a lack of relevance to your research aims), you can earmark that for further exploration in this section.

Essentially, this section is an opportunity to outline how other researchers can **build on your study** to take the research further and help develop the body of knowledge. So, think carefully about

the new questions that your study has raised, and clearly outline these for future researchers to pick up on.

Step 6: Wrap up with a closing summary

Finally, it's time to wrap up your conclusion chapter. The closing summary should serve as a quick reference for your readers, recapping what you discussed in the conclusion chapter. Brevity is key here – you only need to include the key takeaways and nothing more. Make sure that you don't present any new information. In practical terms, this section should be a paragraph.

Quick tips for a top-notch conclusion chapter

Now that we've covered the **what**, **why** and **how** of the conclusion chapter, here are some quick tips and suggestions to help you craft a rock-solid conclusion.

- **Don't ramble**. The conclusion usually consumes 5-7% of the total word count (although this will vary between universities), so you need to be concise. Edit it thoroughly with a focus on brevity and clarity.

- Be very **careful about the claims** you make in terms of your study's contribution. Nothing will make the marker's eyes roll back faster than exaggerated or unfounded claims. Be humble but firm in your claim-making.

- Use **clear and simple language** that can be easily understood by an intelligent layman. Remember that not every reader will be an expert in your field, so it's important to make your writing accessible. Bear in mind that no one knows your research better than you do, so it's important to spell things out clearly for readers.