

conclusions: future-oriented remarks

Especially in a relatively short paper, there is no need to restate the gist of the argument that readers have just read. Instead, aim for one or two paragraphs that suggest new questions, new avenues of inquiry, or new potential connections between the argument just made and other arguments, ongoing unsettled debates, new inquiries, new research, etc. In effect, the conclusion responds to the question “So, where does this leave us?” Conclusions may also be generated by questions like “What are the ramifications of my argument’s findings?” or “How might my claim be applied to new situations or issues that arise?” or “What further inquiry deserves to be carried out, given what we now know?” The conclusion orients the reader to the future.

- A writer might establish the relevance of the argument just made to the wider social or intellectual world:

In our present political moment, when many citizens are losing faith in the traditions of democratic governance and question the health of democratic ideals such as independent thought, personal freedoms, and justice, Susan Griffin’s “Liberty” provides a potential model for reclaiming the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence. Her method for rediscovering values introduced in childhood models a procedure for placing us back on the path to democratic wellness. Her method can be practiced by conceivably any citizen who wishes to fortify his or her understanding of how democratic values come into our lives. It catalyzes deep, critical reflection in the face of political anxiety and focuses its energy on individual agency while it supports what might be called “political insight,” of a sort not unlike the founding fathers, who looked inward for their revolutionary lights. In our era of collapsing political ethics, it may be important than ever for each citizen to engage in value recovery of the very sort that she recommends.

- A writer might locate the benefits of the argument just made to understanding some persistent problem or quandary:

Adding to its value as an experiment in political thinking, Griffin’s work may hold educational utility in civic education. For some time, educators have struggled to locate a set of tools for enhancing their students’ understandings of complex political values such as justice, equality, and freedom. Like many other citizens, students tend to envision these as important but abstract ideals that bear little connection to the process of living one’s civic life. Susan Griffin can guide us in bridging the disconnect between political ideals and personal realities, helping citizens understand that personal reflection holds public benefits.

- A writer might suggest a wider application of the argument just made, thereby reinforcing its relevance:

Allen’s fifteen-week close reading of the Declaration, carried out with residents of the community surrounding the University of Chicago suggests a model for civic engagement at other universities and colleges. At Davidson, for instance, one could quite easily a local reading group or series of seminars attended by local residents eager to improve the political climate of the town. Such an effort, focused as it would be on residents’ own readings, would put Davidson in the position of facilitating strong conversation rather than directing it, seeding an effort that could extend to additional groups, organizations, or even families.