= Gavin T. L. Brown   Home   Conceptions   Assessment   Stat. M

The Discussion/ Conclusion Section

A key element in any academic report is the discussion/conclusion section. How you end is important to making sense of your work and persuading the reader that you have made a contribution. The framework here was drafted to guide my own doctoral students in writing the discussion chapter of a thesis.

I'm sure there are other ways to write this section but this is what I like to read and write.

A. A summary of the thesis

This section gives a high-level overview of the whole thesis (not just each study 1 by 1), why it was done, how it was done, and what was found. This is instead of reporting each piece of each study over again. The goal is to remind the reader the BIG things about your thesis. This is where you are trying to bring everything together into a coherent narrative. Remember examiners and readers probably do not read the whole thesis in one sitting, so this overview is important--keep it high-level.

A possible structure is:

- *The purpose of this thesis was xxxxx.*
- *The topic was investigated in an xxxxx design, using yyy methods.*
- *The major research questions/goals/hypotheses were xxxx, yyy, zzz.*
- *The thesis discovered xxxx, yyy, zzz .*

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Eacn of these 'moves' may take several sentences.

This section is the actual discussion of the MAJOR findings (don't belabour minor results or minor issues).

Here the focus is on the *so-what?* rather than *what-is-so?* which was already reported in each empirical study chapter.

The point of the discussion is to relate findings to previous research; does this thesis corroborate, contradict, or complement previous literature.

I would have a section for each of the research questions, goals, or hypotheses that were outlined in the summary of results at the beginning of this chapter. Present them in the same order as you listed them in the Summary.

C.   Implications of Major Findings

Having discussed the major findings relative to the work reported in the literature review, the IMPLICATIONS of those results needs to be raised. Not every thesis will have implications for all five of these options, but you should seriously ask the question.

What do the findings mean for?:

1. **Practice** (i.e., whatever educational practices the thesis addresses)
2. **Policy** (i.e., whatever educational policies the thesis addresses)
3. **Theory** (i.e., whatever educational, psychological, etc. theories the thesis addresses)
4. **Method** (i.e., whatever research methods the thesis advances, modifies, or questions)
5. **Future research** (i.e., whatever weaknesses or faults there might have been in your thesis, this is where you suggest what could be done to compensate or overcome in a future study and/or ideas you have for new studies based on your results—*to test if xxx is true as suggested by this thesis, future research should yyyy*)

You don't have to follow that order; find the order that fits the type of thesis you did.

D.   Significance Statement

Finally, the chapter should conclude that identifies the significant contribution claim you want to make. Frankly, if you don't know what your 2-4 years of work mean why should you expect the examiner/reader to guess what you should have said. This is where all those 3MT and 60-second elevator pitches come in handy.

Consider ending the final paragraph with:

"The original and substantive contribution of this thesis is....." (fill in the blank)

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