

The Structure of PH.D. Conclusion Chapters by D. Bunton

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1.0 Titles

Table 2

Titles of 44 PhD concluding chapters/sections

Conclusion (13)	General discussion (3)
Conclusions (11)	General discussion and conclusions
Concluding remarks (2)	General discussion, implications and conclusions
General conclusion	General discussion and future direction of study
Concluding general discussion	Discussion
Conclusions and recommendations	Summary
Conclusions and Implications	Summary and conclusions
Conclusions and prospects	Summary and future research
Conclusion–discussion	General summary
	<i>Topic-specific title</i>

2.0 Functions and Length

These varied titles indicate six major roles that the writers see a conclusion playing:

- Summarising thesis findings
- Discussing the findings more broadly than in earlier chapters
- Coming to conclusions (more generalised than findings)
- Giving implications of findings
- Making recommendations
- Suggesting areas of future research.

4.3. Length

The lengths of the 44 thesis *Conclusions* ranged from 2 to 38 pages, averaging 9.2 pages. There was a marked difference, however, between those in ST disciplines and those in HSS disciplines. ST conclusions averaged 4.9 pages, while HSS conclusions averaged 17.2 pages.

3.0 Citations

The number of references to other authors in a thesis *Conclusion* is of interest as it gives some indication of how much the conclusion refers back to previous research in summing up the findings and significance of the thesis and in making recommendations for further research. When this is expressed as a percentage of the number of references in the thesis as a whole, it gives an indication of the importance of the concluding chapter compared with other chapters in positioning the research study in relation to the literature. In these 44 thesis *Conclusions*, the number of references to the literature ranged from nil to 112, averaging 21.0. There was again a marked difference between ST *Conclusions*, which averaged 16.6 references (or 3.7% of the total number of references in the thesis) and HSS *Conclusions* which averaged 29.2 references (or 6.0% of total references).

4.0 Section headings

Section headings are also helpful in showing what the writer is hoping to accomplish in different parts of the chapter, the moves the writer has in mind. However, slightly more than half of the concluding chapters (23 of 44) were not divided into sections (especially in ST disciplines). The 21 that did have sections had between two and eight sections, the ST *Conclusions* with sections averaging 2.5 sections each and the HSS *Conclusions* with sections averaging 5.2 sections each.

Table 3
Keywords in generic section headings in 12 ST PhD *conclusions*

Present more than once	Present only once
<i>1st section heading</i>	<i>1st section heading</i>
Summary (2)	Contributions
Discussion (2)	
Conclusion(s) (5)	<i>Intermediate section heading</i>
	Methodological aspects
<i>Intermediate section heading</i>	Limitations
Recommendations (2)	Implications
<i>Final section heading</i>	<i>Final section heading</i>
Future work (4)	Future directions
Future/further research (3)	Further studies
	Epilogue

Table 4
Keywords in generic section headings in nine HSS PhD *conclusions*

Present more than once	Present only once
<i>1st Section Heading</i>	<i>1st Section Heading</i>
Summary (3)	The Approach
Findings (2)	The Arguments
	Overall Validity
<i>Intermediate Section Headings</i>	
Research Questions (2)	
Implications (2)	<i>Intermediate Section Headings</i>
Recommendations (2)	The (local) Context
Limitations (2)	
<i>Final Section Heading</i>	<i>Final Section Heading</i>
Future/Further Research (4)	Cautionary Notes and Research Directions
Theoretical Implications (2)	A Final Word
Concluding Remarks (2)	

5.0 Types of concluding chapters --

5.1 THESIS-ORIENTED (focus on the dissertation research)

Table 5

Moves found in thesis-oriented PhD *conclusions*

Moves	ST (N=25)		HSS (N= 11)	
	N	%	N	%
1. Introductory restatement	23	92	11	100
2. Consolidation of research space	25	100	11	100
3. Practical applications/implications/recommendations	9	36	6	55
Embedded elsewhere	7	28	2	18
4. Recommendations for future research	20	80	4	36
Embedded elsewhere	1	4	4	36
5. Concluding restatement	1	4	3	27

Typical *Recommendations for Future Research* moves from ST and HSS *Conclusions* respectively begin as follows:

This method certainly **merits further investigation** especially in problems involving a lot of unknowns, such as the following:... (ST5)

The findings of this research study provide **the following insights for future research**:... (HSS11)

Conclusions focussed mainly on the field rather than on the thesis or the specific research study itself. Seven of the eight were characterised by a Problem–Solution–Evaluation structure (e.g., Hoey, 1983) in their approach to issues in the field. The eighth, in the field of Literature in English, followed an argument structure of Claim–Counterclaim–Justification (e.g., Jordan, 1984). Following is an example of a Problem–Solution–

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