# Section 5 –
# Conclusions

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The conclusion section of the Independent Investigation is the point at which you have the chance to both **summarise** the main findings of the data analysis section and offer geographical explanations for the phenomena you are presenting. It is important at this stage to only draw on information seen in the analysis section: no new data or theories should be presented in the conclusion, as the framework for a study of this nature wants students to have already explored all of the main ideas in the previous sections. Instead the conclusion should concentrate on **answering the research questions** and, in fact, using the research questions as sub-headings within the conclusion section can be good practice for showing the reader how the study has always had these questions at its heart.

**Geographical explanations** for the answers to the research questions should be clearly linked to established theory where possible, though students should take care not to repeat the geographical models and theories in the detail in which they were stated in their Introduction and Literature Review section. Instead it is a good idea to link the findings of the study to the theory by showing how the investigation extends geographical knowledge or indeed confirms it within the location or setting of the study. Where the results contradict the theory the geographer is called on to look at the particular circumstances of the study and offer possible reasons why it might not match the preconceived models. There may be many reasons why the results from a study might not follow an expected pattern: from errors in the methodology to site specific factors. It is vital that you do not reject your findings simply because they do not match what you have read in a textbook – some of the best Independent Investigations are those where the results appear 'wrong' but the geographer sees the local geography as a defining factor in what made the results what they are.

The conclusion should be well sequenced and all reasoning should be logical and sound. The researcher can only conclude what their results tell them, even though it is very tempting to make cognitive 'leaps of faith' in your arguments.

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## Wrongly drawn conclusions:

**The results show that since 2002 the seaside town in question has not experienced any coastal flooding. Groynes were built along the its coastline in 2002 and 65% of people say that the pier is now more of an eyesore than the groynes.**

*" The new groynes do not detract from the look of the beach."*

The results do not state this. When people were asked to compare the groynes with the pier, they rated the pier as being less attractive, but that is not to say the groynes are welcomed aesthetically.

*" The new groynes have saved the town from flooding."*

The results do not state this. Though the town has not flooded there is no evidence to suggest that would have flooded if the groynes had not been built.

*" The groynes have been a good investment for the town and people like them."*

The results do not state this. There is no indication from the statement that the groynes have given good value for money as ultimately this will always be unprovable. Nor have people been directly asked if they like the groynes or not.

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**Common Pitfalls:**

- **Discussing data that has not been presented or analysed.** Your study should follow a logical sequence: in the conclusion there should be no new information for the reader to find.
- **Bulking out the conclusion by repeating explanations of geographical theories and models.** If you have already discussed a theory in your Literature Review simply refer back to the theory briefly.
- **Making 'leaps of faith' in your reasoning.** You cannot make a conclusion about an issue if you have not asked that question or found that answer to be true.
- **Discrediting your methodology because the results do not fit the theory.** There may be sound geographical reasons why the theory does not match up with your results. A good geographer will look at all the localised conditions to find an explanation before putting anomalous results down to flawed data collection methods.
- **Making vague links to the aims and research questions.** Remember, your research questions or hypotheses should make up the backbone of your study.
- **Claiming the investigation does more than it actually does.** It is always best to be tentative with any claims about the impact your conclusions will have on the world of geography! It is highly unlikely that your Independent Investigation will do anything more than confirm that a model in its whole, or in part, 'works' for a particular location.