

Introductions and Conclusions

Introductions

Introductions are the overview of the textual journey that you and your readers are about to embark on. The introduction is therefore an important part of your writing as it grabs your readers' attention, but can also tell them how well your thoughts are put together, how well-organized your piece is and how well you write. There is no fool-proof recipe for writing introductions. However, it must answer the following questions:

What was I studying? Why was it an important question? What did we know about it before I did this study? How will this study advance our knowledge?

Introductions should:

- Orient your readers to your topic
- Set the context of your piece
- Raise the question you intend to answer in your piece
- State briefly the main points to be covered in your argument
- State your approach or position on the topic

Example:

An electronic cigarette, also known as e-cigarette, is a type of nicotine inhaler, imitating ordinary cigarettes. E-cigarettes contain nicotine solution in a disposable cartridge. In contrast with ordinary cigarettes, which involve tobacco combustion, e-cigarettes use heat to transform nicotine solution into vapour. Processed and purified nicotine from tobacco leaves, suspended in a mixture of glycerin or propylene glycol with water, is vapourised. Nicotine present in such vapour enters the respiratory tract, from where it is absorbed to the bloodstream (Goniewicz et al., 2014).

Broad context (summary of previous research)

Distributors of e-cigarettes promote the product as completely free of harmful substances. Currently, the scientific evidence on the lack or presence of toxic chemicals in the vapour generated from e-cigarettes, and inhaled by their users is very limited. In August 2008, Ale Alwen, the Assistant Director-General for Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health, stated that 'the electronic cigarette is not a proven nicotine replacement therapy. WHO has no scientific evidence to confirm the product's safety and efficacy.

More specific context to this experiment (summary of previous research)

The current tests show that the cartridges contain no or trace amounts of potentially harmful substances, including nitrosamines, acetaldehyde, acetone and formaldehyde. However, using e-cigarettes requires heating the cartridges and under such conditions chemical reactions may result in formation of new compounds. Such a situation takes place in the case of ordinary cigarettes, where a number of toxic compounds are formed during combustion.

Significance of the research

This study set out to develop analytical methods and measure concentrations of carcinogenic compounds in the vapour generated by different brands and types of e-cigarettes. It was hypothesized that substituting tobacco cigarettes with e-cigarettes may substantially reduce exposure to the selected tobacco-specific toxicants.

Aims of the research and hypothesis



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Conclusions

Conclusions are often the most difficult part of a paper to write but they are important as they signify the end of a textual journey. The conclusion gives your reader something to take away with them and should indicate why the paper was meaningful and useful. It is also your final opportunity to make a good impression.

What has your research shown? How has it added to what is known about the subject? What were its shortcomings? Has your research left some unanswered questions? Can you provide recommendations for future research?

Conclusions should:

- Answer the question “So what?” (Use this as a starting point if you are stuck)
- Bring the reader full circle. Refer back to the purpose/s of your piece to provide unity
- Synthesise your main points
- Give your reader something to think about (greater context, the future, etc)

Avoid:

- Merely summarizing your work. You must critically engage with the message you are driving
- Introducing new ideas or including evidence that should be in the body of the paper
- Apologising

Example:

The vapour generated from e-cigarettes contains potentially toxic compounds. However, the levels of potentially toxic compounds in e-cigarette vapour are 9–450-fold lower than those in the smoke from conventional cigarettes, and in many cases comparable with the trace amounts present in pharmaceutical preparation. Our findings support the idea that substituting tobacco cigarettes with electronic cigarettes may substantially reduce exposure to tobacco-specific toxicants. The use of e-cigarettes as a harm reduction strategy among cigarette smokers who are unable to quit, warrants further study.

Links to introduction

Highlights the key findings

Emphasises the significance and implications of the findings

Adapted from: Goniewicz, Maciej Lukasz, et al. 2014. Levels of selected carcinogens and toxicants in vapour from electronic cigarettes. *Tobacco Control* 23(2):133-139.

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