

TOP TIPS FOR WRITING A LAY SUMMARY

A lay summary should provide an overview of your research that uses clear, plain language to communicate to a non-specialist audience. Lay summaries can make your findings accessible to a wider audience and broaden the impact of your research.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE



People who read your summary will be interested in your research but are not necessarily specialists. For example, imagine pitching your summary to:

- a policy steering committee/MP
- a family member over a family get-together
- A-level students at a career day.

Remember, your summary should get your message across with minimum effort from the reader.

TELL THE STORY

What do you need to say?



Outline your summary by answering: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How?

How will you say it?



- Avoid technical jargon and uncommon abbreviations unless absolutely necessary - if you have to use them provide a clear explanation.
- Avoid scientific symbols and notations (e.g. '<', 'Σ') - not everyone will know what they mean.
- Use the first person and active voice. For example, say 'we will look at how cells change' rather than 'how cells change will be looked at'.
- Use positive, and not negative sentences. For example, say 'We plan to repeat the tests once', rather than 'We do not plan to repeat tests more than once'.
- Use person-centred language, rather than focusing on circumstance, illness, or disability. For example: 'people with a disability/illness' is preferable to 'the disabled/invalids'; a person 'has cerebral palsy' rather than 'is a victim of cerebral palsy'.
- Use analogies to explain complex ideas - but remember to keep them relatable, e.g. link to an everyday activity.
- Avoid complicated English or uncommon words. Examples include archaic language (e.g. amidst, whilst), and verb choices such as 'conducted' used in place of the simpler 'done'.

- Have a title that is short, clear, relevant, and reader friendly. It is your first chance to catch the reader's attention.

What's the bigger picture?



- Cover the 'so what?' factor. Put your research into context for the reader – state the potential non-academic impact and benefits to society. For example, state how many people suffer from condition x, or 'We spend £xx million on xx drugs'.
- Include a 'summary within a summary': one final sentence which explains what the key findings are and why they are important.

MAKE IT AN EASY READ



- Keep your sentence length to an average of 20 words.
- Try to stick to one main idea in a sentence, and avoid complicated sentence structure (e.g. lots of semicolons).
- Check your summary for readability using software tools:
 - [Hemingway Editor App](#)
 - [The Writer readability checker](#)

GET FEEDBACK



- Read the summary aloud to yourself - this can help you check if there's a logical flow of ideas.
- Ask a non-scientist to read your summary to see if they understand it.

STICK TO THE WORD LIMIT

Keep within the 150 word limit as indicated in the conference abstract submission guideline.

Adapted from: <https://www.wiley.com/network/societyleaders/research-impact/how-to-write-a-lay-summary-for-your-research>