

Writing a good lay summary

A good lay summary is clear and accessible to people who do not have a scientific background but may have considerable personal experience. It is not a 'dumbed down' version of your research, but a clear, plain English explanation, which offers context and explains the relevance to people affected by MS / Parkinson's.

Your lay summary is important because it will be reviewed by a number of people affected by MS / Parkinson's. Lay reviewers are not asked to comment on the science of applications.

They will comment and score your request based on:

- how relevant it is to people with MS / Parkinson's, and the potential impact;
- the clarity and quality of the writing.

Tips on language and layout

Do

- Try to explain your research in 20 words, and then use this as your first sentence
- Consider including a glossary of key terms
- Use bullet points and headings to break up long blocks of text
- Use simple diagrams and non-scientific analogies to explain complex concepts
- Ask a non-scientist to review your summary before you submit
- Speak directly to your reader
- Use everyday English
- Use active verbs rather than passive ones

Don't

- Use overly complicated or uncommon words
- Use jargon, abbreviations, acronyms or technical terms without explanation
- Forget to check spelling and grammar
- Use overly long sentences (20 words or less is a good guide)
- Introduce new ideas late in the text

Language should be person-centred rather than focusing on the circumstance, symptom or disability. For example, 'people with MS / Parkinson's' is preferable to 'MS / Parkinson's sufferers'. A person 'has MS / Parkinson's' rather than 'is a victim of MS / Parkinson's'.

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Structure

You may wish to address the following questions, to structure your lay summary.

What is the aim of the project? How will it benefit people affected by MS / Parkinson's?
This section should clearly set out the aims of the project, and focus on why they are important and relevant to people affected by MS / Parkinson's.

What is the reason for this study?

This section should clearly set out the rationale for the project, what is already known from past research, how this project is original, and what you hope to find out.

How will this project be carried out?

This section should clearly set out the methods that will be used, and explain why you have chosen to use them. It should also explain how you plan to involve people with MS in the planning and/or running of the project. If people with MS will be participants, explain how you will recruit them, and how participants' needs will be taken into account.

How will your research findings be put into practice?

This section should clearly set out your plans for dissemination and implementation. Once the project is complete, how will the findings be put into practice or further developed, ensuring that people with MS benefit from your research? This section may also include any planned public engagement activities.

And finally, a quick example:

Before: "The characterization of novel genetic contributions predisposing to disease will definitely help to define all molecular events underlying the neuronal cell loss characteristic of the disease."

After: "We want to understand how genes affect peoples' risk of developing Parkinson's. This will also help us work out what happens inside the nerve cells that die in the brain."

Helpful resources

- INVOLVE 'Make it Clear' campaign - <http://www.invo.org.uk/makeitclear/>
- Plain English campaign - <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides.html>

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