



Best Practices for Writing a Plain Language Abstract

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Clear and concise plain language abstracts are an essential component of any research proposal or research article. Your lay abstract must clearly communicate why your research matters to a broad audience that includes patients, funders, and policy makers. The following document outlines key considerations for writing an effective plain language abstract.

A. Required sections (use headings): 650-750 words.

- **Lay Abstract Title:** provide an engaging title that will draw attention.
- **Background:** Explain the context of your research. What is the broad nature and extent of the problem your research is trying to address? It is essential that you provide a clear context so a lay reader understands what prompted you to pursue your research. This is the 'so what?'
- **Purpose:** Explain the goals of your research. How will your proposed research address the problem you have identified in the Background section? Engage the reader to understand why your question is important so that they should continue reading.
- **Method:** What are the steps required to accomplish the goals of your proposed research?
- **Anticipated Outcomes:** What are the results you are expecting?
- **Patient Engagement:** Define your patient engagement plan or patient partner role in the study or acknowledge that you do not have one and justify why.
- **Relevance to Patients/Community:** Explain the importance of your work and how your research will improve or impact the lives of patients
- **Conclusion**

B. General guidelines for writing a clear and concise plain language abstract:

1. Use plain language and aim for a broad audience at Grade 8 to 10 reading level (Please verify reading level using available reading level assessment tool): Patient partners will have a wide range of scientific literacy and academic knowledge. It is essential that the lay abstract is accessible to a broad audience including patient partners, funders, policy makers. Write as though you are explaining to one of your relatives in Grade 10 high school, or your grandmother – someone who genuinely cares about you, and shares your passion about the work you are doing. Alternatively, write your lay abstract like a high school newspaper article.

2. Use succinct sentences. Write in first person plural, using positive language.

3. Eliminate jargon. It is essential to communicate your intentions without using scientific terminology.

4. Follow a logical sequence of ideas that a non-scientific audience can easily follow.

5. Indent and separate new ideas. When changing ideas or topics use an indent or a space or begin a new paragraph. This breaks up the text and makes it much easier to read.

6. Glossary of scientific terms and acronyms: Your lay abstract must not be cumbersome to read. Do not assume that an acronym that is common in your scientific speciality is well known outside of your community. Include a glossary and a brief explanation of scientific terms and acronyms. This brings clarity to your document and obviates the patient partner needing to consult secondary sources in order to understand your lay abstract. This glossary is not included in your word count.

7. Consider using analogies, similes, and metaphors: The use metaphors or analogies can help lay abstract reviewers to understand important concepts.