Lay Summaries

" A lay summary (a.k.a. plain language summary) of a scholarly publication is a stand-alone **summary written in plain language** (i.e. words and sentence structures that are easy to understand, avoidance of technical terms and jargon). A **clear, simple summary** written in **non-promotional language** helps anyone looking for information read and understand complex scientific evidence.

It is usually hosted within the main manuscript PDF or within the web site of the academic journal, and it is supplied as a supplementary abstract.

Its **communicative purpose** is to briefly describes the key question and findings of the paper for a broad audience (i.e. scientists from other disciplines, early career researchers, educators, students, policy makers, science communicators, and the general public). A lay summary therefore **aims to share research findings with the public**.

The lay summary has the typical **rhetorical structure** of a traditional Abstract that answers the following questions:

- **Aims and purpose**: What did we want to find out? Why does the research matter?
- **Methods**: What did we do? What are the key variables/participants?
- **Results**: What did we find out? Was it what you expected or not?
- **Importance of results**: What do the findings mean? What are the implications of these results?

When writing lay summaries:

- Use simple, conversational-style language
- Use the active voice
- Use pronouns
- Avoid (or, when this is not possible, explain/define) acronyms and abbreviations, research jargon and technical terms
- Do not report statistical data
- Choose neutral and factual words, avoid superlatives and emotional words
- Break up the text into short paragraphs

All in all, follow these **tips** for an effective lay summary:

⊞ Use your knowledge of writing, the lay summary is submitted for publication and peer-reviewed at the same time as research paper.

👥 Identify your target audience, this will help you select information and type of language you use.

👪 Use a readability tool to check how easy the language of the summary is to read and understand. Most tools provide information on word and sentence length, and estimate reading grade level.

⚛ Consider dissemination channels of the lay summary: it can be shared through social media, repositories, and relevant websites.

🔗 Reference and hyperlink the scientific publication.

➤ Click to access two examples of lay summaries:

- https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40744-017-0080-4
- https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38164363/

📚 **Related publications:**

Carciu, O.M. (2022). Digital science communication beyond expert audiences: Exploring add-on genres in enhanced publications. *9th Conference on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and Social Media Corpora (CMC2022)*, 28-29 September 2022, Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Conference presentation.