

Writing a Lay Summary

1. **Content.** Make sure that you answer the questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How?
2. **Brevity.** Use short sentences – up to 15 words on average. Try to include only one idea per sentence.
3. **Structure.** Use paragraphs. Break up your text with sub-headings and bullet points to make it easier to take in.
4. **Jargon.** Use everyday language where possible, and give simple explanations of scientific terms. For example, use ‘nerves’ instead of ‘neurons’, or ‘cell death’ instead of ‘apoptosis’.
5. **‘Academic’ language.** Academics often use complex language where there are simpler alternatives. Use simple words and cut out unnecessary words. Some examples:
 - a. Participate in – take part
 - b. Prior to – before
 - c. Discontinue – stop
 - d. In the event of – if
 - e. Duration – time
 - f. Inform – tell
 - g. Scheduled to undergo – due to have
 - h. Accordingly, consequently – so
 - i. With reference to, with regard to – about
 - j. If this is the case – if so
 - k. For the purpose of - to
6. **Use the active voice, not passive.** For example: ‘You will have chemotherapy’, rather than ‘Chemotherapy will be given to you’.
7. **Imagine you’re talking to the reader.** How would you explain it to the person next door?
8. **Make it human.** For example: ‘people with breast cancer’ rather than ‘breast cancer sufferers’ or ‘people with a disability’ rather than ‘the disabled’.
9. **Get a non-scientist to read it** and comment.
10. **Context.** Include some background; are you trying to find out more about a condition, or testing new treatments for example.
11. **Explain the study’s impact.** Make sure you explain the desired end goal clearly, even if it’s some time in the future
12. **Readability.** Are you excluding people by making your readability level too high? These two websites will calculate it for you (in slightly different ways):
 - a. <http://www.thewriter.com/what-we-think/readability-checker/>
 - b. http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp