

Writing for a Lay Audience - Guidelines

Adapted and reprinted with permission from the University of Sheffield's [Writing for a Lay Audience](#)

As part of the submission process, the MMSF requires applicants to provide a lay summary of their research project. This document will help you write your summary.

What is the purpose of a lay summary?

A lay summary explains your research in non-specialist language to a general audience.

Your lay summary should be understood by someone with a grade 10 reading level. There are several tools and apps that determine your lay summary's readability and comprehension level. The most common is Microsoft Word, which utilizes the Flesch-Kincaid grade level test and reading ease test. For steps on how to use this feature in Word, read [Get your document's readability and level statistics](#).

When writing your lay summary, it is important to remember some key factors:

WHO?

Who is involved in the research (e.g., the university/stakeholders)? Who does the research affect, and who benefits from the research?

WHAT?

What is the research about? What information does your reader need to understand to help them make sense of the research? What information is particularly significant or important? What impact does it have for broader society and for understanding of the subject area?

WHERE?

Are there any geographical limitations to your research that are noteworthy? Where will the research take place?

WHEN?

When does the research take place? What period does the research concern?

WHY?

Why is your research important and of interest to your audience?

HOW?

How will you conduct your research? How did it come about?

SO WHAT?

With all this information in mind, make sure you have answered the most important question of all: why should your reader care?

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Simplified vocabulary will also assist in writing for a lay audience. When possible, go with the simpler word. Some examples include:

Instead of...	Replace with...
mortality	death
morbidity	disease
analgesic	painkiller
illustrate	show
pre- and post-	before and after

(Adapted from the Heart & Stroke Foundation's lay summary guidelines)