Tips for Writing Plain Language Summaries

Content

✓ Answer the questions:
   o Why was the study done?
   o What did the researchers do and find?
   o Who took part in the study?
   o What do the results mean?
   o What were the main conclusions?
   o Why are the findings relevant to, and how do they affect, the PLS/PLSP target audience?
   o What is the objective influence on the wider field?

Please note that these questions do not need to be used as headings; they are provided to help authors determine what information to include in PLS/PLSPs.

✓ Keep statements factual and avoid providing opinions or speculation on the study’s findings and significance.

✓ Ensure statements accurately reflect the information and data within the original article, and there are no statements that could be considered misleading or misrepresentative.

Composition

✓ Use short, clear sentences and phrase sentences in neutral language, remaining as objective as possible.

✓ Use the active voice rather than the passive voice (for example, “Dr Smith’s team report several improvements” rather than “Several improvements were reported by Dr Smith’s team”).

✓ Use language that aligns with preferences of the patient community. For example, use person-centered language rather than focusing on the condition/illness or disability; however, alternative preferences may exist.

✓ Avoid jargon, complex grammatical structures, and abbreviations. If you need to use a technical term or abbreviation, explain it the first time you use it.

Content Review

✓ Assess the ability of the audience to understand the PLSP by having a writer/editor with plain language experience and/or a patient/patient advocate review the PLSP prior to submission.

✓ Readability tools can assist in evaluating ease of understanding; however, readability scores should be interpreted alongside other feedback and review comments provided.

Other Considerations

✓ Review available guidance on plain language writing for science.

✓ Consult plain language glossaries to assist with translating complex science into plain language.
Plain Language & PLS Resources

Plain Language Summary Guidance
ISMPP/Envision Pharma Plain language summaries of publications of company-sponsored medical research: what key questions do we need to address? https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03007995.2021.1997221

Plain Language – General
Center for Plain Language. https://centerforplainlanguage.org/
Plain Language Commission. https://clearest.co.uk/
Plain Language Association International. https://plainlanguagenetwork.org/

Plain Language – Medical
NIHR Plain English Summaries. https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/plain-english-summaries/27363
Universal Patient Language. https://www.upl.org/about

The resources shared here are for general information purposes only. The information provided by these resources does not reflect the views or policies of Taylor & Francis or its imprints.