Writing a Lay Summary

Why?

- May be requested by publisher or funder

- Good practice – makes you think about how to explain your work in the 'real world'

- Can be shared more widely – e.g on a blog or Facebook page

- Could be used to get the media interested in your work

- Builds your profile as more people can engage with your work

- Clarifies the public health importance of your work

- Can be read by non-specialists – helps encourage multidisciplinary collaborations

Language

- Different language to the original paper

- Use the active voice

- Use names – readers engage better with real people rather than anonymous 'researchers'

- Minimize the use of abbreviations, acronyms and jargon

- Explain any necessary abbreviations, acronyms and jargon the first time they are used

- Avoid using long words when there is a short word with the same meaning

- Use short sentences

- Use plain, clear English. An app like Hemingway Editor can help (www.hemingwayapp.com)

Structure

- 5 short paragraphs, no more than 400 words

Paragraph 1	Conclusion of your paper. And the Who, What, When and Where
Paragraph 2	Small amount of background information to put your research into context and explain why it is interesting and important
Paragraph 3	The aims and hypothesis of your study
Paragraph 4	The methods and results
Paragraph 5	The health or social impact of the study. Any policy recommendations. Suggestions for future work.

How to improve

- Read good examples of lay science – articles, books, websites

- Give your summaries to friends outside your field – listen to their feedback

- Recognize writing for the public is important – it is worth your time

- Edit, edit, edit – you won't write a perfect summary first time

Example changes in language

Original text **-** Blood macrophages play a crucial role in atherosclerosis due to scavenging oxidised LDL. CD36 receptors bind and internalise OxLDL. We will use whole genome microarrays to evaluate the transcriptional profile of macrophages after stimulation of CD36 with OxLDL.

Lay text - White blood cells known as macrophages are important in the process of fatty build-up in the artery wall, called atherosclerosis. A specialized protein receptor, CD36, on the macrophage surface sticks to 'bad' (LDL) cholesterol and brings the fatty deposit into the cell. Using 'gene chip' technology, we will study the changes that occur inside macrophages when CD36 recognises and interacts with cholesterol.

Further reading from other universities and organizations

- www.researchsupport.eps.manchester.ac.uk/documents/pe/Lay%20Summary%20Writing%20Tips.pdf

- www.mrc.ac.uk/skills-careers/studentships/for-current-mrc-students/max-perutz-science-writing-award/the-secrets-of-science-writing/

- www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-it/techniquesapproaches/writing-non-specialists

- www.bath.ac.uk/marketing/public-engagement/assets/HowToWriteLaySummariesUKOLN.pdf

- www.bhf.org.uk/research/information-for-researchers/how-to-apply/lay-summaries

If you have any questions about this guide or would like to suggest other topics for our Learning Center please email mahidol.tropmed@gmail.com.

Published February 2016