Writing a Layperson Summary

Lay summaries are short accounts of research that are targeted at a general audience. They play a significant role in most research grant applications and can also be useful in supporting wider public engagement with research. Public engagement is a priority for funders of higher education. Funders expect universities to demonstrate the impact of research on the public, how they are meeting the needs of wider society, and the relevance and responsiveness of their research.

Lay Summaries are one form of writing intended to help communicate research to a non-specialist audience. They describe research in non-specialist language and are meant for people who are not the immediate peers of the researcher. They can be required as part of grant conditions, either during the funding application process, or at the stage when research results are disseminated. Lay summaries are most often written by researchers themselves. Lay summaries are useful to the lay public but can also make research accessible to professionals in nearby fields. The next section of this document provides a definition of lay summaries followed by an overview of guidelines for writing lay summaries.

Layman Summary Definition
The abstract, or project summary, is a concise, clear, and brief description of the project. It should outline the problem, the objectives, expected outcomes, including significance of the project to the field being studied. The abstract is usually written in less technical language than the proposal narrative.
Your layperson summary should include (1) why the study was proposed (background) (2) the reason for conducting the study (rationale and objectives), and (3) the expected outcomes (benefits) for conducting the study.

Guidelines for the lay summary:
1. **Level of difficulty of text (words and structure)**
The text should be written in an easily readable style. The author should use short, clear sentences broken up into paragraphs for readability, and avoid complex grammatical structures where possible. The author should use everyday English words in place of complex words.
2. **Structure**
The text should be ordered logically and flow naturally. *"For example, ideas should be introduced as they are required, and new ideas usually should not be introduced late in the text."*
3. **Avoid complex or meaningless terms and phrases**
Many terms used in academic English are either overcomplicated or contain no useful information.*" Examples include terms such as 'virtually' or 'literally' or archaic language (e.g. amidst, whilst), as well as verb choices such as 'purchase' used in place of the simpler 'buy'."*
4. **Expressing ideas in the active voice**

Text should be written in the active voice ('I... you..') and second person ('you') should be used in place of third person ('he/she'). *"For example, 'You will have chemotherapy' rather than 'Chemotherapy will be given to you'."*

5. Positive phrasing

Sentences should be phrased positively, rather than negatively. *"For example, 'You will have repeat appointments at least once a fortnight', rather than 'The usual practice is not to schedule repeat appointments more frequently than once a fortnight'".*

6. Straightforward to read

The writer should limit the memory load on readers – don't ask them to remember too much jargon/abstract information.

7. Clear theme

A good and relevant title should be provided, and the first sentence should offer a concise introduction to the text.

8. Content

The text should provide answers to the essential questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How?*" For example, the reader should easily be able to find answers to questions such as 'Why is the research being conducted?'"*

9. Relevance, application and benefits

Aims and objectives should be clearly stated. *"For example, the 'point' – the impact – of the work should be clearly understood."*

10. Everyday examples

Give concrete everyday examples wherever possible.

11. Person-centred language

The language used should be person-centred, rather than focusing on circumstance, illness or disability. For example: 'people with a disability/illness' is preferable to 'the disabled/invalids'; a person 'has cerebral palsy' rather than 'is a victim of cerebral palsy'.

12. Appropriate tone

The text should not be written to entertain

[Guidelines obtained from http://www.dcc.ac.uk/resources/how-guides/write-lay-summary#Guidelines]