**Guidelines for Researchers: Writing an Effective Lay Summary**

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Lay summaries are commonly used by researchers in many subject areas - they are in fact required as a condition of entering your project into the Raine Study's Online Submission System (ROSS).

A well-written lay summary will bring many benefits to you as an author: increased visibility, increased "findability" online, and a greater understanding of your work by people beyond your immediate colleagues and team.

Unfortunately, it is much more common to find badly written lay summaries than it is good ones - full of jargon, too long, and incomprehensible to anyone who doesn't share your expertise in that field.

Since the translation of our research to non-specialist audiences is critical to securing funding, grants and potentially even media opportunities, we asked the Raine Study's Communications Manager Kate Rowlands to give us a rundown of what she looks for in a lay summary.

**What is a lay summary?**

A lay summary is a brief summary of a research proposal, project or publication that has been written for members of the public, rather than researchers or professionals. It should be written in plain English, avoid the use of jargon and explain any technical terms that have to be included.

It is different from an abstract, which is written for a target audience of scientific peers and experts.

A lay summary is ultimately an impact statement. It will help raise awareness of innovation and new developments in your field, help increase the health literacy of the general public, and demonstrate how seriously you take your accountability to the funders and donors who have helped finance your research.

It should:

* Use short, succinct sentences, and write in plain English.
* Answer the questions of who/what/where/when/how/why.
* Pass the "so what?" test - why should a non-scientific audience care?
* Explain what it contributes to existing scientific knowledge, and how the general public will ultimately benefit.

Most importantly, a lay summary should avoid jargon unless absolutely necessary, and explain what it means if you do need to keep it in. Imagine you are talking to a first-year undergraduate in Science 101 OR pretend you're trying to explain your work to a distant cousin who works in an unrelated, non-scientific field.

Handy hint: the general public does not use terms such as adiposity, comorbidity or menarche on a regular basis - neither should a lay summary...

If you'd like to find out more, here's a few useful sites:

[*Australian Clinical Trials Alliance*, Writing in plain language](https://involvementtoolkit.clinicaltrialsalliance.org.au/toolkit/undertaking/writing-in-plain-language/)

[*Elsevier Connect*, In a nutshell: how to write a lay summary](https://www.elsevier.com/connect/authors-update/in-a-nutshell-how-to-write-a-lay-summary)