Plain Language Summary Guidelines

What is a plain language summary?
A plain language summary is a simplified, easy-to-understand description of your study. It should be clear, concise, and jargon-free.

Why do I need a plain language summary?
Academic language is a barrier to people both with and without disabilities. By providing plain language summaries, we are making our work accessible to all stakeholders in inclusive postsecondary education, including educators, administrators, disability advocates, non-native English speakers, individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities, and those with other cognitive and linguistic access needs.

How do I write a plain language summary?

- **Know your audience:** Think about who you are trying to reach. Why do they care about your work? What background knowledge do they bring with them? What do you need to explain?
- **Start with the title:** Simplify your title. It should be brief and to the point.
- **Write for understanding:** Use the first person and an active voice. Your tone should be casual and direct. Use simple, short sentences and avoid large blocks of text.
- **Keep it organized:** Place your information in a logical order. Use descriptive subheadings, bold typeface, and/or bullet points to guide your reader through the text.
- **Describe the key takeaways:** What was your research question? What did you find? Why are your findings important? What do you want people to remember about your study?
- **Avoid jargon:** Avoid acronyms, excessively long or obscure words, field-specific jargon, and words that have a different meaning outside of your field. If they cannot be avoided, supply definitions in parentheses following the word.
- **Limit your word count** to between 160 – 226 words**.**

Tips
Take the time you need to do it right. Remember, the more accessible your language, the more people your research can reach!
Ask yourself: can this be explained further? Break complex concepts down into familiar terms.
Use a readability analyzer. Websites such as Datayze's Readability Analyzer are free tools that allow you to run several different readability tests on your summary. Don't focus on the individual "grade-level" scores - just try to make your text as accessible as possible.
Have someone check your work. Give your summary to someone who isn't a researcher or isn't familiar with your field. They should be able to read your summary and explain your study to you. If they can't, keep revising!

Resources

How to Write a Plain Language Summary https://www.agu.org/Share-and-Advocate/Share/Community/Plain-language-summary
Federal Plain Language Guidelines *https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/*
5 Steps to Plain Language http://centerforplainlanguage.org/5-steps-to-plain-language/
CDC Plain Language
Guide https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/developmaterials/plainlanguage.html
10 Steps to Making a Plain Language
Summary https://www.aucd.org//template/news.cfm?news_id=11452&id=17
What is Plain Language? https://plainlanguagenetwork.org/plain-language/what-is-plain-language/
Datayze Readability Analyzer https://datayze.com/readability-analyzer