

Writing and using plain English summaries

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) is committed to making sure that each research study it funds has a clear and concise plain English summary. It is important that this information explains the research as a whole and is easy to read and understand.

A good quality plain English summary is a requirement for funding applications from **14 May 2014**.

What makes a good quality plain English summary?

It is clear, easy to read and is as jargon free as possible. It provides an overview of your entire research study that readers can understand straight away.

Why is it important?

A plain English summary is used in the following ways:

- reviewers use this summary to inform their review of your funding application
- summaries of funded research are made publicly available on NIHR and other research websites to inform the public and researchers.

If it is felt that your plain English summary is not clear and of a good quality then you may be required to amend your summary prior to final funding approval.

A good quality summary helps:

- those carrying out the review (reviewers and board and panel members) to have a better understanding of your research proposal
- you to engage with others about your research such as members of the public, health professionals, policy makers and the media
- NIHR programmes and others to publicise the research
- you to have a clear explanation of your research that you can adapt for different audiences.

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If the plain English summary is well written, somehow the whole application seems easier to assess - I have an idea of what it is about.

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Public reviewer

What information should I summarise?

When writing your summary, think about the reader and how the summary will be used. Consider including the following information where appropriate:

- aim(s) of the research
- background to the research
- design and methods used
- patient and public involvement
- dissemination.

How do I write one?

There are a few simple rules for writing in plain English:

- avoid using jargon, abbreviations and technical terms wherever possible – if you have to use them provide a clear explanation
- avoid complicated English or uncommon words
- use active not passive phrases, for example say 'we will do it' rather than 'it will be done by us'
- keep sentences short
- think about the order and structure
- break up the text, for example use bullet lists
- ask patients, carers and/or colleagues to read a draft to find out if anything is unclear.



The first thing I read in an application is the summary. It really sets the tone and helps orient the reader, making it much easier to navigate the text.

The process of trying to distil the essence of complex research without dumbing it down is difficult but important - both for reviewers as well as for a public increasingly engaging with our research.



Professor Paul Little,
Programme Director

NIHR Programme Grants for
Applied Research

Where do I get further information?

For examples and tips, please visit the NIHR “make it clear” webpage at www.involve.nihr.ac.uk/makeitclear.

For further support and advice on writing a plain English summary, you can also contact NIHR Research Design Service: www.rds.nihr.ac.uk.

If you have questions about the campaign, please contact us by:

Email: makeitclear@invo.org.uk
Phone: 023 8065 1088

Follow us on twitter and support the “make it clear” campaign for better plain English summaries:



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