

## Tips for writing a good lay summary

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You need to write a clear lay summary when applying to any of our funding schemes. People affected by MS from our Research Network will review your application alongside experts in your field. Our funding panels also include researchers without direct expertise in your area of research.

If your lay summary is too brief or too complex, it'll be difficult for them to comment on and score your application. And this will affect whether it might be funded.

The Research Network reviewers will comment and score your project based on:

- The quality of your lay summary and how clearly it describes the project
- The relevance of your project to people affected by MS and the potential impact it may have
- How well you've involved people affected by MS in the planning and design of your research
- Your involvement plans for the ongoing research if it's funded
- If people with MS will be participants, how well you've taken into account their needs, and how feasible the study is for them

We only ask lay reviewers to read the Lay Summary and Lay Involvement sections of your application for their review. So you should make sure these have enough information to fully understand your project.

### Using plain English principles to write your summary

You should consider the audience for your lay summary. Our Research Network members have an interest in science, but may not be familiar with your area of research. A good lay summary is clear and accessible to people who don't have a scientific background. Or that aren't experts in your field of research.

It's not simply your scientific abstract put through a thesaurus. Don't be afraid of re-writing and re-structuring your scientific abstract. You could consider structuring your lay summary like a story. And you should try to avoid jargon or unnecessarily complicated language.

At the MS Society, we write in Plain English so everyone is able to understand what we write. We encourage you to do the same! It takes practice, but it will make your writing more accessible to a wide range of people. You can [read about how we use plain English to be more accessible on our website](#).

You should:

- Keep your sentences short. Try not to have more than 20-25 words in a sentence.
- Write in the active voice and speak directly to your reader.
- Use 'everyday English' rather than complicated language or jargon.
- Use bullet points or headings to break up long blocks of text.
- Use non-scientific analogies to explain complicated concepts. Or include a simple diagram!
- If you have to use jargon or technical terms, make sure these are fully explained.

- Consider including a glossary of key terms.

We'd encourage you to ask a 'non-scientist' to read your lay summary before you submit your application. This could be a family member or friend. Or could you take advantage of our Lay Summary Development Scheme!

## Completing your application form

The 'Lay summary' section in most of our application forms is broken into sections. Each section has a specific question and will have guidance to help you answer the question. You should answer all of these clearly.

### The lay summary

1. What's the aim of your project? How will it benefit people affected by MS?

You should describe why your aim(s) are important and relevant to people affected by MS. Be as specific as you can about the potential benefits your work could bring. What will we know at the end of your project that we don't know now? How will it move the field forward?

2. What's the reason for this study?

You should describe why this study needs to be done. What's already known from past research? How is your project original? What do you hope to find out?

3. How will the project be carried out?

You should describe the methods that you'll use, and explain why you have chosen them. If people with MS will be participants, you must explain how you will recruit them. And what will be asked of them (and any control group).

4. Where could your research findings lead next?

You should briefly explain where your research project could lead once complete. Including any plans for dissemination and implementation. For example, how will it advance our understanding of MS? Will there be implications for clinical practice? Would you be likely to apply for a larger study? This should help people affected by MS to understand the possible impact of your research and how this project fits in the wider picture.

5. How will you share your results?

You should explain how you plan to share your findings with the MS community, and your public engagement activities.

## Our lay summary development scheme

Our optional Lay Summary Development scheme can help you to write a high quality and accessible lay summary. People affected by MS from our Research Network can give feedback on your draft before you submit.

They can comment on:

- how well you have communicated your research proposal
- the importance of the topic to people affected by MS
- How well you have thought through and communicated your involvement plans

You don't have to complete Lay Summary Development if you don't want to. You can still apply without it. It's not part of our review process but can help you to improve your lay summary. You can find more information on the scheme on our website.

## Useful links

- [Read more about plain English and see some examples on the Plain English Campaign's website.](#)
- [Read guidance on writing plain English summaries in NIHR's 'Make it clear' campaign](#)
- [Find more information about how we can support you writing your lay summary and public involvement plans](#)