

GUIDELINES FOR CREATING A NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Researchers and clinicians play an important role in disseminating aggregate research findings to participants in their studies. Recent research suggests that study participants desire to have research findings returned to them, and that doing so can help build trust and encourage future research participation. A *Narrative Summary* is a written summary of your study's research findings. It is a useful way to succinctly summarize the purpose, main findings, and impact of your research study that is shared with research participants. Crafting a *Narrative Summary* can accompany writing a scientific manuscript and abstract. You may also want to consider creating a [Public Summary](#) aimed at disseminating study findings to the general public.

Use the guidelines below and the corresponding [template](#) to write a summary of your research study and results to disseminate to study participants.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY GUIDELINES

1. Reading Level

Aim to write the summary at a **6th grade reading level**. Keep in mind that including certain scientific terms may be unavoidable and will raise the reading level. In these cases, be sure to define these terms in plain language and/or use a simplified figure or picture to illustrate your point.

Ways to lower reading level:

- Use short sentences (15 words or under) to improve the readability of the summary.
- Whenever possible, use words that are no longer than two syllables.

Tip! Use tools in Microsoft Word to quickly and easily check readability statistics!

2. Understandability

The *Narrative Summary* should be **clear and understandable to a diverse audience** of varying levels of educational attainment and understanding of scientific findings.

- Avoid using medical or research jargon. (Example: use “high blood pressure,” instead of “hypertension”.)
- Communicate real-world application of the results – describe what the results mean in a larger context (for the population, for science, etc.).
- Use simple figures and pictures to enhance understanding.

3. Audience

Direct the *Narrative Summary* to research study participants by using appropriate language (i.e. “you” and “your”).

4. Make Use of Readability Resources

For additional tips about **improving readability and clarity of documents**, please refer to the following:

- [CDC Plain Language Materials & Resources](#)
- [MRCT Center Health Literacy in Clinical Research website](#)
- [PRISM Readability Toolkit](#)
- [MHP Salud Reading Assessment Tool](#)

CRITICAL ELEMENTS – PUBLIC SUMMARY

(limit to 2-3 sentences for each element, when possible):

Element 1: Acknowledgement of research participants’ involvement

- Thank participants in the study

Element 2: What is the question you were answering? (*Background*)

- Why is this important? What is the historical context? What problem does this research address?
- Who is the target audience?

Element 3: What did you do? (*Methods*)

- What happened?
- Who was involved?

Element 4: What were the findings? (*Results*)

- How do the findings relate to public health?

Element 5: What does this mean? (*Discussion/Implications*)

- How will these findings change things? (i.e. impact on health care, policy, etc.)
- What are the next steps?

Element 6: Include link to published results.