

Using plain language to share your research summaries with lay audiences

What is plain language?

Plain language is written or spoken communication that someone understands the first time they read or hear it.

Why should I use plain language with well-educated audiences?

Only 12 out of 100 adults in the United States have proficient skills to obtain, understand, and use health information. As a researcher, you spent years learning the vocabulary that you now employ in your work. Even those with advanced education struggle to understand health information. Everyone benefits from clear health communication.

What are some tips for using plain language as I describe my research?

1. **Limit the amount of information you share.** You do not need to share details of your methodology. Do share:
 - a. The main question(s) your research attempted to answer
 - b. The outcome(s) of your research
 - c. The impact of your findings
2. **Avoid jargon.** Not only are your listeners likely unfamiliar with the medical terms, they are also likely unfamiliar with research terms. Examples include: study power; prevalence; p-value; confidence interval; odds ratio.
3. **Provide a written lay summary.** Many funders require a lay summary. If your poster does not include one, print one and:
 - a. Hang it on or near your poster
 - b. Bring copies for participants
4. **Explain numbers.** Many people struggle with percentages and fractions. When possible:
 - a. Use whole numbers (e.g. 90 out of 100 instead of 90%)
 - b. Round numbers (about 9 out of 10 instead of 91 out 100)

Where can I get more information about plain language?

The UAMS Center for Health Literacy can help you with research documents (e.g. informed consent, marketing materials) and can direct you to additional information on writing and speaking using plain language. Call 501.686.2595 or e-mail healthliteracy@uams.edu.