# Public Summaries: Writing for a Lay Audience

Public summaries, or lay summaries, can be an important tool for disseminating child development research beyond the academic research community. The SRCD Communications Team regularly uses authors' public summaries to turn articles into press releases.

The goal of a public summary is to make clear, in straightforward, non-technical language, the importance of your work to the lay public—keeping in mind that your potential audience includes parents, policymakers, educators, mental health and healthcare professionals, and other members of the public. Below are guidelines and an outline to use when writing your public summary.

## Guidelines

- Summaries should be 300-500 words (12 point font, double spaced)
- Create a user-friendly, catchy title that highlights the key study finding
- Be sure that your summary answers: "What do the results mean?" and "Why is this study important to the public?"
- Keep your language simple and non-technical—no jargon!
- Use short, clear sentences
- Do not use references in the text
- Define any scientific terms critical to the context of the study that are unavoidable
- Write as if you are explaining your study results to a non-academic neighbor

## Outline for Public Summary

**"Catchy" Summary Title in Lay Language**

Names/Affiliations of Authors

Contact Information for Corresponding/Lead Author

Funding Information

**Paragraph 1: Key findings and importance of study**

- State the major finding of the study in clear simple language as an answer to the question addressed by the study
- State the importance of the study within the first couple of sentences
- Provide relevant context, such as what is already known about this research area

**Paragraph 2: Methodology**

- Cover the major components of your methods section briefly and simply
- Describe who the participants were (e.g. babies, teens, children in a specific geographic area)
- Discuss in lay language what you measured and how

**Paragraph 3: Importance of findings for the field of study**

- Briefly mention findings other than the major finding
- Discuss whether or not these findings were expected
- Answer how the results change our previous understanding of the topic studied

**Paragraph 4: Implications**

- Address what the findings mean to the public
- Answer for the reader, "Why should I care?"
- Highlight any policy, program, or public health implications of the research that you are aware of

## Public Summary Examples

Public Summary – Example 1  Public Summary – Example 2  Public Summary – Example 3