

Functional Ecology

Plain Language Summary Guidelines

To raise the profile of your work and make it accessible to the widest possible audience, you are required to upload a plain language summary at the revision stage, explaining the importance of your work in a way any reasonably educated person on the street could understand- someone who reads the science and technology section in a newspaper, but not any scientific journals.

As well as making your work more accessible to non-scientists, plain language summaries can also promote your work to other researchers, in your own and related fields. In simple terms: a good plain language summary will get more people reading your work.

The plain language summary will be added to our summaries blog at <https://fesummaries.wordpress.com> and included with your paper, freely available to read. We also encourage you to use the plain language summary directly—post it on your blog, share it on social media, use it to explain your research.

Writing your plain language summary

The plain language summary is an important part of communicating your work to a wider audience; please do not treat writing it as a tedious and unnecessary distraction from your ‘real’ work, to be dashed off in five minutes once your paper is accepted. Try writing it at the same time as the paper itself, give it some serious thought, and approach it as a separate and important piece of writing. It may help to think of writing for an interested undergrad, a friend you haven't seen since school or a someone from a different department—someone who is interested and genuinely wants to know more about your work, but who doesn't have any specialist knowledge of your specific area- **it's a general rule that if you can't explain your research to a stranger at a party or at a queue for the bus, you probably don't understand it as well as you should.** If you find it difficult to say simply and concisely what your paper is about, maybe you need to think again about what the paper itself is trying to say.

A plain language summary is not simply a modified version of the paper abstract. Unless your paper is written in an unusually simple and straightforward style, it's unlikely that you can use text directly from the paper in the plain language summary. Aim to write using clear and simple language to make your work accessible to a much wider audience than your usual readers, and easier to read for everyone.

Avoid jargon, and don't forget that what may not seem to be jargon to you, may well be to others. Common terms for you may be unknown to a non-scientist, or even another ecologist that works in a different area. ‘Transcription factor’, ‘species pool’, ‘forb’, ‘humoral immune system’, ‘cross-reactivity’ and ‘conspecific’ are all examples of words or phrases that you might use without even thinking, but will mean nothing to the non-specialist and should be avoided. If you must talk about, for example the ‘leaf economics spectrum’, then explain in clear and simple terms what that is. Better still, avoid the scientific term altogether and find a simpler way to say it.

Think about including any important natural history background or findings that might make your work more relevant or interesting to the layperson. If your work involved raising an insect herbivore of grape flowers and young fruit, it may not be a central part of your results that the insect thrived on Chardonnay, but died when offered Merlot (a real example), but that sort of information makes your summary more interesting and memorable for a reader. Another recent paper reported an experiment on *Tetranychus urticae* and *Phytoseiulus persimilis* without mentioning that these are an important glasshouse pest and biological control—these are important details for a lot of people. Common names of your study organisms help, if available.

Include a good plain language title—something that says what the paper is about in clear terms. Think of it a bit like a newspaper headline—something to get people reading. Unless you're very lucky, this will be different to the

paper title. "Stress in early life can increase bird song complexity" is better than "Early-life immune activation increases song complexity and alters phenotypic associations between sexual ornaments"!

Include a photo or image- images of your field sites, study organisms or 'ecologists-at-work' (with a description and details of the photographer to be credited) are all good— anything, in fact, to make your work more accessible and interesting. Our cover images usually from photos people upload for their plain language summary!

We will edit your text, up to a point. But if it contains too much jargon and academic-speak, we will return it to you and ask you to try again. It pays to make an effort to get it right the first time.

Technical Requirements

- Start with a shortened title (less than 120 characters) that will attract the reader and says the key message of your paper (like a newspaper headline).
- The word count is 250- 350 words. If it is longer or shorter than this, it may be returned to you for further editing.
- Use high-resolution images; 200 dpi and always provide a photo credit. We often use summary images for cover photos, so a good one is definitely to your advantage!
- If you are struggling to find an appropriate image Creative Commons has a vast selection for you to choose from; <http://search.creativecommons.org/>
- If you have any questions, please contact the office at admin@functionalecology.org