Guidelines & Examples for Preparing Plain Language Summaries for Authors of ACSM Journal Articles

1. Write a brief, plain language summary of your research topic, prepared in Microsoft Word (Arial font, regular style, size 12). The summary must be ≤150 words, or 5-6 short sentences.

2. Consider reviewing the following website that offers recommendations on translating complex technical information into clear simple language stories for general audiences so that readers can more fully understand, appreciate and use such information: http://plainlanguagescience.ca/2013/10/12/rethinking-science-communication-in-plain-english/.

   Basic tips from these sources often include the following:

   a. Provide a short title that captures the unique question or important finding of your research and which, at the same time, can attract reader attention in the popular press;
   b. Begin the PLS with a real-life problem or situation affecting a broad audience;
   c. Write in the third person point of view, e.g. “The investigators found that 60 minutes of moderate-vigorous aerobic exercise”, rather than “We found that 60 minutes of moderate-vigorous aerobic exercise”;
   d. Follow with an explanation of how science (or practice conventions) relate to the identified problem or situation;
   e. What new information has come through your research or your insight about advancing the practice or improving quality of life?
   f. What key unanswered question remains, or what important caution or limitation should be understood in trying to use your new information.

3. Other newsworthy factors to consider when drafting your plain language summary include one or more of the following:

   a. Does the topic affect a large audience?
   b. Does it tie to recent events?
   c. Does this tie to a celebrity?
   d. Is the topic specific to a geographical area?
   e. Does the topic reveal or support a new trend?
   f. Are the findings/outcomes unusual, original or new?
   g. Can the topic be considered controversial?

4. If you use Microsoft Word for your word processing, consider enabling the document readability features to evaluate the reading level of your draft text. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score of 7-8 is included in the readability statistics and is often the level recommended for newspapers. See MS Word Help for instructions on how to enable document readability features.
5. At the end of the PLS, please provide your identification and contact information so that media
journalists may contact you for interviews: your name, degree designation, title, institutional
affiliation, and business email/telephone contact information.

6. We hereby request that you give full authorization, without later review or approval, to Paul Branks,
ACSM Vice President of Communications and Media Advocacy and his staff to create a public
media release about your topic. This authorization to modify the text is needed so that the ACSM
staff can adjust your message for style, reading level, and media appeal. Paul and his team will be
most careful about maintaining the fidelity of content from your statement and the short press-
oriented title that authors provide. If content/substance questions come up in that editing process,
the author would be contacted to resolve. Part or all of the text from the edited piece, will be
integrated into a press release. These releases typically include highlighted papers by a few other
authors who also have had research articles published in recent issues of MSSE. Due to the
several steps where edits may occur, we generally do not present quotes around specific statements in the text, even if the sentence was taken verbatim from the authors original submission. In the news release, the PLS statement may be used, in part or in its entirety, with the corresponding author’s name, title, institutional affiliation and the ACSM journal of publication identified. Beyond the corresponding author, ACSM is unable to communicate about these press releases with other persons at the host institution, or list any other party as a contact in the press release, e.g. public relations or media officers at the institution. Once the press releases are created, they will be distributed to major news services and media journalists.

Our goal with these press releases is to educate the public about the emerging research published
in the field of sports medicine and exercise science and highlight the work of selected scientists
who publish in ACSM journals.

7. The ACSM staff is most optimistic that its periodic news release will bring attention to the important
research you have published in one of ACSM’s journals. The Communications and Public Advocacy
staff distributes these releases in a timely way to media journalists via an online web service called
newswise. Newswise is intended mainly for popular journalists seeking content for creating news
stories for the popular media. ACSM tries to post these media releases to newswise on a monthly basis. ACSM is unable to notify authors when specific news releases are posted to newswise, but our authors can check newswise periodically to see when these releases are posted – most should appear ~30-60 days after you submit a PLS statement to ACSM. This website is publicly accessible, so a posting to newswise provides authors with a citable source of public distribution about their research. ACSM, of course, has no control over the time that a particular media release may remain on the newswise website.
Should you receive contact from the media to do an interview and news story on your research findings, please include reference to ACSM and the fact that your research paper appeared in one of the ACSM journals, e.g. MSSE. Your feedback on this process and letting us know if you do receive a media inquiry will be most appreciated. Please send notice of such contacts to Ms. Annie Spencer at aspencer@acsm.org.
Example 1:


Suggested Headline: Do Wrist or Waist Worn Physical Activity Trackers Give the Same Results?

Wrist-worn personal tracking devices are becoming more popular to track steps/day. Scientists have traditionally used waist-worn devices in research to track steps/day. In this study, the investigators counted observed steps taken on a treadmill and compared steps/day measured using the same research-grade device attached to both the wrist and waist at the same time. Results for wrist and waist devices for steps/day in real life also were compared. The waist device performed better compared to observed steps on the treadmill. Compared to the waist device, the wrist device under-counted steps on the treadmill and over-counted steps in real life. Devices worn at the wrist do not give the same number of steps/day as devices worn at the waist.

For further information about this research, contact:

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Note to Authors: The above PLS example is written at a reading level that allows easy interpretation by the general public. Readability statistics, which you can check through word processing programs such as MS Word, may be helpful when drafting your PLS. Here are the readability statistics for this example: Passive Sentences = 14%; Flesch Reading Ease = 66 (easily understood by >13 year olds) and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level = 8th grade.
Example 2:


Suggested Headline: Barefoot Running and Hip Movement: Good News for the Knee?

Pain at the kneecap and the iliotibial band (to the side of the knee) are the most common injuries in runners. Poor hip strength or abnormal movement patterns can cause the knee to “move inwards” when the leg contacts the ground during running. This puts increased pressure on the kneecap and iliotibial band, and can cause pain. The latest treatment guidelines emphasize strengthening the hip muscles and reducing the amount of “inward movement” of the knee during running. Barefoot running, something of a “craze” a few years ago, has now been examined using computerized gait analysis. In this study, the researchers specifically measured 3-D hip and knee movements in barefoot running, and compared them to running in shoes. It was found that, when running barefoot, the hip caused the knee to “move inwards” less. Barefoot running might help treat knee injuries, or reduce the risk of them occurring.

For further information about this research, contact:

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Note to Authors: This PLS example, while written at a more advanced reading level than example 1, should be understood by many adult readers. Readability statistics for this example: Passive Sentences = 12%; Flesch Reading Ease = 55 (understood by 13-15 year old students) and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level = 10th grade (reference to US high school students).
Example 3:

Munce, TA, Dorman, JC, Thompson PA, Valentine, VD and Bergeron MF. Head Impact Exposure and Neurologic Function of Youth Football Players. *Med Sci Sports Exerc*. 2015 Aug; 47(8):1567-1576. (For publicly available abstract, see: [http://journals.lww.com/acsmmsse/Citation/2015/08000/Head_Impact_Exposure_and_Neurologic_Function_of.3.aspx](http://journals.lww.com/acsmmsse/Citation/2015/08000/Head_Impact_Exposure_and_Neurologic_Function_of.3.aspx); ACSM members can access full-text article through ‘Member Journals’ page, after login at ACSM website).

**Suggested Headline: Hard-Hitting Research - Effects of Head Impacts on Youth Football Players**

There is growing concern about brain injuries in football. In recent years we have learned a lot about concussions, but still know little about the effect of repetitive head impacts on brain health. Moreover, nearly 70% of football players are younger than high school age; yet we know the least about this population. Twenty-two middle school football players were studied during one season using football helmets equipped with impact sensors. The players also performed a series of concussion tests before and after the season. Head impact forces of the middle school players were nearly identical to those commonly seen in high school football. However, the players did not do any worse on their concussion tests after the season. Furthermore, neither the number of impacts nor the force of those impacts affected test performance. Thus, participation in middle school football did not seem to impair these players’ brain function in the time frame of a single season.

For further information about this research, contact:

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**Note to Authors:** This PLS example should be understood by many adult readers. Readability statistics for this example: Passive Sentences = 11%; Flesch Reading Ease = 57 (understood by 13-15 year old students) and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level = 9th grade (reference to US high school students).

For questions about preparation of Plain Language Summaries for use in developing public media statements, please contact ACSM e-content editor, William G. Herbert, PhD, FACSM ([williamherbert@verizon.net](mailto:williamherbert@verizon.net)).