The Power of Translating your Research: How to Write an Effective Lay Abstract and Impact Statement

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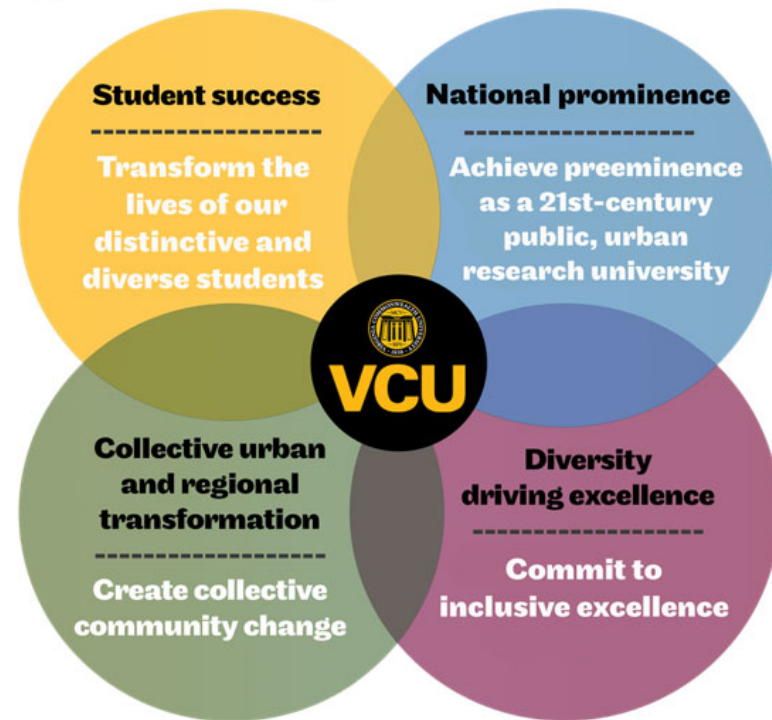**VCU** VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY
C. Kenneth and Dianne Wright
Center for Clinical and Translational Research

ONE VCU Research

Foundation: Societal Impact through a
Culture of Collaboration

- What is the democratic purpose of your discipline?

- How does your research impact society?

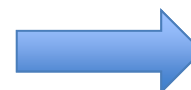- Do stakeholders have access to your scholarship? How?

The integrated themes of Quest 2025: Together We Transform

Student success

Transform the lives of our distinctive and diverse students

National prominence

Achieve preeminence as a 21st-century public, urban research university

VCU

Collective urban and regional transformation

Create collective community change

Diversity driving excellence

Commit to inclusive excellence

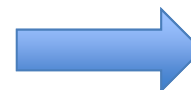**VCU** Center for Community Engagement and Impact

Why is Translation Important?

- Increasing the relevance of the research
- Increasing recruitment to clinical research
- Improving the design of the research to address ethical concerns, improve the research tools and make it easier for the people taking part
- Improving the quality of the data and its interpretation
- Making it more likely that the findings of the research will be used to make a difference to service users' lives.

Duke (2012),
https://www.dcc.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/HowToLaySummariesDec2012.pdf

EQUITY

ACCESS

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What is a Lay Abstract?
What is an Impact Statement?

"A **lay summary** is a brief **summary** of a research project or a research proposal that has been written for members of the public, rather than researchers or professionals. It should be written in plain English, avoid the use of jargon and explain any technical terms that have to be included"
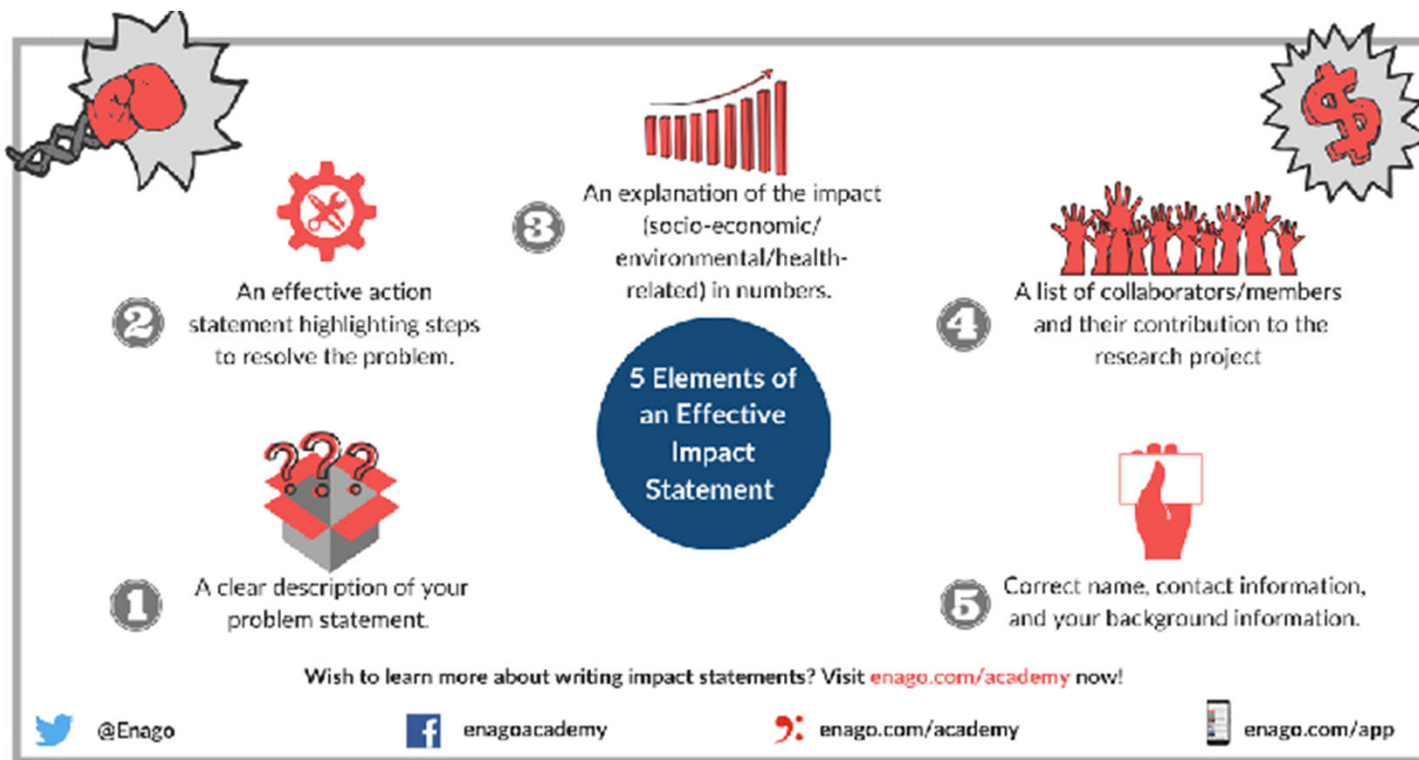
Best Practices

- 8th grade reading level (approx. age 14)– Use the [Readability Test Tool](#)!
- Keep it Short
  - Break up text with sub-headings and bullet points
  - Use short sentences: no more 10-15 words per sentence
- AVOID JARGON – Use a [De-Jargonizer](#)!
- Imagine you're talking to the reader (or your Mama, your middle schooler, or your artist friend)
- Don't oversimplify your research
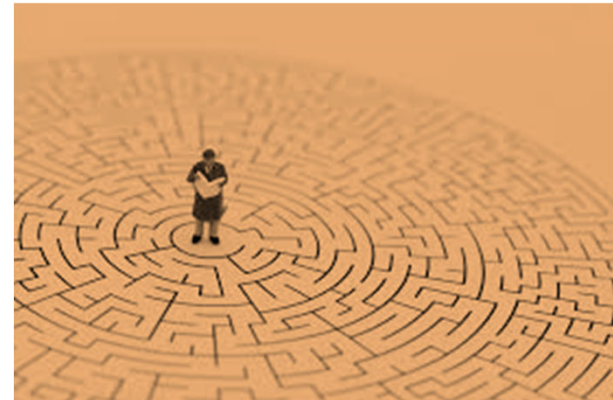- Longer background and significance sections – Focus on the WHY and SO WHAT

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Best Practices

- Make it human
- Express ideas in active voice
  - Second person (you…) should be used in place of third person (he/she/they…)
- Use positive phrasing
- Be truthful and transparent
- Put your research in context – how does it fit into the bigger picture?
- Explain the end goal
- Get a colleague **AND** a non scientist to read it before you submit!

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Wish to learn more about writing impact statements? Visit enago.com/academy now!

@Enago   enagoacademy   enago.com/academy   enago.com/app

CHALLENGES

- Lay abstracts and impact statements are DIFFICULT to write!

- Understanding your audience and the various stakeholders impacted – degrees of separation

- Grant guidelines conflicting with best practices

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Take a few minutes to review the technical abstract on the next slide (from an NIH proposal).

Note words, sentences, etc. that may need to be changed to make this abstract more "stakeholder friendly".

You do NOT need to change the abstract, just highlight where re-phrasing may be needed.

Write.
Edit.
Repeat.

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EXAMPLE of TECHNICAL ABSTRACT:

Most people over the age of 35 years exhibit emphysema, a major manifestation of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Cigarette smoke, pollutants, and gender are thought to be important determinants of the severity of the disorder. Curative therapies or reliable diagnostic biomarkers do not exist for emphysema/ COPD. This proposal will directly build on and expand our pilot findings. Specifically, we will first confirm the role of Z, X, and Y in the pathogenesis of age-induced and cigarette smoke induced emphysema and validate their roles as therapeutic targets. Subsequently, we will analyze molecular interactions of these molecules in young and aged people in relation to cigarette exposure, gender, and emphysema/COPD.

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EXAMPLE of LAY ABSTRACT:

Emphysema is a major subset of chronic obstructive lung disease, predicted to reach epidemic proportions by 2020. The condition develops in most people over the age of 35 and can lead to the loss of oxygen exchange, lung enlargement, and, if severe, complete respiratory failure. Cigarette smoke, pollutants, and gender are thought to be important determinants of the severity of the disorder. Disease-altering treatment or reliable diagnostic features that can be used to measure the progress of the disease have not yet been determined. We believe that the synergistic or additive effects of age and cigarette smoke on Z's function may explain disease development and characteristics.

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Suitability for general audience score: 88

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TEXT STATISTICS

No. of sentences	5
No. of words	107
No. of complex words	25
Percent of complex words	23.36%
Average words per sentence	21.40
Average syllables per word	1.81

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A Reviewer's Perspective

- Community Resident
- Social Worker
- VCU Alumna
- Advocate, Activist, <u>and</u> Researcher
- Community Reviewer

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Engaging Richmond

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