



Video Abstracts and Plain Language Summaries Help Make Research Accessible

Summarized by Audrey Homan | Winter 2023 | [audio version \(.mp3\)](#)

ARTICLE: Bredbenner, K, Simon SM (2019). Video abstracts and plain language summaries are more effective than graphical abstracts and published abstracts. *PLoS ONE* 12(11): e0224697.

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Why do this research?

Most research includes a short summary of the work, called an “abstract”. And most abstracts are text, written with a lot of technical language and jargon. This study looked at what happens if researchers present research summaries as either a video, a plain-language summary, or a graphic. They wanted to know: would people like those kinds of abstracts better than the regular written kind? Would those kinds of abstracts make research more accessible?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers took two similar research studies on HIV and blood, and they made a video, a plain-language summary, and a graphic summary for each of them. The researchers showed these summaries to 538 people.

Then they:

- asked each participant how much they liked the kind of summary they were given
- asked each participant what kind of summaries they usually liked
- and they gave each participant a quiz on the content.

They also asked each participant whether they worked in science, in a science-related field, in a non-science field, or whether they were a student.

What did the researchers learn?

The researchers found that people liked videos the best. Videos were also the format where people scored the highest on the quizzes, and the most people wanted more of them. People liked plain-language abstracts second-best. This was true regardless of what type of career the person was in.

People in the study told the researchers that they felt like they understood the most from video summaries and plain-language summaries equally. When the researchers looked at everyone's quiz scores, it was true: videos and plain-language summaries appear to help people understand more information than the graphic, or the regular text abstracts. And this was again true regardless of what type of career the person was in.

And even when people in the study said they didn't like videos the best, they still scored high on the quiz.

Limitations

- While the study did include more than 500 people, the study did only look at two papers. To make strong recommendations, the study should be run with lots of other papers.
- The researchers did not offer audio-only summaries as an option, so we don't know if audio summaries are better than video or plain-language text.
- The graphics that the researchers offered were one plain image with no text. The researchers are curious whether infographics would do better.

What does this mean for the real world?

Right now, most professional research journals provide summaries that have a lot of jargon, and complicated language. But this research study points to videos and plain-language summaries as maybe being a better way to help people understand and be interested in professional research. This research shows that more journals should try sharing their abstracts as videos and plain-language summaries.

The researchers also want to see more research into how the quality of the summary relates to how well people understand the study.

What is “RECOMMENDED RESEARCH”?

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Each summary explains one published research article that we feel is important to disability studies. Recommended Research summaries are written in plain language by CDCI researchers. They’re meant for: Other researchers, healthcare practitioners, educators, families, and people with disabilities.