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Guide to Summarising a Scientific Paper



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In summarising an article, the aim is to provide a short (around 500 words), simple precis of some of the the work carried out, results and conclusions.

Normally aimed at both scientific and non-scientific audiences, which can include farmers, policy makers and members of the public, important to keep the article as simple and straightforward as possible to avoid confusion. Bear in mind that even if your readers are scientific, they might not be experts in your specific field of science.

Writing the Summary

Hook your audience from the beginning. Your introduction should be the key message from the study.

For example:

Inseminating gilts on their third observed oestrus optimises lifetime performance.

As you write the piece, try to answer who, what, why, when, where and how? This includes who carried out the research (e.g. 'Researchers at the University of Nottingham found...'), why the research was carried out and what the outcome was.

Include an over-view of how the research was carried out, avoiding too much detail. For example:

157 gilts, born between 2002 and 2006, were inseminated on either their first, second, third, fourth or fifth observed oestrus.

Data on litter and reproductivity were collected on all animals until they reached the end of their reproductive life.

Piglets were weighed and recorded within 12 hours of birth and again at weaning.

Sow age at culling and the number of completed parities were also were recorded.



You may also be able to summarise who will be affected by the research (e.g. farmers or consumers) and what the impact might be (e.g. reduction in the cost of production, changing production systems, a need to change legislation).

Each research article is different, so try to pick out the most interesting and noteworthy elements. Always have your reader in the back of your mind and think about what information would be relevant and interesting to them.

Language:

- Remember you are trying to summarise the research in a simple, bite-sized way, often to a non-scientific audience who won't be used to scientific terms.
- Avoid using unnecessary jargon, Latin, mixed metaphors and unnecessary superlatives - you can usually delete words like 'very' or 'quite'.
- Don't make assumptions about people's knowledge - just because you may use a certain term every day, your reader might not know what it means, so make sure you define it.

Avoid needless evasive wording, for example:

- Instead of 'it is possible that', use 'may'
- Instead of 'utilised' use 'used'
- Instead of 'demonstrate' use 'show'

Avoid using phrases like 'It seems reasonable to suppose that' and 'It is interesting to note'

Also remember to use an active voice, for example instead of 'it was discovered' use 'scientists found'

Key rules to follow:

- Keep articles to a maximum 500 words in length.
- Keep sentences to around 30 words, ideally not over 50 words.
- Include one or two sentences at the top of the article that summarise the research.
- Keep it simple - don't use complicated language or provide unnecessary information.
- Keep your reader in mind - what information do they really need to understand the research, its outcomes and what effect it might have.
- Provide full details of the original paper - title and authors - at the bottom.

If you have any questions please contact:

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