

Words Matter

How to Write Great Session Summaries and Speaker Biographies

By John Gregory, IIWCC

When speakers present information at conferences, they are asked to supply a summary of their session and a biography highlighting their academic and work-related experience. Summaries appear in the conference syllabus or app to help attendees select the sessions they will attend. This article outlines the elements required for each, and provides tips to improve their quality.

Session Summaries

Summaries generally list the title, learning objectives, summary and references for an individual session. Each organization will have its specific requirements, usually found in the speaker infor-

mation package. If such guidelines aren't provided, you can request them.

Tips for an Excellent Session Summary

- Be prepared to invest time in creating an effective summary.
- Read the instructions provided by the hosting organization so you know what elements to include and what length the summary should be.
- List two to four learning objectives. Read Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives and use the recommended terms.
- Write abbreviations out in full on first use, followed by the abbreviation in brackets, e.g., Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO).



- Use available tools to sharpen the grammar and spelling. Online options include Hemingway Editor and Grammarly. Both are free.
- Pay attention to readability measures (expanded below).
- Ensure punctuation is consistent. Don't overcapitalize. The brain interprets lowercase faster than upper case, so use capital letters judiciously.
- After writing your summary, check it thoroughly for content, grammar and flow: First, read it out loud to yourself, then, read it out loud to someone else, and then ask another person to read it and comment.

Clinical Referencing Styles

Reference styles follow established conventions. If the speaker information package indicates which style to use, make sure you follow it. If no style is indicated, choose a style that is common in your field or one that is used by the association inviting you to speak. Avoid a hodge-podge: references will come from various sources, but your

goal should be to present them in a single style.

The most common reference styles in health care are the following:

- Wounds Canada uses the Vancouver Style, with a single modification: uppercase letter following a colon in an article title.
- The United States National Library of Medicine – Citing Medicine style is used by PubMed/MEDLINE.
- Harvard Referencing: This is an abbreviated author–date parenthesis referencing system.

Use recognized abbreviations of any journal cited: e.g., *Int Wound J* for *International Wound Journal*.

Speaker Biographies

Speakers would do well to invest time in crafting their biographies. For any conference, the standard of biographies submitted varies considerably.



Tips for an Excellent Speaker Biography

The advice for session summaries above generally applies here as well. In addition, consider the following:

- Write in the third person. "Dr. Jones . . . Her research interests . . ."
- Remove superfluous words, e.g., *current*.
- Order information by priority, not chronologically, for those that only read the first couple of sentences. Is the most crucial facet about you which school you graduated from 20 years ago or how you contribute to wound care today?
- Ensure that your qualifications/credentials are referenced correctly. There are conventions regarding what titles should appear before someone's name and what qualifications should appear following the name.
- There is an apostrophe in *master's degree*, but you earn, for example, a Master in Nursing.

Readability Tests and Tools for Summaries and Biographies

Rudolf Flesch and J. Peter Kincaid have authored much of the research on readability. Their tests, which are included in Microsoft Word, indicate levels of difficulty in English language comprehension. Other readability tools are available as well.

- Flesch Reading Ease: The higher the score, the easier the content is to read.
- Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: The score is the U.S. grade

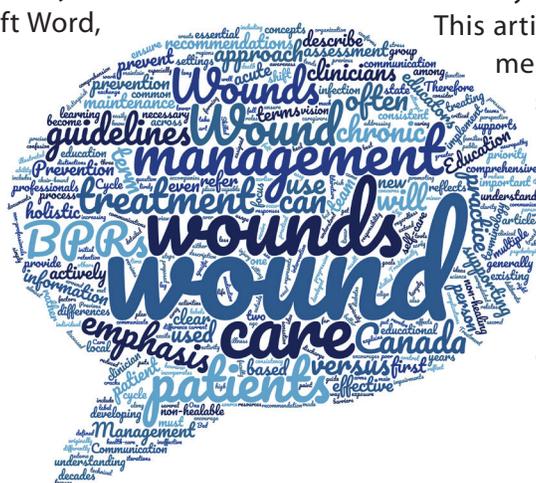
level required to understand the text.

- Hemingway Editor grade readability: Algorithms are built on the parameters of the above researchers and others. It indicates the U.S. grade level required to understand a particular text.
- Grammarly: This invaluable writing app finds and corrects mistakes in all your online written content. I use it on every piece of content I publish.
- Yoast SEO Content Analysis: This is a popular WordPress plugin for websites.

Plain English is language considered comprehensible to grades 8 to 9. Keep editing your summary or biography content until you are down to at least a grade 10 to 11 level. Post-collegiate grade level readability scores are not acceptable even for scientific congresses. They are considered a mark of poor writing. The brain reads plain English faster than it does higher readability grades. As Mark Twain is credited as saying: "Don't use a five-dollar word when a fifty-cent word will do."

Note: Not all the tools and scores are consistent. I use many tools for each piece of content.

This article is a grade level 8, which means it is plain English and should be understood by 13- to 15-year-old students. 📖



John Gregory edits the syllabus for the Wounds Canada conference. You can find him on Twitter @gregiej and @opencityinc.

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