**Guidance for Translational Abstracts, Public Significance Statements, and Social Media Messages**

Recent years have heralded increasing access to information online. The immediate audience for scholarly research is now expanding to include practitioners, policy makers, news media, and members of the public with an interest in psychology and related fields. These audiences, however, have different needs and expertise than do researchers. For example, they may be less versed in the details of research design and statistics and less concerned with verifying methodological appropriateness or replicating a study than they are with discerning the study’s importance, practical implications, and conclusions for their own lives.

In response to this challenge, the Task Force on Translating Psychological Science for the Public, convened by APA President Nadine Kaslow in 2014, recommended inclusion of lay/translational abstracts or short public significance statements as a standard feature of all APA journal articles. This recommendation was supported by the APA Council of Editors and the APA Publications and Communications Board. The format and audiences for such statements will vary across APA journals. Guidance provided here aims to help authors to write the following three general types of translational messages directed at the public, the media, practitioners, policy makers, and other professional audiences: a **translational abstract** (approximately 150 to 250 words), a **public significance statement** (1-3 sentences; approximately 30 to 70 words), and a **social media post** (e.g., 100 to 120 characters for a tweet, link included). This guidance can be adjusted to individual journal needs.

It is recommended that journal editors who wish to implement these tools choose either the translational abstract or the public significance statement, depending on the audience of their journal. Editors can also encourage their authors to share their research via social media regardless of which other public outreach strategy they may have chosen. For all the strategies, **it is imperative that when writing, authors do not overstate or oversimplify their research findings**. Editors and action editors should be vigilant in reviewing this public outreach content prior to publication to ensure this implementation.

These tools afford numerous potential benefits. They will enable authors to emphasize the portions of their research most applicable to practitioners and the public, and they will also give authors greater control over how their work will be interpreted in the popular media and policy makers. In the social media realm in particular, authors will also have the opportunity to have their research be seen by diverse audiences at a click of a button. Each tool provides particular benefits, and journal editors can choose which tool(s) would be most helpful and relevant to the audience of their journal.

**1. Guidance for Writing a Translational Abstract**

The translational abstract should clearly communicate the contents of the article and emphasize its value to educated public or professional audiences, which may include practitioners, policy makers, news media, and other interested parties. In concept, the scientific abstract forms the foundation for the translational abstract; guidelines for writing the scientific abstract are described in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (§ 2.04) and the *Journal Article Reporting Standards* (JARS; see the Appendix to the *Publication Manual*). Although the exact contents of an abstract vary depending on the nature of the article (e.g., whether it is an empirical study, literature review, meta-analysis, theoretical paper, methodological paper, or case study), similar adjustments can be made for all types of papers when translating the scientific abstract into a lay abstract.

**Structure of a Translational Abstract**

Broadly speaking, most papers (and thus most abstracts) follow a pattern of introduction, method, results, and discussion. The translational abstract should follow this pattern, taking into account the following considerations:

- **Stating the problem under investigation or study objectives**: First, clearly describe the problem under investigation or the objectives that you set out to accomplish in your study. Consider your audience—for
example, is it primarily practitioners, policy makers, news media, members of the public interested in psychology, or, most likely, a combination of these? Frame your study in terms that will be relevant to this audience or audiences. This portion of the abstract will often be similar in both the scientific and translational versions.

- **Participants:** When describing participants, provide details only insofar as they are relevant to the applicability of the findings to your intended audience. For example, it is seldom necessary to include the sample size in the translational abstract unless it is remarkable in some way (e.g., if it is very large). If participants were meant to be representative of the general public, they may be characterized just as "adults," and detailed recruitment and demographic information may be omitted. On the other hand, if participants were meant to be representative of patients with a particular diagnosis or of a particular age group, for example, then the nature of the diagnosis or the exact ages involved would be relevant to include in the translational abstract.

- **Study method:** Most details about the study method—including descriptions of apparatuses, outcome measures, data-gathering procedures, and research design—can be either summarized from the scientific abstract or omitted. An exception, however, would be if the study method is, so to speak, the end in itself rather than the means to an end; for example, if the purpose of the study is to present a new therapeutic technique, details on how it was developed would be appropriate to include in the translational abstract. Keep in mind that the translational abstract complements rather than supplants the scientific abstract; these details are still readily available to interested readers.

- **Findings:** State the findings in clear, nontechnical language. Remove any statistics from the translational abstract, including the results of significance tests, effect sizes, and confidence intervals. If the article encompassed multiple studies, it is preferable to summarize the contents of all the studies rather than to explain the findings of each study separately.

- **Conclusions, implications, and applications:** Emphasize the conclusions, implications, and applications that are relevant to your audience (e.g., the study will change how we treat certain conditions and/or understand certain behaviors) rather than those that are relevant to researchers (e.g., the study addresses a gap in the literature). Try to create a “take home” message for the readers. If this portion of the abstract is well-written, news media may even quote you directly, allowing you maximal control over your message.

**Tips for Writing a Translational Abstract**

Like a scientific abstract, a translational abstract should be **between 150 and 250 words**. When writing the lay abstract, it may be helpful to explain your research to friends or family members. What sparks or loses their interest? What don’t they understand? Try to maximize what is interesting and relevant while minimizing areas of confusion. Share your translational abstract with these people before publication to see the reaction it gets and to understand whether your message is getting across.

Many universities also have media, press, or public affairs offices that can help you craft messages tailored to your audience—in many ways, the translational abstract is similar to a press release. You are encouraged to use these resources when writing the translational abstract.

The tone of a translational abstract may also be more personal and friendly than the tone of a scientific abstract. However, **it is imperative that you do not overstate or oversimplify your findings or conclusions.** Compare the translational and scientific abstracts to ensure the essential message is the same, even if the manner of delivery is different.

**Examples Scientific and Translational Abstracts**

Below are two sets of abstracts as published in the *Archives of Scientific Psychology*, the first APA journal to require both a scientific and a translational abstract. These examples are meant to aid you in writing your own abstracts; however, keep in mind that you may make different choices regarding what information to retain,
eliminate, or rephrase when transforming your scientific abstract into a translational abstract. These decisions are shaped by factors such as the topic of the study and personal preferences and writing style.


**Scientific Abstract**
In Study 1, eyewitness identification of the perpetrator of a “crime” (fire), framed as either intended or unintended, was studied in 138 children, ages 7 to 18. Analysis using signal detection reveals an interaction of age and condition on decisional bias. Like in past studies, the framing of the act had no effect on the 7- to 9-year-olds but did have an effect on decisional bias for the other age groups. Decisional bias was more lax (indicating more false alarms) in the intended condition for 10- to 12- and 14- to 15-year-olds but was more stringent (fewer false alarms) for the 16- to 18-year-olds. This pattern of age and condition differs from the pattern of explicit judgments (how bad the act was, how much punishment it deserved, and how bad it is to commit a false alarm or a miss). Study 2 was conducted to confirm the unexpected findings for the 10- to 12-year-olds. Forty-two children, ages 10–12, viewed the same film, which was framed as unintended but resulting either in (a) major or (b) minor damage (fire). Approximately half were randomly assigned to Condition A and half were assigned to B. Parallel results were obtained with an earlier study, with lower bias scores (more false alarms) in the major than minor damage conditions. Thus, from both studies, we may conclude that decisional bias is more lenient (resulting in more false alarms) for 10- to 12-year-olds when either intent or damage is bad.

**Abstract for Public, the Media, and other Professional Audiences**
These studies are based on the assumption that when adults, adolescents, or children identify someone as the “guilty” one (the person who committed the act), they are making an identification based on not only memory and thinking but also a moral decision. This is because, by the act of identifying or not identifying someone, the eyewitness runs the risk of either convicting an innocent person (making a false-positive error) or letting a guilty person go free (a false-negative error). Our interest is less in the overall accuracy of their identifications and more in the balance of false-positive and false-negative errors. We have found in these and past studies that the balance of these 2 kinds of errors changes with age and that this pattern may also depend on (a) the child’s general understanding of the purpose of the task, which appears to be “lost” on 7- to 9-year-olds, the youngest group studied, and, (b) for older children and adolescents, how the act is described, for example, intended or not. In this way, we can understand that the act of identifying the perpetrator as a moral decision and not simply an act of perception and memory.


**Scientific Abstract**
Technological innovations have changed the way that mental health care interventions are delivered. In recent years, robots have been integrated into treatments for multiple mental health problems. To clarify public opinion regarding the integration of robots into psychological treatments, this study assessed parents’ reaction to robot-assisted therapy as a treatment option for children with disruptive behavior problems. Parents from a community sample (N = 100) were presented with a brief clinical description of a child with disruptive behavior problems and evaluated (through treatment acceptability ratings and positive–negative evaluation scores) 3 different treatment options for that child: a robot-assisted therapy, an Internet-based treatment, and a no-treatment comparison group. Robot-assisted therapy was rated as a highly acceptable form of treatment. Parents rated it as significantly more acceptable than the no-treatment comparison group, F (1, 96) = 88.90, p < .001, partial η² = .48, but less acceptable than an Internet-based treatment program, F(1, 96) = 4.73, p < .05, partial η² = .05. Parents also evaluated the treatment quite positively. They viewed it as significantly more positive than the no-treatment comparison group, F (1, 96) = 153.20, p < .001, partial η² = .62, but less acceptable than an Internet-based treatment, F (1, 96) = 9.11, p < .005, partial η² = .09. These results suggest that robot-assisted therapy is viewed
positively by the public and that it merits more attention as a treatment platform for mental health problems.

Abstract for Public, the Media, and other Professional Audiences
Psychotherapy for children, adolescents, and adults increasingly draws on technology as reflected in treatments available on the Internet for all sorts of psychological problems (e.g., depression, anxiety). A relatively new technology is the use of social robots to teach specific skills that can reduce psychological and behavioral problems. The adoption of such treatments depends heavily on whether people find them acceptable and a reasonable approach to clinical problems. In this study, we had parents evaluate 3 strategies to treat disruptive behavioral problems in children. Our primary interest was seeing the extent to which parents would see robots as an acceptable form of treatment. Three treatment conditions were compared. The first strategy was a cognitively based treatment administered through a robot; the second was the same treatment administered through the Internet. A third condition was no treatment at all but seeing if parents viewed the other treatments as better than just waiting and seeing if the child grows out of the problem. In fact, most children experiencing psychological problems do not receive any treatment, so waiting and seeing if the child gets better is a common practice. Parents evaluated the treatments after learning how the treatments were applied to children with behavioral problems commonly seen in psychological services. The results indicated that social robots were very acceptable as a form of treatment for children. The more familiar use of technology through the Internet was viewed as more acceptable than the use of robotics. Both treatments were seen as more acceptable than waiting for the child to get better. As technology is increasingly applied to help with psychological problems, we will need to know more about the conditions that make them acceptable and how to ensure that treatments are seen as viable options when help is needed.

2. Guidance for Writing a Public Significance Statement
The public significance statement summarizes the significance of the study’s findings for a general audience in one to three sentences. It will appear at the end of the abstract online and in print, and thus it augments the content of the abstract. This statement supports efforts to increase dissemination and usage of research findings by larger and more diverse audiences. Each APA Editor can decide how to call this statement, depending on the journal’s focus areas and potential reach.

Guidelines for Writing a Public Significance Statement
The public significance statement should be one to three sentences in length, approximately 30 to 70 words long. When writing the public significance statement, consider the following recommendations:

- Answer the following questions: What did the study find? Why are these findings important to the audience you are trying to reach (e.g., practitioners, policy makers, news media, or other parties)?
- Write the statement in language that is easily understood by people outside of your field. Avoid jargon or overly technical language. Avoid using acronyms in the statement, and if you do use them, define them.
- Ensure that the statement adequately represents the study’s implications if read separately, without the abstract. For example, specifically refer to “patients with depression” rather than “these patients” or “behavioral interventions for bullying” rather than “these interventions.”

Examples of Public Significance Statements
Below are several public significance statements that appeared in the Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, the first APA journal to require public significance statements as a complement to the abstract. These examples are meant to aid you, the author, in writing your own statements; however, keep in mind that you
may make different choices depending on factors such as the topic of the study, specific secondary audiences of the journal, and personal preferences and writing style.

This study suggests that there are distinct subgroups of college students defined by how they respond to alcohol intervention and that interventions need to target freshmen men and those who play drinking games. Although most students initially respond to interventions, most also show decay over the next 12 months, which suggests that we need to determine ways of improving the long-term effects of alcohol interventions.

This study advances the idea that therapists who adopt a vigilant approach may be more attuned to their clients’ changing experience. Additionally, it highlights the risk of misattributing symptomatic change to factors within the therapeutic relationship.

The present study suggests that brief stress management group interventions may be helpful in promoting stress management skills and improving psychological adaptation among women with nonmetastatic breast cancer, especially during the early period of adjuvant treatment. These brief stress management interventions may be easier to incorporate into clinical settings than previously validated longer interventions and may therefore be able to be offered to a broader population.

3. Guidance for Writing a Social Media Post About an Article

Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Google+ allow authors to share links to other work. When content is shared on social media, it reaches not only the author’s subscribed followers but also has the potential to be reshared or “retweeted” by others, which means authors can reach new readers internationally who otherwise might never have come across their work. Messages that go viral can be retweeted or shared hundreds or even thousands of times. Authors can also add hashtags (#) to certain terms in their social media posts. The authors’ tweets or posts become more findable by users who search for the terms specified by the hashtag.

Recommendations for Writing a Social Media Post

The guidelines below represent current best practices for tweets and other social media posts (e.g., Facebook posts) and are in keeping with the recommendations other organizations make regarding social media post composition. The conclusions and implications section of the translational abstract or the public significance statement are good starting points for the content to include in a tweet or other social media post.

- Distill the essential message, finding, or implication into a concise package using words the average member of the public would understand.
- After this message, include a link to the study. The message should serve as a “hook” for the reader to click on the link to find out more about your study.
- Ideally, social media posts should be brief and to the point.
  - Limit the length of your tweet, link included, to no more than 120 characters. The maximum length for a tweet is 140 characters, but you must keep some space in reserve for when your message is retweeted, as this adds extra characters to the message. Research has shown that shorter tweets (around 100 characters) are shared more often.
  - Though there are no length restrictions for Facebook or Google+ posts, the optimal length (i.e., resulting in maximum engagement) of a Facebook post is reportedly 40 characters. However,
with scholarly content outreach, longer, more informative posts have been advised: Aim not to exceed the length of conclusions and implications section of the translational abstract or your public significance statement (30 to 100 words or no more than 1-3 sentences).

- Use proper grammar and spelling. Avoid all-caps, which is perceived as shouting, and text speak, which can come across as unprofessional. Some shortcuts are okay to save space, like using an ampersand instead of the word and.
- Use a URL shortener such as bitly (https://bit.ly) to make the URL of your study as short as possible.
- Include up to 2 hashtags in your post for terms that users might potentially use in a search for content like yours. Integrate these hashtags into your post or put them at the end of the post.
  - To make a single word into a hashtag, put the pound symbol (#) before the word (e.g., #psychology to make psychology into a hashtag).
  - To make a two-word phrase into a hashtag, remove the space between the words (e.g., #memoryloss or #MemoryLoss to make memory loss into a hashtag; writing this as #memory loss will make only memory into a hashtag).

Examples of Tweets about an Article
*Drawn from APA Journals (@APA_Journals)*

- Continuous feelings of love? The parental bond from #pregnancy to toddlerhood http://on.apa.org/1NFsITq
- Visual choice behavior by #bumblebees confirms unsupervised #neural network’s predictions http://on.apa.org/1NctYI6
- How do people who are happy with their lives view the world? http://on.apa.org/1QP3wF0
- Does #aging affect predecisional processing? http://on.apa.org/1KirObB #neuropsychology

Examples of Facebook Posts about an Article
*Drawn from APA Journals (www.facebook.com/APAJournals)*

**Example 1 (article from Psychology & Neuroscience):** Studies have shown that meditation can improve #anxiety and distress. To better understand #meditation as a therapeutic intervention, it may be important to distinguish between emotion regulation outcomes and emotion regulation processes. Menezes & Bizarro (2015) looked at whether 6 weeks of training focused meditation improves emotion regulation processes in a sample of healthy college students. Findings suggest that focused meditation training may enhance emotion regulation processes: in particular, greater perceived access to effective regulation strategies and acceptance of emotions, promoting psychological benefits beyond relaxation training. To read this article, see: http://on.apa.org/1LXAtyF

**Example 2 (article from Spirituality in Clinical Practice):** A recent study examined associations among #gratitude, spiritual well-being, sleep, mood, fatigue, #cardiac-specific self-efficacy, and inflammation in 186 men and women with Stage B asymptomatic heart failure (Mills et al., 2015). The researchers found that gratitude and spiritual well-being were related to better mood and sleep, less fatigue, and more self-efficacy, and that gratitude fully or partially mediated the beneficial effects of spiritual well-being on those endpoints. To access the free article, click here: http://on.apa.org/1GcEYzq

**Example 3 (article from Couple & Family Psychology):** When parents learn of their child’s significant behavioral challenges, the outcome is often like a shock to the system, leaving parents feeling unprepared (Mendez et al., 2015). Their ability to cope is enhanced if the couple engages in coparenting, or a coming together to work through the challenges. Couples who work together balance each other, work as a team, and build each other up. Couples who move apart from each other in challenging times are more likely to see themselves as playing good cop/bad cop. To read the article on #coparenting young children with challenging behaviors, see: http://on.apa.org/1JBVMD8