

# «Briefly summarised»

A Guide to a short dissemination product

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# Before you use the «Briefly summarised» template

## 1. The Cochrane review should:

- minimally contain Summary of findings (SoF) and the certainty of the evidence (GRADE)
- should be a relevant topic for your institution target audience (service providers and/or service users, policy makers etc.)
- be relevant for the setting it is disseminated in
- have results that are meaningful and important to disseminate (does the review show, with high or moderate certainty, that something works or does not work?; or does it show that we lack robust research about an intervention or approach that is widely used?; is the topic is popular or debated?)

It would be good to discuss this with relevant professionals.

## 2. Choose the most important outcomes:

- In Cochrane reviews the authors often have prioritised the outcomes and reported them in SoF. Double check that these outcomes are relevant to your readers (should some be excluded? /should other outcomes be included instead?)
- NB! Also include those important outcomes that lack results (for instance adverse events)
- Ideally you report on one to five outcomes (maximum seven outcomes)

(It is also possible to include a professional here, if desirable)

## 3. Check the critical appraisal (GRADE):

- Check that the Cochrane review has GRADE tables/Summary of findings tables. If it does, you should base the summary on these, but you should always look through them and double check for the setting or conditions you are writing for. In cases where the GRADE assessments you make vary from the review authors', you should clearly state this in the result table with reasons for the change
- If the review authors have not done GRADE, you should, together with a co-worker, make these assessments

Literature about the GRADE system and critical appraisal:

[Cochrane training group](#)

[GRADE working group](#)

[Improving GRADE evidence tables 2016](#)

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# Write the summary

## 1. Preferably two or more people write the summary:

- Use the template (that can be found at [Cochrane Norway](#))
- Review the writing tips and the check list below
- You might find «Briefly summarised» [examples](#) that might be useful the first couple of times you write a summary

## 2. Writing tips

- Consequently use the same expression for the intervention/approach, health problem, and outcomes throughout the whole text
- Do not present recommendations in the result or conclusion
- When a professional term is difficult, but you feel that it still should be used, insert an explanation or another more commonly known term. This should be in parenthesis after the first introduction to the new term (e.g. hypertension (high blood pressure))
- Describe the study participants as “persons”, “women”, “men”, “children” etc. Try to avoid using terms such as “participants”, “subjects”, “diabetics”, “patients” (except when people are in a clinical consultation or treatment setting)
- Try to avoid using the term “intervention” – try out other terms such as “approaches”, “strategies”, “treatments” etc.
- Use short sentences
- You are free to use the term “can” about outcomes with moderate or low certainty of the evidence that in the conclusion (may + probably + may + probably= can)
- Before you publish the summary, we recommend that you show the summary to a non-researcher to make sure it is understandable (you can for instance show it to someone in the family, a friend or colleague)

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## 3. Standardised statements

Present the results consistently, using similar words and expressions for similar levels of effect

If your assessment of the quality / certainty of the evidence is anything other than high, then you should avoid strong statements such as “(intervention) leads to (“outcome”). You should rather indicate to the reader that there is some degree of uncertainty by adding modifying terms such as “probably”, “may” (see Table 1).

We acknowledge that the modifying terms we have suggested in the Appendix (such as “probably” and “may”) have different meanings to different people and may be difficult to translate into other languages. Nonetheless, the principle of including modifying terms when there is some degree of uncertainty should be adhered to (read more here: [EPOC](#)).

Table 1. Suggested standardised statements for “Briefly summarised” summaries

Tillit til resultatet	Important benefit/harm	Less important benefit/harm	No important benefit/harm
High-certain evidence 	(Intervention) improves/reduces (outcome) * / (Intervention) improves/reduces the number of people who get/are (outcome) *	(Intervention) slightly improves/reduces (outcome) * / (Intervention) slightly improves/reduces the number of people who get/are (outcome) *	(Intervention) makes little or no difference to (outcome) *
Moderate-certainty evidence 	(Intervention) <b>probably</b> improves/reduces (outcome) * / (Intervention) <b>probably</b> improves/reduces the number of people who get/are (outcome) *	(Intervention) <b>probably</b> slightly improves/reduces (outcome) * / (Intervention) <b>probably</b> slightly improves/reduces the number of people who get/are (outcome) *	(Intervention) <b>probably</b> makes little or no difference to (outcome) *
Low-certainty evidence 	(Intervention) <b>may</b> improve/reduce (outcome) * / (Intervention) <b>may</b> improve/reduce the number of people who get/are (outcome) *	(Intervention) <b>may</b> slightly improve/reduce (outcome) * / (Intervention) <b>may</b> slightly improve/reduce the number of people who get/are (outcome) *	(Intervention) <b>may</b> make little or no difference to (outcome) *
Very low-certainty evidence 	We are uncertain whether (intervention) improves/reduces (outcome) as the certainty of the evidence is very low / We are uncertain about the effect of (intervention) for this outcome because the certainty of the evidence is very low.		
No data	<b>None of the studies looked at</b> (outcome)		
No studies	The researchers <b>found no studies</b> that looked at how (intervention) influences (outcome).		

This table is a modified version of the [plain language summary-table](#) \* If you do NOT clearly inform about what the comparison is before you present the results, you should inform the reader about this in the last part of the standardised statement. Ex: (Intervention) improves/reduces (outcome) *compared to (comparison)*

In most situations, it is not necessary to refer to the confidence intervals. However, there may be times when it is useful to do so. For instance, in situations where the confidence interval includes the possibility of both an important benefit and no effect, or an important benefit and harm, you should consider using the following type of statement:

“(Intervention) probably improves/reduces (outcome) compared to (comparison). However, the range where the actual effect probably is shows that: In best case scenario the (intervention) probably (substantially/somewhat etc.) increase the number/degree of (outcome). In worst case scenario it may (substantially/somewhat etc.) reduce the number/degree of (outcome).”

(This is only a suggested formulation. You may change the wording to fit the outcome and the direction of the results)

#### 4. Check that:

- it is clear who participated in the studies
- it is clear what the intervention/approach was about
- it is clear what the comparison was
- that the reader can understand all the outcomes (or do they need to be explained?)
- there is consistence between yours and the author's conclusions (If not, is there a good reason?!)
- the whole summary is understandable. To help ensure that the content is understandable, you can show it to a person that is not a researcher (you can for instance show it to someone in the family, to a friend or work colleague) before you publish it

#### 5. Send the summary for a check

Send the summary for a check (to see if it is in accordance with the template, is written in plain and clear language, and that the content is correct) before publishing it. For «Briefly summarised»- summaries written for Cochrane Norway, this can go through Marita S. Fønhus

## Reference important for “Briefly summarised”:

Glenton C, Fønhus MS, Goudie S and Noonan E. How to write a plain language summary of a Cochrane intervention review. Cochrane Norway. 2018. Available at:

[https://www.cochrane.no/sites/cochrane.no/files/public/uploads/how\\_to\\_write\\_a\\_cochrane\\_pls\\_4th\\_january\\_2019.pdf](https://www.cochrane.no/sites/cochrane.no/files/public/uploads/how_to_write_a_cochrane_pls_4th_january_2019.pdf)