



Evidence Summary Content Guidance

All AHRQ evidence reports (systematic reviews, technical briefs, and rapid products) require an Evidence Summary (ES). The ES should be a clear and concise high-level overview of the contents of the report. Required elements include background, purpose, main points, results, methods, and implications for research and practice, although EPCs can add other elements. Guidance on the required sections appears below. (**Note:** The Main Points section below replaces the requirement to develop Key Messages. The Main Points section will be used in lieu of Key Messages on the AHRQ EPC Program web site.)

The target length is no more than 1,000 words, ideally fitting in two or three standard printed pages (a fourth page may be added if optional elements are included). Emphasize main points, results, and implications of the report. Limit the presentation of methods to those methodological issues critical to understanding or interpreting results. Where possible, look for opportunities to provide data visualizations in lieu of, or to explicate, text.

Although the target audiences of the underlying report and the ES comprise health administrators, clinicians, and policy makers, even educated readers prefer non-jargon, straight-forward language. Generally, replace jargon, remove acronyms, and define terms that may not be familiar to the intended audiences. Plain language resources are listed below.

EPCs should use this content guidance in conjunction with the AHRQ Publishing and Communications Guidelines and EPC Publishing Guide. Consult the EPC Publishing Guidelines for specific details about the formatting and placement of this summary in the full report. We have also provided a template with styles formatted to the requirements. (These materials can be found in the Resources folder on the secure site: <https://epc-src.ahrq.gov/src/>.)

We also mean this guidance to be fluid and adaptable to the needs and logic of a given evidence report. If anything in this guidance would create redundancy or illogic, EPCs should work with the TOO to create a better solution for the given report. For example, although we strongly discourage landscape-oriented pages, the guidance does not forbid them. We aim for evidence summaries to be brief, readable, high-level summaries of a report. This is guidance about how to achieve that goal, but we recognize that reports are different and each one is going to require some flexibility.

The bottom line? **In all cases, the ES summary should cover each of the sections below, and in no case should the summary be longer than four letter-sized pages.**



MAIN POINTS

Provide a bullet-point list of the critically important findings from the report (ideally, no more than seven). Bullets should be composed uniformly, either full sentences or dependent clauses, but not both. These are usually the few significant outcomes that the EPC will specify after discussions with stakeholders.

- Concentrate on the most important outcomes identified in the protocol (see protocol guidance).
- These should be the outcomes most closely related to the decisional dilemma.
- Use high-level summary statements here; do not rely solely on statistical significance.
- Report the details of effect sizes and direction in the results section unless these data would make a significant contribution to a high-level summary.
- Report important outcomes even when evidence is insufficient or the report has evidence of no effect.



BACKGROUND and PURPOSE

Briefly describe what this report is about, including the intended audiences and how you expect the results of the report to be used. Forgo descriptions of the disease or condition in favor of outlining the purpose and expected use of the report. **Consider using boldface to highlight the one sentence containing the most clear, most succinct statement of purpose.**

NOTE: *Ideally, the first page of your Evidence Summary will contain the entirety of the Main Points and Background and Purpose sections. If these exceed the first page, your first approach should be to edit to fit. Optionally, these sections can continue to page two.*



METHODS

The primary audience for the Evidence Summary generally trusts and values the scientific work of the EPC program and is not particularly concerned about methods. Keep this section very short. Consider using the succinct summary below:

“We employed methods consistent with those outlined in the AHRQ EPC Program Methods Guidance (<https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/topics/cer-methods-guide/overview>), and we describe these in the full report. Our searches covered publication dates from (include dates).”

If you used methods that the AHRQ guidance does not cover, consider altering the above to describe very briefly the new methods or note the variation and refer readers to the full report.

Include a hyperlink/URL to the full report on the AHRQ website.



RESULTS

Briefly summarize the evidence of benefits and evidence of harms. With a table or text, convey the number of studies, types of studies, number of participants, study limitations, effect size, and strength of evidence in support of the Main Points above. Generally, this section should give readers a high-level view of the effects of the studied interventions and how much confidence the reader can place in these results.

We do not require that you report all results for all outcomes in this brief document. If, for considerations of space, you cannot report all outcomes, note that the full report covers more outcomes and very briefly indicate the scope, e.g., “the full reports contains results for the following outcomes (or interventions, comparisons, etc.)”.



STRENGTHS and LIMITATIONS

Briefly state the critical strengths of and limitations to your findings. Keep the focus on the features that either strengthen or weaken your confidence in the findings.



IMPLICATIONS and CONCLUSIONS

This section should focus on the implications for practice and research and your conclusions. Given the results, discuss how treatment may change and what further research is needed. If these findings are at odds with current reviews or guidelines, or make an important contribution to confirming what was previously known, consider adding a summary statement to that effect (e.g., “The results are generally consistent with....” or “These results differ from that of X, likely given Y.”)

Resources for how to write plain language

Plain language uses grammatically correct, complete sentences and uses the right words to convey information. It tells a reader exactly what he or she needs to know without using extra words. It uses common, everyday words, except when technical terms are necessary.

It also uses:

- Personal pronouns.
- The active voice.
- Logical organization.
- Design features, such as bullets and tables.

For more information on plain language, you can consult the following resources:

- AHRQ Plain language guidance. <https://www.ahrq.gov/policy/electronic/plain-writing/index.html>
- CDC Clear Communication Index. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/ccindex/index.html>
- NIH Plain Language Training. Available at: <https://plainlanguage.nih.gov/CBTs/PlainLanguage/login.asp>