

*For students and lecturers at LTH*

## **Guide and checklist for writing a summary of a degree project aiming at a popular science readership**

The popularised summary of your degree project is a compulsory component of the degree project course and is aiming for a popular science readership.

### **1. Aim**

**Reflection** – The exercise gives you the opportunity to take a step back and view your work from a broader perspective.

**Training** – The exercise is also an opportunity to practise your ‘elevator pitch’ so that you can describe your work in such a way that potential employers and partners understand and develop an interest.

**Visibility** – The summary will appear in a web feed (once the technology has been finalised) on LTH’s study pages to highlight completed degree projects to potential employers, current students, prospective students and other interested parties.

### **2. Intended audience**

The text is aimed at an adult with good general knowledge and a general interest in engineering, but no particular knowledge of your field.

### **3. Layout**

The text is to include the following sections: heading, introduction and main text.

**The heading** should be short and pithy and serve as a ‘super summary’ of what your degree project is about. No longer than one line/around 100 characters.

**The introduction** should draw the reader in and/or summarise the most important parts of your project in a couple of sentences and in an interesting manner.

Please note that it is the heading and start of the introduction that will be shown in the web feed (around 35 words/200 characters). You should therefore focus particularly on this part!

**The main text** forms the majority of the article. No more than one A4, max. 3 000 characters.

Alongside the summary will appear the name of the author and a link to the actual degree project with original title etc. It is possible to link to a YouTube clip or similar.

### **4. Available to all**

Remember that the popularised summary will appear publicly in LUP and can be read by anyone. Any sensitive information should therefore be excluded.

### **5. Questions that should be answered**

- What did you work on? Have you found out anything interesting? (Results)
- What needs/problems did you address in your degree project? (Needs)
- Why is it relevant to solve these problems/needs? (Benefits)
- How can your work be used? (Application and impact)
- Are there any curious details to report? (Surprise)

- Optionally and briefly: What did you do? (Report)

## **6. Structuring the material**

The text should open with the most interesting and/or the most important aspect. People usually read popular science out of interest, not because they have to. Your task is therefore to capture the interest of the reader and draw him or her into the text. If your project is very broad and certain parts are more important or interesting than others, you can emphasise the ‘best bits’ in the introduction and talk about the rest in the main text.

So, whereas academic texts often end with the results and conclusions, popular science texts reverse the order and start with the results/conclusions/problem.

In general, the text benefits from having a very short description of the method, located late in the text. If someone should wish to repeat your experiments, they will have to read the project itself. (However, if the method and experiments are unusual, the information about these can be expanded.)

## **7. Getting started**

Some people find it is easiest to start with the main text, which can later be boiled down to an introduction and heading. Others prefer to start with the introduction in order to identify the essence of their own work. Once you are clear on your key message, it may be easier to expand on this in the main text. Test to see what works for you.

## **8. More writing tips**

- Give examples! Give a concrete example to explain something abstract. Everyday examples to which the reader can relate are easier to understand than general arguments that easily go over people’s heads.
- Put your work in a broader context, something the reader can relate to and that helps him/her to understand why your work is relevant, e.g. “every year x people die of disease y”, “exhaust fumes from petrol-driven cars contain the poisonous substance y”.
- Other stylistic techniques that can be included are metaphors (“rainforests are the lungs of the earth”), and “imagine if” scenarios (“if there was no oxygen in the atmosphere then...”, “if we could travel through time...”).
- Try to avoid technical terms – but if they are necessary, give a clear explanation. However, avoid technical terms entirely at the start of the text so that they don’t hold up the reader. Sometimes, a short glossary at the end is appropriate.
- Use vivid language. Vivid language means varying repeated words and concepts, even if this makes them unscientific. Try to use everyday vocabulary. For example, write tears instead of lacrimation.
- Short sentences are easier to read. Simple words are quicker to grasp. You may also need to vary the length of the sentences.
- Wow! Oh! Ugh! Unlike academic texts, popular science appeals to the reader’s emotions. Important subjects should move the reader. Let your passion show in the text.
- Read the text aloud to yourself, both during the writing process and once you’ve finished. Some people find this makes it easier to identify strange wording or illogical arguments.
- Finally: ask an outsider (neighbour? aunt?) to read the text and give you feedback.

### **Checklist for assessment**

- The heading and/or introduction serve as a very brief summary of the most important aspects/results of the degree project.
- The entire text is written in a popularised style.
- The text answers at least the first four points in section five above.
- The heading and main text do not exceed the stated character limit.

*June 2014, updated October 2014 (English version, November 2014)*

Comments? Please contact Kristina Lindgärde, press officer at LTH, [kristina.lindgarde@kansli.lth.se](mailto:kristina.lindgarde@kansli.lth.se),  
046 222 07 69