

## Top Tips on Writing for a General Audience

### What Works Capacity Development Workshop 2016

#### Top Tips: Blogs

- *Know your target audience:* Write your post with your reader in mind. What will resonate with them? What do they want to know about? What's in it for them?
- *Opening paragraph is important!* The first paragraph should tell the reader what the post is about and why they should care about it.
- *Keep your blog short and simple:* Readers generally scan a blog post. Keep it short and snappy, with a clear structure – including a major heading and sub-headings. Write shorter posts more often, using plain language (short, simple words and sentences). Ask yourself, would someone who knows little or nothing about the topic understand my blog post?
- *Search Engine Optimisation:* Make your post attractive to online search engines by including searchable keywords / phrases and links. And by including visually appealing images - blogs posts with images that are both relevant to the post and visually appealing get more views.
- End your blog with a call to action or a question to engage your readers and encourage them to comment.
- Style:
  - Title: max 140 characters (so it fits in a tweet)
  - Summary: always useful at the top, should be 165 characters (fits within google results)
  - Get your key words into your summary for web-search optimisation.
  - If you are using images, use full column width images, not side images with text wrapped around. Always give images a caption

One last, but really important, tip! **Before you post, always proof read and edit.**

#### Top Tips: Social Media

Social media, especially Facebook and twitter, is an effective platform not only to disseminate your messages immediately and directly to your target audience, but also to initiate dialogue for changing and shaping social norms.

- **Be brief:** keep your content short and simple: Lengthy content generally puts people off. Hence, make your content succinct yet clear. In case you feel more information is valuable, link the post to a website or blog post.
- **Make every word count:** start with the most valuable information: Choose and use your words wisely, keeping in mind what you are trying to communicate to whom and how it will benefit them. Try to engage your audience with a captivating piece of information and follow with some specific details. Remember a tweet has a maximum 140 characters.
- **Use action-orientated language:** make your posts more share-able and re-tweet worthy: Craft your content or message in such a way that it invites your audience to take action – be it reading your story or report, watching a video, joining a conversation, or attending an event. Remember, the tone of your content drives your audience's decision to "follow", "like", "share" or "comment" on your post.

**Top Tips: Videos**

- Keep it short. Ideally 2-3 minutes, never more than 5. Remember it will most likely be shared via social media.
- You don't need a big budget - use free apps / software, use photos, use your phone.
- Tell one story, with one message and ideally one audience in mind. If you can, end on a call to action!

**Top Tips: Policy Briefs**

- Include a summary page or paragraph that grabs attention and conveys your key messages.
- Include an introduction or background section which situates the study in the wider context (national and international) and outlines why it is relevant for policy stakeholders.
- Structure the brief around your key messages - they can act as chapter headings. Briefly summarise the methodology to support the credibility of the findings but avoid lengthy or technical language about the methodology - focus on the findings!
- Use statistics **and** quotes/stories in your supporting evidence - some people are more convinced by statistics, others by the narrative and so the two combined make a compelling case for most readers.
- Conclude the document with recommendations, and ensure these are clear and realistic and directed at a specific audience. And always follow up!

**Top Tips: Writing a Letter to Policy Makers**

- Know your audience: Do your research on who you are writing to – what have they said on the issue? Have they done something on the issue? Are they the right person to be writing to? What will they be most interested in? What do they need to hear?
- Keep it short and sweet: Policy stakeholders are unlikely to read a report unless it is very relevant so ensure that your key messages, and key evidence are clearly and concisely included in a covering letter. Try to keep it to one or two pages. Consider using bullet points for your key messages.
- Come across as credible: Introduce yourself in a way that emphasises your credibility (i.e. expertise, experience) that will then encourage the reader to see you and your work as reliable.
- Always follow up! Sending a letter or a report is no way of ensuring that it will be read – make sure you follow up including by asking for a meeting in the letter.

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