1. Tips for rapidly improving your writing

1. Use verbs instead of nouns. Avoid nominalizations.

Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominalization</th>
<th>Better Alternative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We had a discussion about the new policy.</td>
<td>We discussed the new policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The introduction of new farming techniques was a success.</td>
<td>We successfully introduced new farming techniques.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Use the active, not passive voice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passive voice</th>
<th>Better Alternative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The contract was signed by the manager.</td>
<td>The manager signed the contract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The project was set up in 2011 by FAO.</td>
<td>FAO set up the project in 2011.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Keep the subject, verb and its object close together. Use the Subject+Verb+Object sentence construction often.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Better Alternative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The publication of the report for use by decision makers will enable better food security policy making.</td>
<td>Decision makers will use the report to make better food security policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The area of communication that the focal points are interested in learning more about is along the line of technical reports used in agriculture and government.</td>
<td>The focal points would like to learn more about technical reports used in agriculture and government.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Keep your sentences short - not more than 15 to 20 words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Too long!</th>
<th>Better Alternative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As in the case of Latin America, it has been shown that on average rural women have more children during their lifetime fertility age 15-49 than urban women.</td>
<td>In Latin America, rural women have more children than urban women.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Use short, rather than long words. Use simple, not fancy, words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original sentence</th>
<th>Better Alternative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The road will facilitate the transportation of goods to the village.</td>
<td>The road will make it easier to bring goods to the village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He was compensated opportune.</td>
<td>He was paid on time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Remove all jargon and acronyms that have not been previously explained

7. Break gender stereotypes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original sentence</th>
<th>Better Alternative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The doctor told his patient to eat more vegetables.</td>
<td>The doctor told her patient to eat more vegetables.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Use words that are appropriate for your audience. Tip: use non-technical language when writing for policy makers.

9. Do not provide more information than is necessary for your purpose. You are writing to communicate something clearly to your audience – not to impress them with how much you know about a certain topic. Try to understand what information is really of value to your audience before starting to write.

10. Write a first draft and always go back and edit your work for content and then for language. Remove as many words as possible. Unnecessary content weakens, not strengthens, your writing and is a waste of time for your reader.
Useful resources:

Writing guides from the Plain English Campaign
http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides.html

The Elements of Style by Strunk and White
Available in various editions and online at http://www.bartleby.com/141/
2. Writing for the Web

People don’t read on the web, they scan. You should therefore:

- break the text into short paragraphs and use bullet lists
- use sub-headings and sub titles to break up the text into short sections
- highlight key words in bold
- put the most important information at the beginning - most people decide in the first few seconds whether they will read the rest of the page.
- use a lot of white space to make the text easy to scan.

Web writing is “visual writing.” If something is important make it big, bold or colorful. But don’t overdo it or you will confuse your readers. If a link is very important, make it into a button.

Remember that people come to your website to do something specific. Make it very easy for them to find the information they need. More than any other type of writing, writing for the web means eliminating every unnecessary word.

Give people only a little information at first and then link to more information. If your text is very long, consider writing a short summary for the web and put the rest into a printable pdf format.

**Tip**

The best way of testing if your website is designed well and the writing is clear, is to observe how people use it. Gather some volunteers who are not familiar with your website, and ask them to perform specific tasks or look for a specific piece of information. If they have trouble doing this, you know you need to redesign the way you present information.

**Further reading:**


Information Architecture for the World Wide Web by Louis Rosenfeld.
3. Using the Web to Publicize your Work

“If you want to catch a fish, go fishing where the fish are.”

Don’t wait for your readers to find your information among millions of pages on the web - post it on sites that already get a lot of traffic.

Social and professional networking sites are useful for reaching specific target audiences. Many specialised web portals allow users to post content. The web also allows you to cheaply distribute video, audio, and other multimedia formats. These formats can help you get your key messages across in a memorable way.

Be sure to get web usage statistics so that you can keep track of how well your publicity campaign is doing. Google analytics is a good source for free statistics: http://www.google.com/analytics/

Here are some suggested websites for posting links to your work and website:

**Portals**

**General**

Wikipedia - contribute to articles covering your field of expertise and link to relevant work
http://en.wikipedia.org

**Development Portals**

Eldis
http://www.eldis.org/about/contribute.htm

Relief Web
http://www.reliefweb.int

Zunia Knowledge Exchange Platform
http://zunia.org/

**Portals with a Regional Focus**

South African Regional Poverty Network
http://www.sarpn.org/contribute/contribute.php
Networks and Communities

General
Linked In - Professional Networking
www.linkedin.com
Facebook – Social Networking
www.facebook.com

Food Security, Humanitarian and Development Networks
FAO’s Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Forum
http://km.fao.org/fsn/
Aid Workers Network
http://www.aidworkers.net/
Eldis Community
http://community.eldis.org/

Publish and Share Your Work
Videos
You Tube
http://www.youtube.com/
Vimeo
http://vimeo.com/
Blip
http://blip.tv/

Photos
Flickr
http://www.flickr.com/
Picasa
http://picasa.google.com/

Audio
iTunes
http://www.apple.com/itunes/
Press releases
PRlog – publish your press releases for free on the web
http://www.prlog.org/

PowerPoint slides
Slide share
http://www.slideshare.net/

Tip
Publish your work on any of these sites and link to it from your website or blog.

Communication Plan Template (use bullet points)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Communication Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Audiences and Stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Target Audience</th>
<th>Info they need</th>
<th>Key Messages</th>
<th>Channels</th>
<th>Who will follow up?</th>
<th>Timing (how often) &amp; deadlines</th>
<th>Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
QUICK TIPS

Define your target audience and what sort of information they need

- Begin by defining broad groups and then refining them (ex. “Mothers” becomes “Breastfeeding mothers in district XYZ”)
- For your priority audience, consider their educational background, age, information needs, and time constraints
- Understand the benefit that they would gain from your communication.
- Define what action you want them to take as a result of your communication. Do you provide them with the right kind of information to take that action?

Choosing channels

Make sure the channel you choose is actually one that reaches your audience. Do busy policy makers read unsolicited emails and long reports? Probably not. Consider using intermediaries for hard to reach audiences.

Timing

- Relate press releases to important events locally, nationally, and internationally; Develop a calendar of important events.
- Make sure the information arrives in time to be of use. Consider the frequency as well.

The only way to get it right

- The only way to know if your strategy has been successful is to contact the people you are trying to reach. Conduct occasional surveys or interviews.
- Set priorities in terms of time and budget. Give first priority to reaching your key target audience.

Note for projects funded by the European Union

- The European Union has detailed guidelines which should be respected when planning a communications campaign. Logos and templates for various information products are also available. Please see the link below for more information:
  http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/work/visibility/index_en.htm
5. Press Release Template

LOGO

Press Release: Embargoed until 01/01/11

TITLE
Place, Date

Start with an interesting opening sentence that captures your readers’ curiosity. Mention the Who, When, Where and the What. (2-3 short sentences)

Explain the key challenge or problem to be solved. (2-3 sentences)

Give a few more details. (1 or 2 sentences plus a bullet list)

Get a powerful quote from a well-known person that further explains the main problem. A quote from a member of your target audience is a good strategy. Ex. “Increasing agricultural production is the true key for lasting food security,” emphasized the Minister of Agriculture during his opening speech.

Conclusion – end with a key message or strong statement. (2-3 sentences)

Your Project Name

A short description of your project (2-3 lines)

Partner or Other Organization
Information about your partner organization (2-3 lines)
Note: Some donors require you to acknowledge funding. For European Union funded projects, please see additional guidelines in:
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/work/visibility/index_en.htm

Contact Information:
Name
Title
Phone
Address
Email
Website
General

Free food security e-learning courses and training materials from the EC-FAO Food Security Programme. The series includes a “Communicating Food Security” e-learning Course: http://www.foodsec.org/dl

Writing a Communication Strategy


Working with the Media


Ensuring a food secure future: ingredients for change. Panos Media Toolkit on 
Communicating Research: http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=29009

News release worksheet from Knight Communications 
release-worksheet/

**Communicating with Policy Makers**

East-West Center. Communicating with policymakers about population and health.  
http://www2.eastwestcenter.org/research/popcomm/

European Commission. (2010). Communicating research for evidence-based policymaking:  
A practical guide for researchers in socio-economic sciences and humanities. European  

solutions/enriching-policy-with-research.pdf

matters/ev-128908-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

download/156.pdf

**Lobbying and advocacy**

Dodds, Felix, with Michael Strauss, 2004. How to lobby at intergovernmental meetings.  
Earthscan, London.


Connecticut Association of Nonprofits. 2003. CT nonprofits’ advocacy and lobbying  

Secretariat of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities. 2006. Advocacy and  
Lobbying Manual.. Cape Town. www.africandecade.org/trainingmaterials/advocacy-
manual
Further Reading

**Force field analysis**


**Problem trees and issues maps**


**Writing Policy Briefs**

Eisele, F. 2002. Preparing a policy issue brief. College of Health & Human Development, Penn State University: www.courses.psu.edu/hpa/hpa301_fre1/IBInstructions_fa02.PDF


Mundy, P. no date. Training materials on policy briefs. www.mamud.com/techniques.htm


www.writeshops.org: How to run intensive workshops to write policy briefs and other types of information materials.


**Examples of policy briefs used in the toolkit**


**Writing Effectively**


Writing reports


Basic Concepts of Food Security

An Introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Security. A practical guide from the EC-FAO Food Security Programme.


Food Security Communications Toolkit