Tool 2: Perfect communications product checklist

Before starting

✓ Is your chosen product right for your target stakeholder? E.g. if you write a blog, will they read it?
✓ Write down the aim of your product and make sure your content is linked to and supports your aim:

This [product] is for [stakeholder] to get them to [behaviour outcome you would like to see]. It will contribute to [communications or policy objective].

When writing and creating

✓ Is the most important information at the top?
The general rule for communications products is to start with your main message (usually the conclusion), then the background. Methods are often left out entirely.

✓ Are you using clear, concise and appropriate language?
Being clear and concise means your message will be faster to write, faster to read and get across more often, more easily and in a friendlier way.7 Tips:

• Make a note of the points you want to make in a logical order before starting.
• Imagine you are talking to a friend. Be sincere, personal, and use the right tone of voice.
• Prefer short words. Long words will not impress your customers or help your writing style.
• Use everyday language when possible. Avoid jargon, and always explain technical terms.8
• Use appropriate language when writing about mental health. Certain language can cause offence and may be inaccurate.9 Words will differ between countries and contexts. You may want to consider generating a ‘best practice’ guidance for your team to avoid discriminatory language.
• Use short paragraphs and sentences. Use one thought per paragraph and one to two sentences per paragraph. Keep sentence length to 15-20 words.
• Use active language as much as possible if you are writing in English. Say ‘we will do it’ rather than ‘it will be done by us’. It brings your writing to life. However, passive language can be helpful for negative messages, e.g. ‘a mistake was made’ rather than ‘we made a mistake’.
• Be concise. Use lists or bullet points where appropriate and give instructions.
• Always check your communication is clear, helpful, human and polite.

Final checks

✓ Have you edited your text so it is easy to read and does not contain jargon?
Editing is cutting down and condensing text. You should try and edit your text yourself as much as possible before passing it on to others.

✓ Has a copywriter looked at your content to make sure the main messages stand out?
Copywriting is taking raw material and refining it to draw out the main points and key messages, and highlighting areas where material is difficult to understand.10 If you don’t have the budget to contract in professional copywriters, ask people in your project who don’t know the subject to copywrite.

✓ Has your text been proofread so that all spellings, facts and grammar are correct?

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7 Read more at the Plain English campaign: http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides.html (accessed July 2015)
Proofreading includes checking spelling, grammar, facts and figures according to any style or editorial guidelines your project has. If you don’t have the budget to contract in professional copywriters and proofreaders, ask people in your project who have a good eye for detail to proofread.

✔️ Is your product branded correctly with the right logos, font styles, addresses and web links?
Branding helps to raise the profile of your project and helps your stakeholder quickly identify where the product has come from. If your project and organisation has a good reputation, correctly branding your product will help it to be a trusted document and give it credibility. Make sure products follow the branding guidelines of your project, e.g. correct colour palette, logo etc. If your product has been developed in collaboration with partners, make sure they have signed off the product and are happy for their logo to be added onto the design.

✔️ Have you made sure your product is well designed so it looks professional?
Designers and can help your product look professional, giving your project credibility with and respect from your stakeholders. If you don’t have the budget to use professionals, make sure your design:
- is clear
- only uses a few colours
- has high quality images
- uses consistent font styles and sizes
- isn’t too crammed with text. Space makes text easier to read!

✔️ How will you make sure your product is printed to a professional standard?
Printers can help your product look and feel professional, giving your project credibility with and respect from your stakeholders. If you don’t have the budget to use professionals, print using quality paper. Use slightly thicker paper for short documents, such as a policy brief, to give them weight.

✔️ Are your photos of high quality and at least 300dpi (for print products) or low-bandwidth friendly and at most 72 dpi (for web based products)?
If you are printing your product, use high resolution photos at 300 dots per inch (dpi) (watch a video on how to check a photo’s dpi). If you are creating a web based product, such as an infographic, use low resolution photos at 72 dpi. Large photos will take a long time to load in places with low-bandwidth internet. Before using photographs and images in your products, make sure you get permission from and credit the photographer. You can find lots of images which are free to use provided you credit the photographer on Photoshare (public health specific), Flickr and cheap photos on iStockphoto. Look at the licence type to see whether the photo is free to use or not.

✔️ Do you have copyright to use all the content in your product?
Copyright is an intellectual property that applies to all creative work. Check the copyright law in your country to see what kind of permissions you need to use content generated by others. In general, it is good practice to ask if you can reuse content before doing so, and cite those who originally produced the work with a “©” symbol.

✔️ Has your product been approved for release by your team and collaborators?
Factor into the timeline of production a review of the document by a senior staff member and, if needed, sign off by the project’s Director. If you follow these checks, your products will be consistent and as correct as possible, thereby adding to your project’s credibility. Make sure any collaborators who have helped you produce the product have checked the final version and agree to have their logos on it.