Tool 4: How to write a blog

**Time:** 2 hours

**Resources:** Human resources; blogging platform (e.g. the Mental Health Innovation Network blog); internet access

**Purpose:** A blog gets your opinion or thoughts on issues, new evidence and events online to a stakeholder group quickly.

What is a blog?
A regularly updated website or web page, typically one run by an individual or small group, that is written in an informal or conversational style.\(^1\)

When should you blog?
Blogs should appear in a timely manner. Use ‘hooks’ to promote your blogs, e.g. World Mental Health Day, or react to world events, e.g. building back better from the Ebola crisis. They can support other communications efforts, such as the publication of a journal article or attendance at a mental health conference.

Why should you write a blog?
Blogs are a great way to communicate with your stakeholders who are also active online. As they are short, easy to read products, they can have a broad reach. Blogs help to regularly remind your stakeholders about your work so that when a large communications activity comes along, e.g. an event about your results or the publishing of a new research article, they know about you, trust you and want to hear about your work.

Before starting
Write down the aim of your blog to keep you on track when writing:

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

Structure

Picking a topic\(^2\)

- **Topics that work well include:**
  - issues that have a major impact or consequence on a country or large community
  - the involvement of high profile organisations and groups
  - controversial topics
  - unusual topics
  - stories that have a human element and will touch people’s emotions
- **Be personal:** write about something that matters to you and on which you have an opinion or have experienced personally. When something matters to you it shines through in the way you communicate about it and this has a way of engaging others.
- **Be relevant to your stakeholder:** why should they read your blog? Connect with your readers by using your aim to keep their situation, needs, questions and challenges in mind as you write.
- **Use one topic per post:** it reads better, makes your content more concise, and gets your main message across more clearly. If you have more than one topic, write a series of posts.

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• Be topical but find a new angle: use a current, popular topic or one that people are searching for information on, e.g. the Ebola outbreak, and bring in your own spin or highlight something unique.

**Title**

“The purpose of a title is to get potential readers to read the first line of your content.” - David Ogilvy

- Keep it short: e.g. “Creating global awareness for autism”
- Communicate a benefit: potential readers will click on your post if it promises to meet a need they have, e.g. “Funding tips for mental health researchers”.
- Ask a question to draw in readers, e.g. “How do you get youth to talk about mental health?” or “Where did all the depression go?”
- Use keywords: grab the attention of readers who are scanning content. They also tell search engines, like Google, what your blog post is about and will help it to rank highly for those words (especially if at the start of a title). E.g. “Eliminating Violence Against Women”
- Use power words that evoke emotion, e.g. “Wanted: Investors to transform global mental health”
- Highlight big claims and promises but only if you can back it up!
- Use humorous titles if you can do them well.

**First line**

- Address the readers’ need
- Ask an intriguing question, e.g. “This month, MHIN is spotlighting social entrepreneurship in global mental health, for what we’re dubbing "SE-ptember", Why?”
- Say something unexpected
- Tell a story
- Make a claim or promise
- Paint a picture
- Start with a quote
- Use statistics or an infographic
- Use an image

**Content and writing tips**

- Put most important information at the top including any call to action the blog may be highlighting.
- Make your blog clear, precise, accessible and relevant. Blogs can be targeted to an international audience with varied backgrounds – make sure the context, abbreviations and conversions are adequately explained. A good way to do this is to imagine you are writing to an intelligent, interested friend, colleague or family member. Keep your reader in mind to make sure the content is relevant.
- Break up your content with relevant subtitles. We read online content differently to printed content. When reading online we scan content to find the information we need. Using subtitles helps the reader quickly find content relevant to them and helps you bring out your most important points.
- Use the active voice to bring the content to life, e.g. Active: The Minister visited the community. Passive: The community was visited by Minister.
- Use short sentences and paragraphs: one thought per paragraph; one or two sentences per paragraph.
- Use bulleted lists (max five bullets) as these are easier to scan.
- Bring your blog’s story to life with pictures, videos, quotes, useful tips or a call to action.

**Perfect communications product checklist**

✓ Is the most important information at the top?

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✓ Have you used clear, concise and appropriate language?
✓ Has a copywriter looked at your content to make sure the main messages stand out?
✓ Have you edited your text so it is easy to read and does not contain jargon?
✓ Have you proofread your text so that all spellings, facts and grammar are correct?
✓ Are your photos low-bandwidth and at most 72 dpi?
✓ Do you have copyright to use all the content?
✓ Has it been approved for release by your team and your collaborators?

For more information on this checklist, see Tool 2: Perfect communications product checklist.

Examples: Mental Health blogs

**What’s all the buzz about social entrepreneurship and global mental health?** By Grace Ryan

Strengths of the blog:
- Questions used in title and first line
- Subtitles
- Pictures
- Quotes

**How to Treat Maternal Depression in Rural Ghana.** By Philomina Amofah

Strengths of the blog:
- Title communicates a benefit
- Short and succinct
- Main message is in first paragraph
- Tells a story