Writing tips

Planning

- Define your objective(s) for writing e.g. do you need to inform, update, persuade, reassure?
- Define your audience(s). As you write, try to focus on a 'typical' reader and address that person one to one.
- Make sure that you are using the best channel to meet your objective with your audience – sometimes you might need to use a combination of channels e.g. an online piece supported by posters
- Plan and arrange what you want to say – each section or paragraph should have a single theme or piece of information.

Writing

- Identify the five 'Ws' of the story (who, what, when, where...and why)
- Make your text easy to scan, especially if it is going to be online.
- Use an approachable, clear, concise and engaging tone
- Keep the language you use simple, straight-forward and concise. If your written style is easy to follow, it will take much less effort to read and the reader is more likely to carry on to the end.
- Use headings which capture readers' attention and compel them to read on to learn more.
- Remember (and stick to) the word count if there is one.
- Make a start – this is usually the most difficult part.
- Don't keep stopping to check and critique your words – this is only a first draft, you can refine the words later.

Language

- Avoid abstract or long-winded phrases – make sure your words actually mean something.
- Use active language, rather than passive – it's far better to have people or organisations taking action than to describe things as mysteriously happening or being done e.g. Use 'We believe' instead of 'it is believed'.
- Don't use unnecessary or redundant words e.g. use 'explain' instead of 'give an explanation'. If it's possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.
- Don't use a long word where a short one will do e.g. say 'use' rather than 'utilise'. This way it's easier for your reader to take in your message and retain information.
- Avoid jargon, acronyms and abbreviations – unless you are absolutely sure your audience will know what they mean. Explain unfamiliar terms when you first use them.

Final checks

- If you have time, leave at least 24 hours before reviewing the text – you can be more objective the next day and errors will seem more obvious.
- Is your writing concise? Do your paragraphs flow in a logical order? Are there any abrupt 'jumps' from one subject to the next?
- Check spellings, punctuation and any key facts/statistics. Ask a colleague or friend to read your writing and offer feedback. What does he or she think you are trying to say?
- Always ask someone else to proofread your text before you publish it.