

Blogging workshop 13 March 2019

Top tips

Decide what your big picture blogging goals are

- What do you want to achieve for yourself/your organisation/your specialism?
- What readers do you want to reach and how do you want to help them?

Plan a blogging schedule

- Put together a list of types of article that will help you achieve those goals (see end for ideas).
- Use the question words (what, why, who, where, when, how) to help you generate specific article topics.
- Create a calendar so you know what you're going to write about when (which you can of course add to when you want to write about stories in the news).

For each article, work in stages - your brain can't do everything at once

It's important to separate creative and editing activities. Otherwise, your internal editor will distract you with detail and stop ideas flowing.

1. Decide on your target audience

- Be specific – for example, GPs rather than primary care staff. The better you understand who you are writing for, the easier it is to write.
- Note what do you want your readers to think, feel, know and do as a result of reading the article.

2. Work out the angle for the article

- Consider how to present the information in a way that will attract and engage the target reader.
- Use the list of headline ideas at the end of this article as a starting point. Look out for other ideas to add.

3. Generate ideas for the article and write a first draft.

- Try mind-mapping, or other idea-generation tools.
- Use focused free writing either as an idea generation tool or after you've got some notes together. Focused free writing is writing as brain dump: write without stopping for a fixed time without thinking about word choice, sentence structure, grammar or punctuation.

- Try creating an outline for your article, either as part of idea generation or after you already have notes or a first draft.

Your first draft will be a long way from the finished article. But once you have a first draft, you have something to work with and life gets easier.

4. Edit your draft for content

- Check that it contains the right information, bearing in mind your target reader and your goal.
- Don't tell people things they already know.
- Don't include information just because you think it's interesting!

5. When you're happy with the content, make sure the points are in a logical order

- You want your key takeaway message up front, because many readers won't get any further than the first few lines. Use the inverted pyramid style: main information first, supporting detail after.
- Try creating an outline of what you've done so far, so you can see at a glance what point is where.

6. Edit for effective paragraphs

- Use topic statements – sentences at the start of each paragraph that tell the reader what the paragraph is all about.
- Make sure each point is relevant to the topic statement.
- Check each point flows on from the one before.
- Look for ideas and terms that might need further explanation for the target reader, and add appropriate definitions.
- Keep paragraphs short, so the article looks (and is) easier to read.

7. Sort out your sentences

- Cut complexity: one sentence, one idea.
- Use active sentences (the cat sat on the mat) rather than passive ones (the mat was sat on by the cat) unless you have a good reason not to.

8. Review your word choice

- Don't make your readers work hard to get the information (they won't bother).
- Use the simplest word that says what you mean and is appropriate for the target audience.

9. Proofread: check the little details

- Wait a few days.
- Ask someone else!

A starter list of ideas for...

...Topic categories

- analysis of new findings
- describing techniques
- de-mystifying subjects
- explaining over-simplifications in the media
- explanations of new approaches
- overviews of topics
- putting information into a broader context
- a useful resource
- your own work
- opinions
- controversy
- the basics of
- predictions
- behind the scenes
- people
- questions the reader should ask about...
- common misconceptions
- problem/solution

...Headline themes

- Ask a question
- Describe the content
- Give ‘how to’ guidance
- Announce news
- Comment on news
- Appeal to readers’ curiosity
- Surprise the reader
- Use numbers and lists
- Link to public/patient benefits available now
- Offer future hope
- Talk to the reader about themselves (e.g. ‘Your invaluable genome’)
- Promise the reader a personal benefit
- Give insider insights or personal experiences
- The patient’s perspective