



CONVEYING YOUR MESSAGE: COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

When you communicate with your community are you confident that you are conveying your message well? Well-written materials have the power to inform, clear up misconceptions and stimulate action. Poorly targeted items rarely hit the spot and are likely to be ignored, deleted or thrown in the bin.

We know that many of you feel comfortable developing online or printed materials and have already established a positive dialogue with your members. However, others may be less confident and therefore **Data Saves Lives** has produced this factsheet with general guidance on how to make materials accessible and appropriate for your audience.

First things first

Before you begin writing, consider the following points:

- Are you absolutely clear **why you are producing this item** and what you want to say? What is the intended outcome, and who is your intended audience? Are you aiming to encourage people to take a specific action?
- Identify your **key messages** and map out a rough plan of sections and what will be included. The content should flow naturally, leading readers through a logical sequence
- What is the most appropriate **format** for your members? An online booklet, factsheet or email? A printed item that can be mailed out? A recorded interview or an animation that can be uploaded to your website? Each of these formats has its own advantages and disadvantages
- How much **detail** do your members need? What is their current level of understanding?



The most important rule is to ensure that the item you are producing is appropriate for your audience – the right format, the right level of detail and the right content.



General language and tone

- Use **everyday language**. Written text does not have to be more complex or formal than the spoken word. Use the same language you would use if you were talking to someone. On the other hand, an occasional colourful expression or unusual turn of phrase can incite interest
- Generally speaking, the simpler the words, the clearer the message
- **Avoid jargon** and explain any technical terms
- If you use an abbreviation (shortening) of a title or organisation, state it in full the first time you use it with the acronym in brackets – e.g. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Use the **active voice** with personal pronouns – ‘we’, ‘you’. Speak directly to your audience, e.g. ‘check the Privacy statement on your app’ rather than ‘the privacy policy of your app should be checked’
- Use an **informal, supportive tone** to encourage engagement and involvement, e.g. ‘Together we can ...’, ‘We can help you to ...’
- People do not enjoy being told to do something
- Keep **punctuation** simple
- Always **check spelling and grammar**
- Consider whether terms might be stigmatising, discriminatory or negative about populations or groups

Layout

- Text is much easier to digest in **short blocks**. Use short paragraphs with 1-2 points in each
- Divide text into sections with **headings and sub-headings** to make it easier to find specific information
- Use **bullet-points** if you have a list of points to make
- Use **call-outs** to highlight key facts. An example is shown below:



“According to Mental Health Europe, 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem in any given year”



- Vary the format. Use graphics where appropriate to illustrate points
- Avoid using too many colours or different fonts that may distract from the content
- Using a question and answer format can sometimes work well to cover a number of different points
- Avoid long lists of statistics and where you use them, keep them as simple as possible, i.e. ‘almost a third of people’ is more accessible than ‘31% of people’

Highlighting key information in boxes can help it to stand out

Content

- Clearly state what the item you are producing is intended to do. Explain what will be covered in the introduction and then go on to expand
- Do not be tempted to include too much information in one document. You can provide links to more detailed information elsewhere
- Ensure that the level of detail is appropriate for your audience
- Check key facts and if relevant, provide a source reference
- Vary the content if possible. Blend text with graphics, quotes from experts
- Try to end with a **call to action** that is relevant to the content of the item – a prompt to respond in some way or to take a specific action, e.g. ‘Why not check the Terms and Conditions on your fitness tracker?’ or ‘Think about talking to your doctor about taking
- If you are printing items, do not include information that may quickly date, e.g. contact details of specific people within your organisation or details of legislation that is likely to change in the near future. It is better to direct people to your website which can be updated more regularly.

The section on Explaining how Data Saves Lives includes information on how to bring health data to life.