COMMUNICATING EVIDENCE:

A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK

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VakaYiko is part of the DFID programme Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence (BCURE)

This handbook forms part of the VakaYiko Evidence-Informed Policy Making Toolkit. The Toolkit aims to support skills development and practical processes for evidence-informed policy making in public institutions in developing countries. It consists of a training course, a series of practical handbooks, and a range of informational and promotional materials.

This is the fourth in the four-part series of practical handbooks for civil servants. The complete Toolkit is available on the INASP website:
www.inasp.info/vytoolkit

FOREWORD

The case for using evidence in policy making has been made for some time, not only in an international development context but also in other areas.

In working to improve the way evidence feeds into policy, much effort has been directed towards strengthening the way researchers, think tanks, universities and policy-research institutes develop and communicate their research, and improving their strategies to **influence** policy. International donors continue to fund research that attempts to find solutions to the most acute problems that cause poverty.

But less emphasis has been put into promoting a culture of evidence-informed policy. Such a culture prioritizes building a robust evidence base for decision making, one that includes different perspectives, findings, and, often conflicting evidence. The promotion of evidence-informed policy making focuses on working with the 'demand' side – improving the policy-making **process** – and strengthening policymakers' capacity to decide what evidence is useful, when and for what policy purpose.

In line with this thinking, in the DFID funded VakaYiko project we support policymakers and their staff to access and use robust evidence in their work. We are mindful of the political environment in which they are embedded, where different values, ideas and interests are at stake when making policy. We have found that this complex process could be improved by tackling three key areas:

The first is **attitudes** towards research. Here we focus on understanding the process of research, including different types of research, and how it can enhance informed decision-making.

A second key factor is improving policymakers' **knowledge** of a range of different types of evidence – not only research but also data, citizen evidence and experience. By combining them, staff in public institutions can create a robust evidence base for their policies. Often, this means raising awareness of the extensive support network that exists locally.

Lastly, our approach focuses on building the **skills** of civil service staff – such as researchers and policy analysts – to effectively search for, assess and communicate evidence to those who need it to make fast and important decisions.

In recognition of the importance of research in development, countries around the world are prioritizing investments in science, technology and higher education, as well as data and statistical quality. Now is an exciting time for us to build on this momentum by supporting our partner institutions to realize this vision.

We have developed this toolkit in collaboration with practitioners and policymakers from our partner organizations and institutions in Ghana and Zimbabwe. It is also informed by the rich insights we have gained from VakaYiko's work in other countries including Argentina, South Africa, Sudan and Uganda. We hope it contributes to improving how staff in public institutions use evidence. We also hope that it helps to shape debate and dialogue, ultimately contributing to building supportive cultures of evidence-informed policy making.

Clara Richards

Director VakaYiko, Team Lead EIPM (INASP)

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We would like to thank the partner institutions in Zimbabwe and Ghana who piloted this course and provided valuable insights: in Ghana, the Civil Service Training Centre and the Parliament of Ghana; and in Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and the Parliament of Zimbabwe. We are grateful also to the group of advisors and many facilitators who assisted the VakaYiko team in delivering the pilots and who shared feedback with us, in particular Masimba Muziringa, Lovemore Kusekwa, Nyasha Musandu, George Amoah and Prince Kulevome, who each assisted us with several parts of the course.

Finally we would like to thank our Consortium partners in Ghana and Zimbabwe: Ghana Information for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) and Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Making Network (ZeipNET), who shared their experience and insight with us throughout.

ABOUT THE VAKAYIKO CONSORTIUM

The VakaYiko Consortium is a three-year project involving five organizations working primarily in three countries (Ghana, South Africa and Zimbabwe). Work in a fourth country, Uganda, started in late 2015. Consortium members are the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS), the Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Making Network (ZEIPNET), the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the Parliament of Uganda and INASP.

The project starts with the understanding that the routine use of research to inform policy requires at least three factors to be in place:

- individuals with the skills to access, evaluate and use research evidence;
- processes for handling research evidence in policy-making departments; and
- a wider enabling environment of engaged citizens, media and civil society.

This course addresses the first level of capacity (individual skills and knowledge). In the VakaYiko programme, course delivery and embedding was part of a range of activities targeting all levels of capacity, including public events and policy dialogues, a mentoring and learning exchange programme, and technical assistance to institutions.

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ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

VakaYiko's series of practical handbooks has been developed to support civil servants and parliamentary staff to find, assess and communicate a range of quality evidence to support policy making. The handbooks can be used on their own, or as a resource for participants in VakaYiko's Evidence-Informed Policy Making course.

WHO IS IT FOR?

This handbook has been designed for, and piloted with, mid-level civil servants such as researchers, analysts, committee clerks and librarians in government agencies and parliaments in Africa. These individuals play a crucial role in providing information, analysis and recommendations to guide decision-making and support informed debate. The handbook therefore focuses primarily on the process of gathering and presenting quality evidence, rather than the process of taking decisions based on this evidence.

> "Evidence-informed policy is that which has considered a broad range of research evidence; evidence from citizens and other stakeholders; and evidence from practice and policy implementation, as part of a process that considers other factors such as political realities and current public debates. We do not see it as a policy that is exclusively based on research, or as being based on one set of findings. We accept that in some cases, research evidence may be considered and rejected; if rejection was based on understanding of the insights that the research offered then we would still consider any resulting policy to be evidence-informed."
>
> Newman, Fisher and Shaxson, 2012.

FOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

There are four core principles which underpin our approach:

1

COMPLEXITY AND CRITICAL REFLECTION

This handbook recognizes and values the complexity of the policy-making landscape and the role of evidence within it. It does not provide 'easy answers' or a one-size-fits-all template for evidence-informed policy making. It also takes a broad view of 'evidence', without making an argument for one type of evidence over another.

2

THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

While recognizing and reflecting on the roles of organizational, institutional, political and other factors in evidence-informed policy making, the handbook starts with the assumption that all civil servants are contributing to policy making in some way, no matter how small.

3

NETWORKS

A key emphasis of the VakaYiko approach is on the importance of interpersonal connections in building capacity for evidence-informed policy making.
This includes both the need for different departments in the information system to work together (e.g. researchers, librarians and information technology staff) as well as the need for strong external linkages, in particular those between researchers and policymakers.

4

PRACTICALITY

This is not an academic or theoretical resource. It does not cover complex academic topics such as systematic reviews, randomized controlled trials or data analysis in much detail. Drawing from the experience of our pilots, it focuses on practical skills that affect evidence-informed policy making in day-to-day work life.

1 KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

A core part of evidence-informed policy making (EIPM) is effective communication – getting information to the right person, at the right place and the right time to inform decision-making. This can be challenging, and without good communication planning, new ideas and important evidence frequently does not reach the right audience in the right way or is even simply ignored or rejected (Young and Quinn, 2012). Good communication is critical to the way you carry out your job, and although at times it will require extra effort, by and large it should become part and parcel of what you are doing on a daily basis with colleagues, superiors and other key stakeholders. Communication does not have to be complicated, nor do you have to spend a lot of time planning, but a little bit of reflection can make an enormous difference to achieving your aims.

The three key ingredients of effective communication are **audience**, **message** and **channel**. These ingredients will be the focus throughout this handbook. If you keep coming back to them, you can't go too far wrong.

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE COMMUNICATIONS?

Before you can begin to develop any communications, you need to be clear of why you are doing it. Communications, in your case, could be an individual evidence product, such as writing a report, or a longer package of communications focusing on an upcoming political decision, for instance.

Here are a few pointers to help you think more about aims:

- Is there a problem you need to address?
- Are you offering a solution or a number of solutions?
- What do you want the communications to achieve? For example, informing decisions on how to improve economic transformation.
- Is it a direct mandate (someone asked for more information) or are you suggesting this evidence to help the recipient?

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL AUDIENCES

You are likely to be working with both internal stakeholders – research directors, ministers and members of parliament, committees and others – and, from time to time, external stakeholders – the general public, the media. While the process by which you develop internal and external communications doesn't differ greatly, the type of information and the channels by which you communicate will be different. **You cannot develop the same communications for all stakeholders** – internal and external audiences are different and will have different needs and understanding. It is essential that all communications should be carefully tailored and adapted to the audience.

With internal communications, it can be much easier to gauge the audience's interest and the demand for the information. They often share common points of reference and may understand technical terms and style more easily. External audiences, such as the general public, will not have the same understanding but, rather, will have different perspectives and interests. Communications with external audiences may therefore need more careful planning, and should be as accessible as possible. External audiences may also need background information or for you to tell more of the story; this might not be necessary for internal stakeholders. In all cases communications should be as clear as possible.

The information needs of public-sector officials vary based on their hierarchical position within the sector. Papadópulos (2013) distinguishes three levels of officials: political, strategic and operating actors. While political actors make decisions on the global orientation of a certain policy, strategic actors are responsible for the political design, and operating mangers are in charge of policy implementation actions.

Political actors work in a world of ideas and policy models, and their involvement in policy making is not daily. Their involvement is more intense during periods of innovation or policy change. They usually make decisions within briefer periods than strategic and operating actors, so timing is very important: certain information may be very valuable, but if it is not accessible at the right time, it may not be taken into account.

Strategic actors have a more day-to-day involvement, and their intervention is more intense during the implementation of new policies that require process innovation as well as the creation of specific programmes. These actors' knowledge is related to the innovation in administrative processes, the design of information systems, high-level management systems and assessment and monitoring processes and strategies.

Operating actors have a daily routine involvement implementing the actions designed by political actors and, mainly, by strategic actors. Their needs for knowledge vary according to their place in the policy-making and implementation process.

TABLE 1: INTERNAL AUDIENCES FOR EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY MAKING

Decision-making level	Type of information
Political actors	A. The results and impacts of interventions they support. They usually require indicators that account for the advances in certain areas under their influence. B. Design and implementation alternatives when approaching a new policy. Comparative evidence may be required in these cases. C. Information about budget execution. D. Trends as regards government image, their own image and that of their potential competitors among the electorate. In general, they set the boundaries within which the strategic actors work, and enable them to act within those boundaries.
Strategic actors	A. Information related to plans and programmes functioning. B. Elements that allow them to innovate as regards specific programmes. C. Elements that allow them to innovate at administrative level: monitoring and assessment, information systems etc. D. Diagnoses about different situations that allow visualizing public policy problems. E. Information to justify new courses of action before different players of the political community (political actors themselves, opposing parties, funding organizations etc.). In general, they process and communicate part of this information to political actors as well as inform the operating actors about what needs to be done.
Operating actors	A. They are in charge of collecting and systematizing the information on indicators from projects developed within their area. B. They collect information that allows justifying new courses of action. In general, they process and communicate part of this information to strategic actors.

Echt and Weyrauch 2015.

KEY LEARNING POINT

The more audience-focused you can make your communications, the better. Think about their needs and how you might best help.

REFLECTION POINT

Think about the main audiences you engage with through your work. How do their information needs differ?

2 DESIGNING EFFECTIVE MESSAGES

It you look at a well-written report, strong oral presentation or any other type of effective communication channel or output, you will always find good messaging at its heart. A frequent mistake is to not think about messages at all. This is particularly common when synthesizing information, as it is assumed that you simply need to summarize as much as possible and then pass it on to your audience. But there should almost always be a message or a range of messages running through any communications and closely linked to the aim.

Messages are “just the tip of the iceberg” (Young and Quinn, 2012); they are what your audience most needs to know, and are supported by the main information (the rest of the iceberg) as needed. You can’t just give someone the whole lot and hope they will understand and absorb it all – the chances are that they won’t! Rather, you need to make sure they can quickly see what they most need to know and, ideally, do something as a result. Plus considering messages will help you shape and focus your communications for the better and not waste time on unnecessary information.

Example: ***International trade has been seen in many cases to help countries to integrate into global markets and global value chains. This can help reduce the burden of government to provide social protection in rural areas because some of the most vulnerable can earn greater incomes and thus alleviate poverty.***

The one-line key message here is: ***Trade can reduce rural poverty***.

Email is an interesting example. It is often very difficult to find the key message or messages because there is so much information, and you end up re-reading the whole email and only coming to the message at the end, buried in the details. Re-read an email that you have written recently (or one you have received). Did it have a key message or messages at all? If so, what was it, and do you think the reader would have found it quickly? How might it have been improved?

When planning your key messages, the single most important thing to think about is your audience. Who are they? What sort of message do you need to communicate to them, and why? Thinking through several questions can help you shape the message and then the channel for best conveying it:

- **Who are the audience?** What role do they play? Are they specialists in the topic or are they non-technical? Do you need the same messages for the same audience? Are they people you already know? Or are they the general public?
- **What might they need to know?** What are they currently working on? How can they draw on your information? Did they ask for the information? If so, are you delivering what they wanted? Do they need to know more?
- **How do they best receive information?** Do you know how they tend to prefer communications? What has worked well in the past, and what has not? Is it better to approach them for a meeting or develop a summary?

HOW TO CONSTRUCT AN EFFECTIVE MESSAGE

Heath and Heath (2007) talk about six dimensions to a good message. The ideas originate from the world of marketing but are universal to all types of messaging, including evidence into policy. They are:

Simple. Make sure you pull out the key information and don't over-elaborate your key message. Keep it concise and to the point. The best messages are always simple.

Unexpected. Critical to good messaging is getting people to sit up and listen. They are more likely to remember messages if they are counter-intuitive, surprising or put forward a different angle to a topic. Is there an important or surprising fact that you can put at the top of the paper or at the beginning of a presentation?

For example, Norway gets 98 % of its electricity from hydroelectric power.

Concrete. Don't be too theoretical or abstract; make sure the message is tangible, relates to real life and the audience can identify with it. For example, rather than saying 25%, say one in four people (Martin, 2014).

Credible. Your message can be very clear, concise and well constructed, but if the message isn't credible, then the audience is unlikely to listen. Is your message backed up by good evidence? Is it believable? It is realistic? Can you back up your messages with strong facts or information that cannot be dismissed?

Emotional. We all know that emotions can provoke reactions. Is there a way you can make the audience care about the message by conveying a human story. This doesn't have to mean that you invoke strong emotions (it could be humour or surprise) but, rather, that you make the audience connect with the message in some way.

Stories. We use story telling throughout our communications in numerous ways. Can your message tell a story rather than just being cold, hard facts? What is the impact of the evidence?

Not all of these six dimensions will be appropriate for all messages all the time, but they can help.

Martin (2014) provides the following pointers:

- messages should be short, clear and concise;
- one message equals one idea. No more than three messages in any one communication, and no more than five in total;
- don't assume knowledge on the part of your audience – spell it out or clarify;
- and don't forget, each message needs evidence or key facts to support it.

RULE OF THREE

The rule of three is commonly used throughout different types of communications. There is evidence that audiences can retain three messages well, and any more and this retention declines considerably. It becomes too overwhelming, and they don't take in the information.

Gallo, 2014.

DEVELOPING KEY MESSAGES

Messages are meant to be simple, but it isn't always easy to develop them. Here are some questions to help you:

- Why is this issue or information important (or urgent)?
- How does this issue affect your target audience? Why should they care?
- What action can they take based on the situation?
- Does the audience need any background information to support the messages?
- What is the most important piece of information that my audience needs to know? Limit this to one overarching message and three key messages.

REFLECTION POINT

Think about a topic you are currently working on and think of a stakeholder who might need to know more about it. Go through each of the questions for developing key messages and try to refine yours.

CHOOSING YOUR CHANNELS

It is important not to think of communications as a one-directional process, moving from A to B, but rather as a dialogue with the stakeholder or audience. Communications should include feedback, and can move in many directions simultaneously. For example, giving a brief to a colleague may not be enough to convey the key messages on a topic, so you may want to follow up with a meeting or presentation to answer questions, or add an infographic to tell more of a story.

DON'T FORGET INFORMAL COMMUNICATIONS!

When thinking about communications it is very easy to focus on an individual publication such as a report, but what about more informal channels, such as a coffee with the stakeholder, picking up the phone to make a call or, an informal 'brown bag' lunch? It is important to not just see communications as individual actions or written documents.

CREDIBILITY OF THE MESSENGER

"People share, read and generally engage more with any type of content when it's surfaced through people they know and trust."

– Malorie Lucich, Facebook spokesperson

Without credibility, it can be very hard for your message to achieve its purpose. We can be so busy focusing on the message that we forget to think about the messenger, but the two are completely interlinked and can help build credibility. It may be that, at times, you aren't the most appropriate messenger but, rather, you need to collaborate with someone else or use indirect channels to pass on messages or information.

KEY LEARNING POINT

Don't forget the importance of strong, clear and concise messages in all communications. Above all, you want your audience to retain and even act on a message.

3 DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

"Emphasise the decision...the underlying problem and the options to solve it. Minimise methodology, jargon and equations."

Verdier, 1984, in Young and Quinn, 2012.

There are a wide range of written formats for communicating evidence. These include the brief, the memo, the summary, the fact sheet and the report. They may vary in purpose and length, but they tend to follow similar structures (except for the fact sheet). They are all guided by key messages and strengthened by layout to make sure they are easy on the eye and can be read at a glance. And, most importantly, they should all be carefully planned.

THE OPTIONS

- **Briefs or memos** are concise, standalone documents focusing on a particular issue requiring policy attention. Typical briefs have four main functions: to explain and convey the importance of an issue or outline a problem; to present solutions and policy recommendations; to provide evidence to support the reasoning behind those recommendations; and to point the reader to additional resources on the issue. They can be particularly effective in summarizing and highlighting evidence and research for policy, providing a response to a question or making a request. In certain cases the brief may give multiple or even competing solutions for the reader.
- **Summaries** do not include recommendations or implications for the reader, but otherwise are very similar to briefs and outline key information and messages from a longer body of work or synthesis in a concise format. The most commonly used summary is the executive summary, which helps the reader to briefly see an outline of a full paper, view key messages and points and could be enough to read if you need the basic facts.
- The **fact sheet** is the most condensed of all the formats, a simple one page of critical information for the reader. Fact sheets can outline technical data or statistics, provide answers to questions (FAQS) or are simply summaries of longer reports.[1]

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fact_sheet

Ideally, all these formats should be between one and four pages long (and certainly no longer than six pages). If you need to write something longer, then it is probably a report or a policy paper you want to produce, rather than a brief or summary.

- The report or policy paper is the longest format, and gives much more detailed information. It expands on many of the points given in a brief, gives further background information and context, and may go into more details about the research. It is critical that you also produce shorter formats to accompany the report – such as an executive summary with one or two pages of key messages and an overview of the report or a box with a short summary of the paper.

EXAMPLE OF THE 1:3:25 RULE

The Canadian Health Services Research Foundation uses the 1:3:25 rule. This means that for every report they produce they also produce a one-page executive summary, followed by a three-page further summary with more detail and a full report that is no more than 25 pages – the 1:3:25 rule. Each one is targeted at different audiences, so a senior policymaker, for instance, may only read the one-pager.

Variations of this are also used by many organizations and government departments in other countries. It is a useful guideline, which can be adapted as needed. This is also where you can bring out your key messages that may not be so obvious in the body of a longer report.

FOCUSING YOUR WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Similar to messaging, written formats depend on the following:

- **the objectives and messages** of the communications;
- **the specific context** – how do things work in your department, setting or context? But also what about the wider context in your country or region? What background information do you need to include? What can you leave out?
- **who the audience is** – what do they need to know specifically? What do they not need to know? Is this for one person or multiple stakeholders?
- **other supporting communications activities** – do you need to have a variety of formats such as a fact sheet, a summary and a report? What is most appropriate?

REFERENCES

Any written communications should use references in some capacity. References let the reader know that there is evidence to back up what is written, acknowledge the ideas of others and help build credibility with the audience. The extent to which you use references will depend on exactly the output you use.

- There are many types of references. Harvard style is one of the most commonly used styles. In addition, make sure you reference any ideas or information from another source within the body of the text – for example, *Maxwell (2010) suggests that the findings show that there needs to be more regulation by local government*.
- For reports and longer publications, you should always include references. These can be added at the end of the document or could be referenced via footnotes, if more appropriate.
- Briefs, summaries and memos should ideally have a short section at the end with either the main reference (or seminal work) or a few key references. They can also be useful for further reading for the reader. Once again, this helps the reader understand where the evidence is coming from.
- Fact sheets do not need a reference section but should acknowledge where information has originated.

HOW TO DEVELOP A BRIEF OR MEMO

The section outlines some helpful hints for writing briefs.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE TWO STATEMENTS?

1	2
All government programmes could incorporate the use of rigorous impact evaluations to enhance evaluation	These findings suggest new directions for revamping assessments to provide better information and opportunities to enhance evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS VS. IMPLICATIONS

It is important to know the difference between recommendations and implications because in certain instances it is better to use one rather than the other. Recommendations are usually developed by the author of a written document based on evidence they have examined, to put forward what they think should happen/what is the best course of action.

Implications, on the other hand, are less direct than recommendations (in language) and can be particularly useful when advice has not been requested or is not welcomed. Implications outline what policy changes the evidence points to. So, for example – *it is better for people not to eat sugar (recommendation) versus it appears that eating too much sugar could increase your chances of diabetes and obesity* (implication).

Musandu (2013) suggests the follow ways to make your recommendations stronger:

"Whatever the type, both recommendations and implications should always be backed up by evidence (they should not be just vague ideas of what should be done, based solely on opinion); should use clear language and not use too many words; they should be actionable, so use active language like engage, use and incorporate; and you should suggest three recommendations ideally, and no more than six. Above all ask yourself the question, is this recommendation viable."

Look at an example of a policy brief, and ask yourself the following questions: Are there any recommendations or implications? How could they be improved? Are they clear and actionable? Does the author give a good line of argument to explain why they have been chosen? Are they backed up by evidence? Are they easy to find in the body of the text?

STRUCTURE OF A BRIEF

Generally, policy briefs are four pages in length (around 2,200 words, including references and tables).

They are usually organized as follows:

Executive statement (10%)	Includes a brief overview of all of the parts of a policy brief Should be written last
Introduction (10–15%)	Highlights the importance of the issue, problem or situation, using entry points Gives a brief overview of the conclusions or the direction of the rest of the brief
Methodology (5–10%)	Designed to strengthen the credibility of the brief by explaining how the findings and recommendations were arrived at Not always applicable or necessary – you can sometimes omit this or restrict it to one sentence
Results and conclusions (30%)	Designed as an overview of the findings/facts Constructed around the policy recommendations
Implications or recommendations (30%)	This is the most important part of the brief Usually limited to three implications or recommendations Recommendations, which are direct and clear suggestions for action, are preferred, but less direct implications may be more appropriate, depending on the context
References and useful resources (10%)	Helps readers find out more on the issue if they require more information In a brief, keep references to a minimum, but make sure you do include them – particularly seminal work on the issue or topic

This may vary, depending on the purpose and context of your brief, but it is a good structure to aim for.

PLANNING A BRIEF

To develop the main content elements, there are four main steps:

1	2	3	4
Identify the purpose and overarching message of the brief	Determine three recommendations	Construct a logical line of argument for the recommendations (your results or conclusions)	Linked to the context of the issue, identify one or two *entry points* for the message

STEP 1

It helps to start off by identifying the purpose of the brief.

Sample objective statement:

> *"The objective for this brief is to _______________ (action verb such as convince, inform) ______________________ (target audience(s) – e.g. the Minister of Finance) that __________*
> *(what should happen – e.g. they should increase funds for social protection programmes)."*

This will then make it much easier to think about what messages you might need.

STEPS 2 AND 3

Once you have worked on your objective statement, you can then start to determine your recommendations or implications, *but* you need to make sure that you think very carefully about what evidence you have to support them.

Example policy recommendation:

> *"Additional funds could help to support local businesses to ensure their staff have insurance."*

To back this up look at:

1. Why is this currently a problem?
2. Why is this urgent, timely or important?
3. Why should the target audience become involved?

STEP 4

Entry points or hooks are commonly used at the beginning of reports, summaries or briefs to make the reader want to read further. For example:

> *"Mental illness affects one in four people in their lifetime, and neuropsychiatric conditions now account for 13% of the global burden of disease – and 70% of that burden is in low- and middle-income countries."*

KILLER FACTS

It can make a difference to your writing if you use striking facts to back up what you are saying. Green (2012) refers to several different types of facts to consider. They include:

Big number. A statistic which highlights the size of the problem:

"It is estimated that there will be more than 150 million environmental refugees by 2050 due to the likely effects of global warming."

Juxtaposition. Put two statistics side by side for comparison:

"A woman's risk of dying from pregnancy-related causes ranges from 1 in 18 in Nigeria to 1 in 8,700 in Canada."

Surprising stats. Statistics than can surprise the reader:

"More people die of road traffic accidents than die of malaria."

Humanizing abstract issues. Turning the abstract into a concrete, real-life example:

"12 million children will go hungry by 2050 because of climate change."

Source: www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/how-to-write-killer-facts-and-graphics-what-are-your-best-examples.

TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR WRITTEN FORMAT MORE VISUALLY ENGAGING

As well as having strong content, reports, briefs and summaries can also be **visually engaging**. Common techniques employed to capture the reader's eye include the creative use of the following elements:

- **Titles really do matter**. Many of us may decide to read further based on the title of a publication or report, so make sure it is concise, concrete, not too long and gets to the point. For example: "*Economic losses from natural disasters.*"
- **The stand first** originated from journalism but is commonly used as a sentence or two to explain what the written document is about, underneath or near the title. It can be very useful for the reader. For example: "*This paper argues that putting employment at the centre of country policy means focusing not only on employment quantity, but also on the importance of quality and access.*"
- **An abstract** is a short summary paragraph, particularly common with reports and working papers.
- **Key messages summary.** It can make a big difference to add in a box at the beginning of a written output with the key message outlined. For example:

  "Key messages

  - *Most households don't have the education level or jobs that will pull them out of poverty, improve wealth and assets or reduce food insecurity.*
  - *Households that experienced serious crimes during the war are significantly worse off today than other war-affected households.*
  - *Livelihood and social protection services are rare and aren't targeted to those who need them most; rather, these services often go to better-off households."*
- **Sub-headings and text boxes** break up the paragraphs and sections and allow the reader to quickly find sections or key information.
- **Photographs.** Where appropriate, use photographs and reference their source. They can really liven up a written document. Flickr creative commons is a very good source of open source photos.
- **Graphs, charts and infographics.** Where appropriate, use graphs, charts or infographics (see next section).

KEY LEARNING POINT

All written outputs should be carefully selected, tailored to the audience and highlight and emphasize key information and solutions. How much information does your reader really need?

REFLECTION POINT

Read the box 'Killer Facts' and come up with a few of your own examples for your context. Try looking through blogs and op-eds, as these usually use a number of killer facts.

4 PRESENTING KEY MESSAGES TO YOUR AUDIENCE: ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

At some point in your work, you will need to present to an audience – either formally or informally. This section examines some of the ways you can improve your oral communications and, in particular, share messages on evidence-informed research.

TIPS FOR PRESENTING WELL

- What is the purpose of the presentation, and who is the audience? This will help you to focus on the information you most need to prioritize – and, most important, your key messages.
- Structure your presentation. Make sure you have one overarching message and three key points to share. Make sure the beginning of the presentation captures your audience (use one of the elements of a good message as outlined in the last section to do this). Quotes or surprising facts can work well. Then introduce the outline of your presentation. To close, highlight your key points, any recommendations (if you have them) or next steps.
- Plan your presentation and give yourself time to practice. Even the most experienced presenters practise, practise, practise.
- “If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand” – so goes the quote by Einstein. It’s a good point; try practising what you want to say with someone who does not know very much about the topic (a relative, friend, spouse or colleague) and get them to give you honest feedback. You could also record yourself and listen back.
- What’s the time limit? Find out how long you have to speak and try to prepare for less time. You will usually present for longer – unless you are a very fast speaker. Also try to keep presentations short if possible, or break it up with time for questions. Don’t just speak non-stop at the audience – they will switch off.
- Find your passion. Stakeholders are more likely to listen to you if you sound confident but, above all, interested in what you are saying.
- Finally, don’t start preparing a PowerPoint presentation until you have prepared properly what you are going to say.

COMMON MISTAKES WITH PRESENTATION SLIDES

You may decide that to accompany what you are saying you need to produce a PowerPoint presentation or use some type of visual aid (see Annex 4). Here are some tips on how to make sure they help and don't hinder:

- **Don't use your slides as 'crutch'**. Slides are there to enhance, not duplicate. People can't listen and read slides at the same time. If you need support to remember what you are going to say, have notes, but don't rely on your slides; they are there for the audience.
- **Less is more**. Don't put lots of information or text onto your slides. Break text up with slides with images, videos or quotes. There are lots of studies that show that people respond to visual stimuli much better than text (Gallo, 2014). Be careful with graphs and data – they can be great, but equally make sure they are clear and easy for your audience to read. Any text you do use must be 22 pts or more.
- **Rule of three**. In the previous section we explored the 'rule of three', and the same applies to your presentation and slides. Try to stick to three messages in a presentation (with one overarching message). For example, in this section of the handbook, the overarching message is: *"Make sure you use your PowerPoints carefully."* The three key messages are then: *"Don't use it as a crutch; less is more; and rule of three."*
- **Don't just use PowerPoint**. There is other software out there, including Prezi, which is more dynamic and flexible to use.

REFLECTION POINT

How might you present the key messages from your piece orally to a colleague or other stakeholder? Write a short plan to lay out the messages – the introduction and conclusion.

KEY LEARNING POINT

Presentations should be carefully prepared and audience-focused, with a clear objective and a strong message. They should be enhanced but not dominated by visual aids and slides.

5 INFOGRAPHICS, MULTIMEDIA AND DATA VISUALIZATIONS

When communicating, you should not just think about purely written or oral communications; multimedia, infographics and data visualizations are increasingly important formats to turn to and use to highlight key information and evidence.

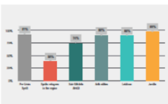
WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INFOGRAPHICS AND DATA VISUALIZATIONS?

Data visualizations showcase data or information in visual form, so there are a wide variety of options that fall under this category (see illustration below). At the simplest level a data visualization could be a graph or chart, a timeline, a map or an illustration.

According the UK Office for National Statistics, an **infographic** is “a self-contained visual story presenting information, data or knowledge, with clear meaning and context and without bias. Infographics use visuals to tell a story or relay a key message.”

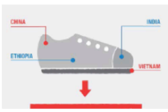
Charts and graphs

Criteria: data set
Good for: visualising relationships between data – e.g. trends/comparisons



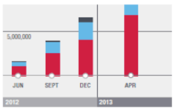
Illustration

Criteria: concept, idea or process
Good for: visualising and simplifying qualitative information



Timeline

Criteria: series of events/data at regular time periods
Good for: showing changes over time



Map based

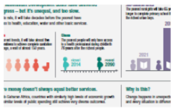
Criteria: data/information linked to multiple locations
Good for: showing geographical trends/distribution

Infographic

Criteria: data set with a clear message
Good for: Highlighting a surprising piece of data, a key message or visualising a research finding

Narrative infographic

Criteria: data/information that tells a self-contained story
Good for: summarising a piece of research/concept/process succinctly



Source: Internal ODI infographic guide.

Data visualizations and infographics can be a great way to capture information and present it in a visual format for the target audience. They can be particularly good to enhance a report or to share in addition to a brief. Concerns are often that they are both time-consuming and costly, which can be the case, but there are some simple ways to do them yourself. Rather than just putting in a table of data, it can make a huge difference to a written output or presentation to present the data in a more interesting and visual way. At a basic level, Excel has lots of tools able to do this quickly. You can also take it one step further and visually showcase the story as an infographic

Technologies are evolving all the time, and new software and apps are appearing that can help to make your life easier. Here are a few that you may want to consider trying:

Piktochart – a free online tool to develop charts and infographics: ***http://piktochart.com***

Visual.ly – a tool that also allows you to see what others are doing and share your content: ***www.easel.ly***

Google Fusion tablets – you can use this tool to turn data into charts or maps and customize as you need: ***www.google.com/drive/apps.html#fusiontables***

Tableau public – a free tool to create more dynamic data visualizations ***www.tableau.com/public***

Datawrapper – another data visualization tool for creating maps and charts ***www.datawrapper.de***

Tiki-toki – helps you to develop timelines ***www.tiki-toki.com***

For Further reading and how-to guides, visit: ***http://onthinktanks.org/tag/data-visualisation*** and ***www.ttdatavis.onthinktanks.org/data-visualisation-resources***.

CHECKLIST

- Have you double-checked the data is correct?
- Does someone else understand the infographic without prior explanation?
- Is the design easy to follow?
- Would additional context help improve the story?
- Does the title frame the content correctly?
- Is the story presented self-contained?

Internal ODI infographic guide.

A FEW TIPS

Know your audience and purpose: What is the desired outcome? Who is the target audience? Tailor the infographic to your audience and consider which channels are appropriate for what you want to achieve (e.g. a printed report/booklet).

Add context: Think about what you can highlight or introduce to improve the story.

Check the data and its interpretation: Keep checking back with your data sources, as manipulation of data can occur throughout the developmental process. Make sure you have properly referenced sources (if the data is from an outside source, make sure you obtain permission to use it first).

Keep it simple: ‘show’ information and data, rather than ‘tell’ where possible.

Teach users something new: Will the audience learn something? Yes = success; no = time to refine or rethink.

KEY LEARNING POINT

Data visualizations and infographics should be clear and audience-focused, aiming to ‘show not tell’.

REFLECTION POINT

Looking at the data visualization and infographic options, can you identify how they could be used more in your day-to-day work? When might they be most appropriate?

FURTHER READING

Extensive online resource on preparing evidence-based policy briefs:
http://global.evipnet.org/SURE-Guides

Hans Rosling's TED talk on data, using innovative visualizations:
www.ted.com/talks/hans_rosling_shows_the_best_stats_you_ve_ever_seen#t-286249 and see GapMinder here: www.gapminder.org

The Atlas of Economic Prosperity is a tool developed by Harvard University which allows you to view graphs of economic data for any country in the world:
www.atlas.cid.harvard.edu

Resources on plagiarism:
www.authoraid.info/en/resources/?q=plagiarism

How to Give a Science Flashtalk: ***www.scidev.net/global/communication/practical-guide/flash-talk-science-video-guide.html***

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