4. Module 4: Writing LMI for the web

Group Size: max 8   **Time:** 2.5 hours

Target group: Practitioner

Aims

This module looks at the skills and knowledge required to write high quality LMI for a range of platforms and audiences. It guides practitioners through the process of developing LMI content, from planning to completion.

Learning Outcomes

- To be able to critically assess the quality of written LMI;
- To be able to effectively plan and create a written article for LMI;
- To understand the different roles associated with writing LMI, such as proof reader, content provider/editor;
- To be able to adapt writing styles to suit a range of audiences and reading abilities;
- To recognise that people get LMI for a wide variety of online sources such as websites, social media, Wiki, etc.

Skills required: competent user of ICT, familiar with the internet, some knowledge of social media. Qualified, experienced careers practitioner, Familiar with the roles/task of the advisers.

Equipment required: Flipchart or white/smart board to write on, computer and projector with a screen, access to the internet. If possible, every attendee has the use of a computer with access to the internet.

Suggested reading: Throughout the modules, you will see "Suggested reading: Linked to Case Studies".

Module 4: Self-assessment

Complete this self-assessment before commencing Module 1 using scale A. Repeat this assessment after completing Module 1 to measure your progress using scale B.

Your current assessment	Grade how your current understanding/competence 1 = Basic to 6 = Expert
I am able to critically assess the quality and reliability of LMI.	A 1…………2…………3…………4…………5…………6 B 1…………2…………3…………4…………5…………6
I can plan a written article for LMI, e.g. length, tone, deadline.	A 1…………2…………3…………4…………5…………6 B 1…………2…………3…………4…………5…………6
I am able to recognise different roles associated with written LMI.	A 1…………2…………3…………4…………5…………6 B 1…………2…………3…………4…………5…………6
I know how to adapt my writing style to suit a variety of audiences and reading abilities.	A 1…………2…………3…………4…………5…………6 B 1…………2…………3…………4…………5…………6
I know how to write LMI content for a range of different online sources.	A 1…………2…………3…………4…………5…………6 B 1…………2…………3…………4…………5…………6
I know how to gain feedback from the target audience.	A 1…………2…………3…………4…………5…………6 B 1…………2…………3…………4…………5…………6

4.1 Writing copy for the web – The basics

Activity: Individual

Time: 10 Mins

Compare these two job descriptions for a doctor. One is from the National Careers Service (England) and the other is from Careers Wales.
https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/job-profiles/hospital-doctor
http://www.careerswales.com/en/job-details/10921

Give each trainee a sheet of paper with these questions. Trainees to write down their answers.

What are the differences between the job profiles?
Is one better than the other? Why?
Who is the main audience for each of the profiles?
Score for readability (1 poor – 10 exceptional) NCS   Careers Wales
Score for presentation (1 poor – 10 exceptional) NCS   Careers Wales
Score for usefulness (1 poor – 10 exceptional) NCS   Careers Wales

Activity: discussion in pairs

Show examples of online LMI from the linked case studies. You will need to gather other (local) examples before you deliver this training.

Task	Action –each pair to write comments on post it notes. Take the post it notes and put similar ones together on a flipchart.	Time
Discuss the articles. Which look good? What looks bad? Why?		30 mins
Why do we produce articles about LMI/Careers?		
Who is it for? Who is our audience?		
Who will write it? Who currently writes these articles? What qualifications or experience will they have? Will this be a full time/part time or voluntary role?		
What skills do they need?		
Has anyone in the group done any writing? What have they written? What was it for? Who was the audience?		
What do they enjoy about writing? What is the hardest thing?		
Discuss the process of writing. **Commission/ decide that something is needed** **Decide on the best person to write the article. Who else should be involved?** **Set a deadline date, number of words, the audience.** **Proofread and copy edit. Who will proof read? Who will check the content?** **Does the copy editor have the final say over the content/style etc.?**		
What else do we have to consider when writing LMI?		
Ensure the reading level is appropriate for the majority of users. What do we mean by reading levels?	Explain reading levels – use newspapers as a guide*	
Should professional jobs have an appropriate level of language or should the info be accessible to all including Teens?	Advantage Disadvantage	

Summary: Look at the flipcharts and review each of the above questions and the post it note answers.

Notes: *For example in the UK we can divide the newspapers into the broadsheets such as The Times and Telegraph, the middle tabloid such as The Mail or Express and the red top tabloids such as The Sun or Mirror. If in doubt about your reader's ability level aim for the middle group of the Mail or Express.

The average reading age of the UK population is nine years – that is, they have achieved the reading ability normally expected of a nine year old. The Guardian has a reading age of 14 and the Sun has a reading age of eight.

Considering the readability of your copy will benefit many people, including blind and partially sighted people. To improve the readability of a piece of writing we need to use shorter sentences and shorter, everyday words. This will reduce the reading age required to comprehend the information.

Suggested Case Studies: Bib-wiki (AT), Education info.se (SE),Professions in the Picture (NL), BEN Occupational Development Navigator (DE), TET-TORI (FI), CareersPortal.ie.(IE).

4.2 Writing copy for the web – How to

Activity: Introduction by the trainer (you can share delivering the session with someone who writes copy. Ask your marketing/PR department.)

Time: 30 mins

Writing for the web is not particularly complicated, but it is an important skill to master.

Guidance practitioners will already know a lot about the subject they will write about. Writing for the web or social media may mean less space and therefore we have to consider carefully what to write. Fewer words = more targeted.

The rules for writing copy for the web are not much different from the basic rules of writing learnt at school. One major difference is that we need to understand is that we are not writing an academic thesis but will frequently be writing for:

Other information providers, such as

- Other professionals, with a limited amount of time to get the information they need for a client;
- Other professionals who are preparing a talk or presentation;
- A newly trained adviser who need to increase their understanding of a particular topic/job or other LMI factor;
- An adviser keeping up to date with LMI.

Different client groups, such as

- Adults – this group can be broken down even more. Job changers, Unemployed, Job returners;

- Young people – looking at a job sector or do not know what they want to do as a job;
- Semi-professional career specialist, such as teachers delivering a careers education programme;
- Clients who access LMI independently of an adviser.

We need to know our audience – or are we writing for every group listed above?

We do need to aim for a broad audience, as we do not always know who will be reading our copy. Can you think of a newspaper that appeals to the same reading ability level? For example in the UK, we can divide the newspapers into the broadsheets such as The Times and Telegraph, the middle tabloid such as The Mail or Express and the red top tabloids such as The Sun or Mirror. If in doubt about your reader's ability level aim for the middle group of the Mail or Express.

It is a skill to explain complicated topics in simple language but this is a skill that careers practitioners frequently have, as their job is to do just that when face-to-face with a client. We just need to transfer the same technique to the web. If we are writing, we need to aim for vocabulary that will be accessible by all groups. The length of the article needs to be short enough to keep the interest of lower level readers while providing enough information that the university degree reader feels they also have what they need from the article.

Understanding your audience – a useful technique if you are writing for one specific group. In your mind, create the person you are writing for.

- What are your person's name, age and gender?
- What does he or she look like?
- What does your person do for a living?
- What kind of home/family life?
- What kind of hobbies does your person enjoy?
- Why are they looking for or reading your article?
- Why have they visited your website rather than a different one?
- How would you describe this person to a work colleague?
- What else is important to note about your person?

You now have a pen portrait to help focus your writing.

Comment: there is a danger when writing for the web that we can be tempted to write in a casual style as we see on many blogs. When writing about LMI a casual style may detract from the importance that a reader will place on the article. The aim when writing LMI copy should be for a style that is modern, uses everyday language and has a gravitas about it. When writing news items we can adopt a style that is more casual and lively.

Think: will our audience find this appealing? Will they understand it? Will they find it useful? Will they want to share it or recommend your website/blog etc.? This is also known as the inverted pyramid method – there are many websites that can give you more information about this style of writing.

Journalists are taught to get the important information upfront. This means that readers should be able find out everything they need to know from the opening few paragraphs. You will write about the most important information and then move on to the detail that can be a fuller, more in depth description.

Consider how often you have started reading something on the web and be drawn into reading the full article after scanning the first paragraph. Sometimes you will find that it is not a suitable that normally interests you but today the paragraph 'grabbed' your interest. That is what you need to do

when writing for the web. If you do not capture the attention of the reader in the first few sentences, they will look elsewhere for the information. They may not return to your website or blog when they next need to access LMI.

The hardest part of writing for the web is keeping your copy simple and stripping out all the technical language. People generally do not want to read complicated explanations, they want web copy to be easy to understand and scan – write in simple, concise language. Every industry has many terms, abbreviations, and synonyms that they become familiar with but will mean nothing to other people. So always, use the full expression and show the abbreviation so they will become familiar with it the next time they see it e.g. National Careers Service (NCS).

4.3 Useful websites

https://www.usability.gov/how-to-and-tools/methods/writing-for-the-web.html

http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/article/art20130702112133610

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/school_report/resources_for_teachers/9600548.stm

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9N21PohBKc#

4.4 Writing copy for the web – your turn

Activity

Your brief is to write an article about something you know about. For the exercise, it can be LMI/Careers related or a personal interest or hobby. Choose something you have a good understanding about and have something you can share with your readers.

Complete the following outline and then write your article.

Time: 1 hour

What is your topic?	
What is your goal? What do you want to communicate?	
Who is your audience?	
Why are you writing this item?	

What key words or concepts do you want include? What do you want to exclude?	
How many words do you plan to write? 100 – 150, 200 – 275 300 – 400	

Title	

Activity: Exchange your article with someone in the group. Read the article and take turns to question the writer about the content of the article.

Time: 20 mins

Consider: Did you understand all they wrote? Did you have questions or possible misunderstandings after you read the article? Were there things you needed to ask supplementary questions about?

After you have both had a turn questioning the writer now give feedback how the article could be improved. Consider the writing style for the audience. Look at the content. Did the first paragraph 'grab' your interest? (Do not worry about grammar, spelling and punctuation at this time, as a word processor and proof reading will be able to help).

4.5 How to gain evaluation and feedback about the article

Task	Discussion	Time
Should we get feedback on the website, on individual articles or on all the LMI articles?	Advantages and disadvantages	10 mins
How do we get feedback?	Online survey, closing of the website triggers a questionnaire, colleagues, etc. Focus groups* (clients, colleagues, employers and other stakeholders).	

*Focus Groups – what are they? How long? Whom should you ask? The users – by age group. Is ethnicity important? Is locality important?