

Module 6 | No-stress ways to write better

Session 1

1 hour

Theme

Rethink what we mean by good writing, and prepare to write better.

Methodology

Ground rules to set for all sessions:

- Bring only the devices you need to the session. *Note to facilitator: Explain here what is needed for this particular session*
 - Mute mobile phones before you put them away
 - Encourage the participants to take space and make space. To take up space is to speak up and participate actively in discussions and putting their ideas and perspectives across. It is equally important to make space for others to do the same. *Note to facilitators: Ensure you check in about this throughout the sessions, especially by making space for those who are not used to taking up space or struggling to do so.*
 - This is a safe space, and we encourage everyone to check their privilege and ensure that we do not discriminate in speech or action.
 - Do remember there are no right or wrong answers. *Note to facilitator: Repeating this during the sessions and activities helps participants speak up more freely.*
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- Ask participants about great books they enjoy reading or enjoyed reading in their childhood. Ask them why they enjoyed those books. Set aside 5-7 minutes to discuss answers.

- Explain how we tend to think of writing and immediately think of the standard of good writing as the great books we have read. We believe we are never going to be that great, and hence, cannot tell a good story. How can we be another Arundhati Roy or a Tagore or a Margaret Atwood?
- However, the key here is to understand that we all have stories to tell, especially in terms of impact, and the audience we are trying to tell it to is very clear to us. We don't have to win a Nobel Prize for literature. All we need to do is to be able to tell our story in a way that it reaches our target audience.
- We can look at different formats of content for telling these stories. But clarity of thought begins with writing and that is why it is always good to start documenting all stories in writing first.
- What are the key things to do before one starts writing?
 - Know your audience
 - Research
 - Write a synopsis

Each of these points are explained here: <https://wiki.aikyamfellows.org/books/comms-for-good-lets-write-better-starting-now/page/before-you-start-writing>

- Explain the importance of a synopsis. You can use personal stories for this.

Or use the example of Stan Lee, who was creative head of Marvel Comics and has created iconic characters like Spiderman, X-Men, Black Widow, Iron Man and more. For each book, he would discuss ideas with his editor and team and make sure a written synopsis comes out of the discussion, which is circulated among everyone working on the project. This is how he made sure all workable ideas are documented and executed. He started out by recording the discussions and sharing it with the team but then he quickly figured no one was listening to the tape, and referencing it when they were stuck. And that is how they progressed to the written synopsis.

- Every synopsis should cover the following points: **who** you are writing for, **what** they will take away from this piece (do you want them to learn something/take action?), the **broad idea** of what you are trying to cover and all the **important points** you need to touch upon within this topic.
- Using all the information they now have, about the audience and the synopsis, ask each participant to write down the topic of one of the blog posts they have written as prep work for the residency. Now, ask them to write a 70-100 word synopsis on one of the blog posts they have already written for their project.
- Give them 20 minutes for this exercise, following which they can read out their synopsis.

Outcomes

- Understanding what good writing means in terms of impact storytelling
 - Understanding the basics of prepping for writing
 - Being able to craft a synopsis
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Session 2

2.5 hours

Theme

Hacks and tools to write better

Materials needed

For the participants: Laptop

For the facilitator: <https://wiki.aikyamfellows.org/books/comms-for-good-lets-write-better-starting-now/page/just-write>

Methodology

- The only way to get better at writing is just by writing. Explain how it is not inspiration that helps one write. Inspiration is just the starting point. The actual writing is a habit that one can learn, and get better at over days of doing it.

- Spare at least an hour a day for actual writing. Discuss hacks to find time like habit stacking and finding productive times where you allow for zero distractions.
- Use hacks from this Comms for Good book on writing to write better:

<https://wiki.aikyamfellows.org/books/comms-for-good-lets-write-better-starting-now/page/just-write>

Participants can go through the entire book in their time, but go over the following points with them

- Putting everything in the first draft

This is important to ensure all your ideas come out. This can then be re-drafted to suit the synopsis.

- Hack for structuring large pieces of content better

When you have to cover a lot of ground and have too many points to go over, it can become difficult to structure the content smoothly. Write each point to be elaborated as a block of content. You can number these blocks, and use the numbering to move the blocks around for a quick visual look at how the content should flow. You can try combinations until you find one that sits right. You can do this using text blocks or using pen and paper.

If it helps, even Nobel Prize-winning authors like Kazuo Ishiguro follow this technique.

Note to facilitator: Refer earlier link for details. In my case, I often talk about how I used to anchor cover stories that were written by multiple reporters and had to be made into a coherent whole. I used to pick up the points and sections I want to work with, number them and move them around until I was satisfied. Then I would start building the story based on this structure.

- How to get over a writing block

AI to the rescue.

Note to the facilitator: The link has a detailed example that includes prompts that participants can work through.

- Using [hemingwayapp](#) to check for readability

Hemingwayapp gives a readability score based on the grade (school levels) that can

understand your writing. For instance, a readability score of Grade 7 means someone in class 7 can understand your writing.

Aim for Grade 10 readability or lower.

You can use the tips mentioned in the Comms for Good book to write better. In general practice, it is a good idea to use simpler words, avoid long and confusing sentences, use active voice and use fewer adjectives and adverbs.

- Write inviting title and crisp intros

Titles should pull the reader into the story. These are best kept short and simple; try not to use big words. A good headline is ideally not more than 7-8 words (60-70 characters).

- Work: Participants to check their existing blog posts (from the Success Pack) for readability on hemingwayapp. They must rewrite their blog posts according to their synopsis, keeping their audience in mind. Each blog post must score Grade 10 or less on the hemingwayapp.

Note to facilitators: Share the link of the Comms for Good book to the participants. Allow them an hour for rewrite. Ask them to share the completed documents with you with the commenting option enabled.

Learning outcomes

- Understanding that writing is a skill like any other, and can be improved by practice
- Learning how to write better for their audiences
- Feeling more confident about writing and creating content ideas using these hacks.

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