

Transcript | How to Adapt Your Writing for Any Audience

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Hello, hello!

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Hello, hello, see everyone joining.

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Fantastic. Hello, and, um, welcome to the room, and welcome to this masterclass on how to adapt your writing for any audience.

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My name is Alicia Fuller, and I am the UK Government Partnerships Lead here at Apolitical, and it would be great to hear from all of you, so do please post.

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in the chat where you're joining us from today, and what organization you work for.

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Um, today we are exploring how public servants can adapt their writing to connect with different audiences.

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from citizens and ministers to international donors and technical experts.

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We'll hear how communicators translate complex topics. challenge assumptions and choose the right language to ensure their message is not just clear, but understood.

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And trusted. For those of you who may be joining us for the first time, welcome, hello, apolitical is the world's largest community for government.

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used by over a quarter of a million public servants and policymakers from more than 170 countries.

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countries. Our mission is to make governments smarter, and we do this by equipping public servants worldwide with the knowledge and skills they need.

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to lead change. So, let's see who's in the room. Okay, lots of people posting. We have, um... Jennifer Home Office near Liverpool, fantastic. We have the Department for Work and Pensions being represented here as well.

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Um, we have Rose Grant from DEFRA, from London. We have a good Canadian turnout as well, Lucas, you'll be glad to hear.

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Um, we have lots of people, we have Scottish representation, we have folks from the US.

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Hello, hello, and welcome to today's, um, webinar. Before we get started, I wanted to introduce you all to the Writing effectively in Government Community on Apolitical.

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This is a space to ask the questions we don't always get time for at work. So, you know, how do you adjust your tone for different readers and audiences, or perhaps what's the best way to explain something.

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quite complex to a non-expert, we know that happens very regularly in the public sector.

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Um, and how much background is too much? Context is sometimes difficult to filter.

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If you've ever wondered these things, you're really not alone, and this community is that place for you to connect with, learn from your peers in the public service around the world.

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You can join via the link my colleague is posting in the chat or in the resources tab.

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We'll continue the conversation started at today's event in this community, so please click through, introduce yourself, say hello.

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Don't be shy. Um, I will get a few technical notes out of the way before we get into today's conversation. This event will be recorded for on-demand viewing on the Apolitical website, so please don't record it yourself.

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Contact details for privacy concerns are in the apolitical homepage footer. Closed captions are available and can be toggled.

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on and off in your screen settings. Fantastic. Before we introduce our speakers, we're going to run a few quick polls, get a sense of where you're all coming to today's conversation from.

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So, let's have a look at our first poll, which will pop up. So, the first poll is, what is your biggest challenge when writing for different audiences? So, what is your biggest challenge when writing for different audiences?

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So we have everything here from tone, language. clarity, um, and I see lots of people voting in, fantastic, this is great.

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Okay, so... it's actually quite a balanced set of responses.

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Um, apart from you're all fantastic, you all seem to know who you're writing for, I think that's probably a very good place to start.

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Um, but great, so coming out Trump's here is, uh, knowing how much context or detail to include. Yes, that is, um, always quite a challenge, uh, in any way, um, or form that you are writing for someone. And then next after that, we are seeing, um, perhaps balancing clarity with that technical accuracy. Um, so thank you very much for voting.

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And in that poll. Great! So we'll move on to our second poll now.

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And this should pop up on your screen, fantastic. So, which audience type do you find hardest to write for?

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So this could be senior leaders, perhaps this is, uh, the general public, or anyone external facing.

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colleagues in other teams, technical experts, or if there are other types of audiences you're typically writing for, please do let us know and pop your, um, note in the chat for us.

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Fantastic. Okay, and we're seeing the results come in here. Okay, so we are seeing around 56% of you do find it quite challenging writing for that senior leader.

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Um, absolutely, this is, um, some... an audience type that we're all, uh, writing for quite regularly, um, and really, really important for, um, good communication and efficiency in the public sector.

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Um, a few of you also writing for that, uh, general public or service user audience as well. Um, this is all really, really helpful information for us and our speakers here today, so thank you very much.

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Great. I'm now going to just introduce you to our speakers.

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So, we are so fortunate to have 3 brilliant guests with us here today, Lucas, Sarah, and Rishwa.

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Lucas Hardonk is a Senior Communications Advisor at the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission.

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Where he leads public environment analysis to shape trust-building communication strategies.

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With over a decade of experience in communications across the public, private, and non-profit sectors.

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Lucas focuses on making complex information accessible and turning data-driven insights into clear, impactful communications that foster meaningful dialogue.

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And connection. So, welcome. Sarah Makruff is a PhD researcher and head of cooperation and Communication unit at the Moroccan Electricity Regulatory Authority.

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She specializes in international cooperation and regulatory governance. contributes to several regional initiatives and represents an institution within the institutional working group of the Association of Mediterranean Energy Regulators. Quite a mouthful, that one, but I'm glad I got that one out.

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And then finally, Rishra Sheka is a strategic communications and partnerships professional working across Europe, Africa, and Asia. She specializes in translating complex policy and data into clear, actionable narratives for policymakers and donors.

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Her experience spans the UNHCR, UNESCO government partners as well, supporting effective decision-making, accountability, and collaboration. So we have a truly global set of speakers here today, which is really exciting.

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You can read the full bios by visiting the resources tab at the bottom of your Zoom screen and heading to the Speakers section.

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So, before we launch into today's presentations. Let's start with a quick icebreaker question, just to get us warmed up. So, Lucas, Sarah, and Rishwa.

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The question in that order, what's the hardest thing you've ever had to explain? So, what is the hardest thing you've ever had to explain?

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I'll give you a moment to think. Everyone else, I posed the same question to you, please do share your answers in the chat. So, Lucas, I'll come to you first.

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Uh, yeah, so there's been a number of things. One of... One of the more challenging, definitely most interesting... a number of years ago, I was working at the local electricity utility here, and we were investing heavily at the time.

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in composite hydropoles, which isn't exactly the most exciting subject matter to the public.

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Um, but I discovered that one of the contributing reasons for this was that woodpeckers were threatening the integrity of the hydropoles around the city. They chip away at them.

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Uh, to make calls to nest in, and also to mark their territory.

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So I figured, what better way, um, to, you know, teach people about this than related to Woody Woodpecker, in much the same way that Woody Woodpecker is often a nuisance.

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Um, these woodpeckers were a nuisance across our city here, um, causing us to have to invest heavily in, uh.

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And something that the public otherwise might not be very engaged in, so I would have to go with that.

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That's such a fantastic example, and such a good example of something that we all grew up with, and we all know is a reference, so great way to kind of bring people into your story there.

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Fantastic. Uh, Sara, come to you next.

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From my side, um, the most difficult, uh... writing that I have done is with the regulatory, of course. It was one of the first decisions that we had to publish.

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And it was tariffs. Uh, tariffs if someone knows... if some people are actually familiar with, it's a subject that, uh.

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touches the social environment, economical environment, it has a huge impact.

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So, uh, we had the task to publish one, uh, one press release.

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That is designated for, uh, two different audiences. The technical experts, and at the same time, the bigger public and the... and the society. So it was one of the biggest challenges, because once you dive into.

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the technical aspects, you get in too many details as the audience actually, uh... They did the poll, uh, so it was a great experience where we had to sit with different experts.

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in communication and in the technical aspects, which is electricity, and at the end, we actually succeeded.

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Uh, and I would say the tool that helped us most is we start with a bigger audience, so that we keep interest of everyone, and then we dive into the details just afterwards.

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So, uh, thankfully, it was a success at that time.

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That's a brilliant example, and I think, you know, two challenges faced there, technical subject matter and two different, you know, audience types. Um, so looking forward to hearing, uh, more about that later, I'm sure. Um, Rishra, over to you.

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Thank you. Hi, everyone. Um, so I think, for me, one of the hardest things that I've had to explain would be... the term... everyone, or, you know, like, inclusion, and in a lot of policy papers, you know, we go with.

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making how... something that looks neutral, which is actually not neutral in practice. So... One of the examples, when back I was working in Togo, we were working on a piece around digital access. And the phrase that the team kept using was, everyone, it's inclusion, it's open to everyone, you know?

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Sounds clear, right? But if you really dig into it, the word inclusion, the word everyone means very different things to a lot of different people. Everyone can mean people with smartphones. Everyone can mean people who can read the language.

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People who actually trust that platform, people who have the time to engage.

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So there are a lot of unpacking that every word needs to be done, that needs to be done before, you know, you make.

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it sound neutral in practice. So, the challenge wasn't technical itself, but it was unpacking a word that people thought they really understood.

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Thank you so much, Rishwa. And again, hopefully we can dig into that, um, a little bit further later on. But yeah, as you said, a slightly different challenge there.

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I see lots of you posting in the chat, so hopefully you can come back to some of those examples later.

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So without further ado, I am going to hand over to Lucas for our first talk. Thanks, Lucas.

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Thank you, I'm just gonna share my slides here.

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Hopefully everyone can see my screen. Okay, um... so yeah, so thanks for the introduction, thanks for having me. I'm thrilled to be here and have the discussion today.

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Um, as Alicia mentioned, my name's Lucas, I work at the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, I'm located here in Ottawa.

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Um, and at my department, I collect and apply insights, um, gain through public environment analysis, and then I use those to help inform.

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how we adapt our messaging on social media, and also other channels to help audiences really understand what's.

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generally pretty complex and technical subject matter. So there's a number of considerations I'll walk through to give you a sense about how we go about this, but first, I just want to say that I'm going to speak today in the context of this somewhat hypothetical scenario.

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Um, so in 2024, uh, the CNSC authorized the construction of a radioactive waste disposal facility.

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Where things like personal protective equipment worn at nuclear facilities will be stored, for example.

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there's disinformation going around that radioactive waste is being dumped into the air by Ottawa River, but in reality, nothing is being dumped into the river, and this is a highly engineered facility that has been subject to intense years-long regulatory scrutiny.

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Um, maybe that some folks from Ottawa here, I saw, um, from some, uh, some departments that are close to ours.

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may be familiar with. Um, so as you can imagine, this topic generates a lot of strong emotions. People feel a direct threat to their safety and the environment.

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And that's where correcting not just a fact, but we're also responding to fear and trust gaps as well.

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So how do we actually draft a message that responds to this information and the emotions that it's causing?

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First thing we need to do, and it might sound a little obvious.

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But it's quite nuanced. The first thing we need to do is clearly identify who we're trying to reach.

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One of the most common errors I see in external communications is organizations trying to communicate with everyone at once.

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And this is often why government communications can sometimes be seen as bland or lacking real value.

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Um, we need to be specific. So in this case, our audiences aren't the general public, it's not all Canadians, it's not a catch-all group like that.

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But rather, the local community members, because they're the ones who are most impacted by it, and who are vulnerable to this disinformation.

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their Indigenous nations and communities because there's a significant interest holder with unique rights that need to be respected.

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NGOs in some cases, are spreading the disinformation themselves, but in other cases, they can actually be leveraged to help us combat and refute it.

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And then local media have a significant influence in small communities, and we want to be able to leverage them as well.

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So once we've really zeroed down who it is we're trying to communicate with.

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Then we can identify the channels that we're going to use. And, you know.

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what I really want to highlight here is that we can try and adapt our messaging as much as we want, but if we're not sharing it in the right place.

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it often won't get through to our audience. So there's two main considerations here. One is that we have to communicate on the channels that our audiences actually use, and in this case, where the disinformation is present.

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Secondly, the channels themselves are highly unique, so we have to adjust our messaging accordingly. Happy to go more into that in the Q&A, but in the interest of time, I'll carry on for now.

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So there's a number of ways that we can find out, um, which channels audiences use. Number one, the platforms themselves provide varying levels of data on gender, location, occupation, and so forth.

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Also, you know, you can review credible third-party sources like academic research, government public opinion research, companies like Meltwater and Hootsuite offer fantastic insights as well that can be leveraged.

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But also, your audiences will tell you if you just ask them directly. Um, for example, we know from speaking with Indigenous nations and communities that of the platforms that they... sorry,

of those nations and communities that use social media, they tend to engage on Facebook the most. So when we're trying to reach them through social media.

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We end up using Facebook for that purpose. Um, so ask them directly, but also through interactions that you have with your audiences and comments, direct messages, varying levels of engagement that you get.

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on your post will give you a sense of what channels are actually being used by specific audiences.

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So in this case, based on, um... various analyses that our department has done over many years. We know that the best channels to reach these for audience groups.

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Um, our, uh, Facebook and X. Uh, okay, next, actually setting an objective. So, the question here is quite simple. What do we want our message to do?

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ultimately setting an objective will serve two purposes. One is that it determines the format of your writing, and secondly, it will allow you to effectively measure the performance of that message after it's been published.

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which itself will give you more insights that you can use to continue refining and adopting your message as time goes on.

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Um, we at the CNSC have 3 preset objectives outlined in our departmental social media strategy, shown on the screen here.

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Um, you know, your department's strategy for setting objectives might look a little bit different, but these ones align directly with our mandate, so they're the ones that we've identified.

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But I want to emphasize here, though, is that the objective of your message should be tied to your communications objective. So, for example, if our comms objective is to prevent the spread of disinformation related to the safety of this waste facility.

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then the objective of our message is to educate our audiences on what makes the facility safe.

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Not just to say that it's safe, because if we... if we just go out and say, don't worry, everything's safe here, nothing's being dumped in the river.

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That sounds awfully suspicious, and I wouldn't blame people for not believing that. So we need to focus on actually educating.

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People on why this facility... Uh, or this project is saved.

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So, on that note, uh, before we can actually be a source of information for our audiences, we need to see them as a source of information for us.

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Um, your audience will tell you everything you need to know before you actually start drafting a message.

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As long as you're willing to do the research and put the time into it.

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A couple of key focus questions here, other than, you know, those that are obviously on the screen.

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Uh, one, how does your audience prefer to receive information? And secondly, what nuances exist in your audience's language? And I'll touch on that in a second.

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Um, how do you actually gather this information, conduct this research?

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Well, part of it is what I was referring to a few slides ago with, you know, platform data, third-party resources, and so forth.

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But the key takeaway here in conducting this research is just not to be afraid to work... er, sorry, to not work in a silo. Do not work in silos when you're, uh, when you're working specifically in comms.

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Speak with teams across the organizations, you'll be amazed with the number of touchpoints that your organization has with the public.

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I know, as I've shifted more into a public environment analysis focus, um, I've had a lot more of these conversations and gained a whole new appreciation.

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For the amount of engagement that our organization does, and the insights that are there to be learned about our audiences that now we can apply.

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To adapt your messaging. I talked about, uh, nuances in your audience's language.

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Um, tools such as Meltwater, Cision, Hootsuite are fantastic for this, if you can get access to them.

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What you see there in the top right, uh, I actually ran a quick search in Meltwater, um, of the use of the terms nuclear waste and radioactive waste on social media throughout 2025.

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And as you can see, uh, the term nuclear waste.

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all year long was the more popular one. So what this means is, when we're thinking about drafting our message, we want to use the term nuclear waste instead of radioactive waste.

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Which may seem like a small change, however, that's the term that our audience understands.

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And that's the term that's going to make our content much easier to find when people go searching for it.

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So, if we wrap this all up with a nice bow, we have our audiences, we've identified our platforms, set our objective, and come up with this text on the right here.

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Um, I won't run through it verbatim, I'll just kind of mention why it works. Number one is we're speaking our audience's language, which I just referred to in nuclear waste.

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Um, we touch on audience concerns, so, um, what I didn't mention in this presentation yet was that one of the concerns in the community.

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or among people who are... who are, um... you know, concerned about the project is that potentially when it rains.

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that rainwater might wash contaminants into the local river.

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So here we've touched on at the very end of the post, uh, this concern by saying the storage cells protect the waste from people, animals, and weather.

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Uh, also the message is written for primary audiences first, while media can also, you know, easily pick short sentences out of this that they can then inject into a newscast or an article.

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And it provides a technical explanation in relatively plain language.

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Obviously, the message is a little bit too long, uh, for X.

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Here you have a couple options, you can thread it into two tweets, just based on the paragraphs that are on the screen here, or the better option, if it can be done without sacrificing meaning, would just be to shorten it into one post.

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Lastly on this slide, I'll just mention this text also is loosely the transcript of, um... a video that we put out, so... Generally speaking, a message that you take can be further refined, uh, or further adapted for audiences that prefer visual communication or platforms that are more optimized for video.

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So I'll leave you with this quote. I think it is a fantastic job encapsulating what comms is all about, um, and what we should strive to achieve. I also just want to mention, uh, yesterday I asked in the writing effectively in Government group.

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Um, what's your top hack for communicating complex info?

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Salma mentioned accepting writing short is much harder than writing long, which I thought was fantastic. A former colleague of mine always used to say, if I had more time, I would write a shorter tweet, which is.

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funny, but also very, very accurate. Um, but what stood out to me in her response was she said, when I default to long explanations, it means that I haven't finished thinking yet. And if this is your case, it's often your sign to go back and think through the steps that we just explored.

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Who are your audiences? What are you trying to achieve? What channels do your audiences use, and then conduct a bit more research.

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We can try and change words, tinker here and there, find synonyms, make things sound a bit better and flow better, but ultimately, if we don't have that solid understanding before we begin writing our message.

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then we're bound to fall flat in the end. Um... So, I just... I just want to say, if anybody feels comfortable sharing in the chat, I'm interested in knowing what sort of strategies you guys apply for communicating complex info, especially in the context of external comms.

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Did any of this resonate with you? What other strategies do you have? I'd be happy to take a look at those if you'd like to share in the chat.

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Otherwise, thank you for having me. Feel free to connect on LinkedIn anytime. You can go to lucasardon.ca, it will take you right to my page.

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And I look forward to chatting more in the Q&A.

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Thanks.

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Thanks so much, Lucas. Some great tips there, and we look forward to hearing, um, some answers to some questions in the chat.

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Great. I'm now going to hand over to Sarah.

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Hello, everyone. Can you confirm that you see my screen correctly?

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Sarah, thank you.

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Perfect. So, hello everyone. I'm actually very delighted to be here with you today.

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And I would like to thank the applicable team for the invitation.

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So, uh... Sharing is what makes us... actually advance in whatever we're actually doing.

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So, uh, whatever... I'm gonna start with a specific number.

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Which is only 44% of citizens actually trust public institutions in the world.

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This is how it is actually written in the report of the OECD survey report.

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And then the way that I like to read it is, I see 56% of potential.

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potential of what? Uh, it's a potential where we're gonna be working together on it, which is... potential to explain better, the potential to make decisions more understandable.

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Potential for institutional communicators such as us to turn complexity into a little bit more cloud.

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clarity. So, um... these principles that I'm going to be sharing with you today come from my personal experience.

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So, uh, I, uh, I come from a role from head of a corporation, a communication unit at the electricity regulator in Morocco.

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And in parallel, also, I'm working on my PhD in electricity and energy governance.

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Which, uh, gave me a bigger picture of, uh, communication and how important it is in such sectors, and how complicated also it is.

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So, um, through, uh, many forms of writing speeches, interviews, press releases, strategic statements, diplomatic notes also.

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I'm happy to share with you, uh... the patterns that I had to encounter during my experience.

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Which are the following. There are 8 principles. Um... I'm gonna start with the first one.

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In the first one. And I believe that it's the most fundamental one. So before tools, methods, and techniques, you have to believe.

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in the power and the meaning of what we do.

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Words have a huge impact. If we see speech writing, or writing in general as a secondary task, or a small task within the communication department, or.

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uh... something that actually follows decisions and decision-making. I believe this is a personal belief, that the impact actually reduces much more.

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So when we really believe in what we write and the impact that we could actually have in the whole sector, environment, direction.

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But whatever the environment that we're in, it has a huge impact.

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So, I also believe that speech writing is not... is definitely not neutral.

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we have to carry intention. We have to carry responsibility in whatever we write. We have to take positions also.

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So, this is why the first point and the first principle I always believe in, and I start with that while working, is.

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I believe that whatever I write. is a tool for governance. So they need it, it helps.

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Uh, it helps ships also governance in the sector.

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The second point is writing full leadership. As many have stated, it is very complicated to write for senior leadership.

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management, and I totally agree, it's not easy. But, uh, one of the tools that I had, and I believe that it really worked really well, is.

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We want to keep the authenticity of the writing, that's for sure, that's really important, and to achieve that, the most important part.

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I believe is intelligent observation. We can't keep staying in our offices, working within our computers, talking to AI.

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try to find the perfect, uh, the perfect speech, writing the perfect words.

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I believe that doesn't work like that. We have to attend meetings, we have to accompany these leaders, we have to be... we have to listen, we have to observe how the argument, how... when they are frustrated, what frustrates them, actually.

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And what keeps them energized, and what excites them in the whole... in their environments also.

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So we have to keep observances. And once we're gonna start doing that.

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Uh, the text we write is not gonna be... difficult to read by them. Sometimes we see that picture where there is a leader who struggles with the words that we use once we write them, etc, and why didn't they practice.

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Well, if we know exactly how they see it and how they want to say it.

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it comes very easily at the end, so this is very important.

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Afterwards, there is a point, I guess, that many of us.

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not working in international environments tend to overlook, maybe.

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But, um... I believe that we have to invest in ourselves.

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We have to invest in the subjects that we work in, invest in subject matter literacy. I work in energy, I have to invest in myself.

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Either the company that I work in has to believe that.

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me getting the right trainings, and me working, uh, in the technical environment is.

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huge asset for them. Uh, it's gonna make everything and the writing very easy, and it's gonna make us trustworthy within our environment, our technical environment, so... We cannot translate what we do not understand. This is... this is... this is for sure.

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So, this is not about becoming a technical expert, or shadowing other people's work, definitely not.

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It is still about writing. So... We must advocate for ourselves, must secure access.

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to technical trainings, I personally. uh, worked really hard to get some sponsorships.

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Sometimes I pay for myself, sometimes I believe that there is a potential there, and.

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Today, it actually helped me, uh, get trust from some leadership management.

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So, this is from a part... the fourth point, also.

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uh... I believe that decision-making is culturally conditioned 100%. I worked with the national and international environment.

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Uh, so, uh... it quickly shows that clarity and authority.

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And credibility do not look the same everywhere. This... this is a fact. Some cultural.

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value a lot of structure and directness. Some others, they don't. For example, if I'm too direct, for example, in my country in Morocco.

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I do not sound efficient. I sound very rude. People don't take it positively.

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While in other cultures, if I sound vague if I speak too much, it's annoying.

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it's boring, and maybe it sounds vague, and the message is.

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lost. So... The thing is, let's be clear, we do not change the truth, that's for sure, but we change the frame. We have to adapt, we have to know the culture that we're gonna be.

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addressing when it comes to writing, also.

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Now, naturally, we're gonna get to the audience, audience dynamics, matters a lot.

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A lot, a lot, a lot, and it is one, of course, that, uh, many of us struggle to define.

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Uh, when we study in our courses, we study different types of, uh, of actors and audience.

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We have the people that enables. the people that block, and people that influences.

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For me, at the beginning of my work, I focused too much on the enablers and the blockers.

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But we forgot about the influencers. They have a huge impact, and I believe, personally, that they have the most impact in... in all of this.

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So, if I believe this is one, uh, this is one tool that I use, if they are accessible.

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I engage with them. I talk to them, I try to ask them, get their opinions, so that I can take into consideration their.

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Uh, their opinions and their, uh... their decision, uh, and their.

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I would say their input in all of this. And if they're not, I do deep research.

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So that I can know how they talk, what they say, uh, how they view the world on it, and try.

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try as much as I can to put their perspective within the writing that I do.

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Okay. And of course... No instance of formal writing happens alone. I believe in that. We are communicators, we have to.

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Uh, we have to talk with everyone within our institution and outside our institution.

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We have to test the water, as we say, so informal exchanges with colleagues help a lot.

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I love a lot, and it helps test the assumption. We can even... this isn't from my own personal experience, I got some blockages from them way before, which helped me reshape my writing according to what my people say about XYZ.

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So, I believe it is a very, uh, very important, as a strong speech.

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Personally, I believe that reflects collective intelligence and numerous disciplines.

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She's not just focused on communication or specific expertise. If we get.

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the perspective of the legal team. I'm sure it's gonna help a lot if we get the perspective on another team within.

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depending on each organization. I believe this is how it defines a really good writing, also.

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Uh, finally, this is the part that had. the most impact, and this is, I saw it with my own eyes, within my experience, repetition.

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Repetition builds... The long-term narrative. I would start directly with an example because I started working with the Moroccan regulators at the very beginning, at its institution.

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I was one of the first recruits, so I lived the changes that the regulatory have encountered.

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So, for example, in 2021. our speeches repeated.

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the same... the same sentence at some points. We wrote it differently, yes, for sure.

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But, uh, the idea is... Simply, we are ready to expand our mission. We are... we started by electricity regulation.

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And the natural expansion is to go through gas, hydrogen, and other, uh, and other energy sectors.

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So our messages from 2021, from the establishment of the regulator, is that we are ready to expand our mission.

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to get to the gas section on the hydrogen, and all other sectors.

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We said that carefully, repeatedly, across different formats and events.

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And fortunately, by 2023. The Parliament, uh... the Parliament started to echo it. They started to hear us.

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the institution around us started to hear us, and they started, okay, so maybe we should think ahead and start actually implementing, and we had the endorsement of these.

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institutions also, and by 2000, by the end of 2024.

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It became a reality, a royal decree, actually, was published.

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orienting the reform for us, the regulator, to cover the full energy value chain.

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So, I believe it was not improvised. And the writing, for sure, the whole team, which means the leadership and everyone within the team of the regulator.

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They prepare the way ahead. And they wrote it, and they believed in it.

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And it actually happened at the right time. So, I believe repetition.

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had a huge impact, and has a huge impact in whatever it was in. And consistency is also very important.

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And finally, finally, finally, this is, uh, also very important, is the structure.

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when I... when I wrote structure, what I meant by it is... There are moments when explanation alone is not enough.

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for immediate challenges. Word sometimes... sometimes for you.

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So when something is difficult to understand. we personally don't explain more. We try to restructure the idea. We try to restructure.

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Uh, the, uh, the subject in a way to.

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give, uh, to give clarity for the... for the audience. So, I personally use numbers to give scale.

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global indicators to provide a perspective. diagrams to make complexity a little bit more visible to the audience.

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And, uh, I believe that structure also. creates clarity before explanation.

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So, uh, by this, I have gone through the 8 tools that I actually use in the... in, uh, in communication and writing speeches.

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And, uh, I hope they had... they were actually good enough, and uh.

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I will be waiting for your questions.

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Thank you so much, Sarah, that's fantastic. Um, and super clear for our audience, so, so thank you. I'm going to swiftly move to Rishwa for our final.

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Case study, thanks.

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Okay. I hope everyone can see my screen. Perfect. Hey everyone, so thank you, I loved hearing my two other panelists, co-speakers as well. It was really interesting, and I think you both touched on some really interesting.

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ways, and I think at the end of the day, communications, whether it's technical or humanitarian, the way that I... the field that I will be working... looking at into, uh, there are core elements, you know, which you both touch out, Bill, which might feel familiar, so I'll probably skip through them faster. But let's dig into.

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So, precision and impact, when we're writing for public services, and why I feel that writing is harder or hardest, when people think that they already understand the topic.

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So, in... before even beginning that, let me set the context and say that in public service writing.

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Creativity is rarely a challenge, and just like you all in my work with the UI and with the government entities.

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I also care about some very practical things, like, you know, not looking unprofessional or dumb in front of my bosses, you know, not triggering political or reputational risks, or let's say, getting approvals, uh, through a system that is too layered and very slow.

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So, the difficulty spikes not when the topics are technical a lot of the times, but when people feel that they feel familiar. That's when the assumptions creep in.

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So, one of my tip when you're writing with it is to always think of.

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the approval chain in mind. When I say that, I mean.

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who is going to approve this piece of work, but also who's going to read this piece of work? And I think Lucas already touched on the elements of the audience.

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So, in my opinion, the real risk isn't just the jargons, it's the assumed understanding.

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So, what happens is we often focus on simplifying technical language. Yes, that's very important.

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But joggons can be... are visible. You can easily remove them. But the dangerous words are the ones that people think that they know. Accountability, inclusion, resilience, gender equality.

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This familiarity hides disagreement. And this hidden differences then ultimately turn into operational risks.

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So, my pro tip when... for this is don't write for what you think the reader knows.

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You don't do the poll surveys, do... speak with your colleagues, the people who are on ground, do those things so that you know where... what is the understanding that your audience actually has.

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Now, this is an example, so where there's this one document, and we have three distinct interpretations. So, is... When we have 3 different... I'm just taking example of 3 different audiences, a senior management, as most of you said, you know, it's very difficult to write for these people. Then the public, and then the partners.

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So, a senior management's first priority will be, is this thing aligned with the project or the mandate of this organization? Are we.

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what am I approving? Is it going to carry any risk? If he has or she or they have to read all of it line by line, it's going to be on the side and you're not going to get the approval fast.

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On the other hand, with the public. When they read something, for them, the priority is, is this fair?

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How is it going to affect my life? They do not care if it's a framework. It was established in 2019. They don't care about these things. They care how it will directly affect them.

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While on the other hand, for donors or partners, they care a lot about credibility. They are putting a lot of money in the project, so why? Why should they do that?

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So, the mistake, as you know, people were also saying in the chat, isn't writing for all of them. The mistake is writing if they're all one. They all come from different standpoints, they all come from different understandings, and they have to present something different to someone.

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who is also checking on them, or their own personal and individual goals.

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So, be very, very clear who you're writing for, even before you start.

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Not just the audience itself or their understandings, but what level they sit at.

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When readers think that they know the topic, they often skim it. They're like, okay, I'm gonna just read it real, real fast.

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And if the action isn't visible in the first few paragraphs when I say action, how it's going to affect them, it gets lost.

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So, you must invert the traditional academic structure to an executive type structure. This is very important for senior management approvals, or even for people, like, in my personal experience, I felt.

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That way, they respond so much faster. So lead with the action, not with a background. Let's dig more into it.

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So, for example, for a senior management, something that he needs to approve, she needs to approve, they need to approve.

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Um, something that is a policy paper, for example.

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And so I worked a lot in accountability to factored people. I know it's a big jargon itself, so let's imagine you don't know, and this is what you know.

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is a core organizational commitment aligned with international standards, the Grand Bargain, etc, etc, etc. It's two-way. If you're starting with that, you're already losing your reader.

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Let's rewrite it. This plan proposes the reactions that will allow country operations to systematically collect and respond to feedback from affected communities.

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starting in the next reporting cycle, and then just put the actions that you have right after that. You can go in the context, of course, but.

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tell the person, tell the reader, this is what this thing gonna do, and it will make a difference for you. So lead with that action, not with the background.

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Um, let's flip it and see it from the public announcement side of you. Again, similar, they don't care about the frameworks, they don't care what protocol, who built it, etc, etc. What they care about is how it's going to affect them.

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So, this change, for example, the one you're talking about, means communities will have clearer ways to raise concerns and get responses from the organizations supporting them.

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And then you start putting more details in that. But that has caught the attention of the reader. So this is also what we call the hook, the first few lines with the, you know, with the internet, with the AI, and our attention spans getting even more reduced. Now it's very important to get the attention of the reader in the very, very first line.

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So, identify that specific entry point for your reader. What is it that he, she, they will be interested in?

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Now, clarity is a structural engineering problem, in my opinion. It's... Sometimes, you know, you can rewrite, rewrite, rewrite, but if you don't reorder them, it's not going to make a lot of sense. And both Sarah and Lucas was, you know, touching upon that, is...

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how we just are not going to rewrite sentences, but we are going to reorder the logic.

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So, move from what this does, so this relevant, to also what this is.

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Background-first structures work for learning, but they often fail when the audience thinks that they... when the audience thinks that they already know this.

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Or when the background first structure also relies on the fact that the person will read the whole document, which is often not the case.

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Senior management will not spend more than 1 minute, even if it's a 10-page policy paper.

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They just don't, they're gonna skim through it. The same with the audience, so you need to catch their attention and assume that they're not going to read it all. We have worked on it, and I know we work on within the UN, we work on so many briefs, we spend months to it. The document becomes our baby, but nobody's going to read it. So it's the executive summary that is the most powerful document, and as somebody was saying, you know.

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I think it was in the Lucas presentation that the smaller you have to write, the more difficult it is.

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That is true. And it applies universally everywhere. Um, so just flipping that hierarchy to survive that skim is really, really important.

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Uh, avoiding definitions and showing the human cost. Now, numbers and concepts are super important. They give credibility. I work with numbers, it's very important, you have to have numbers.

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But they need to be attached with meaning, something that they can land on, something that they can stick to, you know.

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So, for example, we have this term in gender-sensitive programming now. Maybe you can have a vague idea of programming that is gender sensitive. Okay, so you think you are familiar with it, you understand what this is.

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Sure, you have a good... you have some understanding, but that's very... it's very vague. So, to fix this problem, what we're going to suggest is replace the label of the program with the outcome of the program.

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So, just replace the abstract terms with concrete actions, and how to exactly do that?

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So, let's say we have something like gender-sensitive programming is integrated across activities. Okay, that's accurate, that makes sense.

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But I have no idea what it's going to do, and I don't have time to read all of it. Instead, if I just replace this line with, let's say, gender-sensitive programming brought 2 million girls back to school by adjusting safety measures.

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Another more details of it, you exactly know what this did, even if I don't read all of this, I know that gender-sensitive programming probably is.

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to do something with specific... it assumes that people are not on the same line, it knows what's going to do, what will probably be the result of it, and what can I expect if I read all of the document.

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A pro tip which I think for writing any of this, for any of the work, I always think about, is.

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who is excluded if we don't do this? So, bringing those people at the front of especially humanitarian work and in government services really, really helpful.

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So replace those abstract terms with concrete actions that are either there or your target.

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That's also possible, you know, sometimes we have RBM frameworks where we are... we have targets, we haven't achieved something, but we plan to achieve. So that can also be brought in here.

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And now this, I think this is a topic which we're all very familiar with, writing under pressure.

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is in government sector, in... within the UN, and most of the places these days, we are writing under so much pressure, the pressure of time, the pressure of avoiding reputational risk, the pressure of just way too many tasks to be done.

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So, mistakes, and these mistakes are very high, you know.

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high-priority mistakes, they can cause serious damage. So, your wordings.

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will be changed at every stage, because at every stage, the hierarchy or the person reading it will be like, okay, no, you know, from my point of view.

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he might or she might, or they might have a better overview of certain things, and they might change it.

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So, my idea when I say it is we need to, when we are working in public sector, we need to let go of that ego or that attachment. Ego is a strong word, I know, but that attachment to that sentence, the attachment to that written piece, rather have attachments to the idea that you wanted to convey. So if at the core of it, I wanted to make sure that people know what is gender-sensitive programming and.

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I am launching a program that will affect 5 million girls.

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If, as long as that idea is out, it doesn't matter what the wording is.

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You know, at every different level, the wording is going to change. You should have a pushback, have a conversation. Yes, if you feel strongly about it, but don't put.

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too much, don't invest way too much of your time. So, let go of that perfection, because also in... I mean, this is another element of it, is.

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in writing, I feel you can go on and on and on. You can spend as much time as you want on a piece and just make it better. But you have to hold on to what are the institutional values, what is the one message.

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Or 2 messages that you want to go, what is... hold on to that clarity.

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And one of the ways I do that is I ask myself these three questions before I know that this document is done, and before I send that... when I click the send button.

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is, is the action clear in the first few lines? Which means.

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If I stop reading after this paragraph. Or the first paragraph, do I know exactly what to do? So in... for the senior management, translates to what will I... what am I approving, how much will it cost, what can be the main risks for that.

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From the audience point of view, what will it affect them? What will they get out of this public policy or out of this message?

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The second question is, would a non-expert. understand the change. Not the definition, but what the result of it. What is it that I'm going to get out of it?

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And finally, does this create fewer follow-up questions, not more? If it's going to.

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create more follow-up questions. It's not probably done. Early in my career, you know, I would go up and ask my colleagues as well and take help from them.

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ask this, can you, can you help me? Do you think, do you have more follow-up questions on that? Is that clear? That helps. And this, the team effort word that Sara used, yes, writing, especially in public space sector, when you have so many people you're accountable to, is a right, is a group effort, and you have to let go of.

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some things which you feel very strongly about, people will say, you also have to have that stand, but have that opinion and see where it goes from there.

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I always ask myself these 3 questions when I hit pa- when I hit that send button, and I hope.

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something from this could also resonate with you. So I think in the end, uh, my final thing would be if.

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from this last 8 minutes I've been speaking, if there are 3 things that, you know, you should take from this presentation would be don't write for assumed understanding. That's, like, in my opinion, one of the key important things. You need to know what that understanding is, you need to unpack those words.

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structure matters more than the wording itself. You have to bring those actions, you have to bring how it affects the people in the very beginning, unless you're writing for academics. That's a whole different story.

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Uh, and then we have show impact, not just intent. You can have all, okay, this framework will do this, will do this, no, no, no. You have to start very concretely about this is what... with adding a mix of numbers on that.

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will show that impact, or you will get the attention of the audience. So, clear writing in public service isn't about dumbing it down. I mean, you can't dumb everything. You know, there are technical terms, they have to be there. But what it means is really about helping.

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organizations and helping people decide. What is... what is it that they're getting out of it, and what is it that they are giving or acting upon.

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Um, can help, so I think that is where I'm going to end. Thank you, everyone, for listening, and I would love to answer some questions later if you have any, but yeah, I hope you found it useful.

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Thanks so much, Rishwa, and, um, there are a few questions coming into the chat, so please do feel free to type in there if you want to respond quickly to any of those.

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Um, thank you so much, everyone, for those brilliant case studies, all very varied and different takes, but certainly a common theme about, you know, do not skip that step of researching your audience, because it will inform so much about how you write and communicate, including.

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things like how you structural writing, which is, um, going to pay dividends in the long run.

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Um, please do keep sharing your questions, everybody, and to ensure your question gets seen and not lost in the chat, we just want to ask you to submit it in the Q&A, which you should see at the bottom of your screen.

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And just before we dive into a question, I just wanted to let you know we've also created a really good follow-on resource to today's topic that you might find useful.

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This will be an article that sets out the three core principles for writing smarter, not harder, in government. To receive your link to this helpful article, please go to the Writing Effectively in Government community after the event and leave a comment on the post.

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pinned at the top of the page. We'll then send you that resource later this week, and my colleague.

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We'll have just posted that in a link in the thread in the chat, so thank you so much.

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So, um, we probably have time for one or two questions.

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Um, there are a few that have come through, but actually, something that you've all mentioned, and Lucas, you brought up as well, so I'll open this up to the floor. You've all mentioned that writing fewer words takes a longer amount of time, um, and.

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I just wanted to think, is there any tips you could share with our audience for writing in that short form? Perhaps using social media as an example, because we all have to write, um, within a restricted word limit.

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Um, so, Lucas, maybe I'll come to you first.

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Sure, um, a few, sort of. Uh, quick ones that save a bit of characters here and there, but ultimately make a big difference when they're put together.

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Um, simply avoiding fluff and unnecessary words. Oftentimes, you'll see on social media some, like, the classic did-you-know post, or are you interested in learning about.

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These sorts of rhetorical questions aren't actually providing your audience with any real value, they're not learning anything from those, uh, sorts of questions.

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You know, are you interested about learning something? They're following you because they're interested about learning about it, so you don't need to include that in your message.

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Um, so what this does is it not only reduces the character count, especially for platforms where the limit is much smaller.

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Um, but also, it places more of an emphasis on the information you're actually trying to share, so instead of.

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Are you interested in learning about nuclear waste? You just get straight into it. Nuclear waste is, um, you know, safe and stored safe in Canada because XYZ.

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Um, so being more direct. Also, quickly, speaking the first person, if we said the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission over and over again, that would take up a ton of characters. It also just sounds awkward. Social media is a very, uh... you know, um, personal, sort of.

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two-way conversation platform, use contractions, bulleted lists to make your content more easily readable, but also to save space as well. So, some quick, actionable tips.

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Brilliant. Rishwal, Sara, anything to add there?

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I mean, I think, um, what Lucas was saying was absolutely brilliant. I mean, I'll try to come up on.

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on the idea of having that hook to your statements. I mean, sometimes, you know, we all have to write.

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Uh, longer text, and on social media, I mean, LinkedIn posts, and sometimes protocols dictate that, you know, the names go the way they... they do.

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Uh, so you probably would not be able to, you know, get all of it out, but writing in bullet points, um, and what, you know, Zara was saying earlier is often when you.

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right about the same topics oftentimes enough, you get it. So instead of spending all your energy in the very first draft, this is the speech on this topic, and that's it, I'm going to make it perfect.

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go with there, you know, accept that this is probably not perfection. You don't need that perfection in the very first go, but eventually, because you will... if there's a project, they're multi-million, uh, you know, dollar, euro ex-currency projects, you will be writing more about it. So eventually, you're going to get that hook of what that project.

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really entails, and I mean, the basic way, you know, asking why, what, how is one of the ways we go about it, but also sometimes don't be that hard on yourself. It's fine, you know? Go with the project, and eventually that's going to click for you.

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Thank you, Rishwal.

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From my side, I do agree with Rishwa, and also I agree with the point that she said. One of the great tips.

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Let's focus on your core idea. It's very important.

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It's what you should repeat. differently in each of your posts, the message has to be... the end message has to be the same.

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You have to be coherent with what you want to write and what you want to send for the audience.

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This is very important. As for the rest. It is not as important as the core message.

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So, as Rishwa said, don't be hard on yourself.

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Sometimes you can miss one thing or two, and that's okay. You can catch up later on it.

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Thank you so much, Sarah. I think there's probably a number of perfectionists in that room... in this room here today, so, um, yes, such a good tip for all of us to kind of drop that ego and not.

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Not to be too hard on ourselves. Brilliant. Um, we have had some really great questions. Please don't go to the community as we are nearing the end of this session here today, and I'm sure there will be lots of answers to the questions that you pose there.

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We've had some incredible wisdom from each of our speakers, and I'd like all of you in the room to just join me in giving Lucas, Sara, and Rishwar a virtual round of applause.

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And most importantly, thanks to all of you, the attendees, for investing in your learning and just being so engaged with us here today.

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The team is just going to put up a really quick poll, find out how you felt about today. It will help us continue improving our content, um, and we always appreciate your responses.

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Thank you. While you're doing that, I wanted to share a few more exciting events that you can register for, and you can join us again soon. If you're not available to join live, remember that you can always register, and then you can get the recording afterwards.

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Um, tomorrow we have an exciting session around innovation, case studies happening globally.

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Um, on Thursday, we have, um, a webinar around how to stretch resources in local government, and then finally, next Tuesday, we have our next edition of the AI Skills Lab, which will be on AI for Job Applications.

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Okay, that is all we have time for today. We hope you found it really helpful, and we want to say a huge thank you to our speakers.

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to everyone who's made today happen, and to you, the attendees, for taking time out of your really busy schedules.

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keep an eye out for the email coming your way with today's recordings and resources, and we hope to see you at another apolitical event very, very soon. Have a lovely day, and goodbye.

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Thank you

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