Editorial action plan

Start with a plan: Decide what you want to write about, determine your angle, and then jot down a skeleton structure - noting the key points you want to make - this should give you confidence the content will work before you write it. Follow the four stages.

Consider the audience: Write with your audience in mind — who are you writing for and what are their motivations for reading? Is there a clear WIIFM (What's In It For Me)? What do you want them to *think* and *do* as a result of reading your content? This is an essential step before starting to write. Consider what questions the audience might have, and ensure you can answer them before you start.

Open with a punch, close with a kick: Grab attention with the headline and make your position clear, then expand on your angle in the opening 'lede'. Get to the point and delete the run-up. At the end, close with a clear call to action. Ensure readers are left in no doubt as to what they can do.

The 'so what' factor: All writing needs to get a reader's attention and maintain it, competing amongst the noise of other blogs / content. Does yours pass the 'so what?' test?

Brevity is beautiful: Keep headlines short and snappy. For the content, write using short words, short sentences and short paragraphs. Read through one final time and chop out any superfluous, flamboyant lexicology (like that). New paragraphs should have new information.

Be clear: Always keep ideas as simple as possible. See where examples help to explain more complex points. Always judge clarity from the reader's stand point. Ask a colleague to read it and see if they can pull out the three main points. If they can't then you're not being clear enough.

Eliminate padding: *It is interesting that, it is important to bear in mind that*… remove. And remove weak words: *Usually*… If a sentence doesn't include a fact or clear information it's a candidate for deletion.

Be structured: Have a clear structure before you start. Then guide the reader with subheads and bullets where needed (but don't overuse them) and smooth transitions.

Be active: Always be active and confident in tone and words. Use powerful, active verbs. Replace abstract -*ion* nouns with action verbs ('was in violation' to 'violated') where possible, and replace *be-verb* phrases with more direct simple verbs ('is indicative of' to 'indicates')

Kill the zombies: Make it even more active by removing or reducing passive language where possible. If you can add 'by zombies' afterwards, then it's passive. *The article was edited… by zombies*.

Kill the jargon: Ensure blog is readable to many, not just your colleagues or technical amigos. Don't *reach out* to people in your content, or ask them to note the progress of the *E101jk clause* of the latest EU directive. Speak to them as people.

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Be engaging: Ask questions, give instructions, use direct everyday English people will respond to. Rewrite clichés to show you've made an effort.

Be yourself: Let your personality shine through — you're not writing a textbook. It is important you act as the face of the organisation but don't write like a robot. Write like you or people will be turned off.

Have humanity: Do not overlook people and how they will be affected by the story or our work.

Don't patronise: The audience is diverse so getting the tone is important. Engage the audience and draw them into the piece.

Name-check: Include reference to partners, stakeholders, research and other initiatives in your blog. Name-checking will not only increase their visibility in online searches but will also give specific contacts to mention on social media, who may then engage with your blog to further increase its reach.

Make sense: Make sure that what you have written makes sense to a wide audience, not only in the language you have used but the ideas you have shared. Crucially, make sure *you* understand what you have written.

Opinion not opinionated: It is good to state a point of view but don't become argumentative and do not drift into making up positions that are not in line with our approach. Back up opinion with facts, to keep people engaged and to live our principles.

Hyperlink heaven: Ensure your blog hyperlinks to other content on the website if possible. We want to get people linking through to the site or help them stay on the site if they are already there.

Use quotes: To add another voice to your words, to create ideas that can be lifted. But keep them short.

Use images: To capture the story, to engage the reader, to sell your idea. But no weird photoshopping.

Proof makes perfect: Read it one final time (aloud if possible), and sit on it overnight (if time), to help you spot any errors or final changes needed. Then share it with a colleague for checking.

Watch for grammar pitfalls: There's many in the style guide. Here's a few:
- It's, its / You're, your / There, they're, their
- Principle, principal
- Affect, effect
- Companies / collective nouns are singular
- We use British English
- No Oxford commas
- No ALL caps
- Avoid exclamation marks!
- And it is fine to start a sentence with and.

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