Planning content for now and the future

Planning before you write will help to ensure that your content is 'fit for purpose' – that it meets both your communication needs and the needs of your audiences in terms of the information they want, and the format, structure and language they will engage with. Early planning also makes updating or adding to your content easier.

Planning for now

Before you write or edit content, consider the following questions:

- What is the purpose (e.g. is it to inform, persuade, instruct, amuse or warn)?
- Who is the audience (e.g. the general public, government and other decision makers, scientists, industry, children, adults)?
- What is your message (what are the key points you want your audience to understand, remember or act on)?
- What does my audience already understand and what must I include or explain?
- How will the content be published (e.g. book, brochure, webpage)?
- What are the constraints (e.g. document length, budget, deadline, whether you have to use a template)?
- Do you need to plan for the future (e.g. is this document part of a series, or is it online content that will be updated)?

The answers to these questions will determine what you include, how you write and how much you write.

Planning for the future

As well as planning your current content now, you should think about future needs. Ask yourself:

- Will the document need to be repeated (e.g. is it a report that is published each year)?
- Will the information need to be updated (e.g. if guidelines change or new data are collected)?
- Will the content be expanded or cut (e.g. if new sections are added to a website)?

Structure

A clear, logical structure will help you to repeat, update or expand content. It is especially important to make sure web content has a robust information architecture that can absorb additions without reducing navigability. Can you add, remove or change sections without having to heavily rewrite or rearrange other sections?

Schedule

Make a schedule for when information will be collected, drafted, approved and published. Be sure to allow enough time for any required reviews and revisions. For complex content, subject matter experts often need to review the content.

Governance and workflow

Think about how the process worked this time, and how it could work better next time. Did you allow enough time for approvals and sign-off? Were there unexpected delays? What caused them? Considering the experience this time can help you plan for future content development.

Documentation

Make sure you keep a record of every aspect of the process, especially for complex documents, so that others can follow in your footsteps. Your documentation should include:

- where information comes from
- the writing and editing process
- the approvals and publication process
- key contacts for each stage of the process.