

Intentionality in Communications

by Valerie Uccellani

Sometimes writing flows like a river finding its natural path. We are clear about who we're communicating with and the effect we hope it will have on the reader. This feels good to us as communicators, and feels right to the reader.

Unfortunately, the river doesn't always flow so easily. We draft and delete, write and rewrite, sketch and erase. Why? Because we haven't thought through our intentions well enough. If we take time to outline our intentions, we can create more fluidly and more effectively.

Recently, I've been working with a team of national experts to craft resources for managers and frontline workers. The team will divvy up responsibility to create the different written resources and then compile them into a package to be tested and adapted by staff. Before we started the work, we outlined our intentions for each resource. Here are the questions we considered:



- What's our working **title**? A short synthesized statement is a great way of clarifying for ourselves what this piece is (and is not).
- **Who** will use this and **how**? A look at the intended audience helps us to keep their interests in mind.
- What **actions** we are encouraged through this resource? What would be a **sign** that we were successful in our communication?
- What **format** will this communication take and what's the **key content**?
- What **style**/ tone will we use?
- How will people **access** this communication and what's the best **timing** for them to access it? What **preparation** will they need, if any, to use this resource well?

You might be tempted to jump over these kinds of questions, or to think them through on the fly. If you are collaborating, others may have very different assumptions about any one of these questions and the creative process will stagnate.

Writing down your intentions need not take a lot of time. Create a template for yourself using some version of the questions above and fill in the blanks before you start to create. If you are working with others to create a set of materials, consider using a matrix, like the one below. Once it is complete, use it as a guide and the creative process will flow smoothly!

WORKING TITLE	WHO WILL USE AND HOW	FORMAT, KEY CONTENT, STYLE	ACTION OBJECTIVES/ SIGNS OF SUCCESS	ACCESS, TIMING AND PREPARATION (IF NEEDED)

*Which of the questions above have you found to be especially important to clarify?
Which is often overlooked or not clarified enough?*

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