

A Guide for Contributors to the Newsletter

This document lays out a few suggestions as to how to approach articles, items of news etc. you may be contributing to our quarterly newsletter. We now state on our newsletter that we reserve the right to edit articles without the permission of the authors, so following these suggestions should save you and us time, and means that your contribution is less likely to be heavily edited. Please don't let this put you off as we are grateful for any relevant articles or news. We want to encourage more contributions, not less!

So what sort of material do we want?



What we are looking for most of all are practical examples and experiences that can be shared by a wide variety of people interested in consumer involvement issues in research as we hope to increase awareness, encourage innovation and inspire improved practice. We are also interested in related news and notices about events that have recently taken place or are planned for the next few months. If you have recently published research where consumers have actively been involved, please also let us know.

...and how much material?



We need variety in the length of articles. Bear in mind that all our contributors have important things to say, and it is easier to lay out an interesting and attractive design if we have articles of different lengths. So don't go to the maximum (450 words) unless you absolutely have to. You can always include contact details at the end of your article so people can reach you for further information.

Bear in mind our readership



The newsletter circulation is about 2,700 and our audience is very broad in range. From specialized academic researchers to people contemplating getting involved in research for the first time, from research managers to service user researchers, our readership covers people with an interest in research in health services and technologies, public health, and social care.

Keep to the point.....



We have limited space and we want to keep our readers interested, so be clear about what it is you want to get across before you write anything and keep your article on track. Cut out any 'trimmings'. i.e. do you really need to include phrases like "...it must be said.." or "...to repeat..." ?

.....and keep it 'friendly'.



Write from who you are, your ordinary self. Don't adopt an unusually impersonal style. Write in a way that is acceptable and relevant to ALL your readers – but as if you are talking to ONE person – someone you care about and respect. Write as you would speak to that person – if you wouldn't say it, don't write it!

Make it easier to read.....



If you want people to be interested in what you have to say, use words that are relevant and acceptable to everybody. Don't use jargon! Avoid using a long word where a shorter one will do. Clear language is not the same as dumbing down. Spell out abbreviations the first time you use them. Keep your sentences under control... not so short that they're abrupt, but no longer than a couple of lines each. You might think about breaking text up in to manageable chunks under helpful headings, bullet points or summary boxes – but remember this takes up more space in our newsletter and restrict the amount of words per article.

...and bear in mind that it will be put onto audio



We now put the newsletter on to tape for those who prefer it. A text that looks ok and reads ok on a page does not necessarily flow easily when spoken. A good test is to read your text aloud before the final edit. You will soon pick up where it does not flow.

Need to know more?

The Plain English Campaign have an excellent website well worth exploring if you want to know more about how to write clearly. Their web address is www.plainenglish.co.uk

If you have any general questions about the newsletter which are not answered in this guide, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Roger Steel or Helen Hayes at the address below:

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