

Transcript | Write Smarter, Not Harder

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00:00:00.000 --> 00:00:10.880

Urszula Rutkowska: Hello Everyone. I am just going to give everyone a chance to arrive, and in just about a moment we will get started. So

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00:00:11.080 --> 00:00:22.340

Urszula Rutkowska: please bear with us, while everyone slowly enters the waiting room, and or rather leaves the waiting room and moves into the event. But it takes a moment. Actually. So

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00:00:23.600 --> 00:00:26.259

Urszula Rutkowska: please do bear with.

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00:00:27.250 --> 00:00:32.456

Urszula Rutkowska: I will probably start chatting once I see that we have reached

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00:00:33.360 --> 00:00:40.159

Urszula Rutkowska: or rather that the number of folks streaming in has slowed down quite a bit, and it certainly has not. So

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00:00:41.710 --> 00:00:43.110

Urszula Rutkowska: all right.

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00:00:44.680 --> 00:00:56.809

Urszula Rutkowska: all right, everyone. Hello! And welcome to this panel event. Oh, sorry on writing harder, not smarter in government.

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00:00:57.600 --> 00:01:11.030

Urszula Rutkowska: My name is Ula Rukowska, and I am a senior researcher here at Apolitical. It would be great to hear from all of you. So do post in the chat where you're joining us from, and what organization you work for

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00:01:11.330 --> 00:01:31.090

Urszula Rutkowska: today. We are going to be discussing what you, as public servants can do to not only streamline and speed up your writing processes, but also increase your quality, clarity, and concision, so that you nail the art of writing at the 1st time of asking for those of you who may be joining us for the 1st time. Welcome.

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00:01:31.090 --> 00:01:57.639

Urszula Rutkowska: apolitical is a network and learning platform for government used by over a quarter of a million public servants and policymakers from more than 160 countries. Our mission is to help build 21st century governments that work for people and the planet. And we do this by putting the best knowledge and skills at the fingertips of public servants around the world. So if you could please post in the chat

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00:01:57.640 --> 00:02:17.249

Urszula Rutkowska: where you are joining us from, and what organization you work for, that would be absolutely wonderful. And now I'm going to see who we have here today. So we've got lots of folks from Canada which is to be expected from Ireland, from Glasgow from Winnipeg.

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00:02:17.250 --> 00:02:29.810

Urszula Rutkowska: Oh, they're now officially starting to stream in at a speed that I myself cannot keep up with, but I'm seeing a wide representation of folks across the UK. Canada, Us.

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00:02:29.920 --> 00:02:56.740

Urszula Rutkowska: Etc. All right. So a special welcome to everyone here who is already a member of Apoliticals writing effectively in government community. If you're not yet in the community, we're thrilled to extend an invitation to join today's speakers and your peers across the global public service. There are already well, over 5,000 members sharing advice, insights, and resources on government writing.

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00:02:57.500 --> 00:03:13.139

Urszula Rutkowska: Join the conversation, ask a question. Someone around the world will be there to provide a response, the link to the community and the resources tab of this webinar which should be at the bottom of your screen.

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00:03:13.370 --> 00:03:24.530

Urszula Rutkowska: So I'm going to get a few technical notes out of the way before we get into today's conversation, this event is recorded for on-demand viewing on the Apolitical website.

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00:03:24.760 --> 00:03:38.389

Urszula Rutkowska: please don't record it yourself. Contact details for privacy concerns are in the apolitical homepage footer. Closed captions are available and can be toggled off in your screen settings

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00:03:38.900 --> 00:03:40.030

Urszula Rutkowska: all right

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00:03:40.350 --> 00:03:52.310

Urszula Rutkowska: before we introduce our speakers. We are going to run a few quick polls to get a sense of where you're coming from to today's discussion. Now let's have a look at the 1st poll.

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00:03:53.570 --> 00:04:19.229

Urszula Rutkowska: What do you find most challenging about writing option, one simplifying complex policies or information writing clearly under tight deadlines, adapting tone for diverse audiences, balancing detail with brevity or other. So responses are streaming in. So please do respond. What do you find most challenging about writing.

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00:04:19.350 --> 00:04:27.990

Urszula Rutkowska: simplifying complex policies, writing clearly under tight deadlines, adapting tone, balancing detail with brevity or other.

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00:04:28.110 --> 00:04:33.679

Urszula Rutkowska: I will say that my response is probably balancing detail with brevity.

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00:04:33.860 --> 00:04:55.699

Urszula Rutkowska: but I'm also seeing a few folks submitting some alternatives in the chat, including trying not to waffle. All right. It looks like we're done here, and it seems most people actually agree with me. Balancing detail with brevity is the thing that they find the most challenging about writing all right on to our next poll question.

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00:04:57.510 --> 00:05:01.589

Urszula Rutkowska: which type of writing task do you spend the most time on

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00:05:01.710 --> 00:05:15.909

Urszula Rutkowska: option? One. Drafting reports or briefings? Option, 2 writing emails or memos option, 3. Creating citizen-facing content, option, 4. Preparing presentations or speeches and other.

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00:05:16.500 --> 00:05:39.700

Urszula Rutkowska: So in my role, the answer is decidedly drafting reports or briefings. But I'm curious to see where else people are spending their time. I will say that writing emails is definitely a close second, let's see, I also seeing a few additional options coming in in the chat the research involved prior to writing. Yeah, I agree. It does take a long time

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00:05:39.750 --> 00:05:48.849

Urszula Rutkowska: writing practice and policy for operations staff to use to guide their daily work. That's super helpful editing. Yeah, editing is actually quite a

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00:05:48.850 --> 00:06:12.990

Urszula Rutkowska: quite hard and takes much longer than one thinks. All right. It looks like when it comes to which type of writing tasks do you spend the most time on almost 50% of you said drafting reports or briefings? All right. Well, thank you so much for taking part in those polls. Now it's time to introduce our speakers. We're fortunate to have 3 brilliant guests.

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00:06:13.220 --> 00:06:39.309

Urszula Rutkowska: Louise State, Chris Brown and Lorna Brown joining us today. Louise is founder of pushing the pen, a resource and writing service, focusing on ideas and approaches to drive up the standards of written communication within public sector organizations. Louise holds a master's degree in literature, culture, and modernity public administration, and is currently studying for an Msc. In systems. Thinking.

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00:06:39.550 --> 00:07:00.119

Urszula Rutkowska: Chris is a continuous learning products manager in the Uk Government's department for work and pensions. Chris is a keen student of learning, design, delivery, and communication and has developed a side hustle for helping people achieve their dream job across the Civil Service by helping them draft standout job applications.

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00:07:00.770 --> 00:07:24.650

Urszula Rutkowska: Lorna is a senior strategy and policy advisor in the government of New Brunswick's office of the CIO, and a freelance writer and editor. She co-founded and was inaugural vice chair of the Canadian Open Data Society, co-founded her local civic tech, and for

5 years was editor of the St. John, New Brunswick Community newspaper. The voice of those living in the circumstance of poverty.

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00:07:25.020 --> 00:07:33.729

Urszula Rutkowska: You can read the full bios by visiting the reads tab at the bottom of your zoom screen and heading to the speakers. Section.

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00:07:34.220 --> 00:07:37.909

Urszula Rutkowska: All right, let's start with an icebreaker to kick things off

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00:07:38.400 --> 00:07:51.139

Urszula Rutkowska: you, you, and by that I mean the speakers. You will each have 30 seconds to share your responses, and we'd love to hear the answers of everyone here today as well. So please do go ahead and post those in the chat.

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00:07:51.590 --> 00:08:01.750

Urszula Rutkowska: We've gone ahead and posted this very icebreaker in the writing community. So my colleague will share the link there for you to add your answers and get a global thread of ideas.

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00:08:02.120 --> 00:08:03.879

Urszula Rutkowska: The icebreaker is.

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00:08:04.220 --> 00:08:21.290

Urszula Rutkowska: Imagine there is a vacancy in your department for a writer who will be entrusted with helping you improve the quality of your team's writing. Which writer, dead or alive, are you hoping applies for that job? And what key problem do you think that they would help address.

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00:08:21.680 --> 00:08:22.930

Urszula Rutkowska: All right.

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00:08:23.150 --> 00:08:44.099

Urszula Rutkowska: So I'm going to restate the question because it's actually quite long and a reminder to please follow the link to the apolitical writing community in order to share answer. But imagine there is a vacancy in your department for a writer who will be interested with

helping you improve the quality of your team's writing. Who are you? Who are you? Hoping?
Applies Louise. I am going to start with you.

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00:08:45.830 --> 00:09:10.240

Louise Stait: Okay, so I'm going to go for one of the 3 writers on the Cobra Kai Netflix series. And the reason for that is because they're the masters of writing really accessible content for multiple audiences. So you've got experts watching it, who've watched all the Karate Kid movies 40 years ago, like myself and know every detail. People who've never seen the movies, people who are martial arts, experts, people who don't know martial arts experts. But they somehow managed to target it to everybody and make it accessible.

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00:09:11.720 --> 00:09:14.109

Urszula Rutkowska: All right, Lorna. How about you.

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00:09:22.130 --> 00:09:24.800

Urszula Rutkowska: Lorna? Can you hear me? All right.

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00:09:25.390 --> 00:09:43.789

Lorna Brown: Sorry, forgot to unmute. I was trying to be good on the lunch hour. I'd want Shakespeare, but for this exercise, George Orwell, not just because we're living 1984, but because of his exquisite essay politics in the English language which I recommend you all read. If you haven't yet, it's a guide to clear, concise, direct writing. Orwell would teach my team to avoid vagueness.

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00:09:43.790 --> 00:09:59.630

Lorna Brown: get rid of the jargon, expunge the cowardly, civil Service passive voice, please say who did what and write. So people can understand you. He also writes about a downward spiral of mutual reinforcement between bad thinking and bad writing, and today we need his game message. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity.

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00:10:01.240 --> 00:10:04.669

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Lorna. All right, Chris. What about you?

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00:10:15.770 --> 00:10:19.639

Urszula Rutkowska: I see that you are struggling to unmute yourself. There you go.

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00:10:20.370 --> 00:10:37.600

Chris Brown: Yeah. So for me, it's got to be Douglas Adams. He had the rare gift of being able to, and this is why I'd be asking him to join it is he has that rare gift of turning the completely complex into something simple but also funny along the way, without losing the key message.

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00:10:39.830 --> 00:10:51.169

Urszula Rutkowska: All right. Thank you so much, Chris. What a fascinating group of people that we'd certainly have working for us! So

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00:10:51.360 --> 00:11:18.120

Urszula Rutkowska: all right, it is time to start our conversation. We're going to kick off by defining some of the issues here. You all work in different areas of public service and have different sets of expertise, I'd like to know from each of you, in your experience and field of work, what are some of the most common writing challenges that. You see, Chris, I am going to start with you.

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00:11:22.870 --> 00:11:28.170

Chris Brown: I suppose the most common one that I see is that use of jargon?

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00:11:29.630 --> 00:11:30.550

Chris Brown: The.

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00:11:30.810 --> 00:11:35.899

Chris Brown: It's almost as if people feel they have to write that way.

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00:11:36.737 --> 00:11:40.779

Chris Brown: Because I've either learned that or they've seen it somewhere else.

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00:11:43.320 --> 00:11:49.130

Chris Brown: And the ability to keep things brief

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00:11:49.420 --> 00:11:53.050

Chris Brown: is the is one that is the 2 main things I see.

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00:11:55.630 --> 00:11:58.729

Urszula Rutkowska: Yeah, that's super helpful. Thank you, Chris. What about you, Lorna?

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00:12:07.050 --> 00:12:11.209

Urszula Rutkowska: I'm not sure but you are on mute, so we cannot hear you at the moment.

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00:12:11.210 --> 00:12:27.830

Lorna Brown: Sorry I did it again. I'll promise not to do it again. So what I see most often is the unconscious bias that everyone has the same basic knowledge that the writer has civil servants write for fellow civil servants at their own level, not for non-experts and writers of the public, many of whom, if you say fiber the way my colleagues do in telecommunications will think breakfast cereal.

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00:12:27.830 --> 00:12:41.930

Lorna Brown: And remember, elected officials are members of the public. They're not experts in your area either. So this challenge is an apparent inability. I don't think it's an unwilling. It's an inability to see the world from someone else's point of view, and write in a way that will communicate clearly with them, not show how much

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00:12:42.050 --> 00:13:02.899

Lorna Brown: you know, and to reinforce what Chris said. There seems to be this Victorian hangover that if you use more words you're more important, or you're more expert. Writing simply isn't dumbing down. Your bosses are not going to be offended by your conciseness. They're busy people. You help them get to the point faster. They'll be happy. So 2 challenges, lack of empathy and the verbosity to which you can lead.

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00:13:04.590 --> 00:13:13.619

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Lorna, all right. So we have jargon, and we have lack of brevity. Essentially, Louise. What about you? What are some of the most common writing challenges that you see.

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00:13:14.090 --> 00:13:42.349

Louise Stait: Well. Firstly, just to add to Willie's introduction, I am a public servant as well, so I work for the Nhs. England has 42 health integrated healthcare boards, and I'm head of corporate affairs for one of them. So a big challenge, I see, is really the process and the information, the complexity, the volume of what's out there and then people don't know what to put in, what to leave out. They need to do things to be compliant. Do they understand? To leave all that in? They need to not overwhelm the reader. So that's the processing is the issue for me.

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00:13:44.300 --> 00:13:49.940

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Louise. So now we're going to spend a bit of time discussing crafting clear, and

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00:13:50.270 --> 00:14:09.060

Urszula Rutkowska: that cut through bureaucracy. So I have a few questions for each of you, and I'm just going to go through those. So, Lorna, I might start off with you. What are the hallmarks of truly effective public sector writing. And why do so many documents fail to achieve them?

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00:14:12.880 --> 00:14:20.650

Lorna Brown: This is why I'm here today, and it may take the full 2 to 3 min. The hallmarks of truly effective writing in the government are clear, concise, accessible, purposeful.

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00:14:20.740 --> 00:14:46.059

Lorna Brown: in other words, immediately understandable. Get to the point quickly, Bluff. Don't bury the lead bottom, line up front accessibility. Everyone can understand it, and it serves a clear function, answers the readers, questions, it focuses on results, not process. Why do we fail? Again, as I said in the challenges, not understanding your audience and their needs. Writing for people like yourself, not the people who need to use the document. Bureaucratic culture, encouraging wordiness, need to sound official ends up with.

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00:14:46.170 --> 00:15:08.369

Lorna Brown: It's in long sentences which make documents harder to read. It makes your prose turgid and hard to get through fear. Some writers avoid plain language because they're trying to be cautious. They want to sound neutral, so have the courage of your convictions. Say what you're going to say, and too much jargon, too many acronyms makes documents inaccessible. It excludes people, so be inclusive if you want to fix it. I have 10 points, and I can do it in 64 seconds.

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00:15:08.670 --> 00:15:10.740

Lorna Brown: One start with the main point, bluff.

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00:15:10.920 --> 00:15:24.059

Lorna Brown: bottom, line upfront fearlessly to write and edit for the reader. Not what do you want to say. But what do they need to know? 3. Active voice, not passive, 95% of the time, not

this issue, will be considered by the working group. The working group will consider this issue. How hard is that?

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00:15:24.200 --> 00:15:29.609

Lorna Brown: 4 be direct, not. It is important that consideration be given to the recommendation that? No, we recommend

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00:15:30.000 --> 00:15:35.889

Lorna Brown: 5, no redundancies, no. Each and every just, every, no future plans. What other kind of plans are there? Just plans?

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00:15:36.170 --> 00:15:42.259

Lorna Brown: 6. No unnecessary words, no, really, no, very at this point in time is now, in order to is 2,

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00:15:42.490 --> 00:15:53.989

Lorna Brown: 7, no bureaucratic language given. Chris, it is not 1066 anymore. Utilize is mostly unnecessary in a language that contains the word use, so not terminate, end, not disseminate, share, not allocate. Give

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00:15:54.470 --> 00:16:11.089

Lorna Brown: 8. Use bullet points and headings to help the reader. 9. Keep your paragraphs and sentences short, and here's a tip for you. Use a readability tool like flesh Kincaid. You can offer lower the reading level several grades just by cutting a long sentence into 2 shorter ones. Even if you don't change the vocabulary because you're asking the reader to only keep one idea in their mind at one time

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00:16:11.190 --> 00:16:15.899

Lorna Brown: and 10. Read your draft aloud. Does it sound natural if it doesn't make it?

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00:16:16.970 --> 00:16:17.700

Lorna Brown: That's it.

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00:16:18.350 --> 00:16:30.120

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you so much, Lorna, and I think you might have to share some of that advice later on, as there's quite a few comments in the chat, asking you to to slow down so people can write while and take notes while you're chatting.

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00:16:30.120 --> 00:16:34.759

Lorna Brown: I'm assuming I wanted to get it into the recording because everyone can access that afterwards.

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00:16:35.050 --> 00:16:53.529

Urszula Rutkowska: All right. Well, wonderful! Great! But but maybe a small note for me to slow down to help everyone take notes as we're going along. All right, Chris. What practical strategies do you use to move from a blank page to a 1st draft more efficiently.

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00:16:54.320 --> 00:17:21.790

Chris Brown: Yeah, this was an interesting one. So one of the 1st things I do is, and this again, a lot of people will realize this is, who is your audience? Write it down? Who is it that you want to reach out to? And it has to be a specific audience? It's not enough to say, Hey, I'm going to send this out to everybody, even in a department you are focusing specifically on certain people. So is it certain ministers? Or is it certain group of departments, continuous learning, for example, or operations?

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00:17:21.810 --> 00:17:25.010

Chris Brown: The next thing I do, then, is research.

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00:17:25.410 --> 00:17:42.100

Chris Brown: What am I basing this on? What am I writing? Is it based on research? I've been given? Do I have to find the research once? That's all done? I then have just a brain dump of. Just get everything that I have in my head on paper. I then do a version of what Lorna's talked about, but I do it in 5.

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00:17:43.020 --> 00:18:04.180

Chris Brown: So it's what I call the watch method. Number one is, watch my words are my words too long? Are there shorter versions, the jargon acronyms, that kind of thing. Then I watch for adverbs. As Lorna mentioned, it's anything ending in ly. Do you need it? Cross it out if the sentence still makes sense. Crack on.

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00:18:04.390 --> 00:18:12.760

Chris Brown: then watch for that the word that again so many times that comes into written language that it's not required.

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00:18:13.220 --> 00:18:18.870

Chris Brown: The next one, then, is watch for clarity again when I'm reading it?

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00:18:18.990 --> 00:18:26.209

Chris Brown: Does it make sense? Does it make sense to my dog? Does it make sense to whoever I'm speaking to and read it out

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00:18:26.430 --> 00:18:49.319

Chris Brown: because reading it out automatically, does it sound like a conversation? Does it sound like how you would naturally talk? Is another key element be natural, and the last one, then, is, watch for a headline. What is your key purpose here? What are you trying to get across? And absolutely it is trying to keep it down to one idea that the person can take away. Having read what you've written to say, I know what I'm doing now, or thanks so much for that info.

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00:18:51.000 --> 00:18:59.390

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Chris, and just building on that. How do you balance the need for formality in official writing, with the push for plain language.

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00:19:00.435 --> 00:19:01.130

Chris Brown: Yeah.

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00:19:02.220 --> 00:19:04.280

Chris Brown: So formality.

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00:19:04.450 --> 00:19:25.740

Chris Brown: I'm framing that as the the big words that we see a lot in government letters, so a letter comes through the door from, say, for example, Dvla in the Uk. And sometimes it does take a bit of deciphering. So for me, it's understanding that okay, whilst there may be a legal requirement

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00:19:26.210 --> 00:19:38.370

Chris Brown: because of government. It doesn't stop people writing in plain English, why are you using a really long word that actually, you can cut it down to one.

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00:19:38.570 --> 00:19:41.380

Chris Brown: I'm trying to think of a quick example. I can't off the top of my head.

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00:19:41.800 --> 00:19:48.669

Chris Brown: But yes, there is no reason why even an official document can be written in English. In plain English.

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00:19:49.880 --> 00:20:09.919

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Chris, that's super helpful. Now, Louise, would you mind sharing an example of an overly complex piece of writing that was successfully simplified. And and how that really changed the impact of the piece of writing. Essentially, have you seen just like the simplification of something really, actually accentuate? Or, you know, elevate the impact of it.

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00:20:10.716 --> 00:20:29.370

Louise Stait: Yeah. So I've had a lot of success with risk registers and rewriting the strategic risk register. So some of you will be working on this in your own jobs. And obviously some of the strategic risks are very, very hard to define. You know what even is the risk? How do you capture that in a certain number of words? And it's very difficult to get a clear document.

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00:20:29.370 --> 00:20:45.929

Louise Stait: So the 3 sort of techniques I found has worked really well is to basically amend the back end of the process. So the template or the database, and to give people drop down boxes, because this is such complicated information to enter. If you give them drop down boxes with guidance, they can't get it wrong. So you're forcing people to get it right.

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00:20:45.930 --> 00:21:01.769

Louise Stait: The second thing that's been really helpful has been limiting the character count as well. And that's been an absolute game changer. So rather than people writing down a stream of consciousness. Now they're limited to 250 characters for the main fields, and it forces people to write more succinctly.

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00:21:01.770 --> 00:21:09.440

Louise Stait: And the 3rd thing is this kind of storytelling paradigm. So when you're teaching people about how to write risks, how to articulate the risk.

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00:21:09.500 --> 00:21:35.789

Louise Stait: you explain to them that they're telling a story to somebody. They're telling the story to a committee or to the public who read this document. What story do they want to tell to people? And that seems to really change the way people write it. And of course, the 4th thing actually is coaching people and helping them to get it right. And the impact has been that I think it's fair to say people have enjoyed much more. The engagement in the risk register and the committee discussions have been much better as well, because people have a clearer product to base their discussions on.

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00:21:37.200 --> 00:21:57.129

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Louise. All right. Now. Our next topic is balancing precision with accessibility and government communications. Lorna, I'm going to come to you first. And this is the question that I have. How do you approach editing and refining writing, when multiple stakeholders, often with conflicting feedback, are involved.

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00:22:00.110 --> 00:22:06.819

Lorna Brown: Well, I start by recording every meeting and getting a transcript, so I know exactly who said what, when, and in what tone.

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00:22:06.980 --> 00:22:18.939

Lorna Brown: when I use the feedback. I send a thank you note, and I show them where. When I don't use the feedback, I send a thank you note for their time and their input and explain gently but unapologetically, why I didn't

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00:22:19.320 --> 00:22:26.599

Lorna Brown: in deciding what to use in the writing and editing. I consider more than the immediate issue that the document addresses. I consider buzzwords.

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00:22:27.090 --> 00:22:40.459

Lorna Brown: the current Government's interests and priorities that go to the throne. Speech, the state of speeches, party platforms, ministerial mandate, letters, government strategy, priority documents, whatever you have at your disposal to help the reader buy what you're trying to sell

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00:22:41.940 --> 00:23:03.079

Lorna Brown: some a little Machiavellian when the provider of the feedback is an influencer who can help the cause with the main audience I might choose to include something of theirs, otherwise I mightn't have done as long as it did no damage to the main argument, or take up too much space. And it's not going to hurt me if they feel heard and validated when the time comes to execute on the strategy. As long as they've said something at least tangentially to the purpose.

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00:23:04.560 --> 00:23:15.150

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Lorna. Now a question for you, Louise. Public sector writing often needs to be both precise and accessible. How do you strike the right balance.

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00:23:16.450 --> 00:23:41.279

Louise Stait: So I think the 1st thing is to really think about what you mean by the precision, because what you think of as precision as a subject matter expert might be quite different from what your reader needs. So it's about considering if you're writing for a committee or a certain group of people. What do they actually need to see? And sometimes, you know, you've got all of this knowledge in your head, and you feel like it has to be said, but it actually doesn't have to be said. So that's the 1st thing is defining what the precision is.

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00:23:41.280 --> 00:24:01.310

Louise Stait: and the second thing is separating it out. So if you've got a lot of technical detail that needs to go into that document, it's much better often to put it into an appendix, so that your main paper is nice and short. It's got all the key points, and it's readable. And the other stuff is there. People don't have to read it, they can get the main gist of it, and but if they want to delve into that detail, it's there. But it's all nicely set out clearly for them.

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00:24:02.090 --> 00:24:04.100

Louise Stait: Let's see, Sarah just agreed with that.

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00:24:05.420 --> 00:24:16.940

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Louise. Now, Chris, what what strategies can help ensure that technical or policy? Heavy documents remain readable for non-experts.

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00:24:18.850 --> 00:24:33.800

Chris Brown: Kind of linked to what Lorna and Louise have already touched on, and that is that either you can address it through maybe what we know as the executive summary at the beginning, so it could be a very simplified version of what we cover. What you're gonna cover

112

00:24:33.960 --> 00:24:44.909

Chris Brown: or what you could do is, as you're writing the policy a very good technique I use when I am sharing complex information. I then start underneath by saying, which means that.

113

00:24:45.770 --> 00:25:01.919

Chris Brown: So then you create a simple version of that, so that the reader chooses. Because again, it is about the reader, it's not about what the information you're putting across. It's how the reader receives it. So you will have those people go. Yeah, I know what that technical word means, and all that, and other people going. Not a clue. Oh, thank goodness, there's a simple version.

114

00:25:04.510 --> 00:25:33.609

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Chris. Now, our next topic is one that I know. Lots of folks struggle with, which is writing for diverse audiences and adapting tone and style effectively. So you know, most people don't just write for one particular group. They will, you know, sometimes write internally, sometimes write externally, write a multitude of different types of documents for very different audiences, and those audiences in government are perhaps even more different than in a variety of other roles.

115

00:25:33.640 --> 00:25:53.100

Urszula Rutkowska: Chris, I'm going to have you respond 1st again, and sort of, and ask, how should public servants adapt their writing when communicating with different audiences and some examples. Here are ministers, frontline workers, the public, etc. So yeah, any advice on adapting your writing for those different audiences.

116

00:25:53.620 --> 00:26:05.130

Chris Brown: Yeah, absolutely. And it wouldn't come as any surprise that it's knowing who your audience is, knowing who the ministers are, knowing. What public are you trying to reach out to?

117

00:26:05.130 --> 00:26:26.940

Chris Brown: And this is where research comes in as well. Research is so important. When you're writing, it makes your job so much easier because the research is the heavy lifting of what you need to do, and when it comes to writing, it should then flow. So, for example, if you're writing to ministers, you need to know, okay, what the ministers are, what's their job? What's their role? Why do they need this information and

118

00:26:26.950 --> 00:26:33.150

Chris Brown: tailor it to their need again. It's ideally one message, one cool.

119

00:26:33.340 --> 00:27:00.940

Chris Brown: underlying message, and also remember, doesn't matter who they are. They're human as well. So it's that understanding that level of. Okay, I'm talking to a human being. Yes, this is what they need to know officially, and this is how I can make it easier for them to read and understand, and especially in the customer, when you're reaching out to customers again, it's understanding. What group of customers is it, everybody, or is it a particular tranche or area of the

120

00:27:01.180 --> 00:27:21.849

Chris Brown: of the population? And so bit of research will tell you. Okay, I need to frame it this way I need to frame it that way. I need to come across friendly, or I need to come across as legal, for example, but still keeping in mind, you're always talking to a human being, because that's ultimately what we're all about. Communication is human to human contact.

121

00:27:23.330 --> 00:27:47.499

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Chris. And what's really wonderful throughout this entire event so far is how many folks are putting in their own advice and building off of all of your responses. So I just recommend taking a brief look at the chat and seeing your peers advice as well as there's just so much of it coming through Louise. My next question is for you, and we've already talked about about this quite a bit. But what are some of the risks of using jargon.

122

00:27:47.500 --> 00:27:56.700

Urszula Rutkowska: And how do you think government professionals can ensure that their writing sort of avoids this kind of avoids this and remains inclusive.

123

00:27:57.420 --> 00:28:24.640

Louise Stait: Okay? So the risk, obviously, the key risk of using jargon is that you exclude people who don't understand what it means. But there's also a risk that you could confuse each other. So you know, I've been in meetings where an acronym is used in different people in the room think that something different is being used about. So there's all those risks. But I think when you ask the question, how can we remove jargon or get rid of it. I don't think that's necessarily the right question, because if jargon was that bad we wouldn't use it. It's got benefits. It's a shorthand.

124

00:28:24.640 --> 00:28:52.180

Louise Stait: and sometimes it describes something technical that's needed. So so I don't think we necessarily want to eradicate jargon, but it's something about educating the reader. If they don't know what that jargon means. So some of the things Chris said. I quite like putting footnotes in to explain something, so I might say, well, this is a Government initiative to, you know, reduce something or other might even put a web link to explain what it is. That sort of educational thing. All the basics, every time you use an acronym, you know. Put it in full 1st time and then use the acronym afterwards.

125

00:28:52.602 --> 00:28:59.660

Louise Stait: So that sort of basic good practice. But yeah, so I say, use it when it's the right thing to do, but just make it accessible to everybody.

126

00:29:00.570 --> 00:29:17.849

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Louise. All right. We're now going to spend a moment talking about writer's block and productivity challenges. Lorna. I am going to come to you 1st with the following question, what is one mindset shift that has helped you write more efficiently and with less stress.

127

00:29:18.590 --> 00:29:20.060

Lorna Brown: The biggest mind. Shift.

128

00:29:20.260 --> 00:29:34.100

Lorna Brown: mindset shift I've made, and it has changed more than my writing has changed. My life is walk in the reader's shoes. This is reinforcing what Louise and Chris have been saying. Write for the reader, not for what you think, those around you or above. You expect

129

00:29:34.670 --> 00:29:48.869

Lorna Brown: the 1st question I ask on any writing project in or out of government. And remember I'm a pen for hire. I'm a freelance writer and editor evenings and weekends. So I can tell you. This works everywhere is, who's the audience? That's number one. I always ask my colleagues and my clients this one question.

130

00:29:49.050 --> 00:29:52.580

Lorna Brown: who are you writing for? And what do you want them to think.

131

00:29:52.700 --> 00:29:57.540

Lorna Brown: feel, or do differently from what they thought, felt, or did before they read it?

132

00:29:57.940 --> 00:30:18.049

Lorna Brown: I just found I struggle less with wording. When I have a reader 1st mindset the other phrase I use for this sometimes to help my colleagues is, write for your grandmother, at least for the 1st draft. You'll probably have to flesh out that skeleton, or Chris, said his dog. You know some of the stuff your grandmother wouldn't necessarily understand will have to be added eventually. But you'll have the basic storyline find your basic storyline

133

00:30:18.170 --> 00:30:20.369

Lorna Brown: and all writing is basically storytelling.

134

00:30:20.660 --> 00:30:22.870

Lorna Brown: But the mindset shift is is right for the reader.

135

00:30:24.030 --> 00:30:48.469

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Lorna. That's super helpful, and I'll just chime in with my own sort of mindset shift, because I think I really really for many years struggled to sort of just kind of get over that big thing of like I have an outline. I have so many ideas. What do I do, and my sort of big mindset shift is just to write and stream of consciousness and and get it down on paper, and then figure out what to do next.

136

00:30:48.480 --> 00:30:54.510

Urszula Rutkowska: Sometimes you've just got to get some stuff down on paper and then maybe adjust to audience. Once you're there, kind of think about.

137

00:30:55.290 --> 00:31:05.740

Urszula Rutkowska: Put yourself in this particular person's shoes. What is happening and what you've written that just really isn't working. All right, Chris, my next question is for you

138

00:31:06.040 --> 00:31:17.900

Urszula Rutkowska: writer's block is obviously something that we all experience, especially when you're working on. Perhaps a complex, maybe dry government document. What techniques or tools do you use to overcome writer's block.

139

00:31:19.880 --> 00:31:22.399

Chris Brown: When it happens, I just put it to one side.

140

00:31:22.620 --> 00:31:24.520

Chris Brown: I just drop it bottom.

141

00:31:25.700 --> 00:31:45.969

Chris Brown: Metaphorically, I put it to one side and I go and do something completely different. Go for a walk, go and have something to eat, watch a bit of TV, whatever it is that I can do in order just to just drop everything out of my head. What that then does is psychologically and neurologically, it clears the decks, doesn't it? Alternatively.

142

00:31:46.160 --> 00:31:52.190

Chris Brown: What you can do is rather than put it down. If you're typing on a laptop, for example.

143

00:31:52.390 --> 00:32:14.409

Chris Brown: pick up one of these things and a piece of paper, and just see what comes out of that free form doesn't have to be anything specific. It could be a picture. It could be anything at all in order to start the creative process to start your brain going. Because again, there is a neurological link between this and this and that is what clears the mind fog. That's what clears the blockage.

144

00:32:16.310 --> 00:32:41.419

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Chris. All right, we're going to end our discussion section of this particular event by talking about leveraging technology to enhance writing efficiency, Louise, I am going to come to you 1st and just ask, where do you see the role of AI evolving in public sector writing? Should public servants embrace or be cautious about its use.

145

00:32:41.830 --> 00:32:59.949

Louise Stait: And so I've been using AI now since last year, and it's incredible. I think both of the things you said. I think we should embrace it, because if we don't, there's a risk that something's going to overtake us, and we might find that we can't keep up with it, and we don't understand the risks and how to use it, and the risks are massive.

146

00:32:59.950 --> 00:33:12.689

Louise Stait: We should also embrace it because it's got a lot to offer, but some of the risks. One of the really big risks that we've picked up is about complacency. So people thinking that because the AI did it now it's fine, and it isn't. It's always going to need that checking

147

00:33:12.690 --> 00:33:36.329

Louise Stait: which is really important. And the AI produces what they call hallucinations, where it will put things in that were never said so. You've got to watch out for all that stuff, but I think the the greatest use of AI for me at the moment is that it holds up a mirror to your processes. So when you look at a set of meeting minutes, actually, if the meeting was well run and the decisions were made well, and everyone participated, and it was well planned. You get a much better set of meeting minutes.

148

00:33:36.330 --> 00:33:50.400

Louise Stait: And so for me, it's a real sort of mirror, and it's a sort of wake up. Call to improve some of your processes, because the better your work is, the better. The AI outputs are going to be, and it's the same. If you were going to get a summary of a policy, if the policy wasn't good. In the 1st place, your summary is not going to be any good.

149

00:33:51.980 --> 00:34:02.529

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Louise. How about you, Lorna? Where do you see the role of AI evolving in public sector writing? How should public servants approach it, embrace it. Be cautious. Yeah.

150

00:34:08.670 --> 00:34:10.730

Urszula Rutkowska: you are on mute, Lorna. By the way.

151

00:34:10.739 --> 00:34:13.430

Lorna Brown: I was trying to push it, and it wouldn't go.

152

00:34:14.189 --> 00:34:40.679

Lorna Brown: I want to reinforce what Louise said. Yes, of course we should embrace it. But don't be seduced by the speed, and think it's going to make life faster. You have to check everything in it that it gives you as fact, but use it for what it's good at. One thing I'd say for public services. Anonymize everything you put into. Chat, Gpt. I can't comment on copilot. I don't. I don't know it, but AI is very good at summarizing long documents, extracting key insights from a meeting. It's good for comparing stuff from different jurisdictions to find the thread.

153

00:34:40.859 --> 00:34:42.559

Lorna Brown: and don't be frightened by it, because

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00:34:43.399 --> 00:34:49.289

Lorna Brown: yes, there are risks we know about the bias, but as long as you understand that you'll be checking everything.

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00:34:49.539 --> 00:35:17.419

Lorna Brown: A senior Solutions architect from Amazon web services came to speak to us. I invited him to come to talk to our local civic tech. And he said, AI is not going to take your job. Someone using AI well is going to take your job. So do use it. And it actually, it can align. Go back to the things we talked about earlier. It can align plain language, guidelines and readability standards if you ask it properly. That's the thing garbage in garbage out your prompts need to be as specific as possible. Don't ask it. What is digital transformation.

156

00:35:17.509 --> 00:35:30.249

Lorna Brown: Ask it. What are the 3 most important elements of government, digital transformation. And please give me 5 strategic actions to achieve each of the 3. Limit yourself to 500 words in total, write in grade 12 level language. The principal audiences are the general public and elected officials.

157

00:35:30.779 --> 00:35:31.659

Lorna Brown: whatever.

158

00:35:31.929 --> 00:35:34.239

Lorna Brown: That's a prompt that will get you what you want.

159

00:35:35.830 --> 00:35:45.069

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Lorna. And now, Chris, a final question for you. How can AI and digital tools help streamline writing without compromising clarity and accuracy?

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00:35:47.030 --> 00:35:52.059

Chris Brown: Yeah, so it can help, because it can do the heavy lifting.

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00:35:52.320 --> 00:35:53.930

Chris Brown: Use it as a tool.

162

00:35:54.340 --> 00:36:07.629

Chris Brown: Don't rely on it. And as Lorna and Louise have both said, Don't rely on it to create the end product, so use it to do the heavy lifting, use it to do the research and use it to fine tune.

163

00:36:07.850 --> 00:36:12.629

Chris Brown: As you learn the skills yourself. So this is me saying, this is the cautionary bit.

164

00:36:12.960 --> 00:36:21.860

Chris Brown: Don't stop learning how to write effectively, simply because AI has given you this great looking product.

165

00:36:24.140 --> 00:36:49.390

Urszula Rutkowska: All right. Thank you so much to all of you, please. Everyone attending the event. Remember to keep sharing any questions you have for today's speakers. We have a lot of questions from you already, both pre-submitted and in the Zoom. Q. And a. To ensure that your question gets seen and not lost in the chat. Please submit them in the Q, and a feature which you should see at the bottom of your zoom screen.

166

00:36:49.460 --> 00:37:12.689

Urszula Rutkowska: We are going to head into the Q. And A. Now, and we'll give you a minute or 2 to type your questions while you're doing that. I want to remind you all or share for the 1st time for those of you who weren't here for the opening remarks that we have a fantastic writing effectively in Government community. Some of you may already be members, but for those who aren't, this online community supports public servants in their writing.

167

00:37:12.690 --> 00:37:26.620

Urszula Rutkowska: the community is open to all apolitical members, and there are already 5,000 members in it. It also includes exercises and polls and questions and things that you can actively do in order to improve.

168

00:37:26.620 --> 00:37:37.010

Urszula Rutkowska: You're writing. All right. Let's let's head over to the Q. And A. So let me see, we've got loads and loads of questions, and I don't quite even know where to begin. So

169

00:37:37.460 --> 00:37:45.369

Urszula Rutkowska: let's see, Lorna, I am going to start with this one for you.

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00:37:46.310 --> 00:37:58.459

Urszula Rutkowska: How do I condense a wealth of information into a succinct and concise response when delivering to multiple audiences director, upper level management, etcetera.

171

00:38:04.660 --> 00:38:06.535

Urszula Rutkowska: Lorna, you are on mute.

172

00:38:07.930 --> 00:38:25.420

Lorna Brown: So sorry. I think I touched on this before. You're trying to tell a story. So what you look for is the thread of in all the things you have to say that will appeal to each audience to start with. Your grandmother, find the 2 or 3 things that will appeal to them all.

173

00:38:25.680 --> 00:38:33.950

Lorna Brown: and then use the language of their world and their current priorities. As I as I mentioned when you were talking about multiple stakeholders.

174

00:38:34.070 --> 00:38:34.860

Lorna Brown: I

175

00:38:35.070 --> 00:38:58.860

Lorna Brown: there's another question about, are there words that are beneficial for influencing? So it's the same answer. It's not specific words that I can give you a list of look for the right sources. Look for the throne, speech, look for the party platforms, look to the ministerial mandate letters to see what words will speak to each of those audience if their department has a strategy, and it's published internally on your Internet. Look at that, see what's in it for them.

176

00:38:59.010 --> 00:39:06.550

Lorna Brown: and tell a story in a way that's what's in it for them. And some of them, you will find, are basic to all of them. So start with.

177

00:39:08.250 --> 00:39:16.539

Urszula Rutkowska: Wonderful. Thank you so much, Lorna. Chris, I'm going to pose this next question to you, and it is from Jenny, and received quite a few Upvotes.

178

00:39:16.720 --> 00:39:26.299

Urszula Rutkowska: Some communications can go through multiple rounds of clearance, causing delays and sometimes struggling to meet deadlines.

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00:39:26.510 --> 00:39:48.289

Urszula Rutkowska: A lot of the time changes can be due to preference in ways of writing, and others are supported by corporate style guides, have you experienced this? And how do you overcome so many rounds of clearance and changes due to preference. How have you built confidence in your own writing? To perhaps say no to too many changes.

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00:39:49.600 --> 00:39:56.269

Chris Brown: That's a really good question. Several layers to that. So, firstly, yes, I have experienced that.

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00:39:56.530 --> 00:39:59.129

Chris Brown: And the way I got around it was

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00:39:59.490 --> 00:40:15.639

Chris Brown: by again. It's the. It's the opening questions, isn't it? It's the questions that you ask to find out. Okay, what's going on. Who's your audience? What do you want to go? What do you want them to go away with? And making sure that as early as possible in the process, you have the decision makers there on the call or around the table.

183

00:40:15.640 --> 00:40:40.099

Chris Brown: so it doesn't matter who else looks at it. It doesn't matter who else puts in their thoughts and their ideas. The decision maker is the only person that I relate to, and I speak to, if they're happy with it. That then builds my confidence in knowing the direction in which they want the document to go. And this is why I keep talking about building that human to human connection. The person I'm talking to.

184

00:40:40.100 --> 00:40:59.249

Chris Brown: They might be a director. They might be the Prime Minister. They're still human. They still have their ideas, they still have an agenda and a way in which they want this to come across, and so for me, spending time with them. One to one I pick up their language. I pick up how they process, which then is reflected in my writing.

185

00:41:01.000 --> 00:41:16.660

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Chris. That's super helpful, Louise. I am going to pose this next question to you, and it is from Michael Michael asks, is there a tactic that works best for someone with a technical background translating

186

00:41:16.660 --> 00:41:32.659

Urszula Rutkowska: to policy briefs, dash decisions. Michael says that they need to see all their ideas brought out, and then spend time editing to length, whereas others are able to just craft their message in their head as they go

187

00:41:33.120 --> 00:41:47.480

Urszula Rutkowska: this way probably takes more time, any advice. And I think the way that I see this question is essentially any advice on maybe speeding up some of these processes that involved. When you've been a technical writer for a while.

188

00:41:48.880 --> 00:42:02.459

Louise Stait: So is is the question that you've got so much knowledge, you're actually overwhelmed. And and in a way, you're disabling yourself because you've got so much technical knowledge, and someone else with less technical knowledge, would be able to write a much quicker draft. Is that the question? Am I understanding that.

189

00:42:02.460 --> 00:42:26.699

Urszula Rutkowska: Not quite. I think, basically, when you that there is a kind of desire to 1st begin by just having every, all the ideas kind of written out on a piece of paper, and it can, you know, accumulate to 1015 pages, and then you have to spend loads and loads of time editing, whereas for other people they can kind of edit while going along, you know that, and just kind of immediately contain the brief to

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00:42:26.700 --> 00:42:39.069

Urszula Rutkowska: 2 to 3 pages maximum, for example. So what advice do you have? What questions could someone ask themselves in order to maybe not to do this whole dump of everything, any guiding ideas or thoughts.

191

00:42:40.120 --> 00:43:05.629

Louise Stait: So it's really how your brain works, isn't it? So if you're not someone who can naturally just pull out the things, then you're going to have to work with that, so I would probably go through with a highlighter pen, either on screen or the old fashioned way, and I'd be highlighting what I thought the key points were, and I'd be doing it. But obviously this is me as a visual learner, and it'd be color coding things. And at the end of it I could see the themes. And

I've done this before with things like workshop outputs when you've got loads and loads of workshop outputs.

192

00:43:05.630 --> 00:43:21.390

Louise Stait: and you're trying to sort of make sense of it all. The color coding themes is a really helpful way to do it. I'd also want to work with someone else who's got the skills. So either your line manager or someone else who can help with that, because I think coaching and teaching is everything in this sort of stuff. You can't always teach yourself to do these kind of skills.

193

00:43:21.400 --> 00:43:43.120

Louise Stait: And certainly so I've been in public service 30 years and a lot of what I learned was from line managers and more senior people looking at what I've done, ripping it apart, you know, helping me to make it better. So I think there's time for that. So I think there's no shame in trying to get that help and get someone to help you and say, explain their thought process. Why they thought this was a key theme. Why, this is what you should be pulling out, and then perhaps you can take that away for next time.

194

00:43:44.960 --> 00:44:05.640

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Louise. All right, Lorna. I am going to ask you to talk a little bit more about what you've already shared about using AI to rewrite or help write content in government? Could you expand a little bit further on how you approach prompting, rewriting all of these different things? Any other tips or advice that you have to share.

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00:44:06.410 --> 00:44:10.909

Lorna Brown: Yes, I rarely use it to write drafts. I use it for research.

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00:44:12.029 --> 00:44:20.839

Lorna Brown: But when I do want to use it, I think what specific things

197

00:44:21.370 --> 00:44:24.909

Lorna Brown: can it tell me quickly that it would take me a long time to get

198

00:44:25.140 --> 00:44:29.420

Lorna Brown: so I use in the prompt exactly where I want it to look

199

00:44:29.910 --> 00:44:40.900

Lorna Brown: like. Tell me, I don't just say tell me some interesting policies on this from other jurisdictions. I say, please give me one from the UK. One from another Canadian province and one from a non commonwealth country.

200

00:44:41.520 --> 00:44:53.215

Lorna Brown: I'm as specific as possible in what I want, how I want it, how long I want it. How recently I want it. Stick to things that have happened since 2022, or whatever

201

00:44:53.700 --> 00:44:54.900

Lorna Brown: and I use.

202

00:44:56.300 --> 00:44:58.969

Lorna Brown: I don't use jargon in my request.

203

00:44:59.250 --> 00:45:01.469

Lorna Brown: because I don't want it to give me jargon back.

204

00:45:01.770 --> 00:45:12.850

Lorna Brown: I don't want to talk about cloud-based, distributed ledgers. I say, I want to talk about online record keeping systems, you know. So I write for Chat Gpt the way I write for not my grandmother, but for the general public.

205

00:45:13.343 --> 00:45:18.800

Lorna Brown: And it gives me back general public language, even when I don't ask specifically for a grade level

206

00:45:18.970 --> 00:45:20.079

Lorna Brown: hope that helps.

207

00:45:21.070 --> 00:45:34.850

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Lorna Louise. I'm going to ask you this question, and it's about using your writing to influence and change people's opinions. What are your top tips for writing in order to influence your reader.

208

00:45:36.030 --> 00:45:40.939

Louise Stait: Okay. So I would probably say to get under the skin 1st of all, of who they are.

209

00:45:40.980 --> 00:45:57.699

Louise Stait: And so I often talk to people about thinking about board members, vulnerabilities. People don't always see that they think we've got these very highly paid people, and you know, and and they've got superhuman. They can process everything. But actually, if you think they're making some really difficult decisions, they'll be in the firing line if something goes wrong.

210

00:45:57.730 --> 00:46:17.079

Louise Stait: So if you want to persuade people, it's that sense of psychological safety is really important. So rather than trying to sort of push something through, because you think it's a good idea. Try and anticipate some of those concerns. Are there some risks? In that case, you know. Own up what they are. Talk about how you're going to mitigate them, show that you've thought about what could go wrong and sort of

211

00:46:17.150 --> 00:46:23.400

Louise Stait: it helps the reader kind of relax into what you're saying, and then to be able to sort of walk with you on that journey that you're trying to take them.

212

00:46:26.920 --> 00:46:49.190

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Louise. Chris, I'm going to pose a question to you about writing emails. So Hector asks, or rather says or explains, I usually communicate via email. And I find that I am commonly including formatting techniques such as italics, bold underline, highlighting, font color in the body of an email.

213

00:46:49.320 --> 00:47:03.170

Urszula Rutkowska: any tips on how to make emails more succinct and to the point, or perhaps, what do you think of using all these different formatting techniques and styles? How do you craft a good email.

214

00:47:04.690 --> 00:47:12.860

Chris Brown: That is a really another really good question. So use the formatting, for

215

00:47:12.990 --> 00:47:31.739

Chris Brown: if that helps you with your communication. So what I'm saying there is that there's no right or wrong here. If that helps you, and it helps your audience get the information that they need carry on doing that for me. The way I create an email is, I look at

216

00:47:31.850 --> 00:47:37.830

Chris Brown: making up the headline, A promise, prove it.

217

00:47:38.280 --> 00:47:48.009

Chris Brown: and then the process, ie. The next step. So it doesn't matter whether I'm writing to someone in government, whether I'm writing to the public, whether I'm writing to someone on an email list.

218

00:47:48.380 --> 00:47:52.259

Chris Brown: I set out in plain language, breaking up your words.

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00:47:52.420 --> 00:47:55.990

Chris Brown: and I think about as well when

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00:47:57.030 --> 00:48:14.020

Chris Brown: going back to what was said before about with storytellers and in storytelling there are what are called archetypes. There are different types, every film you ever watch, every book you ever read. If you've enjoyed, it is because you've understood and seen

221

00:48:14.140 --> 00:48:30.480

Chris Brown: the archetype. So, for example, Star Wars. Well, you've got the hero archetype in Luke Skywalker. You've got the magician archetype in Obi-WAN Kenobi and Yoda to a degree. So think about if you are. If you are writing to the public, pick an archetype that you think

222

00:48:30.610 --> 00:48:58.660

Chris Brown: would get the most response. If you say, for example, I'm writing to designers well, designers by definition. Their language they use are things like, create, discover, uncover. So they would lend themselves to the archetype of magician, because magician creates things and they uncover, and they discover. And so I'd be writing in that way in order to maximize the response that I'm wanting someone to take. So by combining

223

00:48:58.810 --> 00:48:59.890

Chris Brown: the headline.

224

00:49:00.360 --> 00:49:17.219

Chris Brown: and you could do a whole session on headlines. Headlines do not have to be short, because it's all about how much people are enjoying what they're reading. This misconception, that everything has to be short because everyone has a short attention span.

225

00:49:17.350 --> 00:49:25.680

Chris Brown: It's unfortunately, innocently. It's wrong. We have always had a short attention span, because it is part of our biology in order to keep us safe.

226

00:49:26.190 --> 00:49:53.369

Chris Brown: What's happened is, if you watch a 3 h film, you've watched it because you've enjoyed it, and that's the key. When you're writing, write for enjoyment wherever you can make it as enjoyable as possible for your reader, and therefore it doesn't matter how much you write. It doesn't matter how you write it. The person is getting what they need from it. They will stay with you all the way to the end, and there is a process that again I can share. If you want. If you contact me separately, that will

227

00:49:53.820 --> 00:49:55.790

Chris Brown: confirm and will

228

00:49:56.230 --> 00:50:03.580

Chris Brown: guarantee. Someone starts at the top of the email and get to the bottom, and they won't even know they've done it. That's how good it is.

229

00:50:05.170 --> 00:50:28.070

Urszula Rutkowska: Chris, that's super helpful, and I'm sure so many folks here appreciate it. I remember when I was teaching 1st year, writing during my Phd. To a bunch of 18 year olds. And actually, the 1st thing that they asked me to teach them was how to write an email. And it was quite a, and it's just one of those things that I think we're always trying to improve. And it's so hard.

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00:50:28.070 --> 00:50:52.620

Urszula Rutkowska: So thank you for taking the time to answer that question, and I'll also plug that. We do actually have an event called the Art of writing the perfect email coming up in a few weeks. So in case you just really want to focus on writing an email, do sign up for that event. All right. So, Louise, I am going to ask you the following question, and you know I think we can all agree that feedback on writing is one of the most helpful things in terms of

231

00:50:52.710 --> 00:50:53.779

Urszula Rutkowska: actually

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00:50:55.790 --> 00:51:13.700

Urszula Rutkowska: in terms of actually improving and sort of making sure that your writing is getting better. But in a really busy work environment it's often just really hard to PIN people down and get them to give you feedback. Do you have any advice on what you can do when you don't get any feedback on your written work, from your team over and over and over again.

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00:51:15.403 --> 00:51:18.580

Louise Stait: So when you say from your team.

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00:51:19.900 --> 00:51:22.630

Louise Stait: you may just mean from the people that you want to feed back on your writing.

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00:51:22.630 --> 00:51:29.209

Urszula Rutkowska: Yeah, I mean, the, this is an anonymous question that was posed by someone attending the event. And they've just mentioned from your team. Yeah.

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00:51:29.210 --> 00:51:52.919

Louise Stait: Yeah, okay? So I think, because in this sort of the perspective of giving feedback, what I've learned many years or decades ago is that a lot of people don't want feedback, and people will come to you and say, Can you give me feedback on this document? They'll say, Be honest, rip it apart. I don't care. I want to learn, but actually they don't want that. They want to. They want a bit of encourage, a lot of encouragement. They want to be told that it's good, and you can perhaps touch on a couple of few things that they could improve.

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00:51:52.920 --> 00:52:10.899

Louise Stait: And a lot of people are in that psychological space. They don't want the feedback. So I think people learn over time that it isn't always safe to give feedback because it's not going to be received. So the best thing one of the best things you can do is to make it really clear that you genuinely do want that feedback, and that you have got broad shoulders, and that you will accept it graciously. So that's a really important thing. I think

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00:52:10.960 --> 00:52:38.810

Louise Stait: it's about obviously people's workload. So you know, it's quite difficult when you have people, if you're quite senior and busy. And then someone says to you, I've written this report, it's due to go to the Finance Committee tomorrow, you know. Can you check it for me? That's really hard, and especially if it needs a lot of work, whereas if you'd gone to that person a few weeks earlier and said, I'm doing this to give you a heads up. Can you help me with it? Then you build the time in, you know. You maybe even put a bit of time in their calendar to look at it or go through it with you and that kind of thing, so you know, help them to find the time for it.

239

00:52:38.870 --> 00:52:50.990

Louise Stait: and don't just sort of expect people can do it. So I think that would be my main. Just assume that anyone's going to give you that feedback, but try and lay the groundwork and make it successful.

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00:52:52.260 --> 00:53:02.639

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you so much, Louise and Lorna. Just one more question from you. But are there any keywords that are always beneficial for influencing.

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00:53:03.910 --> 00:53:14.719

Lorna Brown: Well, actually, I mentioned before that. No, there are not a set of words. There's a set of resources that will give you the words for the current circumstance.

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00:53:17.290 --> 00:53:44.129

Lorna Brown: an award that worked last week might not work next week. So you have to keep yourself up to date with what's going on in your organization. What's what's going on in the news? But with strategy, priority documents, and so forth. If you know what your minister is going to be fiscal year by reading his or her ministerial mandate letter. You will know, to use the words, the current government that I'm working, for, for example, in their platform and in their priority commitments, which they translated one to one into work for us, is open by default.

243

00:53:44.340 --> 00:54:07.249

Lorna Brown: My heart sang, I co-founded the Canadian Open Data Society for greater transparency in government. So I don't just say citizen-centric approaches anymore. I say, open government approaches open by default approaches because I'm keeping up with the language that will resonate with that specific reader. So no, there's no set of words. There are millions of words. Use the ones that your reader needs to hear, and wants to hear.

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00:54:08.050 --> 00:54:16.119

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Lorna, that's super helpful. And, Louise, I'm going to ask you just one more question, but any tips to bring empathy into your communications.

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00:54:17.843 --> 00:54:19.189

Louise Stait: Yeah. So

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00:54:19.430 --> 00:54:37.859

Louise Stait: there's there's so many different groups of people that might be reading. And so when I do the training, the sort of plain language training for people. I go through these groups and get people to think about them. So you've got, perhaps, your committee or board members as your primary audience. But you've got all sorts of other people you've got. Obviously the general public. If things go through freedom of information.

247

00:54:37.860 --> 00:54:57.079

Louise Stait: you've got journalists, you've got auditors. You've got all these different groups, and it really helps to think about some of the vulnerabilities of these different groups and what they need. So that's 1 side and then the other thing I talk about sort of empathy as a form of self-defense almost. And so heading off risks. And so we think we talk about journalists, and we talk about the Daily Mail Test.

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00:54:57.080 --> 00:55:26.530

Louise Stait: which some of you, not from the UK. The Daily Mail is a newspaper that likes to sort of get scurrilous stories. So we talk about the Daily Mail test. Is there anything in your paper that you know, journalist on a slow news day could pull out and make a story out of, and that's empathy as well. Is there anything that this committee is going to worry about when they read your paper, which might prevent them from agreeing what you're asking to. So it's that sort of that Yin Yang approach. Really the empathy, the caring for people and making sure they get what they need, and the empathy of heading for any sort of oppositional trouble that you might have.

249

00:55:27.149 --> 00:55:42.219

Louise Stait: Oh, sorry! I should have said special interest groups is another one. They're so important, the special interest groups really important part of democracy. But again, you've got to think about. What do they need, and what might they read? That, you know, perhaps, would be read in the way that you hadn't intended.

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00:55:43.660 --> 00:55:48.329

Urszula Rutkowska: All right. Thank you, Louise and Chris. Just one more question for you.

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00:55:48.680 --> 00:55:54.629

Urszula Rutkowska: Concision. It's come up a lot. But what is your top tip for being more concise as a writer.

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00:55:59.520 --> 00:56:01.419

Chris Brown: Top tip would be.

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00:56:07.980 --> 00:56:10.450

Chris Brown: use the watch method that I mentioned earlier.

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00:56:11.010 --> 00:56:13.560

Chris Brown: because that will give you the conciseness to me.

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00:56:15.350 --> 00:56:21.589

Urszula Rutkowska: All right. Thank you, Chris. So everyone be sure to re-watch the recording from from the beginning of the event.

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00:56:21.720 --> 00:56:25.129

Urszula Rutkowska: Chris's thoughts on the watch method much appreciated.

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00:56:25.130 --> 00:56:26.819

Urszula Rutkowska: I can. I can say it again if you want.

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00:56:26.820 --> 00:56:29.119

Urszula Rutkowska: do say it again. Say it one more time.

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00:56:29.240 --> 00:56:47.059

Chris Brown: Okay? So the watch method is, watch for the words. So are you using long words when short ones would be better? Are you using jargon. Are you using acronyms? Then watch for adverbs. So that's the words that end in LY. Do they really need to be there? If not, cross it out. If the sentence still makes sense, you take it out completely.

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00:56:47.220 --> 00:56:55.799

Chris Brown: and then watch for the word that again, that seems to be a word that crops in everywhere, that it's a filler. Take it out. It's not needed.

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00:56:56.240 --> 00:56:59.680

Chris Brown: Watch for clarity.

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00:56:59.820 --> 00:57:06.780

Chris Brown: Do you understand? It? Does my dog understand it? Does your granny understand it? Does your next door neighbor? Does your 5 find a 5 year old

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00:57:06.890 --> 00:57:09.589

Chris Brown: 5 year old can understand what you're writing? You're onto a winner.

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00:57:09.820 --> 00:57:17.739

Chris Brown: And then the last one is watch for the headline, watch for the the key point that you're trying to make, that you want people to take away after they've read it. There you go!

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00:57:18.820 --> 00:57:33.079

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Chris, all right. So we've had some incredible wisdom from each of our speakers, and I'd like to ask all of you here today to join me in giving Chris, Lorna and Louise a virtual round of applause.

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00:57:33.280 --> 00:57:40.629

Urszula Rutkowska: and, most importantly, thank you to all of you, the attendees for investing in learning and being so engaged in this topic.

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00:57:40.630 --> 00:58:05.239

Urszula Rutkowska: I'm going to ask all 3 of you for a 1 word, takeaway that summarizes what you are taking away from our discussion in a second, and while I give you all a moment to think, the team is going to pull up a quick poll to find out how you felt about today, which will help us continue improving our content. And we really appreciate your responses. So, on a scale of one to 10. Please rank your agreement with this statement.

268

00:58:05.240 --> 00:58:24.950

Urszula Rutkowska: This event was a valuable use of my time, one meaning that you completely disagree, and 10, meaning that you completely agree? All right. So let's hear those

one word takeaways, Lorna, I'm going to start with you. What is your one word takeaway from today's event?

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00:58:26.790 --> 00:58:36.709

Lorna Brown: I didn't expect this, but commitment the commitment of people to want to write well in government, so many of them, and giving up an hour and listening to us so, and

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00:58:37.370 --> 00:58:42.300

Lorna Brown: I'm committed to finding out more of what Chris and Louise know, because they were very helpful to me.

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00:58:43.990 --> 00:58:49.169

Urszula Rutkowska: Thank you, Lorna. All right, we've got commitment. Now, Chris, what about you? What is your one word? Takeaway?

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00:58:49.680 --> 00:58:57.690

Chris Brown: Curiosity again, the fact that people have given up an hour of their time to be curious about how to write effectively. I love it absolutely. Love it.

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00:58:57.690 --> 00:59:01.919

Urszula Rutkowska: All right, curiosity, and over to you, Louise.

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00:59:02.967 --> 00:59:13.130

Louise Stait: I thought service, because I could see all the chat comments as they were popping up, and I just it felt like being part of a tribe. Everyone's literally trying to serve their public and feels really good.

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00:59:14.380 --> 00:59:41.799

Urszula Rutkowska: All right, everyone. Thank you so much. The conversation isn't over. We'll keep sharing ideas and challenges and questions in the writing effectively. In government community today, we'd like you to join our speakers and post your answer to the icebreaker question in the thread that my colleague has just posted in the chat, and I'd also like to know which of the answers given by your peers resonate with you most, so please do like or upvote the best answers in the thread.

276

00:59:41.900 --> 01:00:01.430

Urszula Rutkowska: That is all we have time for today. We hope you found it helpful. And we want to say a huge thank you once again to everyone who's made today happen. And to you for taking time out of your busy days. Keep an eye out for the email coming your way with today's recording and resources, and we hope to see you at another apolitical event very soon. Have a great day and goodbye.