



# PUBLISH TO BE READ

Editorial guidelines for authors of EU publications



Publications Office  
of the European Union

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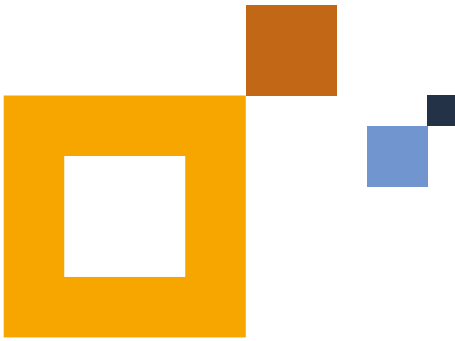
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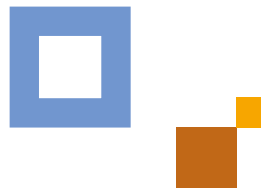


## Why use this guide?

**We have prepared this guide to help EU authors plan their publications and create relevant content with greater outreach.**

In a world where information overload is narrowing our attention span, practical tips can help authors find their way to their target audiences. These guidelines can be particularly useful for publications targeting the broader EU public; however, authors of technical, administrative and scientific publications should follow the same principles.

*Publications Office of the European Union  
Publishing Advisory Services*



## A. See the big picture



### 1. Plan and work together

Most European Union publications focus on the EU's political priorities. So how can you **avoid producing content that overlaps** with existing or planned publications? How can you make sure that you shed at least some new light on the topic you are exploring?

You can see what other Commission directorates-general and EU institutions are planning by consulting the OP's [collaborative planning service](#). You can also share your publication plans with other EU authors using our collaborative planning tool.

To make the best use of your resources, especially financially, adapt your strategy to your intended readers. For a specialised audience, mostly interested in accurate technical information, focus on clear content with basic visual aids. However, investing in more appealing, modern publishing products to reach a wider EU public is a must. To produce a richer, more multifaceted publication on a topic that has already been covered in other publications, consider **co-authoring** with other EU services.

#### The OP can help you

- [Collaborative publishing planning](#)
- [Publishing community engagement](#)



### 2. Identify needs and expectations

When planning a publication, **identify the needs and expectations you want to address**, and decide on the best format. Later, during drafting, adapt your **writing approach** accordingly.

Distinguish between objectives concerning policymaking, accountability and communication with the public. For the latter, choose topics and angles that have an impact on everyday life. Use short, visual publications that can reach such readers more easily.



### 3. Be inclusive

**Think of readers who are harder to reach** – those who might be interested in your content but cannot access information easily. Consider people with intellectual, visual, auditory or motor disabilities, those at risk of social exclusion, refugees and migrants, and those without access to the internet. The age of readers is another important factor.

Adapt your publications to the needs of your intended audience. Keep in mind that all Commission websites and the documents uploaded to them must be accessible. The other EU institutions are also encouraged to embrace accessible publishing. Therefore, remember to systematically apply accessibility standards when preparing your manuscript.

**The OP is a reference centre for accessible publishing.** To get help on this topic, contact the OP's team for accessible publications.

Go paperless as much as possible, but opt for printed copies for those who do not have access to the internet or are not familiar with it, or for work in the classroom, etc.

#### The OP can help you

- Drafting templates in Eurolook
- Accessibility services



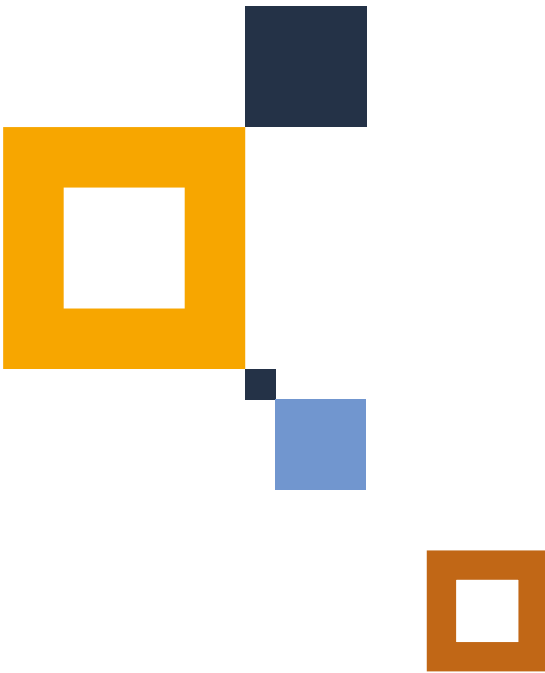
### 4. Give the floor to people

Let **people** tell their **stories** and share their **experiences**. Those who have seen their lives improve or have changed things on the ground can be the most convincing ambassadors for EU policies. Collect such testimonials and stories during the planning phase. Instead of administrative statements and generic photos, inject everyday life into your publications.



### 5. Ensure balance

Publishing about EU initiatives that aim to improve people's lives is important. Excessive self-praise, however, may alienate your readers and even increase scepticism. Address people's fears, worries and complaints sincerely. Ensure balanced coverage that describes **EU achievements and benefits, but also limitations and progress that may be required**.





## B. Develop a clear publication concept



### 1. Take time to reflect

Before you start collecting materials and drafting, you need to develop a **clear, coherent and robust concept** for your publication. In this phase, decide on the following:

- why you need to create this new publication;
- for whom you will be writing;
- the key messages you want to get across;
- how the publishing context will be reflected in the final product;
- the languages in which you will reach your readers most efficiently;
- the format, content, visuals and tone that will suit best your audience;
- how you will distribute and promote your publication; and
- how you will measure its success after publishing.

To get **support in developing a well-thought-through concept**, ask the OP for editorial advice early in the process.

The OP can help you

- Editorial advice: publication concept development support



### 2. Have a reason

Clearly define, from the very beginning, the **purpose** of your publication. 'To inform' is a rather vague objective. Decide what impact you would like this information to have on your readers.

Ask yourself if you want to:

- raise awareness;
- put in the spotlight neglected or less-well-known aspects of EU policies;
- convince your readers to change their attitudes, opinions or behaviour; or
- encourage them to take action.

Adapt your content and writing style accordingly.



### 3. Know your audience

Decide whom, primarily, you want to reach. Even if your publication is meant for a broad audience, be aware that the ‘general public’ does not really exist. Your readers have **various profiles, interests, needs and concerns**. Consider their age group, level of education, occupation, income, location, values, opinions, attitude towards the EU, activities, behaviours, reading habits, etc.

Segment your audience and focus on those readers to whom your objective seems to be most relevant. Think of them as concrete, real people. To do so, consider creating ‘**reader personas**’, i.e. fictional profiles of people who represent the main groups of your target audience. Various online tools can help you do this.

Do not make decisions based solely on assumptions. **Rely on data collection and analysis**. Consider using surveys, interviews, focus groups, polls, case studies, observations, experiments, online information, data on social media use, etc.

The OP can help you

• [Surveys](#)



### 4. Put your messages into context

Once you know whom you are writing for, put yourself in your readers’ shoes. Shape your **key messages** bearing in mind what you want to achieve with this publication and whom you are going to address. Choose what to focus on and provide no more information than is needed. Be aware that too many messages, angles or details might discourage readers and make your publication less effective.

**Similar information** might need to be presented in **different ways** depending on the **context** and communication circumstances. Choose the optimal format, visuals and promotion channels to reach your readers and make sure you address them in a language they understand. For instance, precision and attention to detail are valuable prerequisites for drafting legal texts. If you present legislation in a very detailed way to non-specialists, however, you risk alienating readers and preventing them from realising the benefits the law has for their lives.

If your publication is meant for an event, commemoration, anniversary, etc., try to extend its **shelf life** beyond this event. For instance, avoid vague time indicators such as ‘last month’ or ‘5 years ago’.



## 5. Speak your reader's language

Even at this early stage, remember that you should address your audience in a **language they understand** and can relate to. Make sure your text will have the appropriate tone and register. To do so, follow [clear-writing principles](#).

Publishing in **all of the official EU languages, or as many as possible**, is generally beneficial. Some people speak only their native language or are not comfortable with reading in a foreign one. Even if your readers can read in more than one language, your message will sound more personal and engaging when delivered in their mother tongue, and they will feel more respected. Publications that are not available in the preferred language of readers increase perceptions of a **distance between the EU and its citizens**.

With regard to future translation, when you draft your content you should avoid titles or cultural references that will be difficult to translate. Even for publications that are not going to be translated, make sure that non-native speakers will be able to properly interpret the content.



## 6. Adapt your content to the format

Choose the **optimal publishing format(s)** to reach the intended readers. For example, try to answer the following questions before deciding.

- Does your audience read mostly on paper or online?
- Will your online content be consumed primarily on computers or mobile devices?
- Could you make your publication easier to use and more attractive by producing it as web content, instead of a more static PDF document?

The format and **type** of publication selected will affect your **approach to the content**: the way you write your text and how you structure and illustrate it. For example, texts for the web should be more concise, but you can enrich online content with extendable drop-down sections and other features. In such contexts, pay more attention to visuals and easy-to-use navigation.

When publishing in more than one format, for example both PDF and HTML, it is important to create the most complete version first. Use this version afterwards to adapt the content to other chosen formats and types of publication. For instance, extract only key points and use brief text blocks for leaflets, whereas posters will mostly rely on visuals, keeping the textual part to the bare minimum.



## 7. Go visual

Outline the **structure** of your publication from the very beginning. Build your content so that readers can see at a glance the progression of chapters and sections. **Break up your text** with meaningful headings and subheadings and use – sparingly – bold characters, text boxes, bulleted lists, tables, diagrams and other means to help make the text more readable. For non-print publications, embed hyperlinks to provide more information while reducing footnotes and other secondary content.

**Visuals** such as illustrations, photos and videos make your publication more appealing and livelier. Show people related to the topic being discussed, and avoid generic photos. Even in ‘heavy’ publications, such as those of a legal, technical or scientific nature, graphs, photos or artwork can make the content less abstract and encourage further reading.

Visual content helps readers understand instructions or concepts that could be hard to follow if they are described only using text. Similarly, you can use data visualisation techniques to depict trends and patterns in a comprehensive and appealing way. Treat visuals and text as equally important and complementary means to convey information. In this sense, they should support, not detract from or repeat, each other.

Adapt visuals to the chosen publication type and format. For example, tables with detailed data may be necessary in an annex to a study. For more impact on social media, however, extract a striking or unexpected figure and post it together with a catchy illustration.

### The OP can help you

- [Graphic design](#)
- [Digital and multimedia products](#)
- [Data visualisation \(service\)](#)
- [Data in publications \(guide\)](#)



## 8. Spread the word

Create a well-thought-out **distribution and promotion plan**. Use, and regularly update, your (e)mailing lists.

Consider promoting your publication on **social media**. Identify which platforms are mostly used by your target audience. For your posts, extract interesting facts or data from the content and remember to include the link to the publication.

Give your flagship publications more visibility through the [EU Publications carousel](#) and bundles, and the [OP's newsletter](#), with the help of our [promotion experts](#).

### The OP can help you

- [Mailing lists](#)
- [Promotion of publications](#)



## 9. Measure success

**Measuring** how your publications perform will help you **publish smarter**. Try to define the desired performance in advance, during the concept development stage. At least how many people do you think should read your publication? In which languages? In which formats?

This will allow you to compare its performance against your objectives later on and see to what extent they were attained. Conclusions from performance data will also help you make well-informed decisions about your future publications.

Use solutions such as [widgets](#) or links to the [EU Publications](#) to increase the OP's ability to provide you with comprehensive and meaningful **data analysis**. This will both boost the performance of your publication and allow the OP to accurately measure it.

Ask the OP's [Publication Performance Measurement Team](#) to provide you with a tailored measurement and evaluation of the success of your publications. This will cover areas such as print, digital publishing and social media.

Use **EU Publications Analytics** – a self-service platform developed and managed by the OP – if you need only raw data about how your audience interacts with your publications.

### The OP can help you

- [Publication performance measurement](#)
- [EU Publications Analytics](#)



## C. Draft efficiently



### 1. Set a realistic time frame

Before you start drafting, **think of all the phases and actors required** to create and disseminate a publication:

- potential co-authors and other content contributors;
- visual material and copyright issues to be addressed;
- editorial feedback and time needed to apply potential changes;
- approval procedures in your institution, including last-minute updates;
- time needed for other services (graphic design, language editing, printing, distribution, etc.).

**Build in sufficient time** for each of these phases, along with a buffer. The OP can help you with a precise timetable, taking into account any imperative deadlines. Just remember to mention it well in advance. Get support from the OP's [Front Desk for Authors](#), who will help you learn more about the various services.

**If several authors** or content contributors will be involved in your publication, **agree in advance** on the structure, the tone, the length and the main points of each contribution. This will help you avoid inconsistencies and repetition, and will make the final editing of your draft easier. If possible, **involve an editor** or a coordinator to ensure a homogeneous and consistent result. Share your schedule with the leading or essential contributors, and agree it with them.

**The OP can help you**

- [Advice on copyright](#)
- [Printing](#)



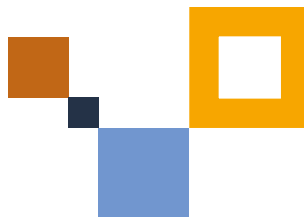
## 2. Apply clear-writing rules and techniques

Follow the *European Commission Clear Writing Guide*, and apply the typographical and linguistic requirements set out in the *Interinstitutional Style Guide* and the *European Commission Style Guide*. Besides increasing the impact of your publication, this can reduce the time required for production.



### Structure and content

- Define the structure ahead of time.** Prepare an outline of the content before you start drafting.
- Use the **drafting templates in Eurolook** when you start writing.
- Create a **catchy, informative** and **distinctive title** for your publication. If needed, add a **subtitle** to describe the content more clearly.
- Move **key information towards the beginning** (the ‘inverted pyramid’ structure).
- Write succinct, meaningful and engaging **headings and subheadings**.
- Be concise.** Modern audiences are easily distracted and tend to have a short attention span. This is particularly true for online content.
- Vary the length of your **sentences** to avoid a monotonous rhythm, but try to keep them **short**.
- Vary the length of your **paragraphs**, but try to keep them **short**.
- Verify the readability of your content by using the **Editor function** in MS Word.
- Write** less about dry data and processes and more **about people and the impact** on their lives.
- Wherever possible, try to give short, real-life **examples** of what you are talking about.
- Identify** the **questions** that readers are most likely to ask and make sure you address them.





## Language

- Use inclusive and gender-neutral language.**
- Address your readers** by using personal pronouns such as 'you' and 'your'. Avoid impersonal phrases such as 'it is thought that' and similar.
- Use **short and simple words** wherever possible. Convert technical and bureaucratic jargon into simpler, everyday language.
- Avoid abstract nouns.** Convert some of them to verbs or adjectives.
- Avoid unnecessary repetition.**
- On the other hand, **stick to the same terms** for the same concepts. Do not vary words for stylistic reasons.
- Minimise your use of bracketed phrases.** If you have to use a bracketed phrase, keep it very short and place it right at the end of a sentence.
- Avoid abbreviations, complex terminology and legalese.** If you cannot entirely avoid them, clarify their meaning and explain them the first time they appear in the text. However, if you end up with many terms or abbreviations, include them in a separate list.



### 3. Check again

When you have finished drafting, check that you have met the objectives you set out when conceiving your publication.

- Is your draft fit for your **intended audience**?
- Are the main **messages** conveyed clearly?
- Is the **structure** clear and easy to follow?
- Is your text **free from repetition**?
- Have typographical, grammar and spelling **errors been removed**?

To be sure that a publication is fit for purpose, you can contact the OP's [Editorial Advice Team](#) and ask them to go through your text. They will check its relevance to your target audience and identify potential gaps, unnecessary repetitions and structural flaws.

Apply their recommendations and then send your final manuscript to a language editor – preferably to the OP's experienced language-editing teams – to make sure your final content is error-free.

#### The OP can help you

- [Editorial advice: editorial assessment](#)
- [Language editing](#)

### Find out more

- [Accessible publishing](#)
- [Clear writing for Europe](#)
- [Data Visualisation Guide](#)
- [Europa Web Guide](#)
- [Europa Webtools](#)
- [How to choose a title for your monograph](#)
- [How to choose a title for a serial publication](#)
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