

***Writing Clubs in the Research Communication Context***

**Module Facilitation Notes**

Resources to run a workshop in establishing or further developing a writing club at your institution.

INASP designs and runs capacity development activities that cater for both women and men’s interests and needs. We use methods that increase active participation and an inclusive learning environment, adopting attitudes and behaviours that value differential experiences and perspectives and ensuring listening and respect for each other’s experiences and views.

**Introduction to the workshop materials-for the trainer/s**

Thank you for your interest in the AuthorAID writing clubs module, designed primarily for individuals in low- and medium-income countries who are considering, or might consider, starting a writing club. It can also serve individuals who wish to develop existing writing clubs further. Participants may be at any career stage - administrators, faculty members of various ranks, postdoctoral fellows and postgraduate students have all established successful writing clubs.

For the purposes of this module, a writing club consists of people who meet periodically to discuss their writing, within the context of research communication. The club may be in person, electronically, or both. And it may focus on the writing process, the writing product, or both.

At the outset, please go through the module and understand the materials, which have been designed by AuthorAID Associate Dr Barbara Gastel together with the AuthorAID team at INASP. You will then be in a better position to adapt the materials, if necessary, so that they are relevant to your context and audience and in turn, will be able to design an AuthorAID workshop that is fit for purpose.

This module can be freestanding. However, it can also be included for example:

* Near the end of a workshop on research communication or on mentoring in research communication
* As part guidance on embedding research communication assistance in an institution or professional organization or
* At conferences attended by individuals who might consider setting up a writing club

Please do the following at least one month before your AuthorAID workshop:

* Carefully go through all the facilitation notes, referring to the other materials (the pre-workshop reading, the handouts and trainers’ PowerPoint slides) wherever indicated in the facilitation notes.

After going through the facilitation notes, think about your own AuthorAID workshop:

* How long is your workshop going to be?
* What is the profile of the participants who will attend your workshop? What do they already know about the topic and what would they expect to learn or do during your workshop?
* Which activities would be the most relevant for your workshop? Do you have a good rationale for selecting some activities and leaving out or adding others?
* Would you need to include activities on any other topic not included in these materials? If so, who will develop the materials for these activities and who will facilitate them at the workshop?
* Decide who is going to be part of the workshop team, for example, the workshop administrator (the person in charge of logistics and arrangements), a co-trainer and/or resource person. Share your thoughts with your team and seek their feedback.
* Design a selection process to recruit the right participants for your workshop. Tell the workshop candidates what the workshop is about, and what they will be expected to do during the workshop.

Then, at least two weeks before your AuthorAID workshop, please do the following:

1. Draft the agenda (plus intended learning outcomes) for your workshop and share it with your workshop team. Some example intended learning outcomes have been provided on slide 5 in the trainers’ PowerPoint slides.
2. Select the participants for your workshop.
3. Share the workshop agenda (plus intended learning outcomes) and any pre-workshop information, for example advance reading material noted at the start of the module, with your workshop participants.
4. Put together the materials for your AuthorAID workshop by using or adapting the materials in this module and by developing materials you may need for any new activities you have designed.

**Guidance for trainer/s**

***Background knowledge and skills for trainer/s***

Those who are looking to facilitate this workshop should ideally have:

* Experience with or exposure to writing clubs in the research communication context.
* Experience in mentorship or developing other people’s skills in research communication.
* A positive attitude towards active learning and an interest in using active learning techniques in the training room.

***Organization of workshop***

* This is a workshop design for 10-15 people, in order to optimize discussion and can function well even with just a few people (for example, in a department considering starting a writing club). The materials can also be adapted so that the module can be reasonably delivered to up to 25 participants, however the time for discussion may be reduced.
* It is strongly recommended that a second resource person or co-trainer who can facilitate group work and write up any activity outputs support the lead trainer of this workshop.
* Every participant should receive, at the start of the workshop, the finalized agenda (plus intended learning outcomes).
* The trainer/s can insert relevant photos/images into the PowerPoint slides and, edit or re-format text and content so that it is better tailored to the participant audience. For instance, if they have experience with a writing club, they may add one or more slides about it; such slides might fit well shortly before or after those outlining the writing clubs at the University of Colombo.
* It is recommended that if any PowerPoint slides are shared with participants, then this be done after rather than before the workshop.
* The timings are an approximate guide and trainer/s are expected to make adjustments during the course of the workshop.
* As good workshop practice dictates, trainer/s need to spend time in advance of the workshop, to study the facilitation notes and training materials. It is also recommended that trainer/s consider how best to format the facilitation notes so that they are easy to use on the day and that they match the trainer/s’ preferred note format.
* The trainer/s will need to monitor the atmosphere in the training room, and use energizers when a change of pace or in energy levels is required.

***The active learning approach***

The design of the module is informed by the active learning approach and trainer/s of this workshop might want to refer to the AuthorAID training of trainers toolkit, which provides more detail on what active learning looks like in practice.

Active learning is an approach, rather than a fixed set of activities. It can include any activity that encourages learners to take an active, engaged part in the learning process, such as: group discussions, participatory presentations and problem-solving. It involves providing opportunities for learners to meaningfully talk and listen, read, write and reflect on the ideas being studied. This is in contrast to more traditional methods of teaching such as an instructor trying to ‘transmit’ knowledge to learners as they sit and listen.

It concerns itself with “creating an environment where students can take charge of their learning, see relevance in it and engage in it, instead of having information just delivered to them”[[1]](#footnote-1)

From time to time, certain individuals and/or groups of participants can dominate workshop discussions and activities. It is the trainer/s’ responsibility to be pro-active in managing these types of situations. Strategies can be adopted by trainer/s to ensure that there is equal participation by both women and men, as well as by participants of differing levels of seniority. It is recommended that when trainer/s take questions and/or comments from the full-group, that female-first contributions are prioritized, particularly at the start of the workshop. In addition, trainer/s should focus on the whole room, and maintain as much balance as possible, with respect to gender and seniority of the participants posing questions and/or making contributions. Also keeping questions and answers short will allow more questions to be asked during a given question and answer session, allowing a greater balance in the questions asked. For more background and the research behind these strategies, the trainer/s might want to read the Oxfam blog here: [www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/how-to-stop-men-asking-all-the-questions-in-seminars-its-really-easy/](http://www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/how-to-stop-men-asking-all-the-questions-in-seminars-its-really-easy/)

***The training room***

The trainer/s together with the workshop administrator need to ensure that a suitable training room and layout is organized in advance of the workshop. If possible, the room layout should be one that facilitates interaction.

It is recommended that, for the smooth and successful delivery of the workshop, the following training room and layout arrangements be made:

* Small, moveable tables are sourced, comfortably sitting up to four participants (for example if a total of 15 participants, four tables are required).
* Two small extra tables are provided: one to house the laptop and projector and one for the trainers’ workshop materials.
* Light, movable chairs are sourced, enough for each participant and two as spare.
* Find a training room, with wall space on which flipcharts can be attached.
* Identify a blank wall to act as a screen if no screen for the projector is available at the training venue.
* Remove any raised platform or stage at the head of the room, it is not required.

***Workshop stationary and resources***

Please make sure the following are available:

* Stapler
* Sticky notes (or post-it notes) of three different colours
* At least two sets of flipchart paper pads and two flipchart stands
* Five sets of colour marker pens
* Projector and screen
* Computer to connect to the projector (in case the trainer/s will not be using their own laptop computer)
* A few flash drives
* Optionally, a chalkboard and chalk or a whiteboard (in this case, make sure the whiteboard markers are different from the markers used for flipcharts as the latter kind could have permanent ink!)

1. A. Walsh and P. Inala, *Active Learning Techniques for Librarians: Practical Examples* (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)