

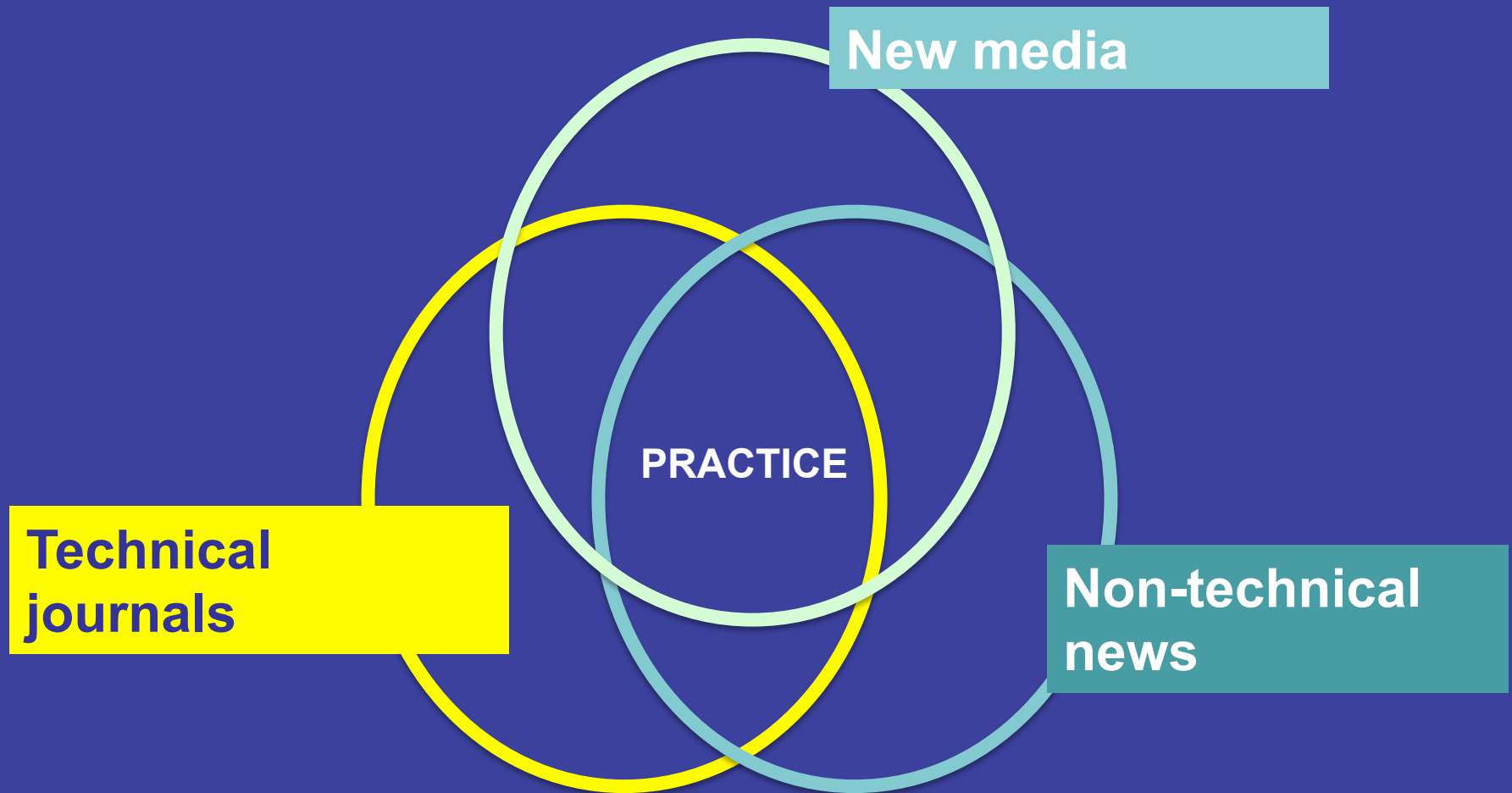
Tips for writing

Simon Collins
HIV i-Base

Pro's and con's of writing a review or article or blog (or tweet)

- Pro's – it can structure your views, your opinions can reach a wider audience, you may have a good impact
- Con's – need to make sense, you may be misunderstood, requires time and a few skills, it can be difficult

Approaches to writing



Introduction: non-technical writing

- Define your reader.
- Community writing, especially about health, needs to focus on what you want to say.
- Target reading age: 12 years.
- Key points at the start and the end can help keep your focus.

Patient info

Aim to be:

- Clear
- Concise
- Accurate
- Relevant
- Up-to-date. Include a date.

Chose each word, sentence and paragraph to explain the information.

When more than one option is possible, explain the differences.

Patient info

Aim to:

- State clearly when something is not known.
- Facts can be more helpful than general statements.
- Quantify adjectives.
 - Instead of 'some people' or 'most people' specify a percentage or number.
 - Instead of 'soon' give this in hours/days/weeks/years etc.
 - If referring to high or low, quantify this and include a reference range.

Non-technical language

- Assume no medical training.
- Assume low literacy.
- Assume English is a second language.
- It is more complicated to follow the meaning of a sentence, especially when the information is important, if the writer uses a style – possibly impressive and literate in other circumstances – that uses 30, 40, 50 or more words, with many qualifying ideas.
- Tabloid newspapers are written very carefully.

Words and sentences

- The simpler the better.
- Use words with 1-2 syllables rather than longer words.
- Use short sentences. Aim for 10-12 words. Short sentences make lively text.
- Rarely need dashes semi-colons and colons or exclamation marks! (– or ; or : or !)

Paragraphs

- Use short paragraphs.
- Ideally 1-3 sentences per paragraph.
- Each paragraph to make one clear point.
- Use short sentences.

Space

- Include space between paragraphs ... so a reader can breathe.
- Include a balance of space on every page.

Direct language

- Use the active rather than passive tense.
- If technical terms are important, explain them in non technical language.
- Include a glossary.
- Personal stories can make the information much more real.

Layout

- Use larger heading and short subheadings to direct the reader.
- Use an introduction paragraph in a larger typeface or bold type.
- Text size should ideally be 12 point (12 pt).
- Leave space between lines with an additional half space between paragraphs.

Layout

- Leave space (no more than 75% text).
- Use graphs and tables.
- Use bullet lists.
- Include summary points for conclusions.
- Remember contrast
- Include pictures!



Thanks

simon.collins@i-base.org.uk

www.i-base.info

www.ukcab.net