

COMMENTARY GUIDELINES

STEP #1 MOTIVATION & INSPIRATION

HERE ARE SOME REASONS FOR WHY YOU MIGHT WANT TO WRITE A COMMENTARY (BLOG):

- To provide expert comment on a major development or news event;
- To provide an accessible and engaging 'way in' to a bigger piece of research;
- To give a quick round-up or highlights after a key conference or event;
- To say something that hasn't yet been said/to provide new ideas;
- To answer a question that our target audiences want an answer to;
- To provoke and invite debate.

Formats that work well include:

- Lists – e.g. *'Five ways to ensure a successful outcome at Addis'*
- Mythbusting – e.g. *'Five myths about governance and development'*
- Lessons learned – e.g. *'When aid goes wrong: a lesson from Pakistan on why we can't ignore markets'*
- How-tos – e.g. *'How to measure the impact of your events'*
- Quick post-event debriefs – e.g. *'Our verdict on the Lima climate talks'*
- Explainers/arguments – e.g. *'Why migration should be a priority for development'*
- Addressing people or organisations directly – e.g. *'Dear Mr O'Brien: a letter of advice to the UN's new Emergency Relief Coordinator'*

STEP #2 PLANNING

KEY QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO ANSWER ABOUT YOUR COMMENTARY:

1. What is the question that this commentary answers?
2. What's your key message?
3. How does this commentary add value to the discussion? What is unique about its angle or approach? In short, why should we publish this?

Once you begin the process of developing a commentary piece, you can consult ALNAP's communications team - they can help you:

- Shape the message to make sure it resonates with your target audiences
- Edit, plan, and structure the commentary
- Plan the best time/way to distribute the commentary

STEP #3 WRITING

FOR THOSE MORE ACCUSTOMED TO WRITING RESEARCH PAPERS, HERE ARE A FEW GUIDELINES FOR WRITING IMPACTFUL, ACCESSIBLE COMMENTARY PIECES:

- ✔ Make your key argument clear in the first paragraph – give your reader a reason to continue reading!
- ✔ Make it relevant. Refer to recent news events, contentious debates or major developments in your field. The intro should answer the reader's subconscious question: 'why am I reading this now?'
- ✔ Write in the first person. Refer to your work, your research, your job, your experiences where relevant - readers want to know where you're coming from
- ✔ Keep the tone conversational, but don't 'dumb down' – your target reader is intelligent and engaged, but possibly new to your specialist subject
- ✔ Write in short, concise sentences, use short paragraphs and break up the text with subheadings where possible
- ✔ Avoid jargon and spell out any acronyms the first time you use them
- ✔ Include facts and statistics, where relevant
- ✔ Link to further information – tell readers where they can get more background info or follow the latest developments on the issue
- ✔ Include photos, infographics and videos if possible
- ✔ Keep it short – 500-700 words is ideal (maximum 850 words)