

Case Study: From Academia to Practice

Purchasing and applying the standards

The Managing Editor purchased the ISO 24495-1:2023 Plain language Part 1: Governing principles and guidelines in June 2023. She purchased the ISO 24495-2:2025 Plain language Part 2: Legal communication in August 2025. This series of forensic mental health plain language summaries was started using Part 1 for guidance and continues to follow the guidance of Parts 1 and 2. She will purchase the ISO 24495-3 Plain language Part 3: Science writing as soon as it is released to provide further guidance.

What was the problem or issue we tackled?

The St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton Forensic Psychiatry Service/Division of Forensic Psychiatry at McMaster University (together referred to as the Forensic Psychiatry Institute) in Ontario, Canada, has a long history of research and knowledge translation. When the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, the team decided to launch an online lecture series to continue their knowledge translation work.

While the weekly [International Forensic Psychiatry Lecture Series](#) is successful, not everybody around the globe can attend the live webinars. Some people working at or interested in the intersection of mental health and the law have difficulty committing a full hour for a lecture, either live or recorded. To address each of these anecdotal concerns, the team received, we wanted something that could provide this valuable information faster and easier to a wider audience.

How did we gather information for the solution?

Having run for more than five years now, the lecture series attracted an average of about 250 attendees from 77 countries in 2024, with 41 speakers providing 36 hours of content in 2024. This told us that the team was inviting internationally respected leaders in mental health and the law, who were in high demand.

After every lecture, the Knowledge Translation Specialist sends attendees a survey to provide feedback, with an average satisfaction score of 4.5 out of 5. The feedback from the survey not only helps identify and improve future lectures, but it was also used to inform the creation of [From Academia to Practice: Why It Matters — Plain Language Summaries in Forensic Psychiatry](#), which was launched in January 2025.

What was the scope of our project?

We wanted to build on the success of the lecture series and increase the reach of the lecturers' expertise. As the name of the series suggests, we wanted to move research evidence into practice more quickly by focusing on why it matters.

Using existing lecture content, we write plain language summaries to save time and reduce cognitive load for people working at or interested in the intersection of mental

health and the law. Instead of committing an hour for a lecture, readers only need about three to four minutes to read each summary.

The weekly plain language summaries take the form of a blog.

While lecturers can write their own summaries, almost all have asked that the team prepare the summary for them to edit and approve. All the lecturers so far have agreed to take part in the series, most calling it a great idea.

How did we plan this project?

The Knowledge Translation Specialist at the Forensic Psychiatry Institute proposed the idea for the series based on the feedback she received on the lecture series. She is the lead on the lecture series and continues to receive this feedback from attendees' comments during the live lecture, the post-lecture surveys, and casual discussions with lecturers and others in forensic mental health.

The Head of Forensic Service and Academic Lead at the Forensic Psychiatry Institute accepted her proposal. He was looking for an alternative to the *International Journal of Risk and Recovery*, which had become unmanageable because of difficulties finding authors and reviewers.

He invited the Managing Editor of the journal — who is also a plain language specialist — to take the lead on this project.

The three met to discuss the scope of the project, the process for developing and approving the plain language summaries, and how the summaries would be presented on the website and promoted.

The Knowledge Translation Specialist asks each lecturer's permission to take part in the blog series and forwards the PowerPoint presentation to the Managing Editor.

The Managing Editor planned to write each of the weekly summaries by reviewing the slides and watching the lecture recording. However, the weekly format proved too much of a time commitment, so other plain language specialists familiar with forensic mental health were contracted to help. The Managing Editor edits all blog posts and works with lecturers to fine-tune the text and approve it and the accompanying image.

The Managing Editor also posts the summaries, writes and schedules LinkedIn posts, and creates the monthly electronic newsletter.

How did we apply the plain language principles?

Principle 1: Relevant

Like the lecture series, the blog series' target audience is people working at or interested in the intersection of mental health and the law. They may not be academics, and they may not have expertise in the area in general or any specific aspect of it.

Lecture survey responses told us that attendees valued the practical applications and policy implications that lecturers shared from their experience and research. These are the focus of each blog post.

Website traffic, social media promotion, and email marketing statistics for the blog are used to confirm whether we were providing relevant content that resonated with our target audience and in a format they would use.

For readers who want more information, links are provided for related content (for example, a research paper) and the recording of the lecture.

Principle 2: Findable

From Academia to Practice is prominently displayed on the [Forensic Psychiatry Institute's website](#), with a banner ad, a first-level menu item, and an information box. Website visitors looking for the lecture series, annual conference, or other programs easily see From Academia to Practice.

Each new summary is promoted on [the institute's LinkedIn page](#). Knowing that people's attention is drawn to a person's eyes, each post includes a picture of the lecturer. Appropriate hashtags are used for the topic of the blog.

A monthly electronic newsletter is emailed with highlights of the month's summaries and other news from the institute, including the lecture series. Because the institute was phasing out the *International Journal of Risk and Recovery*, an email was sent to the journal subscribers, informing them of the change from a journal to a plain language summary series. This gave them the option to opt out of the distribution list. This puts the blogs directly in their email inbox.

Each blog post has descriptive titles and headings, and each page is optimized for search engines. The content also meets the requirements set out by the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

The lead of each post highlights the practical application, policy implication, or both from the lecture, so readers understand the scope and purpose of the summary.

Principle 3: Understandable

Almost all summaries are written by plain language specialists. The Managing Editor reviews all content and works with lecturers to finalize the text and accompanying image.

Plain language techniques (for example, clear and concise paragraphs and sentences, familiar words) are used to help with understanding. When medical or legal jargon cannot be avoided, it is explained on the first reference. Terms are used consistently.

While most graphics are decorative, some provide simple flowcharts and checklists to clarify the content.

Principle 4: Usable

While it is not possible to confirm whether this project is reducing the time research evidence takes to become routine practice, we are using website, social media, and email marketing statistics as proxies. First-year statistics are provided in the next section.

A readership survey is being planned in 2026.

What outcomes did we achieve?

The Forensic Psychiatry Institute website has experienced growth in visitors this past year, with From Academia to Practice being a significant new contributor.

The 32 pages in From Academia to Practice: Why It Matters had 21,433 pageviews in the first year of the series (2025). The plain language summary for Neither Gangs nor Stalking: A Review of “Gang Stalking” Allegations in the U.S. Federal Court System was the most-viewed webpage in 2025, nearly doubling the next most-viewed page (lecture recordings).

The 39 LinkedIn posts for From Academia to Practice had 30,985 impressions (views) (average 794 per post) and 1,996 post engagements (that is, reactions, clicks, shares, and comments) (average 51 per post) for a 6.4 per cent engagement rate (engagement divided by impressions). Benchmarks for non-profit, health, and academic publishing range from 4.7 per cent to 6.5 per cent.

The email open rate of 25.85 per cent is at the high end of the 19.3 per cent to 26.6 per cent benchmarks for non-profit, health, and academic publishing sectors. Higher open rates occur when the subject line is directly relevant to the audience’s work or research areas. Two subject lines were written for several emails, with MailChimp sending 100 of each subject line to a sample of the distribution list. The subject line with the most opens is used for the rest of the distribution list.

The click-through rate of 4.89 per cent is better than the 2.1 per cent to 3.0 per cent benchmarks. Click-through rates indicate how well the email’s content was of interest to subscribers, who click on the links.

However, the click-to-open rate is a better indicator as it shows the engagement (clicks) of only subscribers who opened the email and not all emails sent. Our click-to-open rate was 18.9 per cent, which is significantly better than the 13 per cent benchmarks.