

Writing a Policy Brief: Things to Consider



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What is a policy brief?



- Briefing note for a senior official or executive
- A short document that presents findings and recommendations
- A means of exploring an issue and reporting on research
- A means of providing policy advice

Format of a Policy Brief



- A stand alone document
- Deals with a single topic
- Contains all the relevant information in concise form
- No more than 2-4 pages

Who is the Reader?



- Is this an internal or external document?
- How knowledgeable is the reader?
- How can I catch their attention?
(specific messages for decision makers, media, public)
- Where will the brief appear? (Format)

Content



- Focus on a single topic
- Define the objective/purpose
- Identify key points
- Convey only essential information
- Provide suggested “talking points” if a briefing note

Outline for a Briefing Note



- Issue
- (Suggested speaking points)
- Background
- Current Status
- Key Considerations
- Options
- Conclusions/Recommendations

Questions to Ask



- Why am I writing this?
- Who am I writing it for?
- What does he/she need to know?
- What points to cover?
- How to present the material.

Outline for a Public Brief



- Executive Summary (prepare last)
- Introduction/Issue
- Approaches and Results
- Conclusion
- Implications and Recommendations

Purpose of the Executive Summary



- Provide a brief overview of the issue
- Identify the key issue
- Encourage readers to read more
- Precedes the brief
- Exercise care and discipline when writing

Introduction



- Explains the significance of the issue
- Describes the research objective or position taken
- Provides an overview of findings and conclusions
- Engages the reader

Approaches and Results



- Describe the approach taken to the issue
- Summarize the facts
- Describe any research or analysis
- Advocate by outlining opportunities or advantages
- Move from general to specific

Conclusion



- Base conclusions on evidence
- Be clear: avoid weasel-words
- Ensure ideas are balanced and defensible
- Summarize final position

Implications and Recommendations



- Implications are softer than recommendations and leave some flexibility regarding final position
- Implications are what could happen; Recommendations are what should happen
- Recommendations
 - Describe what should happen next
 - Outline precise steps in sequence
 - Ensure recommendations are manageable and feasible.

Climate Change-An Example



- What is the issue?
- What are the causes? (evidence/debate)
- What are the effects?
- Risk Factors (short/long term)
- Solutions (evidence/options)
- Costs
- Implications
- Recommendations

Format-Titles and Subtitles



- Use titles and subtitle to break up text
- Titles should ideally contain action word
- Questions can arouse interest

Format-Layout



- Use charts, graphs and photos—judiciously
- Consider use of sidebars with excerpts from the text to catch interest or summarize a point
- Highlight key sentences
- “Bullets” of key points

Review



- Tighten the language—check spelling and grammar
- Eliminate repetition
- Review for jargon and acronyms
- Check arguments, proof and persuasion
- Draft Executive Summary

With thanks to IDRC, Ottawa, Canada, “Toolkit for Resources: How to Write a Policy Brief

Thank You



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