

WRITING POLICY BRIEFS WORKSHOP

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WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

- Understand the purpose and audience of a policy brief
- Learn the key components of an effective policy brief
- Develop skills in concise and persuasive writing
- Practice structuring and drafting policy briefs

WORKSHOP AGENDA

- 1. Introduction to policy briefs (20 min)
- 2. Hands-on writing exercises (40 min)
- 3. Refinement and Q&A (30 min)

WHAT IS A POLICY BRIEF?

- A concise document presenting a problem, evidence, and policy recommendations
- Aims to inform and influence decision-makers
- Must be accessible, clear, and actionable
 - Short, focused on practical solutions
 - Engaging style for non-specialist readers

WHY WRITE A POLICY BRIEF?

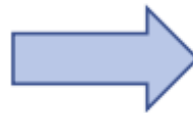
- Because you want policies or programs to change
- To shorten something so that a busy person will read it
- To simplify something for a non-scientific audience
- To take the important parts out of something that is long and detailed

POLICY BRIEF VS. ACADEMIC PAPER

- a policy brief prioritizes immediate action based on evidence, while an academic paper prioritizes scholarly exploration of a topic
- In academic writing, you have to convince the reader that your **methods merit the result**. In policy-brief writing, you have to convince the reader that the **results merits their attention**

Academic Writing

- Motivation
- Data
- Methods
- Findings
- Discussion



Policy Brief Writing

- Motivation
- Data
- Methods
- **Findings**
- **Discussion/Implications**

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?

- Policymakers, regulatory bodies
- Industry leaders, NGOs, media
- General public and journalists
- Brief must be clear and concise for impact

KEY COMPONENTS OF A POLICY BRIEF

- Title
- Executive Summary (max. 1/2 page)
- Introduction
 - Policy background and other context
- Problem Statement
- Findings (short)
 - Organized to answer your questions
 - Data/methods to provide context
- Policy Options & Recommendations
- Conclusion & References (few!)



TEMPLATE

... STRUCTURE

Executive Summary: Begin every policy brief with a summary or Bottom Line Up Front (“BLUF”) statement of the problem you are addressing and your recommendation on how best to solve it.

TIP: Avoid summarizing any background information here. Your introduction should be concise and focused exclusively on the problem and solution - you will be able to go into your research in the following section.

Background: Provide a concise summary of the issue with relevant historical and/or technical context. What is the current policy, how well is it working, what are the alternative solutions, and how does each option compare with the others?

TIP: If you are using technical data, do not walk the reader through your calculations or process. Instead, include just the findings in your writing or in a table if you want to present a large set of numbers.

Recommendations: Use your qualitative and quantitative findings to explain which of the above options is the best solution to the problem.

Implementation: Share execution steps of your recommended policy. Outline any significant risks, costs, timing barriers, and political implications.

TIP: You can share a timeline on the general implementation of each phase of your recommendation to help your reader quickly and easily understand how long it will take to see results.

Conclusion: What is the big picture? Reinforce the importance, urgency, and stakes of your policy. Explain consequences if your reader does or does not implement your policy or recommend it to their boss.

EXAMPLE TOPICS

- Reducing the carbon footprint of Machine Learning
- Ethical and privacy concerns of AI for mental health support
- Bias in AI-powered hiring systems
- Regulating AI-generated art and copyright issues
- Standardizing AI model robustness against adversarial attacks
- ...

EXAMPLE: AI MODEL ROBUSTNESS AGAINST ADVERSARIAL ATTACKS

- Introduction:
 - Adversarial attacks pose a significant threat to AI reliability, especially in security-sensitive domains like healthcare, finance, and autonomous systems.
 - Current AI development lacks uniform guidelines for robustness testing, leading to inconsistent protection measures across industries.
- Findings:
 - Lack of mandatory adversarial robustness testing in AI deployment.
 - AI systems can be easily manipulated, risking security breaches and misinformation.
 - Existing industry practices focus on performance optimization rather than resilience to attacks.
- Data/Methods to Provide Context
 - Research shows adversarial attacks reduce AI accuracy by up to 80% in some models.
 - Case study: Autonomous vehicles misclassifying stop signs due to small visual perturbations.
 - Comparative analysis of AI security standards in different countries.
- Policy Options & Recommendations
 1. Establish AI security standards with mandatory adversarial testing.
 2. Require AI companies to disclose robustness evaluations in high-risk applications.
 3. Develop a certification program for AI security compliance.
- Conclusion: Standardized security testing will enhance AI reliability, ensuring safer and more trustworthy AI applications.

EXERCISE 1: WRITING A PROBLEM STATEMENT

- Choose a relevant policy issue
- Write a 2-3 sentence problem statement
- Share and receive feedback in small groups

A strong problem statement is **specific, evidence-based, and directly linked to solutions**

EXERCISE 2: DEVELOPING POLICY OPTIONS

- Select one of the problem statements from the group
- Identify two policy options
 - List two possible solutions to address the problem.
- Compare strengths & weaknesses
 - Briefly note one advantage and one challenge for each option.
- Choose a recommendation
 - Select the best option and justify it in one sentence.

Keep responses **concise and actionable, focusing on feasibility and impact.**

TIPS FOR WRITING AN EFFECTIVE POLICY BRIEF

- Know your audience
- Be accurate but simple:
 - Be concise and avoid jargon
 - Sentences should be short (1-2 lines).
 - Words should be short (1-3 syllables).
- Use a clear structure (headings, bullet points)
- Support arguments with evidence
- Make it visually appealing (use charts, infographics)
- Write persuasively with actionable recommendations

USING FIGURES AND TABLES

✓ **Dos:**

- Use relevant, clear, simple visuals that enhance understanding.
- Label tables and figures correctly and concisely.
- Highlight key takeaways with bold or captions.
- Ensure data is accurate and sourced properly.

✗ **Don'ts:**

- Avoid overloading with too much data.
- Don't use complex or cluttered visuals.
- Don't include figures without explanation.
- Avoid unreadable small text or unclear legends.

HOW TO GET YOUR BRIEF NOTICED?

- Leverage social media
 - Share key insights on LinkedIn, Twitter, and blogs.
- Engage help from your university
 - Contact with journalists
 - Send press releases or op-eds to relevant media outlets.
- Host briefing events
 - Present findings to policymakers and stakeholders.
- Partner with influencers
 - Collaborate with experts and advocacy groups.
- Direct outreach
 - Email policymakers and follow up with meetings.

PREPARING FOR A MEDIA INTERVIEW

- Prepare a briefing document with the 1-3 key points you want to convey/would like to see in an article
- Brainstorm reporter questions and how you'd respond
 - Turn 'difficult' questions back to the topic
- Practice the interview with a colleague
 - For TV and radio, it's especially important to have concise answers since they may only use 30-45 seconds of a 5-10 minute interview.

You will never regret practicing before an interview, especially if it's a challenging topic or interviewer.

THANK YOU!