

How to write a policy brief



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Policy briefs are a key tool to present research and recommendations to a non-specialized audience. They serve as a vehicle for providing evidence-based policy advice to help readers make informed decisions.

A strong policy brief distills research findings in plain language and draws clear links to policy initiatives. The best policy briefs are clear and concise stand-alone documents that focus on a single topic.

[Take a look at policy briefs in IDRC's digital library](#)

Planning your policy brief

Purpose, audience, content, and structure are the vital elements of an influential policy brief.

Purpose
Audience
Content
Structure

Policy brief template

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to writing policy briefs because the topic and audience will shape each one. However, effective policy briefs tend to contain the same key elements and therefore have similar structures: an executive summary, an introduction, an overview of the research or problem, an examination of the findings, and a concluding section that explains the policy recommendations and implications of the research.

Review the elements of an effective structure (in detail below) before writing your policy brief. [Examples drawn from IDRC's GrOW policy briefs](#) are included throughout to help you gain a better understanding of layout and the content requirements of each section.

Executive summary

Introduction

Research overview

Discussion/analysis of research findings

Conclusion or recommendation

Designing your policy brief

A policy brief should be convincing and interesting to read. The design and presentation of your brief are important considerations and can help keep the reader engaged. Use compelling titles and headings, sidebars featuring interesting details, bulleted lists to summarize your points, and graphics such as charts and images.

Titles and headings

Sidebars

Lists

Graphics

Revising your policy brief

Once the policy brief has been drafted, reflect once again on its purpose, audience, content, and structure. Will your brief help to achieve your goals? Test it by trying to explain it in a twenty-second elevator pitch and assessing what information stands out. Revise the brief to make it as user-friendly as possible by removing jargon and statistics that make it less approachable. Ask a colleague with no prior knowledge of the issue to read the brief and provide feedback. What points do they draw from it, and do they match your intentions?

Using your policy brief

A good policy brief can play double duty by standing on its own or as an effective accompaniment to a presentation. Tailor any accompanying visual presentation to your brief by focusing only on the key points and answering important questions. Your audience can refer to the document when needed, so avoid repeating all of the brief's text in your presentation. When distributing your policy brief, it is often a good idea to develop a short question-and-answer package and a section for further reading.

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