

How to communicate research through policy briefs

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Do research publications contribute to dealing with global challenges?

→ *Answers to global policy challenges are often known, but the information is hard to read, inaccessible, unusable, or unavailable.*

[London School of Economics and Political Science \(LSE\)](#) revealed that:

12% of medicine journal articles

82% of humanities journal articles

27% of natural sciences journal articles

32% of social sciences journal articles

were never cited

In the study "Which World Bank reports are widely read?" (World Bank, 2014), using information on downloads and citations, there was evidence that **31% of policy reports had never been downloaded, and 87% were never cited.**

WE NEED TO DO BETTER

Does media do better?

US policymakers find newspaper reports as useful as classified information (both >60%).
Op-eds are influential because of where they are published and their short length.

UK policymakers read

- Internal briefings (79%)
- Media reports of academic outputs (61%)
- Social media/university websites (51% combined).

Those sources are not objective research.

Policymakers need more scholarly work.

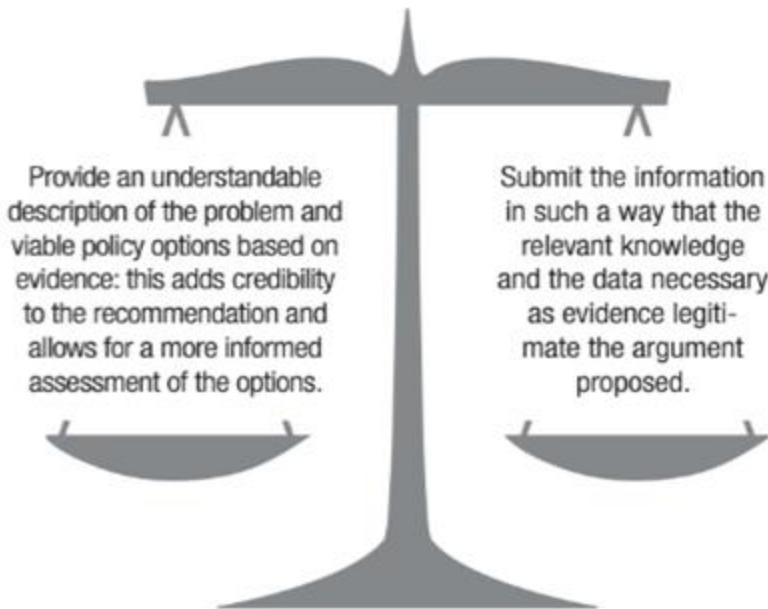
Yet, in plain language and to keep things short.

SOLUTION = policy briefs.

How can policy briefs help?

Policy Briefs

- Provide summaries of research;
- Are easy for readers to understand;
- Hold policy recommendations;



Source: CIPPEC. ["How to Communicate Research for Policy Influence."](#) Policy briefs.

Blogs, policy briefs, policy studies, research papers... What are the differences?

	Blog	Policy Brief	Policy Study	Research Paper
Audience	Community of readers	Informed and non-specialist audience, like journalists, NGO's and decision makers	Expert audience and policy specialists	Researchers, academics, policy makers
Focus	Audience-driven, promoting self-expression	Audience-driven, to design a specific policy message and inform or persuade targeted stakeholders	Issue-driven, detailed research and analysis on policy issues	Issue-driven, includes research on academic issues
Context of use	Written to share research, build social networks, document professional/personal growth	Used for advocacy, to start the dialogue on a topic, to interest non-specialist audiences and to make connections to the larger study	Impact how experts thinks about a policy challenge and inform briefs	Presenting academic research and scientific discovery, policy development, problem-solving, and creating public awareness
Methodology	Present information in a conventional style	Include the key findings from the main research	Based on evidence which is collected by research	Based on the authors' original research and description of the study design
Language use	Informal and accessible	Clear, simple and straightforward	Technical and specific	Academic and formal
Length	1-2 pages	2-8 pages	35-60 pages	1-60 pages

Advocacy or objective?

- **Advocacy:** Provide an argument for a particular issue
- **Objective:** Provides neutral essential information on a particular topic



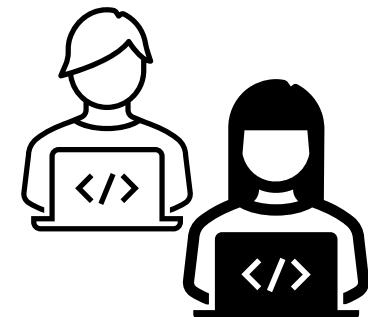
Write your policy brief

The [United Nations](#) makes some recommendations, which can be summarised as follows.

- Be ACTIVE: Use the active rather than the passive voice – to show who is responsible;
- Be DIRECT: State facts and ideas directly (with references) and use concrete rather than abstract words;
- Be DYNAMIC: Use verbs rather than nouns, wherever possible, to be action-oriented;
- Be DIGESTIBLE: Keep phrases as short as possible and present one idea per paragraph;
- Be SELECTIVE: Use appropriate language for your audience and purpose.
- Be INCLUSIVE: Use disability, gender and minorities inclusive language.

We recommend the following weight of sections while writing policy briefs;

- Introduction with policy-relevant issue (20%).
- Core with main argument in non-academic format (50%).
- Conclusion and policy advice (30%).



Learning platform

Toolkit

 Maastricht University

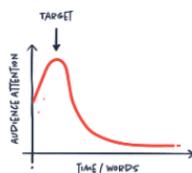
Policy Brief Toolkit

Problem Statement

The world faces various policy problems, but what if the [answers to these problems already exist and have not been read yet?](#) Answers to global policy challenges are often known, but the information is hard to read, inaccessible, unusable, or unavailable. [London School of Economics and Political Science \(LSE\)](#) developed an interesting blog highlighting how academic papers are rarely cited or read by reviewing the available data. They found that the non-citation rates differ across fields and that 12% of medicine, 82% of humanities, 27% of natural sciences, and 32% of social sciences articles were never cited.

[The World Bank](#) has raised an important question: Is anyone reading these reports? In the study "Which World Bank reports are widely read?" (World Bank, 2014), using information on downloads and citations, there was evidence that 31% of policy reports had never been downloaded, and 87% were never cited.

Based on these issues, it is important to reconsider our strategies for getting our results across. We need to be flexible and consider new mediums for sharing information that can help us reach out to wider audiences.



Source: <https://www.ferdio.com/notebook/2019/8/1/design-for-short-attention-span>

[Exit Course](#)

Navigation icons: <<, <, ^, >, >>

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Course timeline

Session 1: 25 August 2025,

Homework: Write a policy brief based on a research you completed, and email that to vis@merit.unu.edu by Wednesday 27 August midnight.

Peer review

Wednesday midnight we will send you policy briefs to review, with the review grid as guideline. We expect all to review 2-3 policy briefs. Please be critical and constructive in your review.

Session 2: 29 August 2025

Discuss issues/decisions in peer groups, link with visuals to use.

Information on dissemination strategies

Invitation to join the team teaching your students

Policy Brief Writing – Instructions

Editorial Pictures included in the text

References at the end

You can be creative with the design

Submit a PDF document

Maximum Word Count: The optimal word number for the policy briefs is 1,000 words, but the total should not exceed 1,500 words, excluding references.

Required Sections:

- Highlights (in bullet points),
- Background,
- Core: two or three subheadings
- Key Policy Changes and Recommendations: The recommendations should be numbered, each with a bolded subhead followed by a short paragraph. There are no specific restrictions on the sizes of these sections, but they should be concise and direct to keep the text to a minimum.

Picture Use / Visuals: One figure or picture recommended. Double check that the visual (in case you do not create it yourself) is open access – so our use is allowed. Generally, any visuals should support the clarity and impact of the policy brief without overwhelming the text.

Bio / One-Line Introduction for Supervisor and Student: one-line introduction for both the student (university, degree/programme) and supervisor (if the brief is based, for example, in a thesis)

Final Peer Review Guidelines



Name Peer reviewer	
Name author	
Title Policy Brief	
Content	
Was the main aim of the policy brief clear	
Was the introduction appealing and did it invite to continue reading	
Was the main argument in the body of the policy brief clear	
Were there policy recommendations and did they link to the aim of the brief	
Format / Editing	
Was the structure of the brief balanced?	
Were there illustrations that assisted the story?	
Was the writing style simple	
Other	
Anything else you wish to add	