

Key Elements of your Policy Brief

Your policy brief needs to strike a balance between a convincing problem description, which highlights the relevance of the policy issue and an analytical, evidence-driven section explaining policy options for tackling the issue, and your recommendations for tackling the issue. Your policy brief should feature five key elements:

1. **Problem and policy-oriented:** A policy brief is practical and action-oriented. Its content must focus on the problem and centred on the policy and/or political dimensions of the issue, as well as the practical solutions that can be offered based on evidence.
2. **Analysis-driven:** Building on facts and evidence, a policy brief demonstrates analytical thinking on the range of possible solutions for the given problem. The arguments put forward for and against different options should be the result of a measured and balanced consideration of the possible solutions. They should take into account the impact and feasibility of the alternate policies in a variety of ways, one of which is by considering the potential costs and benefits of suggested policy options.
3. **Evidence-based:** Your policy briefs must be evidence-based in order to convince policymakers. For this, you need to provide and cite convincing examples such as data, comparisons, and effects of inactions or policies taken in other countries on this issue. If you do so, provide evidence from multiple reputable sources and cite these sources properly.
4. **Offers viable recommendations:** The goal of your policy brief is to persuade a decision-maker to address a specific issue and implement the policy that you have devised. You have to promote your ideas from your from the evidence. Your recommendations should take centre stage, but you should also show your brief's audience why those recommendations are provide the best option for tackling the issue (i.e. the recommendations should be driven by your evidence).
5. **Appealing layout:** A professional looking layout helps making a favourable impression on your target audience. The layout and polished look of your policy brief serves to catch the eye of your audience and draw them into reading it. It shows that your ideas and recommendations should be taken seriously. Paragraphs and sub-headings can make the structure clearly visible at first glance. Recommendations can be numbered or listed with bullet points. An easy to read graph can help to illustrate the major argument or trend. Subtle use of images might also be considered. Keep in mind that a well-designed layout reinforces the substance of your message and does not distract the reader from your arguments.

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What should go in your Policy Brief?

Title of Policy Brief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the issue; make title memorable by choosing a provocative or surprising title, so that it sticks in the reader’s mind • It is often best to communicate your key message and the need for change in the title
Executive summary or Key Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The executive summary aims to convince the reader further that the brief is worth reading • It is especially important for an audience that is short of time to clearly see the relevance and importance of the brief in reading the summary. Keep executive summary to just 1-3 statements • Instead of executive summary, some people use a ‘Key Messages’ section or text-box on the first page. This should not have more than 5 messages; in fact, just a list of 3-5 messages are ideal
Introduction (Context and Importance of Problem)	<p>The purpose of this element of the brief is to convince the target audience that a current and urgent problem exists which requires them to take action. The context and importance of the problem is both the introductory and first building block of the brief. As such, it usually includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear statement of the problem or issue in focus – what is the problem, how large is the problem? who is affected by the problem? why is the problem important? • A short overview of the root causes of the problem • A clear statement of the policy implications of the problem that clearly establishes the current importance and policy relevance of the issue
Critique of the policy options – present the options and discuss their impact (based on evidence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main part of your brief should provide a critical analysis of the potential policy options for tackling the issue – this is an evidence-driven section • Highlight the shortcomings of the current policy • Illustrate both the need to change and focus of where change needs to occur • Provide an overview of the potential policy options for tackling the issue and discuss their justification of why these options can address the issue
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the evidence in the preceding section, propose base 3-5 specific and feasible recommendations required to address the most pressing issues outlined at the beginning of your policy brief. • Your recommendation should make it clear in detail what policy-makers have to do to adopt your recommendations and why it is in their best interest to do so
Reference list	<p>At the end of the brief, include a list of references to the materials that you cited in the main text.</p>

-Sources: Global Debate and Public Policy Challenge (no date). *Writing Guidelines: Policy Brief*. <http://gdppc.idebate.org/content/writing-guidelines-policy-brief>

-Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) Network Coordinating Team (no date). *Guidelines for Writing a Policy Brief*. http://www.pep-net.org/sites/pep-net.org/files/typo3doc/pdf/CBMS_country_proj_profiles/Philippines/CBMS_forms/Guidelines_for_Writing_a_Policy_Brief.pdf