

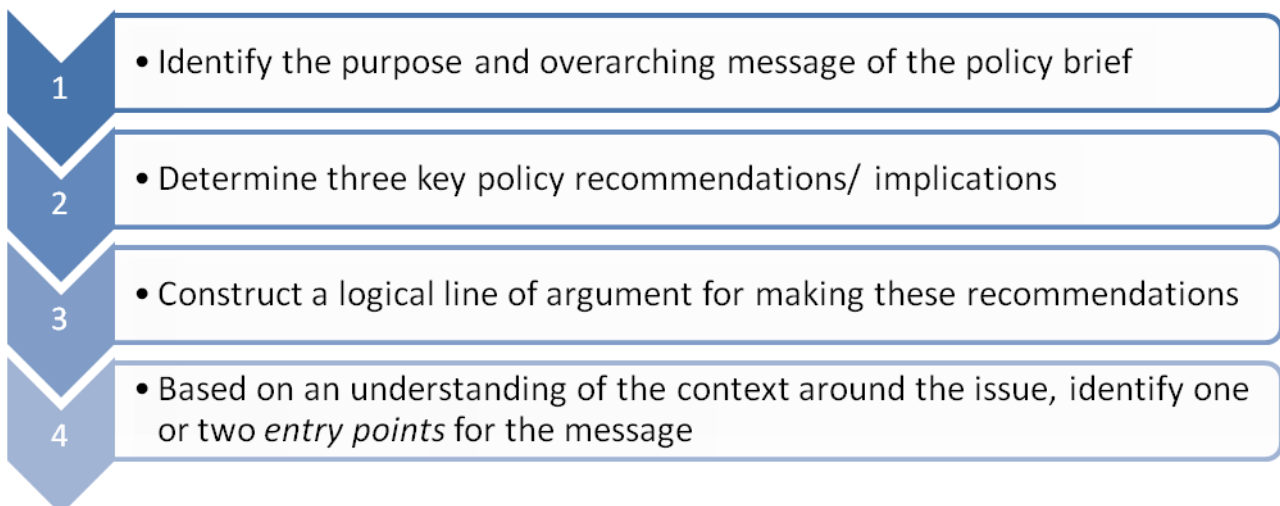
How to Write a Policy Brief

Policy briefs are concise, **standalone** documents focussing on a particular issue requiring policy attention. They can be particularly effective in bridging the research and policy divide. Typical policy briefs have four main functions: to explain and convey the urgency of the issue; to present policy recommendations or implications on the issue; to provide evidence to support the reasoning behind those recommendations; and to point the reader to additional resources on the issue.

Planning a policy brief

When planning a policy brief, there are several factors to keep in mind. The [RAPID Framework](#) provides a good set of questions to think through and considers the **political context, evidence, links and external factors**. These can help zero in on the targeted policy actors and processes.

After having a clear understanding of the policy environment in which you are working, you will need to plan both the content and format of your brief. To develop the main content elements, there are four main steps:



These elements will translate into different sections of the policy brief (see overleaf).

Writing Tips and Tricks

- Make it stick! (Heath 2007)
 - Simple
 - Unexpected
 - Concrete
 - Credible
 - Emotional
 - Stories
- Understand the audience
 - **Policy briefs are for decision makers and sometimes practitioners**, but not the general public nor academics.
 - Policy makers may not be experts on the issue, but they will likely have a basic understanding of the policy area.
- Tap into 'fashionable' ideas, concepts, paradigms and wordings when possible

Structure of a policy brief

Generally, policy briefs are four pages in length (around 2200 words, including references and tables). They are usually organised as follows:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Executive statement (10%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Includes a brief overview of all of the parts of a policy brief• Should be written last!
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction (10-15%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highlights the urgency of the issue using any entry points identified in Step 4 above• Gives a brief overview of the conclusions or the direction of the rest of the brief
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Methodology (5-10%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Designed to strengthen the credibility of the brief by explaining how the findings and recommendations were arrived at• Not always applicable or necessary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Results and conclusions (30%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Designed as an overview of the findings/facts• Constructed around the line(s) of argument behind the policy recommendations as identified in Step 3 above
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implications or Recommendations (30%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Based on Step 2 above, this is the most important part of the brief• Usually limited to three implications or recommendations• Recommendations, which are direct and clear suggestions for action, are preferred, but less direct implications may be more appropriate depending on the policy context
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• References and useful resources (10%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helps readers find out more on the issue if they require more information• Keep references to a minimum, but include seminal pieces of work on the issue

Format of a policy brief

In addition to having solid content, policy briefs should also be **visually engaging**. Common techniques employed to capture the reader's eye include the creative use of:

- Titles, standfirsts and headings
- Photographs
- Graphs and charts
- Text boxes
- Pull quotes
- Side bars

These elements can highlight key messages, ideas, facts and statistics. They are also a clever way of telling a bigger story than space may allow in the main body of the text. For example, a picture can make the situation more real and tangible by visually telling the story of why the issue is important. A graph can also help situate the topic in a wider context.