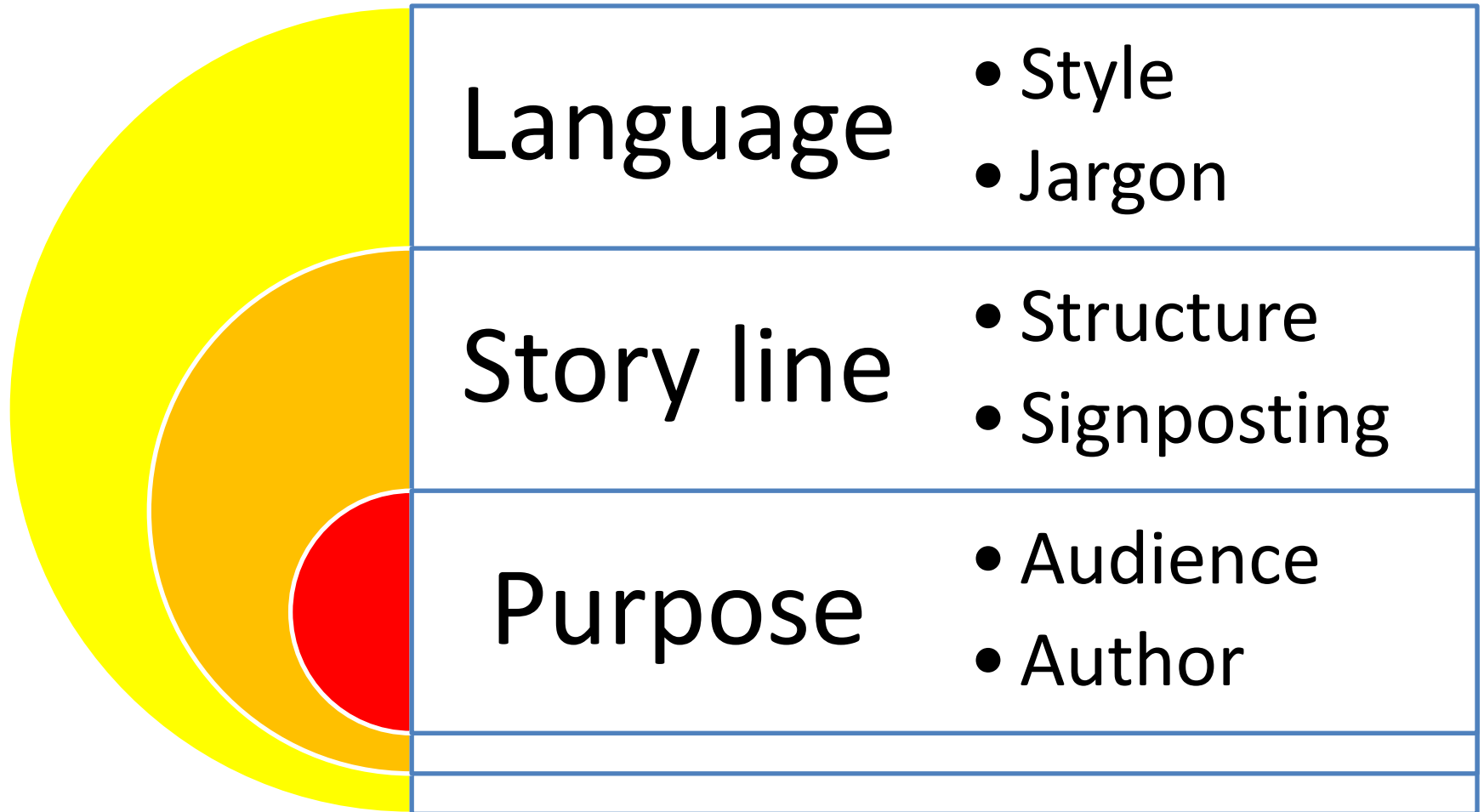


Writing well ... for policy makers

писане добре- escrivint bé - psaní dobře - skrive godt -
goed schrijven - kirjalikult hästi - kirjoittamalla hyvin - écrit
bien - Γράφοντας καλά - gut schreiben - כתיבה טובה - jól
írva - scríobh go maith - skrifaðu vel - scrivendo bene - よく
書く - rakstot labi - rašau gerai - gutt schreiwen - skriver
godt -dobre pisać - escrever bem- scris bine - хорошо
писать - písat' dobre - pisanje dobro - escribiendo así -
skriver bra - ysgrifennu'n dda

Translating the idea of writing well into practice



Briefs by definition have some common features

Policy actors are busy and do not have **time** to read full length academic papers. ...Thus policy briefs are an effective way of bringing important research to the attention of policy actors because **they can be read in a short amount of time**. Making research findings **easily digestible** increases the likelihood of research being read and acted upon. **Condensing findings** into policy briefs reduces the potential for important research to be lost because the research is in a format that policy actors do not have time to access.

... and some elements that depend on what they are for (author, reader, issue, timing)

1. Introducing or supporting ideas through powerful storytelling ... and **compelling anecdotes that give a personal angle** on policy decisions
2. **Promoting the credibility of the author** and his or her **sources**
3. Framing the message through **the lens of the policy maker's values, needs, and emotional sensibilities**
4. Keeping communication **concise** to promote further dialogue
5. Connecting to the audience through specific word choice that acknowledges readers' values, needs, and priorities
6. Avoiding insider **jargon**, such as highly technical terms or ... -specific acronyms that could cause confusion or distract from **a call to action**
7. Using inductive and deductive reasoning to craft powerful arguments
8. **Referencing** data and research that validate the connection between an idea and positive outcomes ...
9. Incorporating **visual components** (graphs, tables, images, or charts) to reinforce ideas, arguments, and calls to action

<https://bloomboard.com/microcredential/view/e90afc22-b76a-4b5d-a671-4d71d0f0cfcf>

The Observatory opts for non-normative briefs offering options not recommendations

A policy brief is short (7,000 words) and specifically designed to provide policy makers with evidence on a policy question or priority. A brief

- Brings together existing evidence in an **accessible format** and uses **1 page of key messages + a 2 page executive summary + a 20 page review** to give instant access to the main points and supporting detail
- **Tailors** the way evidence is identified and synthesised to **reflect the policy question and 'tell' a story**
- Uses **systematic , transparent methods** to give users confidence
- Is underpinned by a formal open **peer review** (for quality and independence)

OBS policy briefs provide evidence not policy advice. They do not seek to advocate a policy position or offer solutions. but to set out clearly what is known about an issue. They may outline evidence on different policy options but they do not promote a particular option or act as a manual for implementation.

Good writing is different depending on its aims ...

You need to make **explicit choices** about what you want the brief to achieve.

- Do you want to advocate a particular position?
- Is objectivity / being seen to be objective important?
- Is this about a single issue or single intervention?
- Do you want to build a long term relationship with the policy maker(s)?



Also ...Who will use the evidence and how complex it is matters to how you write it up

Different audiences

- Politicians
- Technocrats
- Generalist civil servants
- A wider public

- Regional or national
- International

- Health
- Other sectors

Different capacity / preferences

- Familiarity with the issues
- Knowledge of existing evidence
- Understanding of technical terms
- Capacity to handle different types of evidence

- Interest
- Attention span
- Style preferences (comparative / experiential)
- IT literacy

To write well you need to know what you want and also who your audience is and what they ...



It is useful to assume that ...

Policy makers

- Have limited time
- Are generalists rather than specialists
- Deal with multiple, competing issues
- Come with their own views and preferences

Policy makers value writing that is

- Short and accessible (in terms of language and look)
- Context specific
- Objective (with any limitations clear) and
- Linked to what they already know.

1. Create a strong **story line**

Introduction

Why is the issue important?

Why is the policy response relevant?

What questions will the brief answer?

Evidence

What is the evidence?

How does it link to the policy question?

What relevant experiences or lessons are there?

Policy implications

What works?

What are the implementation challenges?

Are there co-benefits or or unintended (negative) consequences?

What is the room for manoeuvre?

Terms of reference set out (and insist on) a clear narrative

Policy question / title: sub-title
What are the challenges for ...? A review of ...
What it is expected to cover
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Context and why the brief is importantWhat the specific policy issue isHow the evidence relates to itExpected overarching conclusion (see also findings and policy implications below)
Approach / methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Type of review(s) to be carried outSources of data and information (systematic reviews to be consulted/updated, search strategies / country case studies)Plans for boxes, tables, figures.
Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Expected limitations and any assumptions
Expected findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Main hypothesesThe evidence you expect to marshal to answer them <p>NB. Policy briefs are not intended to generate new evidence but to bring together what is already known to answer a specific question.</p>
Policy implications
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Policy impactsPolicy options (If the brief lends itself to generating options map out the expected options and linked evidence)
Links to other work
Review
Please
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Look at the reviewer's framework (attached) to ensure the brief as planned will meet series expectations.Outline any steps to ensure that the brief will be fully informed by the literature and will not 'miss' contentious issues.Note potential reviewers (from academia and policy making).
Authorship
.
Timelines
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Initial draftSecond draftReviewPublication.

Create a strong story line

2. Structure to guide the reader through the text

Beginning: what is the policy issue?

Middle: what do we know about it?

End: what are the options?

A template imposes structure, consistency (across briefs) and focus

Main brief – 20 pages (=7000 words excluding references)
The main brief is intended to 'rehearse' the evidence for those people who feed information into the policy making processing or advise politicians or policy makers, or draft legislation. It feeds into the key messages and executive summary and demonstrates a proper evidence base. The brief should broadly follow the headings below.
Introduction (1000)
Context: Why X (the broad area / issue) is an important challenge to policy makers (250 words maximum)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">This is a chance to define the context - what is the pressure on policy makers that makes the policy question relevant / important? So perhaps there are demands for efficiency, a more responsive system, industry pressures etc. etc. that create expectations.
The issue: Why policy makers are looking to Y (the policy brief issue) as a policy response (100 words maximum)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Here a very brief explanation of the area being looked at to explain the link between the subject of the brief and the contextual challenges.
The brief: What this policy brief addresses (300 words)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">A very short outline of what the brief does so the terms of reference compressed – setting out the main question and sub-questions.Overview of the approach – here please explain the way you are going to address the issue (perhaps drawing on an existing framework or a mix of models) and make clear what any key concepts mean (here key means ideas that the reader needs to understand – it may overlap with but is not the same as technical terms will still need to be defined but are dealt with separately)
The evidence (5000 words maximum)
This is where the collected evidence should be presented and discussed
Please agree with the editor (and in light of the ToR) a set of sub-headings to outline the areas you will address
The headings should directly relate to the approach or framework you have outlined in the introduction (what does this policy brief address) and capture the policy relevant dimensions. These may be country experience, issues around resources, regulation or governance – it will depend on the brief and your discussion with the editor.
It will be important to
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Signal clearly what is being looked at – section by section or idea by ideaRelate the evidence back to the original policy questionSynthesize so far as is possible experience / lessons from different settingsAcknowledge explicitly any gaps or limitations in the evidence
It will also be important to be readable and visually interesting so please use
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Stand-alone text boxes for illustrative / interesting examples of specific countries or issuesTables to summarize the evidence across domains
Policy implications (1000 words maximum)
The policy implications crystallize the key aspects of the evidence that directly impact or shape a policy maker's room for manoeuvre. They draw on the evidence to map out what is or is not possible. It is an important opportunity to interpret and explain what the evidence means for policy makers.
Actual recommendations are to be avoided (because they are normative and also need to be country specific) but this does not mean that this section should not make bold statements. If there is no evidence that an approach is useful it is legitimate to say so. If an approach has consequences this should be pointed out.
Bearing in mind (a) the limits of the evidence, (b) what is context specific, (c) methodological limitations and (d) the neutrality of the brief please say what the review of the evidence tells us and what we know about
<ul style="list-style-type: none">What worksProblems with implementationNegative impacts or unintended consequencesAny potential co-benefitsThe policy maker's room for manoeuvre (so constraints on change based on EU law or global trade agreements)Possible challenges to reform / change implementation (legal, industry or other)The implications for policy-making / policy makers.

Structure to guide the reader

3. Signpost so the reader knows what's happening

Label the text

- Sections
- Sub-sections

Separate ideas

- One per paragraph
- Use graphics

Make labelling work

- Message led headings

Using headings that 'carry the story' helps the reader and the author

Chronic disease management programmes

Promotion of friendly-family workplace options to improve the work environment

Initiatives to improve health literacy

What are chronic disease management programmes?

Longer maternity leave encourages women to stay in the workforce

What people want most is information at specific decision points

Signpost to guide the reader

Message led headings also work with tables and charts ...

Obesity rates
under 15, males
2000-2015

Preventable
mortality in EU
MS

Boys are
increasingly obese

More people die
needlessly than in
the rest of Europe

4. Simplify to make the text ...

Accessible

- Avoid jargon / technical terms
- Use terms like about half, or almost three out of four not 51.6% or 73.2%
- Don't qualify everything
- Explain methods in an annex not as the introduction

Compelling

- Focus on the story not the data
- Start with the conclusions then back them up with numbers
- Use message led headings
- Give examples (in boxes)
- Use tables and figures
- Flag policy implications
- Make it visually interesting

5. Re-read, revise, review

Edit

Re-reading with fresh eyes helps you see what works and what doesn't

Consult 'typical' readers

Non-specialists can help spot detail that isn't needed and to make things simpler

Use formal, external review

Peer reviewers should look for specific things (check content, spot gaps, and improve readability) and confer credibility

Good writing is less about art and more about method. It is underpinned by...

Good planning

- Is the question right?
- Do the authors know what the aims are?
- What is the story line?
- Are the terms of reference clear?
- Is there an agreed structure and guidance on style?

Good editing

- Does the brief answer the policy question? Is the story clear?
- Does it read well? Do the headings work?
- Is it visually interesting?

Good review

- Is the evidence right? Does the brief work?

Recommendations: writing well means thinking about the ...



Aims

- What is the brief trying to achieve? Is it presenting evidence or options or advocating?



Audience

- Who is going to read the brief? What do they know? What are their style preferences?



Plans

- Is there a clear story line? How will the brief be structured, signposted and kept simple? Do the author(s) and the editor know what is expected? Can reviewers help?