Writing reports for policy makers - Tips and group exercise

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SERIO – and our clients

What we will cover

The importance of style and structure

Some common tips to consider when writing reports for policy makers

Introduction to brief group work session
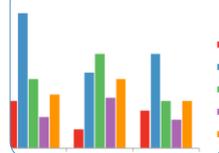
Informal feedback and group discussion

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Why getting it right can matter

30-60

Policy makers are busy – might not read full length academic papers. On average, policy makers spend 30-60 minutes reading a policy brief

79%

79% of policy makers from both developing and developed countries rated policy briefs as a 'key tool'

Making research findings easily digestible increases the likelihood of research being read and acted upon

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Sharing research findings - written

Types of Reports	Contains	Aimed at
Formal Research Report	Detailed description with aims, method, findings, conclusion	Funders, other researchers in your field
Executive Summary	2-3 page summary of formal research report	Wider dissemination
Academic Journals	Literature review, method, findings	Other academics
Social media	Taste of findings and direct to full report	Anyone and everyone
Presentation	Often covers Executive Summary but will focus on key messages	Conference attendees
Policy Paper	Briefly cover aims, method, findings but focus on policy and recommendations	Policy Makers

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What's in a sentence?

Writing in plain English means:

25 Words — Short sentences: the Government style guide recommends sentences should be a maximum of 25 words. Comprehension drops as the sentence gets longer.

Aa — Reduce capital letters: minimise where appropriate. They are harder to read.

Avoid jargon and unnecessary clauses – but explain specialist words.

The more complicated and specialist the research, the more thought needs to be given to writing clearly and concisely

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Why do we do what we do?

WHY?

Policy papers rely on the authority of the research conducted to address a specific issue or problem.

BUT

There needs to be close attention paid to the audience, their professional expectations and jargon. Focussed work for decision makers is key!

HOW?

Irrespective of the type of methodology used, i.e. an evaluation report, data visualisation, or a policy paper there are some key common areas to consider.

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Common tips when writing reports for policy makers

1. **Define the problem or issue.** Highlight the urgency and state significant findings for the problem based on the data. Objectivity is your priority, **so resist the urge to overstate.**

2. **Analyse—do not merely present the data.** Draw careful conclusions that make sense of the data and do not misrepresent it.

3. **Summarise your findings or state recommendations.** Provide specific recommendations or findings in response to specific problems and avoid generalisations

4. **Generate criteria for evaluating data.** Explain the key assumptions and methodology underlying your analysis and prioritise the criteria you rely on to assess evidence.

5. If you are producing recommendations, **develop a theory of change, and analyse the options and trade-offs**. What are the pros and cons? What is feasible? What are the predictable outcomes?

6. **Address**—and when appropriate rebut—**counterarguments, caveats, alternative interpretations**, and reservations to your findings or recommendations.

7. Suggest next steps and the implications of the findings or recommendations. You may briefly address the feasibility of next steps or explore the implications of your analysis
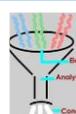
8. **Distil the conclusions succinctly** in a concluding section and remind the decision maker of the big picture, the overall goal, the necessity of the investigation, or of the urgency for action. **This answers the "Who cares?" question that reminds the reader of the value of the research and recommendations**

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Group session – 20 minutes

- What is good about the report?
- What is bad?
- What would you have done differently?
- Who do you think this report is aimed at?
- Do you think that these reports have addressed their main purpose?
- Could you use any of these structures for your research?

x3 Policy impact reports

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Other sources of information and guidance

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/content-design/writing-for-gov-ukhttps://www.researchtoaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PBWeekLauraFCfinal.pdf

https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/bicameral/post/about-post/writing-a-policy-brief/

http://www.scidev.net/global/communication/practical-guide/how-do-i-brief-policymakers-on-science-related-iss.html

http://www.fasttrackimpact.com/single-post/2015/12/19/How-to-make-a-policy-brief-that-has-real-impact

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Feedback and discussion
Session

20 minutes

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