

Policy Memo Guidelines

What is a Policy Memo?

Policy memos play a vital role in the political decision making process. They are written for decision-makers who are confronted with a policy problem which requires additional expertise to address. The purpose of a policy memo is therefore to synthesize current research on a topical challenge or question and to offer policy recommendations for readers with limited time to make a decision. Thus, a good policy memo provides a brief analytical introduction to a specific policy and its effects, an analysis of alternative options and a clear policy recommendation. The format of policy memos differ from your typical academic essay. Given your intended audience will be short on time, you need to make your points in a clear and succinct manner. Furthermore, you should also assume that your audience is familiar with the case you are addressing. The following outline of a typical policy memo should act as a helpful guideline. For further information, please consult the additional sources in the further reading section below.

Structure and Content

A policy memo typically contains the following five sections:

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Problem Description
- Policy Options
- Recommendation

And a bibliography in the context of this policy memo competition.

By dividing your policy memo into sections, you allow your busy reader to quickly scan your work for the most relevant points. You may individually adapt each section's heading to its content. Ideally, your heading provides a brief and concise summary of the section, so that your audience already understands what to expect in each section. Your document title should be short and catchy. It emphasizes the memo's main policy vision and should follow the Chicago Manual of Style and conform with [basic title capitalization rules](#).

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Each section offers a word count as orientation. The exact length of each section varies depending on your policy issue. Overall your work should be between **1,500 and 2,000 words** long.

Executive Summary [150 – 200 Words]

The executive summary is the first section the decision-maker reads; however, it should be the last section you write. Executive summaries are similar to an abstract, they should provide a brief summation of your final recommendation and the reasons for your conclusion. Therefore, only once you have written the whole memo should you write an executive summary.

Introduction [200 – 250 Words]

The introduction should outline the policy problem this memo aims to address. This outline should provide contextual information tailored to your intended recipient, highlighting why they should care about the issue and how your final recommendation is within their remit. In the introduction, you should avoid providing too detailed or simplistic explanations. Remember your intended recipient is highly intelligent and likely short on time. Thus, it is important to choose relevant contextual information.

Problem Description [300 – 450 Words]

The problem description should identify one problem under the status quo, highlight the relevant stakeholders and explain how they are affected. In identifying the key stakeholders, you should explain the relevance of these problems (i.e., why is it necessary for the decision maker to act now). Rather than exploring the general problem itself — which has already been tackled in the introductory part — this section establishes the specific issues identified in this field. This should include the current legal, socio-economic, and political impacts of the issue at hand.

Policy Options [500 – 800 Words]

This section presents the various policy options considered to resolve the issue. Try to establish a golden thread throughout your sections so that it logically guides your reader towards the (in your understanding) ideal policy solution. In this section, the focus is on convincingly building an argument for your preferred policy option. The policy solution should be politically, financially, and legally feasible. Back your proposal with suitable examples and breakdowns of steps and resources needed. Ideally, you anticipate the strongest counterarguments and weaknesses of your main arguments and refute them conclusively. Revise, anticipate, and then clarify important questions your reader would be most likely to ask. Be as specific as possible and avoid merely describing the issue or recommending pseudo-solutions.

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Recommendation [150 – 300 Words]

This is the last section of your memo and arguably the most important. Recommend **one** of your policy options from the previous section and use this paragraph to establish why your recommended policy is the best option. It is vital that the **memo only offers a single policy recommendation**. Decision-makers reading this memo are unlikely to have the time or the resources to implement multiple options. Thus, if they see multiple recommendations, there is a chance none will be implemented. By offering one recommendation, the memo is forced to be critical in its evaluation of the policy options. You are required to reaffirm why this policy helps the decision-maker achieve their goals better than the other policy options. Do not just use strawman arguments or shy away from potential drawbacks. Instead, be sure to highlight and acknowledge potential limitations, explain ways to mitigate these drawbacks, and/or explain why it is still the best policy. Fundamentally, do not present your option as a perfect fool-proof plan. Policies always have drawbacks and limitations. By highlighting these problems for the decision maker, you make it easier for the reader to accept your recommendations because you have already explained why it is still worth it.

Format & Requirements

- There is no mandatory template for this competition yet we generally recommend adopting the following style and layout:
 - International A4 format (21.0 x 29.7 cm; 8.27 x 11.69 inches)
 - Cambria, 11 pt. Font
 - Footnotes: Cambria, 9 pt font, single-spaced
 - Single-spaced, 2.5 cm; 1-inch margins
 - Alignment of Header and Subheadings: Left-aligned
 - Alignment of body: Justified (text distributed evenly between margins)
 - **1,500-2,000 words**
- For citations please adhere to **The Chicago Manual of Style, 17th edition**. Within this style, please rely on the Notes-and-Bibliography Style (i.e. footnotes). See explanatory link in further readings section.
- You are free to choose between American and British English as long as you are consistent throughout your memo.
- Please send your final policy memos for the European Policy Prize 2021 to the European Student Think Tank at editorinchief@esthinktank.com. The deadline is January 24th at 11.59 pm CET.

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Writing Style

Your policy memo should be succinct and concise. Do not try to hide a lack of knowledge behind florid language — your reader will catch your attempt. Your choice of word should be tailored to your target audience and account for their presumed knowledge of the topic. Use formal language featuring concrete words, terms and phrases, but avoid jargon an intelligent non-expert might not be familiar with. Some specific terms essential to the topic at hand might need a short explanation. Guide your reader by using an authoritative voice and avoid passive sentence structures (especially, the inflationary use of the words *could* and *would*). Cut out introductory and transitional phrases and keep your ideas evidence-based and action-oriented. Your thoughts should progress reasonably and coherently so that your reader can easily comprehend your ideas.

Further Reading Material

Our Recommendations for the European Policy Prize 2021

Three-step process on crafting policy memos

- Harvard Kennedy School Communications Program. “How to Write a Policy Memo” https://projects.ig.harvard.edu/files/hks-communications-program/files/lb_how_to_write_pol_mem_9_08_17.pdf

Understanding distinctive features of a policy memo

- Duke University, Writing Studio. “Policy Memo” <https://twp.duke.edu/sites/twp.duke.edu/files/file-attachments/policy-memo.original.pdf>

Tips for beginners

- Pont Career Skills Training. “Writing a policy brief: tips for beginners” <http://www.tepsa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Policy-brief-guidelines.pdf>

Common mistakes in word usage

- UCLA College, Chemistry and Biochemistry. “Word usage in scientific writing” http://www.chem.ucla.edu/dept/Faculty/merchant/pdf/Word_Usage_Scientific_Writing.pdf

Chicago Manual of Style, Sample Citations

- The Chicago Manual of Style. “Notes and Bibliography: Sample Citations” https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html

Other Sources You Might Find Helpful

Three steps (plan, write and communicate) for effective policy briefs

- Research to Action. “How To plan, write and communicate an effective Policy Brief” <https://www.researchtoaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PBWeekLauraFCfinal.pdf>

Structure and assessing policy options through SWOT analysis

- Stanford Law School. “Tips for Writing Policy Papers” <https://www-cdn.law.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/White-Papers-Guidelines.pdf>

Basic Guidelines focusing on structure

- NYU Wagner. “Memo about memos” <https://wagner.nyu.edu/files/students/NYU%20Wagner%20Memo%20About%20Memos.pdf>

Detailed Guidebook for Policy Advisers

- International Centre for Policy Advocacy. “Writing Effective Public Policy Papers” https://www.icpolicyadvocacy.org/sites/icpa/files/downloads/writing_effective_public_policy_papers_young_quinn.pdf