Final Policy Brief Guidelines

Critical Thinking
AA 2024-25

When is the assignment due?

It is due on May 30th 2025. For this assignment, I'm happy to grant one-week extensions upon request (assuming you ask for it before the deadline). For longer extensions you would typically need to discuss with me – stating your reasons for needing more time.

What's the point of this assignment?

The aim of this assignment is to help you reflect critically on the ethics or methodology of your research or prospective project. It is also, at the same time, to help you exercise in communicating your research or innovation. Write in a professional, assertive, and engaging way. The brief should offer a strong opinion backed by evidence but written in a manner accessible to a broad audience. Don't just describe a problem or offer a solution—critically engage with it, showing a deep understanding of its complexities. Be mindful of your audience's potential responses and objections to your arguments.

Useful resources

The best resource that you have to discuss the *content* of your paper is office hours. *Please* schedule an appointment with me or attend one of your TA's dedicated sessions during class hours. I cannot emphasize enough how much of a difference early guidance on your paper can do. It is also important that you do not arrive at your office hours/appointment without any clue of what you'd like to write on. In general, the more you have formed an idea before the appointment, the more we will be able to help you with the content of your policy brief. You may also consider discussing this assignment with your Master's thesis supervisor, if you already have one.

Paper length

Aim to write a 2500 words piece (max 3000 words). You can check 'Policy Briefs' and 'Commentary' pieces in Nature journals to get a clearer idea of expectations.

Paper topic

Choose a topic that critically examines an ethical or methodological issue directly relevant to your research or innovation project, offering practical insights and suggestions. Note: do not just report what your project is about, but go deeper into its methodological foundations, the ethical assumptions or upshots, its use of data etc. The audience of this piece will be policymakers, researchers, industry professionals, and the general public with an interest in research and innovation in your area. Write in a clear and engaging way and avoid technical jargon. Someone who's not familiar with your topic should still be able to follow your reasoning and your conclusions. A policy brief ends with a recommendation of some kind: improving methodology? Bringing ethics or public engagement into the field? Etc. Use data, examples, and references to back up your claims. Cite key studies, reports, and theoretical frameworks to lend authority to your argument. Use appropriate citation styles (e.g., APA, Chicago) for all external sources, including research articles, books, policy documents, and case studies.

Grading

Your policy brief will be graded on a scale from 1 to 30 using the following criteria:

Clarity (C) (30%): This part of the grade concerns how well you have managed to explain the issues at stake. Scoring well on this criterion means, among other things: using sentences that are complete and

grammatical; selecting words appropriately and using them consistently; explaining the key concepts accurately; making sure that the information provided is correct and its exposition is not ambiguous or misleading; making use of helpful examples; writing with good style.

Structure and Quality of Reasoning (Q) (30%): This part of the grade concerns how well you have managed to organize the various parts of your paper. Scoring well on this criterion means, among other things: making sure that the information provided follows a logical and intelligible structure; avoiding repetitions in the paper; making good use of each paragraph (including introduction and conclusion); being concise.

Originality and Insight (S) (40%): This part of the grade concerns how in-depth and complete your treatment of the problem is. Scoring well on this criterion means, among other things: considering a novel aspect within the broad topic of responsible research and innovation; providing a compelling argument for or against a certain view/ argument/ policy recommendation, making sure that you cover every issue not superficially, but in depth, by representing the view that you are arguing for or against accurately and in its most plausible interpretation; making clear the way in which each conclusion that you consider is supported by various considerations or premises; accurately describing the consequences of believing a certain conclusion; making explicit any distinctions between main arguments and secondary ones, or between a conclusion and its implications, or disambiguating between alternative interpretations of a certain thesis; considering the strongest objections to your arguments and offering insightful ways of responding to those objections.

Plagiarism

Do not plagiarize. I can tell when somebody plagiarizes right away and then it's a very ugly procedure to have to send an email explaining that you have automatically failed the class. If you are using someone else's ideas or strings of words, you need to acknowledge them in your work. NB: Using ChatGPT, DeepSeek etc. is not advisable insofar as it may result in *involuntary* plagiarism, which is still liable to an automatic failure grade. After all, involuntary plagiarism is still a breach of the University Code of Conduct and is not tolerable. Even when it does not constitute plagiarism, using machine learning writing tools may undermine the reason why you are taking the class (to engage in critical thinking) and is unlikely to lead you to a good grade, since the level of philosophical reflection and insight that is expected from this assignment is much, much higher than these silicon parrots can currently achieve.

Paper Structure

Regardless of the specific topic, I recommend roughly the following structure:

Title (1–2 sentences)
A clear, concise title that reflects the central issue discussed in the brief. For example: "Navigating Ethical Boundaries in AI-Driven Healthcare: Lessons from My Master's Thesis"

Abstract (200 words)
Provide a brief overview of the problem you are addressing, the key arguments you will make, and the recommendations for action.

Introduction (300–400 words)
Introduce your research or innovation project briefly, including its context and scope. Identify the ethical or methodological challenge that you will focus on (e.g., data privacy, environmental sustainability, bias in algorithms). Clearly state the objective of the brief: Why is this issue important, and why should policymakers or stakeholders care?

Problem Statement (600–800 words)
Contextualize the problem: describe the context in which this ethical or methodological issue arises. Reference relevant literature, studies, or real-world examples. If you want, you can explain how this issue

specifically relates to your research or project. What makes this challenge unique in the context of your work? Discuss the potential consequences of ignoring or mishandling the issue, both in terms of scientific integrity and broader societal impact (e.g., social justice, public health, environmental concerns).

Analysis of the Ethical/Methodological Issue (800–1,000 words)
This is the moment to show critical reflection: Analyze the ethical or methodological dilemma in depth. Discuss how traditional research practices or methodologies might fall short in addressing this issue. Draw on examples from your own project or from other relevant fields to illustrate the risks or challenges faced by researchers in handling this issue. If appropriate, identify the stakeholders (e.g., policymakers, communities, industries), how they might be affected by research or innovation choices, how can their perspectives be integrated, etc.

Recommendations for Action (600–800 words)
Based on your analysis, suggest practical, actionable solutions to address the identified ethical or methodological issue. These could be changes to research design, policy interventions, or suggestions for broader industry or academic practice. Be original and inventive. Ensure that your recommendations are aligned with the RRI framework. How can these solutions promote responsible and sustainable research practices? If appropriate, offer both short- and long-term strategies for implementing change.

Conclusion (200–300 words)
Summarize the core arguments and reinforce the importance of addressing the issue. Reiterate the practical implications of your recommendations for future research, policy, or innovation. End with a call to action or a reflective statement that challenges the reader to consider the ethical or methodological consequences of their own work.

Final Checklist
♦ Does the brief present a clear, focused ethical or methodological issue?
♦ Have you drawn connections between your research or innovation and broader societal concerns?
♦ Is the argument well-supported with evidence and examples?
♦ Are your recommendations actionable, aligned with RRI principles, and thought-provoking?
♦ Is the writing style engaging and accessible to a broad, policy-oriented audience?
♦ Have you followed the formatting and citation guidelines?