

Writing a Policy Brief – 9 Important components¹**Assignments 1/2**

1. Executive summary: This should be a short summary (~150 words) of the purpose of the brief and its recommendations. It may look nice in a box.

2. Statement of the issue/problem: Phrase the topic as a question that requires a decision. This can be as short as one question. For example, “**What role** can the {any political, social, religious organization of your choice} play in enhancing the {political/economic/social} status of {any disadvantaged group of your choice}?”

3. Background (of the problem): Include only the essential facts that a decision maker “needs to know” to understand the context of the problem. Assume that you have been hired to filter through reams of information on behalf of a very busy and sleep-deprived person. **Be clear, precise, and succinct.**

4. Statement of your organization’s interests in the issue: This is meant to remind the reader of why the issue matters for the country/group/organization that you are advising. If, for example, you were the National Security Advisor for the US, then it would be appropriate to review the US’s geostrategic, economic, or humanitarian interest in the problem at hand.

5. Pre-existing policies: This summarizes what has been done (by others and the entity that you represent) about the problem thus far. Depending on your topic, some of the information may have already been presented in #3 (e.g., perhaps the problem itself stems from some other country or organization’s intervention). The objective of this section is to inform the reader of policy options that have already been pursued, if any. Note that the absence of action may be considered a policy decision.

6. Policy options: This section delineates the possible courses of action or inaction that your organization may pursue. Please provide the decision maker with **at least two potential courses of action**. It’s okay if they strike you as wildly unrealistic. Please no more than 5 choices!

7. Advantages and disadvantages of each policy option: Write this section from the perspective of the entity that you represent. For clarity, you may present the pros and cons of the options in bullet points or outline format. This may seem like stacking the deck since

¹ This guide draws heavily from Prof. Tsai’s “Guidelines for Writing a Policy Brief”

some options may have only one advantage and several downsides, but it isn't always that obvious. For instance, one measly advantage may conform most fully with the interests of the organization summarized in #4. It is up to you to advise the decision maker if it is worth it.

8. Your recommendation: After prioritizing the relative pros and cons of the above options, please recommend one option. Yes, this may require going out on a limb on an extremely complex issue that challenges your ethical instincts. But if you have agreed to advise a particular country/organization/person, then you will be asked to make a recommendation on their behalf.

9. References consulted/cited: A bibliography of any works you used or cite. Should be formatted consistently using APA, MLA, or Chicago style.