How to Prepare a Briefing Paper

Introduction

Briefing papers are commonly used by managers in organisations as a way to present information in a concise and structured format. They can be used for a variety of purposes:

- To provide a summary of a particular area or topic
- To inform a decision-maker about a topic or issue
- As a persuasive document, to get others to agree on an issue and help with its resolution

Key Elements

Briefing papers present information in a professional manner that can quickly and effectively inform the intended audience. As the name indicates, briefing papers should be brief. The content should be concise, clear, reliable and easy to follow. They will seldom exceed two pages in length.

Planning

Before you start writing, it's essential to determine the **scope** of the paper. This is important because it will allow you to be clear about what you will and won't be covering, and the level of detail that you will go into. Both these will vary based on how much information you're able to find as well as how much information you'll need to include in order to support the objective of your paper.

Next, it's important to consider who will be reading your paper; your **audience**. You need to think about what they need to know about the subject area and how much they might know already.

Structure

Once you have covered these first two planning stages, you should start to map out the key points you want to make, bearing in mind that you are aiming for approximately 2 sides of A4 in total, which equates to around 1,000 words. This means that you won't have space to include any unnecessary information or be long-winded.

While you may see some variations on structure, most briefing papers will include the following information:

- **Name**: Identifies who the briefing paper is intended for.
- **Date**: The date of submission of the briefing paper.
- **Subject:** Here, the topic or issue of the briefing paper should be described in a few words. It should get directly to the matter of the issue. It's important to ensure you get your point across without being too wordy.
- **Summary section:** Some briefing papers may include three or four key bullet points to provide an 'at a glance' overview of its content, but as the overall length is short, this is not always necessary.

- **Background information:** This gives the reader some history and context on the topic or issue. It's very important that all the details in this part are factually accurate and reliable.
- **The purpose of the paper:** Having established the context, this section should inform the reader of its intention and intended outcome.
- **Main body:** This section will present an analysis or examination of the topic or issue, considering the context and purpose already established.
  - Make sure to do the necessary research and back up any claims with evidence. You can include statistics and data where relevant but remember to keep it factual; keep opinions out, so that it is as unbiased as possible.

  - Depending on the purpose of the paper, this analysis may present the pros and cons or strengths and weaknesses of current against proposed business practices. Analysis might also include the financial implications for a particular course of action.

  - Remember to think about your audience and explain things in terms that they will be able to quickly and easily understand. This means avoiding jargon and technical language or information that isn't of central concern.

  - Where relevant, it should also identify any sensitive aspects of the topic or issue that may negatively affect a person or the organisation.

- **Conclusion:** This brief closing section should clarify why this issue should be considered important by your reader.

- **Recommended Action:** This will set out the next steps or suggested course of action. Use the facts you have laid out to show why the solution you are proposing is a good one. Remember that the reader will be the one who makes the final decision on this issue, not you.

Editing

As you are aiming for a concise document, it is well worth spending time to edit your briefing paper. Remember, it should be clear, easy to follow, include all necessary evidence and be about two pages long.

- If too long, look for places to cut it down by looking for any information that is less important or off-topic
- Make sure there aren't key pieces of information missing that are necessary to make your argument clear and convincing
- Check the structure, so that facts flow from the issue
- Remove any jargon or technical language
- Carry out a final proofread to check spelling and grammar