

Policy Papers: What's Effective, What's Not

A Policy Paper Translates Academic Knowledge into a Policy Solution

A. FROM ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE INTO A POLICY SOLUTION

A Policy Paper is a research piece focusing on a specific policy issue that provides clear recommendations for policy makers.

1. Policy Papers are usually addressed at a **non-academic audience**, such as a particular official, agency, or organization
2. Policy Papers often focus on **prescriptive questions**. They may begin by diagnosing a particular issue or situation, and typically argue for a solution that will address that issue or situation
3. Policy Papers are focused on being **persuasive**. The intention is to convince the target audience that your position is the correct one.
4. **Evidence** in support of a position is crucial in a Policy Papers
5. Policy papers are **written efficiently**. The audience often does not have much time and does not want to read a book on the subject.
6. Policy Papers are accompanied by policy briefs which summarize the papers in a page or less.
7. Maintain a measured tone when writing your policy
8. Be concise, know your issue
9. Acknowledge potential opposition and identify ways to mitigate risks
10. You want your reader to walk away with answers to two questions:
 - Why is the current situation untenable
 - How can it be fixed

B. POLICY PAPER COMPONENTS

1. There is not just one way to write a policy paper.
2. The **basic elements** of a policy paper include:
 - Description of the **context and importance of the problem.**
 - It is helpful to carefully define the problem and frame it as a specific question to be answered.
 - Discussion of a range of **policy options. Provide two (2) in addition to yours**
 - These are the choices for addressing the policy problem.
3. **Criteria** for judging policy choices.
 - Be explicit and DO NOT assume everyone shares your opinion OR your choice for action.
 - It is an important service to the reader (and to the decision-maker) to know the reasons for recommending one policy (or set of policies) over others.
 - There often is major debate about criteria that should be used.
4. The policy **recommendation.**
 - The policy recommendation should flow from the logical application of your criteria to your policy choices. SEE YOUR WORKING TABLE
 - YOUR TEMPLATE should make clear outcomes about how the policy choices met some criteria (Policy Choice A fails to meet the first criteria of legality).
 - If there is some uncertainty about others. For instance, it is unclear how Policy Choice B would affect the criteria of inclusiveness, or how to judge the cost effectiveness of Policy Choice C. You may need to incorporate uncertainty into our policy judgments
 - It is important for the policy analyst (YOU) to be clear to readers and decision-makers where that uncertainty exists.
 - Not all criteria are equal. Rank the importance of criteria.
 - Some officials consider legality a *necessary* criterion.
(This would allow us to immediately remove Policy Choice A from our list of choices without any further consideration.)

POLICY BRIEF DEVELOPMENT TEMPLATE

Policy Question: What should our town do to improve voter participation?	Policy Choice A: Pay people to vote	Policy Choice B: Schedule local elections on days when few people work	Policy Choice C: Increase spending on public messages encouraging voting
Criteria 1: Legality	NO	YES	YES
Criteria 2: Cost Effectiveness	NO	COST NEUTRAL	PROBABLY
Criteria 3: Inclusiveness (policy affects the broadest range of votes possible)	YES	PROBABLY	YES
RECOMMENDED?	NO	YES	YES