

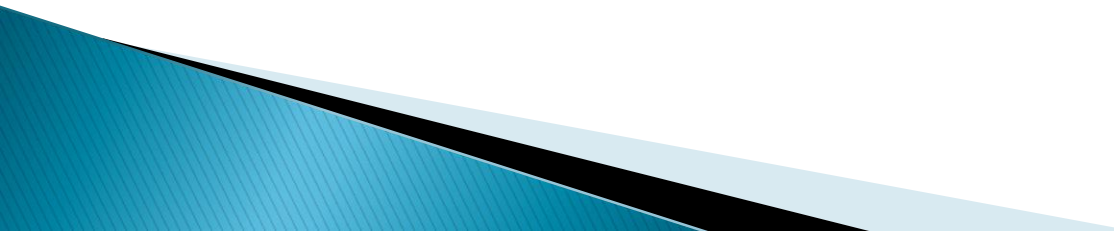
Writing Effective Policy Papers

Translating Academic Knowledge into Policy Solutions

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Overview

- ▶ What is a policy paper?
 - ▶ How are they used?
 - ▶ How do you write an effective policy paper?
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What is a policy paper?

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

- ▶ What it is not:
 - Historical analysis
 - Opinion piece

What is its purpose?

- ▶ To convince a policy maker's staff to advocate changing course on a specific policy issue.
 - Shape perceptions around issue
 - Bring the issue to policymakers' attention
 - Frame the issue for them—their perception of the problem and the solutions
 - Provide text for their memos
 - Busy staffers prefer not to have to rework complex writing
 - You want them to lift your words directly as much as possible

How is it used?

Legislative Branch

- ▶ When and how staffers write memos
 - Boss assigns staffer to conduct research
 - Staffer has personal interest and wants to bring it to boss's attention



How to get it to legislators

- ▶ Two kinds of staff:
 - Committee staff
 - More educated and specialized
 - Harder to initiate contact from the outside
 - Personal office
 - Identify Legislative Aide by calling or visiting office
 - Send policy memo (3–4 pages)
 - Try to find contact information for committee staff

How to get it to legislators

- ▶ Think tanks
 - Think tanks send pieces to staffers on a regular basis
 - Academics can build relationships with think tanks to collaborate on policy papers
- ▶ Congressional Research Service
 - Captiol Hill's think tank
 - Staffed by former academics
 - Will accept longer policy papers
 - Ask for researcher responsible for your topic

Executive Branch



- ▶ Policy Staffer
 - No time for extensive research
 - Conduct mostly online research
 - Use more in-depth research conducted by intelligence departments in each agency

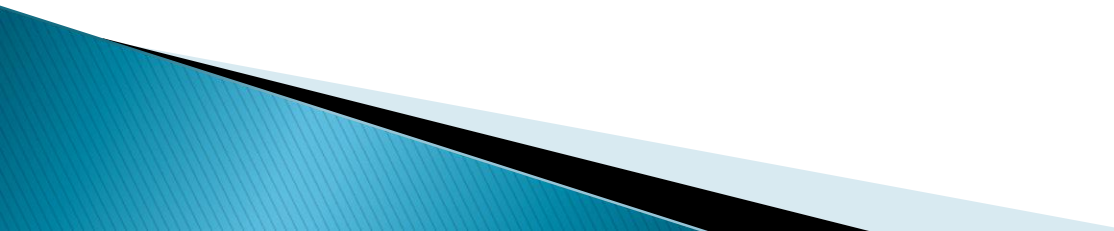
- ▶ Intelligence Departments (CIA, DIA, INR)
 - Track internet publications—make sure your article titles contain the problem and solution to increase the chance of retrieval through Google search
 - More time for extensive research
 - Attend academic conferences—provide “fact sheets” and executive summaries to audience

Deal with short attention spans

- ▶ Clear and concise statements
 - No extra points for lengthy prose or sophisticated vocabulary
- ▶ BLUF
 - Bottom Line Up Front (begin paragraphs with conclusions)
 - Key difference between academic and policy writing
- ▶ Only essential information
 - Don't get bogged down in too many details
 - Distill to essential elements
- ▶ Cover all the bases
 - Make it as thorough sounding as possible so they feel they don't have to go to other sources



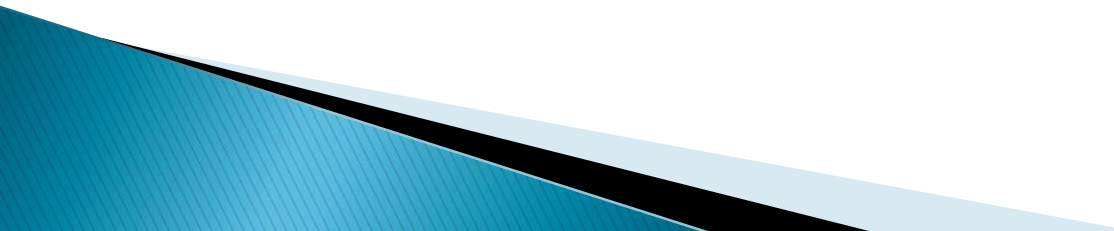
Get people to act

- ▶ Give specific policy recommendations
 - ▶ Show how it will impact them
 - How will it impact their constituents?
 - How can you tie it to national security?
 - ▶ Don't argue for an ideology
 - Argue for a specific course of action
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Maintain a measured tone

- ▶ Fact-based argumentation
 - Don't come across as an ideologue
- ▶ Acknowledge potential downsides and ways to mitigate risks
 - Lends credibility to your research

Reader takeaways

- ▶ You want the staffer to walk away with answers to two questions:
 - Why is the current situation untenable?
 - How can it be fixed?
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Structure of a policy paper

- ▶ **Executive Summary/Purpose Statement**
 - Most staffers will only read this part
- ▶ **Body**
 - **Background**
 - What is the current policy? Why is it being conducted this way?
 - **Analysis**
 - Why is the policy not working? Why is it necessary to find an alternative?
 - **Policy options**
 - Discuss a few alternatives and their implications
 - **Recommendation**
 - Provide your recommendation and how it can be implemented
- ▶ **Conclusion**
 - Summarize analysis and recommendation
- ▶ **Appendix**
 - Relevant figures, maps, graphics

Writing exercise

- ▶ Transforming academic writing into a policy paper
 - Read the academic blog post
 - Write the analysis section of your policy paper (arguing the author's points)
 - Why is the policy not working?
 - Why is it necessary to find an alternative?
 - No more than 6 sentences
 - Trade and discuss with a partner

Writing exercise

Analysis

US officials' simplistic view of "secular" politics as good and "Islamic" politics as bad has contributed to Egypt's current crisis, and is likely to increase anti-American sentiment and undermine American interests in the Middle East.

- ▶ **Maintaining the current perspective could stifle political reform in Egypt and undermine its security.** Taking advantage of US officials' fear of Islamist politics, Mubarak has repressed the population for decades. The current unrest is the result of a lack of outlets for political dissent.
- ▶ **Rejecting Islamic politics could undermine US interests in the region by fueling anti-Americanism.** Continued support of Mubarak and refusing to deal with the Muslim Brotherhood as a legitimate representative of a subsection of Egyptians will reinforce the popular belief that the US is a hegemonic, anti-Islamic power.

Your challenge

- ▶ Serve as the bridge between academia and policymakers
- ▶ Be concise without being superficial

“Writing a memo is like figuring out how to convey the full experience of a Thanksgiving meal in a single bite” -Senate staffer