

How to Write an ESID Briefing Paper

What is a Briefing Paper

ESID Briefing Papers are short, non-peer-reviewed publications which aim to present ESID research in an accessible, quick, and easy-to-digest way for a diverse but busy practitioner audience who is likely to be interested in our findings and implications, but not necessarily in the details of the research process that produced them. Briefing Papers are often based on ESID Working Papers, but they are a different kind of product and not a mere summary.

Two Types of Briefing Papers

- 1) Briefings aimed at persuading policy-makers.
- 2) Briefings aimed at challenging other researchers.

Only try to do one type of brief at a time! If your research has both policy and research implications, write two separate briefs, each with a clear and distinct audience.

Length

4 pages, about 1500 words.

Structure tips

First bullet points, then text. A Briefing Paper should have 4 or 5 key messages, which should appear in the form of bullet points at the beginning. Each message should be then expanded in its own section with a clear heading. When outlining the Briefing, therefore, start with the messages and then outline each section, not the other way round.

Break it down into sections. Since they are intended for time-starved audiences, Briefing Papers should be divided into sections that are largely self-contained: that is, each section should convey one message without requiring the reader to know what comes before or after it.

Content tips

Accessible language. Briefing Papers are usually not intended for specialist audiences, and therefore you should make no assumption of prior knowledge. Abstain from using technical jargon except when absolutely necessary, and even then provide a clear definition the first time a key term is used. Try to write the Briefing as if the audience was an educated friend, not an experienced colleague.

Examples and illustrations. Use examples whenever possible to ground the Briefing's ideas in empirical and operational contexts. But do not go into so much detail that it becomes distracting; try to rely on common knowledge instead, and to introduce cases as brief narratives. When presenting data, consider incorporating 1 or 2 graphs or tables which summarize things at a glance.

Embrace authority over uncertainty. A Briefing Paper targeting a policy audience often seeks to make a persuasive argument in favour of a certain policy option, and this requires the writer to be assertive. As a general rule, you should refrain from formulating key messages with major caveats, qualifications, or acknowledgments of insufficient evidence. The paper should persuade policy-makers to change the way they understand policy, not to consider how difficult it is to conceptualize a problem (they probably know that already!).

In contrast, a Briefing Paper targeting a research audience should qualify its claims in order to illustrate the complexities and shortcomings of the data or methodology. Even then, try to be direct and assertive in questioning why researchers conduct their work the way they do.

Challenge, but do not antagonize. While intellectual controversy is at the core of academic debates, a policy audience may be less receptive to messages that disparage particular governments or political ideologies. Whenever possible discuss policy options instead of political choices so as to maximize the audience for the Briefing Paper.

Referencing and citations. A Briefing Paper targeting a policy audience does not require in-text citations to establish credibility: specific data and ideas can be attributed to an author or institution in text, but in general the credibility of the Briefing Paper comes with your authorial expertise and the ESID brand more broadly. You can include a “Learn More” section at the end of the paper listing no more than 6 key references.

In contrast, a Briefing Paper with targeting a research audience may require a more explicit use of citations to ground its messages in relevant academic debates. In that case, consider using footnotes instead of in-text citations: footnotes allow reference checking for those readers who are interested without cluttering the main text for those who are not.

Try to be consistent with past papers. Not all ESID Briefing Papers will be alike, but as an expression of the ESID brand they should all aspire to a certain level of consistency in how they formulate policy and research messages. So before you outline a new Briefing take some time to review what has been published already. You can find a section on Briefing Papers on the ESID website:

<http://www.effective-states.org/publications/>

Ask for help

If you have any questions or need any advice on how to draft a new ESID Briefing Paper, please contact:

Pablo Yanguas – ESID Research Associate (pablo.yanguas@manchester.ac.uk);

Clare Degenhardt – BWPI Editorial Administrator (clare.degenhardt@manchester.ac.uk).