

A Guide to

Policy Writing

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ABOUT THE PROJECT ON MIDDLE EAST DEMOCRACY (POMED)

The Project on Middle East Democracy is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to examining how genuine democracies can develop in the Middle East and how the U.S. can best support that process. Through research, dialogue, and advocacy, we aim to strengthen the constituency for U.S. policies that peacefully support democratic reform in the Middle East.

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Introduction

Effective policy writing is an essential skill for individuals and organizations aiming to influence decision-makers and add value to policy debates. In general, policy writing refers to the process by which government employees and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) create written documents (“policy products”) for lawmakers and policy professionals to read and act upon.¹ The core element of policy writing is the *problem-solution relationship*: identifying a problem, making a thorough and convincing argument in favor of a specific solution, and persuading the target audience to make decisions in line with those arguments.² A typical policy product written for a policymaker introduces a timely policy problem, presents potential solutions to it, evaluates those solutions, recommends one or more of them, and ends with a convincing argument as to why.

Policy writing differs from academic writing in that it does not necessarily consider the creation of new knowledge an end itself. Rather, the creation of knowledge is only necessary insofar as it informs the behavior of political actors: government employees, lawmakers, or NGO leaders. Policy writing aims to solve concrete problems by supporting these decision-makers, and policy products provide normative claims to action that are focused on facts, values, and feasibility, rather than advancing an academic debate. Although policy writing may sound conceptually similar to opinion or editorial writing, the tone of a policy product should not be polemical, biased, or emotional. In addition, policy papers should present alternatives to a current policy problem, rather than merely criticize existing or previous policies.

All good pieces of policy writing share certain attributes. The tone should be professional and accessible, and the writing should provide a coherent argument that is evidence-based, original, and actionable. Policy writing should also be succinct and not over-burdened with superfluous background information, although the average length of a policy product will vary. Forms of policy products typically include briefs, reports, memos, proposals, books, and position papers.

This guide is intended to assist in brainstorming, researching, and writing effective, persuasive policy products. The first half of the guide addresses the research process, namely: selecting a policy problem, identifying your audience, research design, assembling evidence, and evaluating alternative options. The second half focuses on the writing and production process: crafting policy arguments and recommendations, the structure of policy briefs, the editing process, and the dissemination of policy products.

¹ Pennock, Andrew, “The Case for Using Policy Writing in Undergraduate Political Science Courses” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44.1 (2011): 141.

² Eoin Young and Lisa Quinn, *Writing Effective Public Policy Papers* (Budapest, Hungary: Open Society Institute, 2002).

Defining Policy Problems

Policy writers should focus on issues that are relevant and definable with precision. Specificity will help accurately identify the target audience and potential solutions. The policy problem must also have at least one definable policy solution; if the problem cannot be addressed through policy, then it should not be the subject of a policy product.

The development of a specific, relevant policy problem is an essential part of the policy writing process. There are a number of factors policy writers should consider as this process develops. First, ensure that the problem is pressing and relevant. If possible, contact decision-makers in the field directly and ask them what they consider the most significant policy challenges they currently face. Next, verify that the problem can be solved through the policy process. If the issue cannot be addressed by changes in policy, it will be difficult to provide decision-makers with actionable recommendations, and the product will not be useful.

Policy writers should ensure that the issue or issues being addressed are narrowly and precisely defined. Ensure that the scope of the problem is not too broad. The more specific the problem, the easier it will be to identify the target audience and present actionable recommendations. Consider breaking the problem up into smaller elements if possible and appropriate.³

Delineating boundaries to narrowly define the problem is particularly important if brevity is crucial to getting the attention of a busy policymaker. It is also important to ensure that the solution is not implied within the problem statement. Overly simplistic problem statements and solutions are not actionable or insightful.⁴

After defining the substance and parameters of a policy issue, verify that authoritative and reliable information on the subject is accessible. This data should support the existence and relevance of the issue being addressed (further discussion of the data collection process can be found in the “Assembling Evidence and Data” section).

At this stage, writers should be able to craft the policy problem into a research question that will help guide the search for solutions. When doing so, it might also be helpful to identify an initial portfolio of potential policy options, as well

³ Peters, B. Guy, and John Hoornbeek, “The Problem of Policy Problems,” in *Designing Government from Instruments to Governance*, ed. F. Pearl Eliadis, Margaret M. Hill, and Michael Howlett (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 80.

⁴ Eugene Bardach, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2011), 7.

as estimated costs and benefits for each. These policy options need not be fully developed, as you will address them again at a later stage.

CHECKLIST

- Is your policy problem timely? Are decision-makers interested in it?*
- Can the problem be solved through policy?*
- Is the problem clearly and narrowly defined?*
- What do you hope to convince decision-makers to do about the problem?*
- Do you have access to authoritative, relevant information on this issue?*
- Can you think of potential solutions for this policy problem?*

Knowing Your Audience

Familiarity with the target audience will allow writers to craft a policy product around the audience's knowledge of the issue. To define the target audience, start by identifying potential stakeholders. Then, think carefully about their level of knowledge and interest in the topic. Take care to avoid using overly technical explanations and jargon that the audience may not understand.

When preparing to write a particular policy product, writers should define whom they seek to influence and inform. Pinpointing a specific audience will allow policy writers to focus the paper on specific needs and concerns of decision-makers in order to craft more meaningful and effective arguments.

First, identify the audience most capable of resolving or addressing the policy problem. Think carefully about which stakeholders are impacted by the problem, and who, specifically, has the power to influence the issue and implement changes. A clear understanding of every decision-maker and stakeholder involved will help reveal how much background information the writing should include.

In general, writers should assume the target audience consists primarily of busy, intelligent individuals who do not necessarily have specialized or technical knowledge of the issue. They are unlikely to be as informed about the issue as the writers themselves, so avoiding unnecessarily intricate and overly detailed explanations is critical.⁵ Carefully consider what the target audience knows and does not know, and modify the information presented accordingly.

Questions about the writer's audience:

- Is the target audience a specific individual, such as a political leader, or does it include members of an organization or agency? Is it a combination of several different actors?
- How knowledgeable is the audience about the particular issue addressed?
- Is there a way to frame the issue such that the audience will be more receptive to the argument? What questions will the target audience likely have about this issue?
- What are the audience's interests, and how might they conflict with or benefit from the recommendations presented?

Although decision-makers should be the focus of policy writing, writers may also choose to target a wide but knowledgeable constituency that includes journalists,

⁵ Wilcoxon, Peter J., "Tips on Writing a Policy Memo," last modified September 24, 2013, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://wilcoxon.maxwell.insightworks.com/pages/275.html>.

diplomats, administrators, and transnational or international organizations. Other recipients may include regional organizations, human rights groups, trade unions, and environmental organizations.⁶ All potential audiences and contributors should be identified, contacted, and integrated into the project's development and dissemination activities. The more specific policy writers are in identifying the intended audience (or audiences), the stronger and more actionable the writing will be.

⁶ *Communicating Research for Evidence-based Policymaking* (Brussels: European Commission, 2010), accessed September 22, 2013, http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/guide-communicating-research_en.pdf.

Research Design

Research design is a critical component of the policy writing process. It involves forming assumptions about policy processes, as well as selecting tools and methods applicable to the policy problem. There are several models of policy processes, but the three most common include the systems model, the institutional model, and the rational-comprehensive model. Methods and tools generally involve a choice between quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The next step in the policy writing process is typically the most difficult. The research design phase involves both an analysis of the policy process writers hope to inform, as well as a breakdown of the tools and methods most relevant to the project goals.

THE POLICY PROCESS

Relatively few policy products document the theoretical analysis behind the development of policy. Policymakers do not usually have time to follow this analysis or determine how it translates into action. There is typically very little discussion of theoretical models, or of the ways in which different ideas about what drives policy processes impacts policy. The purpose of this section is not to provide a thorough overview of competing models, but rather to make policy writers aware of their existence and influence in the policy writing process.

The term “policy process” refers to the conception, development, and maintenance of policies or programs designed by public actors. Generally, the creation of public policy follows four steps: problem definition, policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. The extent to which actors and institutions influence these processes varies, and occasionally the policy process is more cyclical than it is linear. Even as a particular policy is being evaluated or monitored, new information and external constraints can alter the range of policy options available. In some cases, these developments can cause a change in the definition of the problem itself.

Of the models usually discussed by theorists, three are particularly important. The first model, known as the “systems model” emerged in the 1960s. Generally, it assumes that the policy process is the product of a system that processes inputs, such as issues, pressures, and information. These inputs produce policy outputs, such as laws, regulations, or other statements of policy.⁷

The “institutional model” assumes public policy is the product of institutions,

⁷ Thomas A. Birkland. *An Introduction to the Policy Process: Theories, Concepts, and Models of Public Policy Making*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2011). 26.

not inputs. The structure of government institutions plays an important role in policy formation, as individual actors are bound by the resource and capacity constraints defined by public institutions.⁸

A more normative model, the “rational-comprehensive model,” has its roots in the decision sciences. It assumes that policymakers have a full range of options from which to choose. Knowing their constituents’ preferences and the benefits and risks of each option will naturally lead policymakers to choose the option that provides the greatest public benefit.⁹

METHODS AND TOOLS

Public policy analysis applies tools and methods from the social sciences (particularly economics) to the study of government behavior. Broadly, these tools and methods fall into two categories: qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative methods rely heavily on rigorous statistical analysis, with a particular emphasis on descriptive statistics, regression, variance, surveys, and statistical modeling. Qualitative methods, however, rely more heavily on case studies, interviews, and focus groups. Other qualitative approaches involve ethnographic research, document reviews, and site observation.

As described above, the purpose of this section is not to describe the full range of methods available to the policy writer. It is important to emphasize, though, how critical the selection of tools and methods is to research design. Quantitative studies are more appropriate for studies that involve measurements made using the scientific method, which also involve modeling, the control and manipulation of variables, and the collection of empirical data. Qualitative studies are better suited to answer questions about how programs operate and how they affect people, for the purpose of understanding meanings and patterns inherent in relationships.

⁸ Margaret M. Polski and Elinor Ostrom, “An Institutional Framework for Policy Analysis and Design,” (paper presented at the Vincent and Elinor Ostrom Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis at Indiana University Bloomington, Bloomington, Indiana, June 15, 1999).

⁹ William Fox, Sayeed Bayat, and Naas Ferreira, *A Guide to Managing Public Policy* (Claremont, South Africa: Juta and Company, 2007), 67.

Assembling Evidence and Data

Conceptualize and seek a solid fact base that will help you answer the policy question. When deciding what to include when writing, take care to include only the information that is relevant to and necessary for advancing a specific argument, and do not overwhelm the audience with data. Include only credible and authoritative sources: unreliable information or evidence from potentially biased sources will undermine the policy argument.

The collection of data plays an important role in helping policy writers craft feasible and realistic recommendations. Data is especially critical as writers assess the costs and benefits of different policy options. If the appropriate amount of time and resources are available, policy writers may wish to conduct field research, but this may be unnecessary.¹⁰

When selecting evidence for inclusion, think carefully about whether each piece of information is essential to the development of the argument. Policy writers often make the mistake of including all the evidence they have collected, regardless of relevance, which can lead to long, unfocused papers.¹¹ To avoid this, focus on including only the results of specific research, rather than details of the research methodology. If necessary, methodology can be summarized in a footnote or included in an appendix. Strike the right balance between including enough information to support your policy recommendations and overwhelming the audience with unnecessary data.

Make sure that all sources utilized in the writing process are objective, verifiable, and reliable. Confirm that the author or agency providing these sources is knowledgeable about the topic, widely respected, and regarded as unbiased. Reliable sources of data should not usually include the opinions of others, or be emotional in tone.¹² Writers should also verify that the data used is up to date. Even the inclusion of data that is perceived as bias could adversely affect how stakeholders receive the writing.

Potential sources include, but are not limited to:

- Government reports, legislation, and policy statements

¹⁰ David L. Weimer and Aidan R. Vining, *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practices* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 296-297.

¹¹ Young and Quinn, *Writing Effective Public Policy Papers*.

¹² "Introduction to Research," Cornell University Library, accessed October 1, 2013, <http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/intro#2Findingbooks,articles,andothermater>.

- Reports from NGOs (local, national, and international organizations, and think tanks)
- Reports from multilateral institutions (such as the United Nations, World Bank, etc.)
- Public opinion surveys
- Academic articles, dissertations, and books
- Newspapers and periodicals
- Business groups and corporation reports and data

CHECKLIST

- Have you used a wide variety of sources?*
- Do you have enough evidence to identify solutions and support your arguments?*
- Are your sources objective, reliable, and verifiable?*
- Is the evidence essential to the development of the specific argument?*
- Do stakeholders perceive any of the sources as biased?*

Evaluating Alternatives

When comparing the costs and benefits of different policy options, establish a clear set of criteria that are most critical to solving the policy problem. Efficiency and effectiveness are common evaluative criteria, although others may be more relevant depending on your goals.

Generally, policy writers should address the merits of at least one alternative course of action beyond the recommended option. Weighing alternative courses of action is an essential component of crafting a convincing and thorough argument in favor of a particular policy. Evaluating the costs and benefits of other options signals to the audience that a comprehensive approach to the policy problem has been taken. Additionally, policy options should be distinct from one another, rather than simply variations of the same solution.¹³ There is no specific number of options that should be included; some situations will call for only one option, while others will have several.

When developing alternative policy options, it is helpful to consider what other individuals or organizations are already doing or proposing to address the problem, in order to prevent recommending solutions that have already been implemented. Policy writers may also wish to address some of these existing proposals in writing. This will be important as policymakers consider your recommendations, despite the popularity of alternatives.

Maintaining the status quo is occasionally a valid policy option, especially when alternative options are rigorously analyzed.” When discussing this option, authors should consider what outcomes will emerge should policies remain unchanged.¹⁴ It might also be helpful to look at solutions to similar problems that have been implemented at other times and places.¹⁵

There are several elements writers should bear in mind when devising a list of policy options. Do not attempt to identify the “perfect” policy option: almost all will have advantages and disadvantages. Although writers will develop a preferred solution to recommend, specific policy recommendations should not be made until the costs and benefits of all possible options have been evaluated. Refrain from evaluating options that are unrealistic, such as suggesting courses of action that require far more resources than decision-makers possess, or solutions that are otherwise unrealizable: policy options should be specific and grounded in reality.¹⁶

¹³ Young and Quinn, *Writing Effective Public Policy Papers*.

¹⁴ Bardach, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis*, 17.

¹⁵ Weimer and Vining, *Policy Analysis*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 281.

Once the list of available policy options is clear, authors should develop a system of evaluative criteria for surveying specific costs and benefits, and compare the options.¹⁷ The evaluative criteria used should be consistent with intended policy goals. Efficiency and effectiveness are commonly used as evaluative criteria for assessing the extent to which an option is in line with a particular goal. Efficiency pertains to maximizing the ratio of outputs to inputs, usually measured economically in terms of monetary inputs and outputs. Effectiveness refers to how well the policy realizes relevant objectives. Other potential evaluative criteria include: equality, transparency, rationality, flexibility, and stakeholder acceptance.¹⁸

The most important constraint is whether or not the policy option is feasible. If a policy option is not robust enough to survive modification during implementation, has too many inflexible constraints, or is not popular enough to gain support, it cannot be a viable option regardless of efficiency or effectiveness.¹⁹ Even when the political feasibility constraint is met, evaluative criteria often conflict with each other, so tradeoffs have to be made in determining the options that are most consistent with broader objectives.²⁰

CHECKLIST

- Have you established alternative policy options aside from your recommended policy?*
- Is maintaining the status quo an option? Are there different ways of implementing or financing the options that might be relevant?*
- Do you have a clear system of evaluative criteria? To what extent do each of your options achieve your goals?*
- Who would be harmed by implementation, and who would be helped?*
- Are your options feasible? Can they withstand change during the implementation process?*

¹⁷ Weimer and Vining, *Policy Analysis*, 282.

¹⁸ See Bardach, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis*. For more information, see: ESCAP Virtual Conference: Integrating Environmental Considerations into Economic Policy Making Processes, "Role and Assessment of Policy Measures," last modified October 30, 2003, accessed September 15, 2013, http://www.unescap.org/drp/vc/orientation/M5_6.htm.

¹⁹ Christine H. Rossell, "Using Multiple Criteria To Evaluate Public Policies," *American Politics Quarterly* 21 (1993): 155-184.

²⁰ Weimer and Vining, *Policy Analysis*, 288.

Crafting Policy Arguments and Recommendations

Crafting comprehensive and persuasive policy arguments is essential for the development of policy recommendations. There are many types of policy arguments, but the type of argument used depends on the research conducted, how writers choose to frame arguments, and the audience. Principal types include authoritative, technical, pragmatic, and values-critical policy arguments.

A policy recommendation specifies the *who, what, when, where, and why* of a particular course of action. Besides explicitly identifying the goal that will be accomplished through fulfillment of the recommended course of action, strong policy arguments provide factual or ethical reasoning for implementing a policy and address questions of feasibility and efficiency.

A policy argument is a “statement that advocates adopting a policy or justifies the decision to adopt a policy.”²¹ Good policy arguments make a clear case for action by using effective logical reasoning. Comprehensive and persuasive policy arguments “act as a decision-making tool and a call to action for the target audience.”²²

One useful measure of an argument’s logical effectiveness is Bardach’s New York Taxi Driver Test: *Imagine that you are talking to a taxi driver, and he has just asked you about your current project. Sum it up clearly and concisely in three sentences, or in about 30 seconds...if you are not able to clearly and briefly sum up your idea in this manner, you need to further clarify your ideas.*²³

In other words, a policy argument must be clear enough to explain it quickly to a non-specialist. If doing so seems unlikely, you must reassess your argument’s logic.

Policy arguments that pass Bardach’s test can be used to frame a policy debate in multiple ways:

Authoritative policy arguments are based on the recommendation of a well-regarded authority on the relevant subject matter. An expert, such as an elected official, scientist, or another professional in the field may advance a claim based upon their knowledge and/or experience. Policy writers may choose to cite this expert advice as justification for pursuing a particular course of action.

²¹ William J. Ball, “A Pragmatic Framework for the Evaluation of Policy Arguments,” *Policy Studies Review* 14 (1995): 26.

²² Young and Quinn, *Writing Effective Public Policy Papers*, 18.

²³ Bardach, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis*. 41.

Technical policy arguments utilize scientific or mathematical rules or models to provide the rationale for decision-making. For example, when cost-effectiveness or efficiency is the primary goal, consider using a cost-benefit analysis to compare policy options and evaluate the desirability of a given policy alternative.²⁴

Pragmatic (or comparative) arguments support a claim with “factual and values based ‘good reasons.’”²⁵ These arguments are inductive, employing parallel cases, assumptions about the similarities of multiple policy cases, and analogous reasoning to provide justification for a policy recommendation. In other words, if in a previous case or similar set of circumstances of a particular policy proved effective, writers may recommend applying the same policy again.

Values-critical arguments are normative, based on principled evaluations of specific ethical dimensions of a policy. A policy recommendation may prove justifiable because of its ethical implications, specifically whether it upholds certain values. These values include (but are not limited to): equality, fairness, social justice, human dignity, efficiency, freedom and autonomy (regarding political and economic rights), community and participation (“the public interest”), tolerance, transparency, and order.²⁶ When making a values-critical argument, it is important to note that a policy may aid in upholding some values while others are sidelined. Writers may therefore find it helpful to both rank particular values in order of priority, and address the conflict directly in the argument.²⁷

CHECKLIST

- Is your argument convincing and easy to follow?
- Is your logic coherent, and have you developed each aspect of your argument?
- Is your evidence incorporated into your arguments?

²⁴ Weimer and Vining, *Policy Analysis*, 220.

²⁵ Ball, “Pragmatic Framework,” 6.

²⁶ See Ball, “Pragmatic Framework,” 15-19, and Weimer and Vining, *Policy Analysis*, 142-158.

²⁷ Rossell, “Using Multiple Criteria,” 161-167.

Writing Policy Briefs

Policy briefs are the most common form of policy writing. A policy brief defines a policy problem, provides background information, outlines options for addressing the problem and evaluates their potential outcomes, and provides evidence in support of policy recommendations.

First and foremost, a policy brief defines a policy problem within the current policy framework and provides background information so that a non-specialized audience can understand the problem and understand why this problem must be addressed. It also outlines policy options and evaluates their potential outcomes. Finally, a policy brief makes an argument by providing evidence in support of the brief's policy recommendations and defending them as the best possible options among several.²⁸

When writing a policy brief:

- Adhere to a coherent and easy-to-read format.
- Be short and to the point. Focus on a single issue, but provide enough information so that the reader understands the most crucial details.
- The audience probably consists of busy non-specialists who are looking for something that is attractive, interesting, and easy to read. Do not force your readers to search for key points or information—clarity is essential.
- Base your argument on firm evidence, not just a single experiment or viewpoint, and draw from multiple and diverse sources.²⁹

The following outline should be used as a general guide when writing a policy brief:

- Title and Author
- Executive Summary (optional)
- Introduction
- Background: Overview of data and summary of current policy
- Analysis of alternative options
- Policy recommendations
- Conclusion

²⁸ "How to Write a Policy Brief," International Development Research Centre (IDRC), accessed September 28, 2013, http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Resources/Tools_and_Training/Documents/how-to-write-a-policy-brief.pdf.

²⁹ *Food Security: Communications Toolkit* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2011), accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/i2195e/i2195e.pdf>.

- Endnotes
- Appendices (optional)

The title identifies the topic and captures the interest of the audience. Short, catchy, and to the point, the title should be descriptive and relevant, so that your readers feel compelled to read the writing.

The introduction of a policy brief identifies the specific policy challenge that the author(s) will address, perhaps phrased in the form of a question, and contextualizes the issue by conveying the scope of the policy problem. Writers should also include a succinct synopsis of the findings, research methodology, and conclusions that will follow in the rest of the paper. The audience should immediately know whether or not the brief is relevant to their own interests and priorities.

Following the introduction are one or more background or data sections. These sections contribute to the reader's overall understanding of the issue. Include additional background information and data not previously discussed, as well as the results of research conducted. Using a wide variety of sources builds credibility, but it is important to include only those facts a decision maker needs to know. Brevity is essential to maintaining the attention of your audience.³⁰

The discussion of policy options entails not only a description of various ways to formulate a policy, but also an analysis of each case. Writers should reference existing policies and identify what they have done (or not done) to address the policy problem. Also, consider new potential solutions advanced by others. Sources for identifying alternatives include existing policy proposals, policies that have been implemented elsewhere, as well as options that you yourself have formulated. Later, clarify the tradeoffs between policy options to ensure that they are distinct from one another, and not variations of the same proposal.

Policy recommendations are the most important part of the policy brief, serving as both a decision-making tool and call to action. Generally speaking, authors should provide a set of four to eight actionable, feasible, and realistic policy recommendations for specific actors to implement. Recommendations must be as precise as possible and organized in a way that is accessible to the reader, making logical conclusions based on data and arguments. Recommendations should be presented clearly and objectively, using active, rather than passive, verbs.

Make sure to refute potential criticisms of a recommendation, or at the very least, acknowledge them as challenges that may impact implementation. Recognizing the potential challenges and how they may impact stakeholders strengthens your argument, and will make your recommendations appear more credible.

The conclusion summarizes key arguments, re-emphasizes the importance of action, and reinforces the principal message of the brief by reiterating the aforementioned policy recommendations through the lens of the policy problem. The conclusion may be short, and can be combined into one section

³⁰ Jeff Lovitt, ed., *How to Win Respect and Influence Policymakers: Principles for Effective Quality Controls in the Work of Independent Think-tanks* (Prague: Policy Association for an Open Society (PASOS), 2011), accessed September 14, 2013, <http://pasos.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/policyprinciplesbook.pdf>.

with the policy recommendations if necessary. Never introduce new ideas in the conclusion.

You may also choose to include the following sections if time and space permit, as necessary:

A short executive summary (approximately 150 words) summarizes the brief and outlines the policy recommendations to readers who may not have the time or feel initially inclined to read through the brief in its entirety. It is typically located on the first page of the brief, and like the introduction, works to convince the reader that the issue merits greater attention.

In the appendix, you may choose to include additional information or data referenced in the body of the brief that supports or supplements your argument.

CHECKLIST

- Is your title short and descriptive? Does it capture the reader's attention?*
- Does your introduction identify, define, and elaborate on the nature of the policy problem? Does it compel your audience to act?*
- Are there clear links between the problem you describe and the options you discuss?*
- Have you outlined, evaluated, and compared possible alternatives?*
- Have you provided a convincing argument for your recommendations?*
- Is your conclusion a concise synthesis of your major findings?*

The Editing Process

Once a draft of your policy product has been developed, authors and editors should initiate a collaborative review process prior to publication. Reviewers and authors should ensure information is accurate and relevant, that the writing's tone and language are appropriate and consistent, that the structure is clear and compelling, and that all grammar, spelling, and punctuation mistakes have been corrected.

Once writers have submitted a draft of their policy product, editors must edit the draft's content, structure, and style prior to release. This involves a number of steps:

- Providing substantive editorial feedback
- Checking the format, tone, style, and language
- Fact checking
- Author's re-reading and revisions
- Publication

Policy products should go through a series of reviews, by a number of reviewers if possible. The first draft will undergo a number of revisions before publication, a fact that editors should communicate to authors in order to establish clear expectations from the outset. In the first stage of editing, the editor should focus on the content of the brief and provide substantive feedback on the strength and clarity of the author's argument.

Editors should also confirm that the draft follows a standard structural and stylistic format for policy products. Headings and subheadings should be incorporated where appropriate to divide the paper and improve readability.

Editors should also consider the tone and language of the paper, and confirm that it provides a balanced perspective on the issue at hand. In order for policy arguments to receive serious attention and influence policy, the tone must be dispassionate and analytical. Writing that is overly polemical or extreme may undermine the credibility of the author or organization publishing the piece.

Editors are responsible for verifying that all information presented is accurate. This involves fact checking from the original sources cited in each section of the paper. Accurate fact checking may also require editors to conduct background research so they understand the issue and can ensure the paper makes a meaningful contribution to the existing debate. As this process may be tedious, a number of editors or assistants may be involved, depending on the length and scope of the paper.

It is especially important that when providing comments, editors do so in a constructive manner and present feedback in a way that does not contradict or override the author's vision. After receiving editorial comments, the author should re-read and revise the paper as necessary.

In the final stages of revision, editors should focus on the following elements:

- Ensuring clarity of message
- Ensuring a clear, logical, and easy-to-follow structure
- Adding missing information
- Removing unnecessary or repetitive information
- Affirming that all paragraphs are coherent and sentences are logically sequenced
- Removing or re-wording dense or convoluted sentences
- Correcting errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar
- Making final formatting adjustments

This final stage of editing is often the most time-consuming. Spelling mistakes and grammar should not be a primary focus until the end, as sentences and arguments may be reworded. Checking the format and layout should also be completed before publication.

At the end of this stage, make all necessary changes so that the final draft is clean and ready for publication.

CHECKLIST

- Is the structure of the paper clear and easy to follow?*
- Do sections and paragraphs follow each other logically?*
- Is it easy to locate sections in the paper? Is your writing scannable?*
- Will your audience understand the terminology you use in your paper?*
- Can you find any extra words that might be superfluous?*

Communicating and Disseminating Written Policy Products

Be strategic in disseminating policy papers to your target audience. Methods for distribution may include: digital distribution, hard copies, combining policy papers with other types of materials, and distribution to media outlets.

The function of the policy paper as a call to action is best fulfilled when a wide range of stakeholders have an opportunity to read the paper. The publication and distribution of policy papers plays an important role in broadening the policy debate on specific issues and furthering arguments and ideas within the policy community.³¹

The target audience for a paper should be defined in the initial stages of the policy writing process to ensure that the brainstorming, researching, writing, and dissemination processes are effective. Understanding your target audience's capacity to act is also critical, as it impacts the framing of the writing.

To maximize impact, always try to publish policy papers during a peak period of interest. Doing so requires strategic planning to ensure there is enough time to complete all steps of writing and editing in order to publish the paper while interest in the issue is still high. It might be wise to create a work plan to issue papers around important dates relevant to the policy problem, such as elections or anniversaries of important events. If the audience has a set deadline for making a decision, be sure to factor timing into your analysis.

Knowing the target audience also impacts how policy papers are disseminated after they are published. Though your target audience may be broad, effective methods for disseminating policy work to this audience could include:

- Digital distribution
 - Link an online copy of the publication to your website and take advantage of social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.
 - Email copies to an electronic list of subscribers and supporters. This can be done through a mass-mailing program that provides data on how many individuals have opened a message and clicked on relevant links.
 - Ask relevant partner organizations to distribute copies to their constituents.

³¹ Young and Quinn, *Writing Effective Public Policy Papers*, 85.

- Hard copies
 - “ Make sure physical copies are available at events or in the reception area of your organization’s office.
 - “ Mail copies to key actors or distribute them at meetings, conferences, or workshops.
- Hold an event to discuss the publication, ideally with stakeholders able to influence policy, and send participants back to their organizations with extra copies.
- It may also be useful to produce other materials to supplement your publication, such as:
 - “ A presentation, or slide deck, to use in meetings and conferences
 - “ Short, summary-form fact sheets
 - “ A brochure or flier about your project or organization
 - “ Statements to use in media interviews, a press release, or talking points
- Submit an advance, or embargoed, copy of the writing to members of the media

CHECKLIST

- Have you been strategic in your dissemination efforts to ensure that you are reaching your target audience?*
- Have you exhausted all possible publication options?*

Appendix A:

Suggestions for Further Reading

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- Peters, B. Guy, and John Hoornbeek. “The Problem of Policy Problems.” In *Designing Government from Instruments to Governance*, edited by F. Pearl Eliadis, Margaret M. Hill, and Michael Howlett, 77-105. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005.
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- Polski, Margaret M. and Elinor Ostrom. “An Institutional Framework for Policy Analysis and Design.” Paper presented at the Vincent and Elinor Ostrom Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis at Indiana University Bloomington, Bloomington, Indiana, June 15, 1999.
- Rossell, Christine H. “Using Multiple Criteria To Evaluate Public Policies.” *American Politics Quarterly* 21 (1993): 155-184.
- Weimer, David L., and Aidan R. Vining. *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practices, Third Edition*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.
- Wilcoxon, Peter J. “Tips on Writing a Policy Memo.” Last modified September 24, 2013. Accessed October 7, 2013. <http://wilcoxon.maxwell.insightworks.com/pages/275.html>.
- Young, Eoin, and Lisa Quinn. *Writing Effective Public Policy Papers*. Budapest, Hungary: Open Society Institute, 2002.

Appendix B: Sample Policy Memo

Scenario: The following memo is a hypothetical sample memo written during the Libyan Revolution, in March 2011. The memo is written from the perspective of a member of the Warfallah tribe, who is advocating for the adoption of a semi-proportional electoral system. The member is recommending the leader of his tribe take this position at an upcoming meeting. A key assumption of the writer is that the leader should do whatever is best to maximize the tribe's influence. This is the *goal* of the memo, and the objective the recommendations aim to satisfy.

To: A leading sheikh of the Warfallah tribe

From: Tribe member (name)

Re: An Innovative Approach to Libya's Evolving Institutional Framework

Date: March 25, 2011

Memorandum

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide a recommended institutional framework for Libya's future and anticipate proposals likely to be introduced at the upcoming constitutional reform committee meeting.

Guiding principles: Embrace alliances, reject tribalism

The Warfallah tribe expects you to enter negotiations with a strong desire to maximize the tribe's political influence (in the form of a political party) within the adopted institutional framework. Two principles should guide your approach:

1. Although the tribe is the largest in Libya, it only consists of roughly 15% of the population. The tribe will need to **creatively ally with another political bloc** in order to maximize its influence. The other two political blocs consist of workers and Islamists—both of which have an advantage as parties based on transnational advocacy networks.
2. The people of Libya resented **Qaddafi's unpopular acceptance of tribalism** as the basis for political competition. If the Warfallah approach these negotiations with a similar outlook, other blocs will be reluctant to align themselves with the tribe. Consequently, party-list systems should be avoided at all costs, as they will signal an attempt by the tribe to pack seats with tribal members.

Recommendation: A semi-proportional system with equally populated two-member districts

At the upcoming meeting of the constitutional reform committee, you should support the creation of a semi-proportional parliamentary system. The Prime Minister will be selected according to the allocation of seats in parliament amongst workers, Islamists, and Warfallah leaders. These are the only three political parties that will compete for power in the near future. Electorally, the country should be divided into equally populated two-member districts. However, each party should be limited to one candidate—a slight modification to typical cumulative voting systems. Each citizen should have two votes. This system might encourage political gridlock, but it is the only system that will allow for representation that exceeds 15%.

This proposal only functions so long as there is an agreement between the Warfallah and either the workers movement or the Libyan Islamic Fighters Group (LIFG). This will be very easy to achieve, as the recommended system effectively prevents any party from achieving a majority in Parliament. Other parties will want to ally themselves with the Warfallah in order to win the second seat in districts heavily populated by the tribe. In exchange, the allied party will back the Warfallah candidate to serve as the second member in areas where the Warfallah presence is not as strong. This arrangement enhances the tribe's importance, and it is the best available option to take more than 15% of available seats. It also signals a rejection of tribalism, which will actually improve the Warfallah's standing in Libya.

Anticipating opposition to a semi-proportional system in the form of competing proposals

The committee will likely consider two proposals that will unfavorably affect the tribe's political influence. The first will recommend some **variation of a presidential system that relies on majoritarian voting** in a simple majority single-ballot system. This would almost certainly lead to a marginalization of the tribe's influence. Theoretically, this system favors a two-party system, which will lead to competition between the workers movement and the LIFG. This is likely to occur for two reasons. First, majoritarian voting over-represents larger parties and under-represents small ones. Second, voters are affected psychologically—Warfallah voters will not want to waste their votes on candidates that do not have a chance to win.

The second proposal might involve a **parliamentary or mixed system that relies on proportional voting**. This would be a more suitable alternative to the above proposal, but it will still provide disincentives to other political blocs interested in the tribe's support. Proportional voting will allow the tribe to flexibly shift alliances and join different coalitions, but it will never engender the universal support that could be enjoyed under the recommended option. The tribe will only ever obtain 15% of

available seats. Since it will be competing with the workers movement and the LIFG, the tribe might always be reduced to a swing coalition partner.

Conclusion: A semi-proportional system as a compromise solution

You should immediately move to make your counterparts aware of the merits of a semi-proportional system with two-member districts. With your principles in hand, you should defend this solution as a political compromise that is likely to satisfy all parties. For these and many more reasons, this solution maximizes the tribe's influence and provides a robust, stable institutional framework for Libya's future.

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