

Duke | Policy Bridge

How to Write a Policy Memo

What is a policy memo?

Succinct presentation of a problem, its context, and recommended action.

- 1-2 pages
- Easy to understand
- Goal is to inform a specific audience

Who are you writing for?

- Colleagues
- Supervisors
- Legislators

What does your audience need?

- Basic information
- Clear explanation of a core dilemma
- Strong choice from a variety of alternatives
- New strategy or solution

What is the format?

Most policy memos include the following sections:

- Informative & Engaging Title
- Introduction. *Summarize the conclusion/recommendations at the beginning.*
- Background. *Why should the audience care? Define the scope of the problem.*
- Policy Alternatives. *Describe current and proposed policy options.*
- Policy Recommendations. *Explain what steps must be taken.*

How is it organized?

- Start with your conclusions
- Keep a logical, coherent flow
- Give visual cues (Headings, bullet points, highlight key points, white space)

Want to learn more?

- Check out this [University of Michigan Infographic](#) overview on policy writing.
- Read [The Craft of Memo Writing](#) by Harvard Kennedy School's Prof. Behn.
- Learn how to assess different policy solutions with [Stanford's Guide](#) to policy memos.
- Look at [example memos](#) and briefs compiled by NYU Wagner.

Did you...

- ✓ avoid jargon?
- ✓ keep it short?
- ✓ start with a solution?
- ✓ use active voice?