

POLS 261: Policy Brief

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WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM



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The Writing *Process*

Getting started

- Explore the assignment
- Make rough notes
- Pick a tentative topic



Drafting/revising

- Get feedback on your draft/revise: work on higher order concerns: structure, argument, organization

Editing

- Work on style and lower order concerns
- Proofread, consult checklist for assignment



Genre: policy brief (knowledge translation)
evidence-based, research-to-practice
persuasive/argumentative
analytic, synthetic

Length: 7 pages, double-spaced, 12 pt font

Value: 30%

Due: March 30th

References: Your choice (APA, MLA, Chicago, Vancouver, etc.)

Sources: minimum of 6 academic sources



The paper will be evaluated based on:

1. quality of **research**,
2. quality of **writing** (style, structure, completeness),
3. quality of **analysis** (clearly identifies problem, offers persuasive recommendations)



Students are required to write one **evidence-based policy brief** that develops a theme/question related to course topics. You must

- a) **select an audience** for whom you are writing,
- b) **select a topic** of interest to that audience (an “urgent problem in global politics”)
- c) **inform your audience about the issue** (provide background research on your topic that draws on scholarly literature), and
- d) **offer compelling recommendations** on what action(s) your institution should adopt.
- e) **i.e., create a compelling narrative** about your topic and potential responses to it.



“Please keep in mind that your paper is designed to be read by **intelligent non-experts**. This requires **writing clearly and succinctly** to ensure your target audience understands the problem and your recommendation. While this should be written in an ‘essay style’ (i.e. full and descriptive paragraphs) you may also wish to make use of charts/pictures, bullet points, bolded text, and other visual aids to emphasize key points in the document.”



Three aspects to this:

1. **Understand** and be able to **summarize** a topic (based on course themes, theories, and/or case studies);
2. **Situate** your topic within a broader academic conversation;
3. **Take a position** on your topic

Approaches:

- **Summarize/describe** topic: what are the most important aspects for your argument?
- **Analyze**: what are the component parts?
- **Synthesize: persuade** audience of your position



Policy brief:

- Identifies **problem/need**
- Translates informing **evidence**
- Outlines **responses/solutions**
- [Proposes **recommendation(s)**]

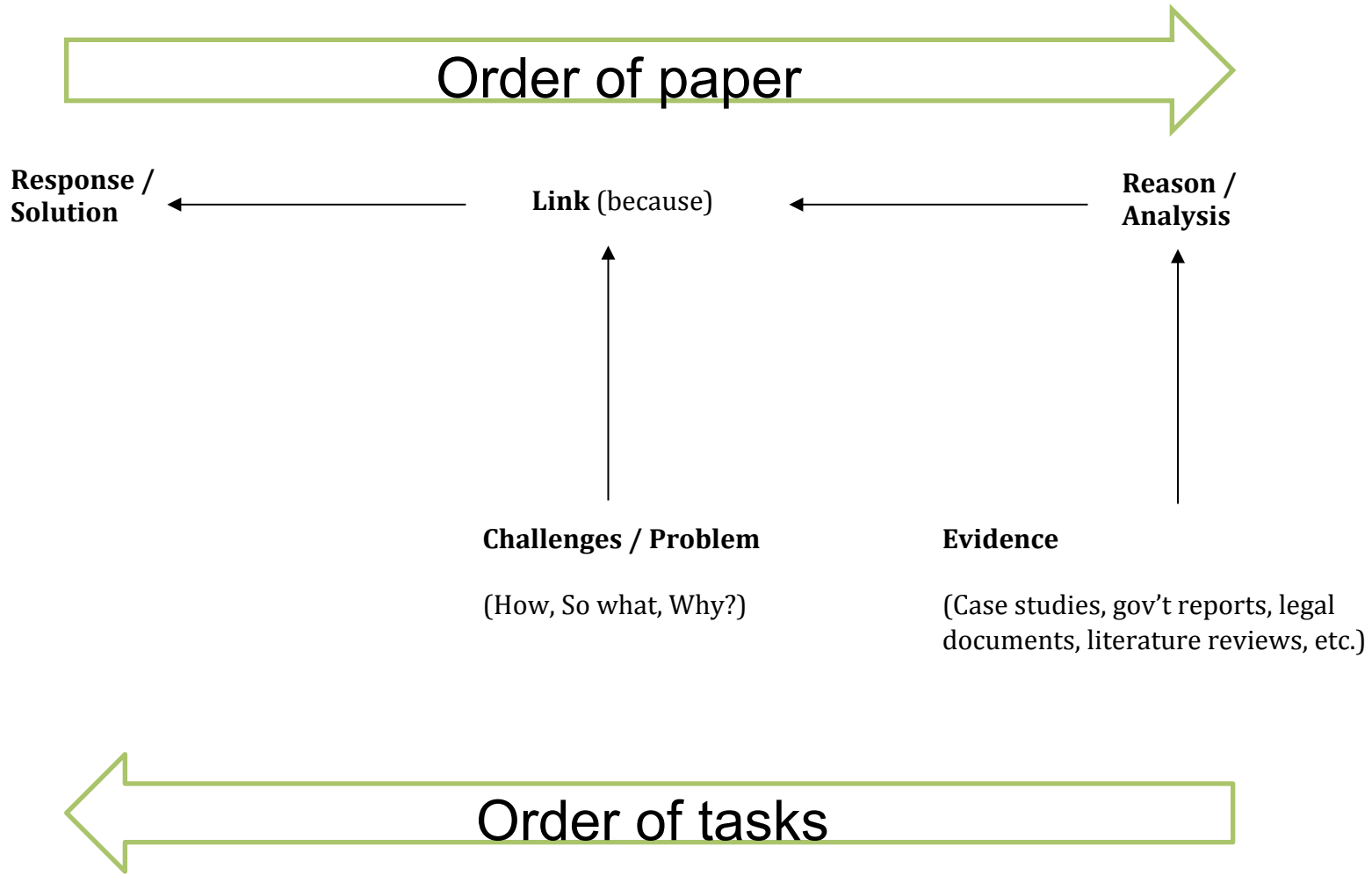
Problem → discussion of possibilities → response

- Not attempting to cover every aspect of an issue: focus on the most *pertinent, compelling, and exigent* aspects.



Argument:

- Demonstrates knowledge of
 - Problem/issue and context (summary)
 - Chosen audience/organization (summary)
 - Analyzes existing research on the topic (analysis)
 - Reads problem through course concepts (analysis)
 - Supports compelling position/response (synthesis)
-
- Don't attempt to cover every aspect of a topic: focus on the most *pertinent*, *compelling*, and *interesting* aspects.





Include:

- Observation (What?)
- Argument (So what?)
- Implication(s) (Now what?)

Needs to be:

- Specific/focused
- Manageable
- Interesting
- Explicit

“I argue X, because of A, B, and C.”

“[Organization] should X and Y, based on 1, 2, and 3.”



Executive summary:

- identifies problem, gives brief background/context, names responses/recommendations developed further on.

Statement of problem:

- develops more fully the chosen topic, links topic to audience (i.e., makes clear *why* your audience should care)

Background/context:

- provides political/historical context of issue at hand (only include relevant aspects!)
- synthesizes existing research/policies, identifies stakeholders impacted by issue
- “what does a policymaker need to know in order to understand the scope of the problem and the merits of your recommendation?”

Recommendation(s): AT LEAST 1/3 OF YOUR PAPER (2-3 PAGES)

- propose potential course(s) of action for your institution
- outline at least two and no more than three possible options, discuss pros and cons of each
- explicit recommend a specific action/policy response.



Need to consider:

- **Audience**
- **Tone** (professional vs. academic)
- **Evidence** & other supports (relevant, recent, actionable)
- **Focus** (specific vs. broad)
- **Clarity**
- **Readability** (sections, divisions, charts, bulleted lists, etc.)
- **Practicality** of policy options

“brevity with clarity”



Brevity with clarity:

- Use active, declarative sentences
 - Avoid overly-long and complex sentences
 - Avoid passive constructions
- Avoid modifiers (adjectives, adverbs)
- Maintain a disinterested, objective tone
 - Avoid placing yourself within the text (“I”)
 - Avoid emotional appeals or attempts to blatantly spin the issue/responses
- Avoid jargon: professional vs. academic
 - Expertise without obfuscation
- Be direct
 - “This policy brief addresses [need/problem]”



Ways to introduce evidence:

- Direct quotation
- Paraphrase
- Summary
- Visual argument

~~**Quotation:** more wordy; places focus directly on text; allows you to comment on *rhetoric* and *form*; need to provide explicit *analysis*; integrate into your own sentences (avoid “dropped quotations”~~

Paraphrase and summary: more concise; focuses attention on specific aspects of evidence; creates a persuasive narrative; keeps focus on *content* rather than *rhetoric*

Always (ALWAYS!) indicate when you draw on another’s ideas



Always comment directly on your evidence

- Assert
- Cite
- Explicate: always **explicitly** link your evidence to your claims



Always have a **topic sentence** that explicitly indicates what the paragraph is about, and how it fits within the larger document

Always have a **transition sentence** that connects each chunk of argument to the next:

- use transitional words/phrases
- link back to main claim or sub-claim

Transitions for purpose

For this purpose	In order to	To that end
In order that	So that	To this end

Transitions for argument or proof

Accordingly	Despite	In addition	Nevertheless	Therefore
Admittedly	Even so	In any case	Nonetheless	Thus
Although	Even though	In conclusion	Obviously	To be sure
At this level	Evidently	Indeed	Of course	Truly
Because	For	In fact	On the one	Whatever the
Besides	For the same	In light of this	hand... On	case may be
But	reason	evidence	the other hand	What's more
Certainly	Furthermore	In summary	Regardless	
Clearly, then	Granted	Meanwhile	Since	
Consequently	However	Moreover	That is	

Transitions for exemplification, illustration, addition or clarification

Additionally	For instance	More importantly	Specifically	The next part
Again	Further	Moreover	Such as	To add
Also	Furthermore	Most importantly	Take the case of	To clarify
And then	Generally	One characteristic...	That is to say	To demonstrate
As an illustration	speaking	Another characteristic	The final type	To explain
Besides	i.e., (that is)	One example...	The first	To illustrate
Besides that	In addition	another	(second, third)	To put it another
Case in point	In another case	example	category	way
Equally	In general	One kind... another	The last group	To rephrase it
important	In other words	kind	The most	What's more
Finally	In particular	One way... Another	important	
First	In the same way	way	component	
Following this	In this case	On this occasion	The most important	
further	In this situation	Point in fact	example... The	
For example	Like	Pursuing this further	next example	

Transitions for emphasis or repetition

Absolutely	Certainly	In brief	Obviously	To repeat
Always	Definitely	Indeed	Of course	Undeniably
As I have noted	Emphatically	In fact	Perennially	Undoubtedly
As I have said	Eternally	Naturally	Positively	Unquestionably
As has been noted	Extremely	Never	Surely	Without a doubt
Assuredly	Forever	Nobody denies	Surprisingly	Without reservation
By all means	In any case	No doubt	To be sure	

Transitions for comparison and contrast

Although	Despite	Likewise	hand... On the	Vis à vis
After all	Even though	Meanwhile	other hand	Where
As	However	Nevertheless	Otherwise	Whereas
Balanced against	In comparison	Nonetheless	Similarly	While
But	In contrast	Of course	Still	Yet
By comparison	In the same way	Once in a while	Though	
Compared to	In spite of	On the contrary	Unlike	
Conversely	Like	On the one	Up against	

Transitions for concession and exception

Admittedly	Granted	Nevertheless	Once in a while	Though
Although this may be true	However	Nonetheless	Perhaps	To be sure
Certainly	In spite of	Of course	Regardless	True
Despite	It is true that	Of course, it is true that	Sometimes	Yet
	Maybe		Still	

Transitions for cause and effect

Accordingly	Because	For this reason	The first (second, third) cause / effect	important cause / effect
Another cause	Consequently	On account of	Since	Therefore
Another effect	For	Since		
As a result	For that reason	So	The most	

Transitions for narration and process

After	At first	third	Meanwhile	(second, third) step
After a few hours (days, months, years)	At last	Firstly...	Nearly	The next step
After that	At the same time	secondly... thirdly	Never	The last step
Afterwards	Before	Formerly	Next	Then
Almost	Before long	Frequently	Now	Thereafter
Always	By this time	Immediately	Once	Two hours (days, months, years) later
As	Earlier	In the first place	Previously	When/While
As soon as	Eventually	In the meantime	Soon	
	Finally	Later	Subsequently	
	First... second...	Later on	The first	

Transitions for description

Above	Beyond	Inside	On one side... On the other side	The least important
Behind	In	Nearby	Outside	The most important
Below	In back of	Next to	Over	Under
Between	In front of	On		

Transitional chains

Basically... similarly... as well	In the first place... pursuing this further... finally
First(ly)... second(ly)... third(ly)...	In the light of the... it is easy to see that
Generally... furthermore... finally	In this case... in another case
In the first place... also... lastly	To be sure... additionally... lastly
In the first place... just in the same way... finally	

Transitions for conclusion or summarization

Accordingly	Finally	In final analysis	In summary	To summarize
As a result	Hence	In final consideration	Lastly	To sum up
As I have said	In brief	In general	On the whole	Therefore
As I have shown	In conclusion	In sum	Summing up	Thus
Consequently	Indeed		To conclude	

References

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- Transition words* (n.d.). Retrieved November 1, 2007, from <http://larae.net/write/transition.html>
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Make the document **readable** and **useable**:

- Use whitespace: don't fill the page completely
- Use headings, **bold**, underlined, and *italicized* text to
 - emphasize key terms,
 - indicate section breaks, and
 - separate policy options
- Use lists (numbered, bulleted, etc.) to list options



Policy Option 2: Another policy option is to follow best practices outlined by Work Safe Alberta and pair ergonomic education with workstation adjustments as a preventive measure for all employees.(10) Benefits to this policy are that all employees, including laptop users, can maintain ergonomic postures during computer use, thereby alleviating risk factors and helping to prevent the development of WMSDs. A recent study found improvements in posture and reductions in WMSD pain for employees who received education paired with ergonomic workstation adjustments, versus those who received education alone.(11)

A simple, cost effective solution to implementing this policy is to issue a portable adjustable laptop stand and separate keyboard to all laptop users. This will allow employees to raise their laptop screen to recommended heights while maintaining a neutral position for keyboarding, thereby eliminating postural risk factors.(10) Accordingly, while the cost of this equipment is relatively low compared to the cost of the laptop itself, it has potential for cost savings to the organization by reducing the incidence of WMSDs. Additionally, because these items are portable, they can be used both in the office, in the community for homecare workers, and at home for telecommuters. Disadvantages to this policy are the upfront costs associated with purchasing the equipment as well as the cost of training employees to use them. There is also risk that some employees will not utilize the equipment as intended.

Policy Option 3: Research suggests that an ideal policy option is to combine ergonomic interventions with input from employees, a strategy known as participatory ergonomics.(10) This policy strategy combines expertise and training by Workplace Health and Safety (WHS), ergonomists, and/or occupational therapists alongside the input of employees to develop an optimal ergonomics strategy. This is important because a systematic review shows that workplaces that involve employees through participatory ergonomics demonstrate reduced WMSDs, worker's compensation claims, and lost days from work.(12) Another advantage of this policy is that it has the potential for greater 'buy-in' and compliance by employees, along with greater reassurance that ergonomic interventions are appropriately targeted and implemented. The main barrier to this strategy is that it will require the greatest time, resources, and upfront cost to implement, as well as the greatest organizational shift along the culture-of-safety continuum.

Summary:

AHS can choose to (a) take no immediate action, but place these policy recommendations under review at the next policy meeting, (b) take action to implement one of these new policy measures as a pilot study within one sector of AHS, or (c) take action to implement one of these new policy measures



disorders (WMSDs) was recognized by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in 1997.(3) WMSDs, already prevalent among healthcare workers, are projected to increase unless ergonomic interventions are matched with HIT use.(1) Consequently, policies are needed to facilitate best practices for the prevention of WMSDs among healthcare workers by mitigating the ergonomic hazards of HIT/laptop computer use.

Need for New Policy:

The impact of WMSDs is significant upon both employees and employers. To illustrate, the Canadian Center of Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) recognizes WMSDs as a leading cause of human suffering, lost productivity, and economic burden upon society.(4) As such, workplace safety policies should be periodically reviewed to protect the safety, health, and wellness of employees, while minimizing economic burden upon employers.(5) This brief outlines gaps in current policy and makes recommendations for review by upper management.

Recognizing the impact to employees, a survey of Canadians reveals there is a strong demand for employers to prevent WMSDs by developing and regularly assessing strong ergonomic policies.(6) To meet this demand, employers should seek to establish workplace safety-cultures, which are shown to enhance quality of care for patients, increase commitment and satisfaction for employees, and improve system performance for employers.(7) To effectively create such a culture, all workplace hazards, including awkward postures related to HIT use should be addressed.(1)

The economic costs faced by employers include lost productivity, absenteeism, and increased worker's compensation, disability and healthcare costs.(3) For example, Alberta Human Services reports that WMSDs account for approximately 30 percent of lost-time claims among Alberta workers.(8) Of unique significance to Alberta Health Services (AHS) is the fact that people with workplace injuries become heavier users of the healthcare system after their injury, putting greater economic strain on the health authority as both an employer and provider of healthcare services.(9) Accordingly, AHS should take particular interest in the prevention of WMSDs.

Policy Aims and Suggestions:

Policies should aim to reduce and prevent the human and economic toll of laptop-related WMSDs. Best practices outlined by Work Safe Alberta are not currently being followed by AHS in their entirety.(10) By law, according to Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) standards, AHS has a duty not only to accommodate but also to prevent workplace injuries.(10) Current policies within AHS provide short training



- Get feedback from a “trusted reader”
 - Consider using other students in the course or the Centre for Writers
- Ask readers to read for specific purposes: thesis, structure, transitions, development of a particular paragraph or idea.
- Focus on higher-order concerns before lower-order ones



Towards the due date, switch your focus from

higher-order concerns (arrangement, arguments, evidence) to

lower-order concerns: proofreading, grammar, citation format,
grammar/spelling



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