

HOW TO WRITE A POLICY PAPER

A policy paper is a brief document in which the results and recommendations of a research are presented to a non-specialized audience. The aim of a policy paper is to analyze large amounts of complex data/information in order to present a short, neutral summary on a specific issue. At an undergraduate level, research is usually based on secondary sources on a topic or issue a student has selected. Therefore, the policy brief is a medium for exploring an issue in detail and highlighting key ideas derived from the research.

Guidelines:

Some key points to bear in mind are as follow. Firstly, students must focus and analyze on a single issue, for example, ‘Traffic Congestion in Karachi’.

Secondly, identifying and stating the thesis statement or purpose of the policy brief is important. For example:

The rising levels of air pollution has decreased the quality of life in metropolitan cities. A main source of said pollution is due to transportation such as buses, cars and motorcycles. Transportation doesn’t just contribute to the deterioration in atmosphere, it also decreases the quality of life as a form of traffic congestion. Therefore, this policy brief aims to address the issue of traffic congestion and its adverse effects on the residents of Karachi.

Thirdly, students should identify three to four salient points from their research on the topic and discuss them in the paper. In the case of the above example, the reduction in the quality of life in urban Karachi due to traffic congestion can be linked to three factors. First, traffic congestion has been linked to a major source of stress and fatigue as it makes travel increasingly strenuous. Second, this strain impacts the physical and mental wellbeing of the residents and affects all spheres of their life. Third, the lack of a functioning public transit system has led to the increase of private vehicles, which has contributed to the increase of lung diseases such as asthma.

Lastly, adhere to the word limit by distilling the information in a concise manner.

Structure of a Policy Paper:

1. Abstract or Executive Summary
2. Introduction
3. Approaches and Results of Research

4. Conclusions
5. Recommendations
6. Bibliography/References

1. Abstract (150 words)

The goal of an abstract is to convince the reader that the paper is worth an in-depth reading. For instance, the importance and relevance of the adverse effects of traffic congestion on the residents of Karachi need to be apparent to the reader whilst reading. An abstract of a policy paper should include:

- The description of the issue addressed
- The thesis statement highlighting the need for bringing changes in the current policies on the subject.
- The student's recommendations for action.

It is important to note that abstracts are written after you have completed writing your essay, so that you are able to reflect and distill the main findings of the text in a concise manner.

2. Introduction

The purpose of this section is to provide the context and background of the issue being presented in the essay. This backdrop is important as it will be the first building block of the policy brief. It must include essential information that the reader needs to know in order to understand the context in which the issue is located. Thus, it should include the following:

- A pithy statement about the issue being analyzed
- A brief overview of the root causes of the problem; this might be historical but students need to be decisive about the information presented here. They don't need to provide extensive details, just enough to highlight the history of the issue.
- The current policy implications of the problem at hand. This is pertinent, as this point is further linked to the recommendations and suggestions section.

In the case of the above presented example,

The history of both public and private transportation in Karachi needs to be highlighted. This overview will aid in the readers' understanding of the current socio-political and economic transportation scenario in Karachi. The landscape is marred by incessant congestion due to an absence of a functioning public transit system. Thus, it isn't farfetched to state that Karachi which is home to roughly 16 million people suffers from a transportation crisis which has led to an increase in traffic congestion.

3. Approaches and Findings

The approaches part of this section highlights the methods used by you to conduct research and gather secondary data, whereas, the findings provide the analysis of the data. It should highlight basic conclusions, providing specific details such as whether a specific policy is efficient or inefficient in resolving the issue.

For example:

A thorough analysis of secondary literature concerning the issue of traffic congestion and the analysis of the government plans for the *Karachi Circular Railway* was undertaken. It was found that abysmal governmental funding and the lack of consensus of varying political groups has contributed to the project's dismal situation. Therefore, due to the absence of a functioning public transit system, congestion has only become worse.

4. Conclusions

This section presents an overview and analysis of the data. Students should aim for concise conclusions deduced from the data presented. It is important that all arguments within the discourse concerning the issue be covered. Students may also critique the current policies and offer plausible explanations as to why a certain approach in addressing the issue might not be working.

In the current example:

In the absence of an economical and functioning public transit system, citizens have been forced to buy private automobiles, which has led to congestion. This has an adverse impact on both the mental and physical health of the citizens, and has thus reduced the livability ranking of Karachi as an urban metropolis. In order to combat this issue, firstly the projects such as *Karachi Circular Railway* and *Green Line* need to be completed as soon as possible. Secondly, to further discourage the purchase of privately owned cars and motorbikes, a hefty tax needs to be imposed on them by the government.

5. Policy Recommendations

In this final section, students will recommend one or two policy options. The purpose of the policy recommendation is to provide a convincing and detailed account of why the current policies are not worthwhile and thus need to be amended. The recommendation need not be the best or sure-shot solution, but it needs to be carefully argued by keeping the analysis of the data in mind.

While recommendations and conclusion are separate sections, they both still have to be supported with evidence based on your secondary research of the topic/issue. Good recommendations are those that list the specific steps that can be followed to bring about effective policy change.

For instance:

What might be a successful strategy to deal with traffic congestion in Karachi? Should the government build an economical public transit system which would reduce the usage of private transportation? Should the government impose a hefty fine on private automobiles to discourage people from further purchasing cars (case of Singapore)? If you focus on successful strategies deployed in cities aside from Karachi, be specific as to why such strategies worked and how these could be made better in the context of Karachi.