

A policy memo is the condensed outcome of a careful search process, aimed at preparing a policy decision that should be implemented. A careful search process should be executed even with a search time of less than a day. Writing a policy memo requires the application of all of the research and writing skills included in series A and B of this collection. However, the outcome of the process as stated in the ultimate policy memo, cannot be presented as a normal research report or an essay (⊕B18). A decision maker is not likely to read long reports. The report can be added to the policy memo, but the memorandum itself should be as short and as focused as possible.

Take the following five characteristics into account when writing a standard policy memo.

- 1 *Always keep it short.* Do not write more than one to three pages with 1.5 line spacing. Include relevant tables and figures in the text, not as an annex. Write short sentences.
- 2 The standard memo includes the following items:
 - a summary of the *policy problem* at hand;
 - a brief description of possible and realistic *scenarios*;
 - a short statement about *relevant data and opinions*;
 - an argued conclusion *selecting* the best policy;
 - a *time frame* for the implementation of the policy decision.
- 3 Try to consider and describe the *different* scenarios or options as realistically and objectively as possible. There is always more than one possible scenario, otherwise a policy memo would not be necessary. Be creative and imaginative, and play the ‘devil’s advocate’ when necessary. It increases the relevance of your memo and makes it possible for the decision maker to assess the pros and cons of different options, more seriously.
- 4 Only after serious consideration of the different and realistic scenarios, present *your* choice. Make clear why you have made this particular decision. Important influences on the choice are always:
 - *Timing*: are we dealing with a tactical or a strategic decision-making problem? Different timing can make different strategies feasible or appropriate.
 - What is the *budget* required and/or available?
 - What is the policy maker’s *mission statement*? Does a mission statement exist at all? If you advise to adopt a strategy that departs from the mission statement, your policy memo should be far more convincing in its argumentation.
 - Who can and should be chosen for an effective execution of the strategy?
- 5 It is common practice to leave out sources in policy memos. Try to abstain from this practice. It is more a sign of intellectual laziness, than of functional writing for the policy maker who is not supposed to be interested in your sources. Although a policy memo is not a scientific document, find ways to reveal the sources, even in a condensed version. Keep listing *sources* carefully when you write the *original version* of the policy memo, in order to be able to return to the original sources, if necessary. Do not underestimate the need for policy makers to know where you got the information from. Always reveal the exact references with tables and figures.

The following page includes two examples of headings for memos. The first example can also be used for sending other material to colleagues, the second shows how a policy memo should be presented.

Memo

Date: [Full date]
To: [Names of directly addressed]
From: [Names]
Re: [Subject]
Cc: [Names]

Status: 0 as agreed
 0 upon your request
 0 for your information
 0 needs further attention
 0 draft, needs further elaboration
 0 request for response
 0 please return
 0 ...

[initials]

← example one: summarising memo

[text of memo – or for any other report that you would like to draw attention to – separate on adjacent pages]

example two: heading of full policy memo



Memorandum

Date: [Full date]
To: [Names of those directly addressed]
From: [Name]
Re: [Subject]
Cc: [Names of additional recipients]

[text of memo, continued on next page if necessary:]

- a. What is the policy problem?
- b. What are relevant solutions and scenarios?
- c. What is relevant data?
- d. What is the best policy available?
- e. How can/should it be implemented?