# Unit 3 -­‐ Session 4

**SKILLS SESSION – LEARNING TO WRITE A POLICY BRIEF**

## INTRODUCTION

We undertake many forms of writing every day: reports, proposals, academic papers, and so forth. In this course you inevitably will do a lot of academic writing, as a Masters is primarily an academic qualification. In the course of this module you have already engaged in different forms of writing: doing a mind map, answering questions, written reflections. In this session I want to introduce you to a form of writing which policy makers and planners use quite a lot, but which is rarely specifically taught – how to write the POLICY BRIEF.

Policy briefs are frequently used to introduce one or several policy choices (or strategic choices) to address a problem. They are written for people who are influential, busy, and have little time to read – ministers, parliamentarians, permanent secretaries, etc. So a policy brief has to be, as the names says – BRIEF; some will argue, not more than two pages, others will say anything up to about eight pages. This may vary with audience and complexity of the policy suggested. Very importantly, the quality of a policy brief is determined by the clarity of argument, structure and sense of audience. The writer has very limited space to explain the background to the “problem” to be solved, context and rationale, and to motivate one or several policy options to address the problem. So, brevity and clarity are essential.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES OF THIS SESSION

**By the end of this session you should be able to:**

* + Write a policy brief

## READINGS

You will be referred to the following readings in the course of this session.

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| Details |
| IDRC (not dated). *How to write a policy brief.* Available on URLhttps://[www.idrc.ca/sites/default/files/idrcpolicybrieftoolkit.pdf.](http://www.idrc.ca/sites/default/files/idrcpolicybrieftoolkit.pdf) |
| Pellini. Policy Briefs: A Development Research Communication Tool. ODI. https://[www.slideshare.net/guestcadff0c/policy-­‐](http://www.slideshare.net/guestcadff0c/policy-)briefsa-­‐development-­‐research-­‐ communication-­‐tool |
| A brief on policy briefs. url: https://goo.gl/6ZEDU4.This is a collation of key tips on Researchgate. |

Several organisations have developed well-­‐written guidelines for constructing policy briefs. I have decided to share three of these with you here, so that you can get a sense of the similarities and differences of how policy briefs are constructed. Two of them are very short (two and three pages respectively). One, developed by the “Research Matters” project of the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC), is a bit longer, because it provides a detailed case example of the development of a policy brief.

***Activity 1: UNDERSTANDING HOW TO WRITE A POLICY BRIEF***

1. Study all three guidelines on how to write a policy brief. You will find that all three of them have similarities regarding the purpose of a policy brief, but

they suggest slightly different structures as there is not only one way to write such a brief.

1. Make notes on those elements that all three guidelines agree on and what the main differences are.
2. Find an example of a policy brief on the internet or maybe one written for your MoH, and compare this example with the suggestions of the guidelines.

## 5 Session summary

This skills session introduced guidelines for writing a policy brief – and required that you undertook the challenge of writing one.

Policy briefs are a crucially important tool for managers, policy makers and advocates to make a brief and very focussed argument for a particular strategy or course of action. You may find it useful in many aspects of your professional practice.

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This brings the module to an end. I hope you leave with a greater understanding of the scope of health workforce development, and how it is located at the centre of and inextricably tied up with all other aspects of the health system. Furthermore, I hope that particularly the last unit will have given you a sense of the importance and the possibilities of doing research in this field – whether at the evaluation end of the continuum investigate and track specific interventions in your work environment; or as research studies aimed at understanding particular aspects of HWD better. The field needs innovative and incisive research, policy and practice. Please feel encouraged to contribute!

https://[www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCSmIYmPOi4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCSmIYmPOi4)

