



Writing high-level summaries of your research

Why you should write an accessible summary of your research

Writing a research summary aimed at policy stakeholders is a useful way to communicate research findings and raise awareness of your research. Research summaries will have most impact when they address a specific and current policy need.

Research summaries are not a guarantee of policy impact, but are a useful resource to have available for when public policy engagement opportunities arise.

What is a research summary?

A research summary communicates policy-relevant research findings and other evidence-based information and conclusions to policymakers in clear, non-academic language. They may also provide a series of recommendations, based on research findings, to address a particular policy issue.

Questions to ask yourself before you start

Why does this research matter for public policy?

Think about whether there are particular areas or public policy issues for which your research findings are significant? Is there a current policy debate to which they are relevant? Do your findings show ways to improve current policymaking? What are the implications of your findings? What solution(s) are you offering to policy challenges?

What audience am I trying to reach?

You should have a particular audience in mind and try to target it as much as possible. Audiences may include:

- local government officials and representatives
- central government officials
- Parliamentarians
- Parliamentary staff
- think tanks, charities and civil society groups
- business or industry representatives.

What information do I want to get across?

Accessible summaries should focus on research findings and conclusions, not try to describe how the research was undertaken (except briefly and at the end of the document).

Things to remember

Tailor a summary to specific policy needs as much as possible.

Research summaries should be considered as providing a starting point for further engagement, not an end point.

The 'impact' of an accessible research summary will ultimately depend on it being used by the right people in the right place at the right time.

How to write an accessible research summary

Guide structure

- Key points box
- Introduction: statement of the problem or question your research addresses
- Key research findings and conclusions
- Short analysis, including description of relevant research insights (use sub-headings as appropriate)
- Brief summary of research

Keep it short

Policymakers have limited time. It should be kept as short as possible – a single page is ideal, but in all cases the most relevant information should be on the first page.

Keep it simple

You are not writing for academic peers but for an audience with variable expertise. Use plain language and avoid complicated and lengthy sentences.

Title

This should communicate the key message of your research findings, *as well as capture a policymakers imagination.*

Focus on key research findings

Outline the policy issue and summarise your conclusions and how your research findings address it. Explain the significance of the findings. You should provide a short analysis of your evidence and may include a very brief description of your research at the end. If you are including any conclusions for policy or policy recommendations, ensure these are prominent.

Further information

Providing links for interested readers to access more information (such as the full research paper, or project website) is useful.

References

These should be kept to a minimum and included in endnotes (not footnotes).

Golden rules

- Keep it short
- Use accessible language
- Focus on key research findings and their implications
- Target the summary to the intended audience
- Deliver clear conclusions
- Recommendations should be actionable, rather than vague aspirations

Dissemination

Research summaries can be disseminated in numerous ways: via social media, websites, meetings and mailings to a targeted audience. Reaching a smaller number of people who are more likely to read at least some of the briefing is more valuable than a larger number of people who may never read it.

More information

See examples of [UCL Public Policy research summaries](#).

UCL Public Policy can provide support and help with developing research summaries, including using our standard 'UCL Research Insights' template – please get in touch.

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