

Ontario Healthy
Communities Coalition

Writing Effective Briefing Notes

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Welcome!

Workshop objectives

- * what are briefing notes
- * what makes a briefing note *effective*
- * how to plan, develop, and edit briefing notes
- * how to become a better briefing note writer

Workshop structure

- * briefing notes: overview
- * some rules for writing well
- * tips for writing effective briefing notes
- * questions

Overview: What are briefing notes and what are they useful for?

- * information
- * problem solving
- * proposals
- * strategic inquiry/policy development

What makes a briefing note “effective”?

- * It has an immediately clear focus
- * It is as short as possible
- * It achieves a strategic purpose

What is the role of briefing notes in advocacy?

- * familiar to government decision makers
- * convenient structure for argument and problem solving
- * clarifies issues and strategies
- * helps the reader promote your ideas

What can go wrong?


- * too many purposes
- * lack of focus
- * too much information
- * no connection with the reader
- * too much work for the reader

A few words about writing

- * Writing well takes effort
- * Improvement is ongoing
- * The effort is worthwhile

Where are you now as a writer?

- * In general, how easy do you find it to write?
- * What process do you follow when you write?
- * How easy do you find it to organize your ideas?
- * How easy do you find it to write concisely?

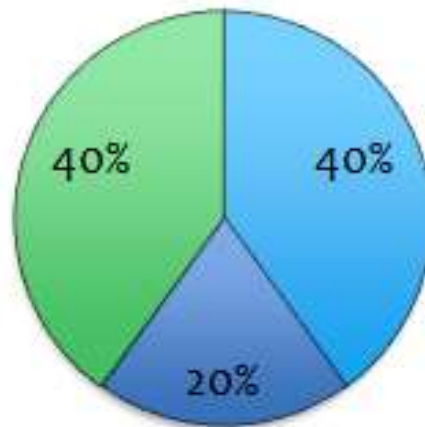
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- * In general, how do people respond to your writing?
 - * What do you most need to work on to be a more effective writer?
 - * Any other issues?

Three rules for writing well

- * Plan more, write less
- * There is no right or wrong, just better or worse
- * Editing makes the difference

Plan more, write less

The 40-20-40 approach



■ Planning ■ Drafting ■ Revising

There is no right or wrong, just better or worse

Better (for example)	Worse (for example)
single, clear focus	multiple focuses
short, focused points	long, dense paragraphs
a clear narrative flow	isolated chunks
complete	missing information
reader-oriented	no reader context
etc.	etc.

Editing makes the difference

- * in determining focus
- * in ensuring conciseness
- * in determining readability
- * in ensuring strategic value

Some tips for writing better briefing notes

1. Get your purpose straight

- * If you aren't sure about what you want your briefing note to do, your reader won't be either.
- * Readers will grasp your message more easily when they can see it immediately.



Take a minute:

- * What is your purpose?*
- * How can you capture that in your title?*
- * In your purpose/issue statement?*

2. See things from your reader's point of view instead of your own

On the whole, the difficult thing about persuading others is not that one lacks the knowledge needed to state his case nor the audacity to exercise his abilities to the full. On the whole, the difficult thing about persuasion is to know the mind of the person one is trying to persuade and to be able to fit one's words to it. (Han Fei Tzu, quoted in Meltsner, 1980: 125-126)

Readers' questions*

- * How will this help me?
- * Is this a good use of my time?
- * Do we speak the same language?

*(adapted from Armstrong & Terrell *Thinking Like a Writer*, 2009)

Questions for you to answer

- * What do they already know?
- * What do they want to know?
- * How can I help them understand?



Take a minute:

- * In what ways can you see things from your reader's perspective?*
- * What does that mean for your BN?*

3. Don't get trapped by templates

Organize to fit your purpose.

Find your own three parts: beginning, middle, end.

issue/purpose	implications
background	next steps
current status	conclusion
key considerations	recommendation
options	other



Take a minute:

- * Which sections do you need to include and in what order?*

Then outline your ideas before you write.

- * outline to as much detail as needed
- * revise your outline, not your draft
- * keep going until your outline is complete
- * only then start writing actual sentences and paragraphs (or develop in point form)

4. Collaborate before, during, and after you write.

Collaborative writing is

- * more efficient
- * more effective
- * more enjoyable



Take a minute:

Who should/could you talk to/write with?

Who can offer advice?

Who should/could be involved in the editing?

5. Write for readability

- * keep the reader comfortable
- * keep the reader moving forward
- * use headings
- * use bullet points and lists
- * keep paragraphs and sentences short and clear



Take a minute:

** Which techniques do you need to use more?*

6. Edit less for correctness and more for impact

Ask yourself

- * Is the purpose clear?
- * Have you approached things from your reader's perspective?
- * Have you approached things strategically?
- * Is everything there that needs to be there?
- * Do the beginning and the end match?

Ask yourself

- * Is the writing readable?
- * Is the layout easy on the eye?
- * Would you be confident walking into a meeting with your briefing note as the script?

7. Use each briefing note as an opportunity to improve

Once you have finished a briefing note, ask yourself

- * what worked?
- * what didn't work?
- * what should I do differently next time?

Questions?