



DANDELION

Packaging Information

The way a project presents or packages its information will heavily impact on how effective their communication is in reaching its target audience and maximising the impact it has – and many get it wrong. Information is often presented in long papers, using technical language and designed in a way to make it inaccessible to all but the most expert audience.

The information a project may wish to publicise will include recent results, research findings, analyses, recommendations and useful information that can assist other projects or policymakers, for example, in doing their own work. But, in order to make this information accessible to all the different audiences it is trying to influence, projects need package it in such a way that is appropriate to each, a way that excites, interests or motivates each to delve in and read.

Of course, a project must also ensure that any information presented is accurate as well, and any editing and design work it does should not detract from that. But the aim should be to package information into an accessible format, appropriate for the audience it is aimed at and that the reader is able to extract vital pieces of information easily and that it should be as memorable as possible.

There are many ways to package your research information to ensure you achieve this aim – factsheets, infographics, guides and policy briefs are just some examples – and each is more suited to different forms of content. For example, infographics are excellent for turning complex figures and facts into easily digestible, eye-catching and memorable nuggets of information, whilst guides add a simple structure to detailed pieces of information by breaking them down into sections that are easy to understand and followed by non-specialised audiences. In all cases, however, the main rule of thumb of communication is to keep things short, concise and attractively laid out.

Two excellent methods to communicate project information and recommendations are through policy briefs and factsheets. They are two very different yet equally effective short and concise ways of capturing the attention of readers quickly while at the same time getting across the important facts of the topic and any calls for action.

Policy briefs

What is a policy brief?

A policy brief is a short document that in essence presents policy recommendations, supported by evidence achieved through the project's analyses and results. These are more often than not based on a specific research topic or issue that has been thoroughly explored specifically to provide policy advice. The DANDELION project wrote nine policy briefs to convey issues on the socio-economic challenges that European society is facing and these are best-practice examples of how this type of information should be packaged and how it should then be presented.

Policy briefs are primarily for governmental policy actors. They are the preferred form of communication for this group because they act like a business card for researchers and stimulates them to make decisions.

There are usually two basic types of policy brief:

- An advocacy brief, which argues for a particular course or action
- An objective brief, which provides a more balanced argument.

Usually up to only 20 pages long, policy briefs do not go into all the details but highlight enough so that the reader can understand the issues at hand.

How to write and present a policy brief

Policymakers are extremely busy people and so how you write and lay out your policy brief is extremely important. The best way to grab the attention of these busy people is to make sure your brief looks attractive, appears interesting, is short and is easy to read. A good example of what it should contain is as follows:

- Enough information on one particular issue, but not too much
- Evidence from a lot reliable sources in different fields
- A focus on firm results and not just recommendations
- Findings linked to the specific issues relating to the bigger picture.

When it comes to structuring your policy brief it is important to try to break-up what can sometimes be text-heavy passages with graphical content and white space to make it more appealing to the reader. A good way of doing this is to use sidebars, boxes, graphics, tables and photographs, which keep the reader interested and allows them to skim through key points, while still getting an impression of the overall picture.

It is also worth structuring a policy brief with short, catchy and to-the-point headings and subheadings, which allow the reader to find the section they are

after quickly without being faced with unappealing columns of unbroken text. By including relevant key words or an interesting question in the title, you are more likely to grab the reader's attention.

There are a number of questions you should also address when writing an effective policy brief. These include:

- What are the shortfalls of the current policy? A brief summary
- Are you aware your recommendations need to align with policy actors who look to make cost-effective decisions? Don't propose the unaffordable! Make them financially realistic
- Do your recommendations discuss what needs to be changed and how? Make them practical
- Are you using active language? Keep things in the present, actionable, doable
- Does your recommendation seem feasible? Don't propose anything that you consider would be too difficult to achieve. Chances are that if you do, they will!

Factsheets

What is a factsheet?

Factsheets are a lot shorter than policy briefs and provide a simple overview of important information about a project or a specific issue or problem. They are easy-to-skim, compact (usually only one or two pages, maximum), and flexible as they can provide a concise summary for a number of topics.

Usually targeted at the general public, stakeholders, the media, the research and business communities, factsheets are a great gateway into enticing someone into reading more about your issue. Busy policy makers in particular like a good factsheet as a way of quickly getting up to speed with an issue and assessing whether a project's findings about a particular topic need more scrutiny.

DANDELION produced factsheets for each of the policy briefs, demonstrating how targeted policy recommendations can be presented as more accessible and user-friendly documents for non-academics.

They capture the reader's attention through innovative design and bold headings that stand out amongst standard documents, files or emails. Having captured the attention of your readers, factsheets become a great way of drumming up support for your issue or research.

Because of their compact nature, if the reader is interested in or agrees with what is presented, he/she is very likely to share the document and forward it to

their friends, co-workers and networks to whom it might be of interest. This can create scope for a project and or piece of research and help it gain influence further afield. As long as the data is up-to-date and relevant, a factsheet can also be shared indefinitely.



How to write and present a factsheet

Those who will be reading your factsheet do not have enough time to gather all the information on a topic and so for your factsheet to be impactful, here are some things to remember when compiling your content:

- Avoid jargon
- Use analogies to explain complex ideas
- The most important information should be in the first paragraph
- Details used in tables or graphs do not need to be repeated in text
- A factsheet is a self-contained document – imagine your reader has never read anything else on the subject
- Do not turn facts into a sales pitch
- Use evidence
- Give reference links so the reader can find out more about the topic if interested (which, of course, they will be once they've read your factsheet)

In terms of the text on the page, keep it short and simple – one word is better than two, a shorter sentence is better than a longer sentence, and a paragraph should be no longer than three sentences. Your language should be straightforward but remember to show you care and avoid repeating words and phrases.

Whilst the content and language is the nitty-gritty of your factsheet, structure plays one of the most important parts in capturing the attention, and retaining the interest of your reader, so remember:

- Facts still need to be structured so they do not appear strewn across a page
- Use catchy and eye-catching headlines to lead your reader around the page
- Graphics, charts, backgrounds and colour keep your reader engaged and provide information at a glance

- Leave a lot of white space
- Bullet points break-up information
- Use stylish branding to promote your project



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