



Briefing Book Guide

A briefing book provides a decision maker with an overview of an issue or problem, normally in support of policy findings or recommendations. Briefing books are often accompanied by oral briefings that present the most important findings or recommendations. The decision maker then refers to the extended briefing book for the background information and deep analysis that supports the core findings and/or recommendations. Briefing books are both a complement and a potential substitute for the oral briefing. The executive summary serves the substitute function – it makes sure the briefee gets the gist of the analysis even if the briefing does not occur. The rest of the book is the complement, for going deeper before or after the briefing and/or to be distributed (in whole or selectively) to a secondary audience.

The Core Components of a Briefing Book

The briefing book should address the precise needs, expectations, and concerns of the decision-maker. The book should have a hub-and-spoke approach. The hub is the executive summary and the spokes are the various tabs. Your briefing book should:

- **Define the problem or issue.** Highlight implications or state significant findings based on the data.
- **Analyze--not merely present—the data.** Show how you arrived at the findings or recommendations through analysis of qualitative or quantitative data. Draw careful conclusions that make sense of the data and do not overstate or misrepresent it.
- **Summarize your findings or state recommendations.** Provide specific recommendations or findings in response to specific problems and avoid generalizations.
- **Generate criteria for evaluating data.** Explain the key assumptions and methodology underlying your analysis and prioritize the criteria you rely on to assess evidence.
- **Analyze the options according to your methodology and assess their feasibility.** What are the pros and cons? What is feasible? What are the predictable outcomes? Support your assertions with relevant data.
- **Address—and when appropriate rebut—counterarguments, caveats, alternative interpretations, and reservations to your findings or recommendations.** Your credibility as a team relies on your ability to locate and account for counterargument. You should be especially sensitive to the likely counterarguments your decision-maker faces in implementing or acting on your recommendations or findings.
- **Suggest next steps and/or implementation of the findings or recommendations.** Briefly address the feasibility of those next steps or the implementation.
- **Include any material specifically requested by your briefee. This could include, for example, a speech draft or press release.**
- **Include a summary of sources and resources utilized in preparing material.**

Adapted from Marie Danziger, “Option and Decision Memos: Basic Components.

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