COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY

Tips and Tricks for Writing a Policy Paper That Makes an Impact

In this guide, Claudia Wessling, Head of Communication and Publications, Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS) and Wiebke Ewering, Head of Communications, German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) share some tips and tricks for writing impactful policy papers.

Before you begin writing, answer these basic questions:

- What information do your readers need to know to solve their problems?
- Can your analysis help them solve these problems?
- Has your topic already been widely covered?
- Does your piece contribute new ideas to the debate around the topic?
- Do you have reliable facts and data to bolster your argument?
- Does your paper offer practical recommendations and actionable advice?
- Are you willing and able to move away from expert's jargon to reach a broader audience?

Practical Tips for Structuring and Writing a Policy Paper:

- A policy paper analyzes, classifies, and provides actionable advice to the political community.
- Length should not exceed 15,000 characters (or 3,000 words).
- Title and subtitle introduce the topic in a clear and compelling way.
- On page one, key messages are listed in bullet points after a brief teaser.
- Main conclusions are clearly stated at the beginning of the text.
- Statements are substantiated with arguments; backed up with data, facts, and examples; and documented with sources.
- Headings and sub-headings don't ask questions but give statements.
- Subheadings are important to structure the text.
- Relevant sources can be included, but no academic citation is needed.
- Infographics help visualize your arguments and make your paper more engaging.