

What is a research brief?

A Research Brief is a short, non-technical summary of a discussion paper, intended for decision-makers, with a focus on the paper's policy-relevant findings. One research brief should be submitted to accompany each discussion paper that is based on EfD-funded research.

How to submit research briefs

There is a “research brief” template for each center. Submit the final brief (in the template, with content and format finalized and proofread) to the Research Officer at the EfD secretariat. Researchers may write directly in the template or may ask the center Communication Officer for help in placing the text (and a picture) in the template.

Researchers are encouraged to contact cyndi.berck@gmail.com for editorial support, from developing the content to proofreading the final version.

How to write a research brief

1. First, think about the **audience**. Target research briefs to decision makers and staff members in government agencies, NGOs, industry groups, etc., **not** to peer academic researchers.
2. Next, think about the **takeaway message**. Why is this research important for sustainable development and policy alleviation? What are the key findings that policy makers can use?
3. Write a **title** and a **subtitle**. Use specific, active language that focuses on policy relevance. If the paper title is technical, use everyday language instead

The title and subtitle can work together as a Q&A. (*How do villagers want to receive payments for conserving the forest? Some Tanzanians want individual payments, while others want to invest in community projects.*)

The title can present the main finding, while the subtitle can talk about the particular country, community, resource, or ecosystem that was studied. (*Farmers aren't investing in irrigation that could yield larger crops. Maize farmers in Kenya say it's because they lack access to credit.*)

4. Write three to five **key points** (bullet points), each one sentence. Focus on the policy problem and key findings. Some readers will only read the title/subtitle, bullet points, and maybe the introduction and conclusion. Make sure they get the “takeaway message” in those parts.
5. Write a one-paragraph **introduction** (50 to 100 words) summarizing the policy problem, your research, and key policy-relevant findings. Use the introduction and conclusion to the discussion paper on which the brief is based as sources for the introduction (and conclusion) of the brief.

Unlike academic writing, put the *findings first* (in the introduction) and *background later* (in the “story,” or main body of the brief).

Avoid technical jargon or explain it in plain language, throughout the brief.

Example: We interviewed 300 farmers to find out how much money they would want to set aside land for conservation. Three years, we interviewed most of them again to ask whether the payments were enough.

Not: Using a longitudinal dataset, we estimated WTA for PES.

6. Tell the *story* of your research in about 600 words in the main *body* of the paper. Why was this an interesting problem to study? How does this problem affect people? What practical solutions can you suggest? What was surprising? What was interesting about the ecosystem or community? How will your research help households, organizations, government, business, etc.?

Include any vivid examples from the discussion paper. One researcher noted that less than 1,000 members of a gorilla sub-species remain. The reader remembers concrete images like that.

Literature review, modeling theory, data preparation, econometrics, robustness checks, etc. very seldom belong in a research brief.

7. *A concluding subheading* should be similar to the title, but move from initially presenting the problem and findings to focusing on the policy implications.

8. *A concluding paragraph* should be about 100 to 150 words. Restate the key findings and policy implications, but use different wording, and focus on what the decision maker should *do* with the information. What policy actions are in progress, or are recommended? What challenges or trade-offs should be kept in mind?

9. *Total word count for introduction, body/story, and concluding paragraph: about 800.*

10. There is a space at the bottom of the template marked “*about this brief*” for the *citation to the discussion paper*, as well as the *contact information* for one of the authors of the discussion paper and research brief. Also, please provide *two or three other references*, either to academic papers or publicly available resources, for “*further reading.*”

11. Provide a *photo or other image*, in a format such as JPEG or TIFF. This should be an engaging picture of people, wildlife, a farm, etc., or a visually-appealing pie chart, bar graph, etc. could be used. No statistical tables! Please write a *caption*.

Total length of brief: three pages, including picture and all other information.