

A briefing paper is a summary of facts pertaining to an issue and often includes a suggested course of action. It consists of a precise statement or set of instructions intended to inform another individual who may have solicited assistance to study and make recommendations on a matter. For example, an executive assistant may provide a briefing paper to a manager or chairperson for a board meeting, or a bureaucrat may provide a briefing paper to an elected politician to consider a matter in department decision making.

As the term suggests, briefing papers are short and succinct. Usually written in outline format, a briefing paper will seldom exceed two pages in length. Briefing papers provide a summary of an issue, explain a situation that needs correcting, identify any financial implications, and recommend a course of action including arguments for and against the suggested action.

Components of a typical briefing paper:

Name

- a note to identify who the briefing paper is intended for

Date

- the date of preparation of the briefing paper

Subject

- the topic or issue of the briefing paper

Background

- provides a summary of past and/or current events that provide a context for the topic or issue, including any policies or past practices

Analysis

- identify significant aspects of the topic or issue
- identify the options or courses of action that should be considered, including details about the advantages and disadvantages of each
- identify actions currently taken or recommended to address the issue

Cautionary Notes

- identify any sensitive aspects of the topic or issue that may affect a person or an organization in a negative way

Contact

- the name and contact information of the writer of the briefing paper