Writing for a policy audience

Social science research can have an impact well beyond the academy, such as influencing public policy. When you are used to writing for an academic audience, it can be difficult to change styles. Here are some tips for writing for a policy audience.

1. Build a Relationship

Before you start the writing specifically for policy makers it is important to build up a relationship with them. Research who the correct decision maker is in your area. Engage with relevant people at conferences, send an occasional email with an accessible summary of your research and possible implications. Don’t expect to be able to just send a policymaker a copy of your research article and that they will then turn to you for your expertise. There is a difference between an academic audience and a policy audience, give yourself a chance to make connections and learn how to communicate with a different audience.

2. Make reports short and to the point

You can’t waste time with preamble. There is a good chance you are writing for a decision maker who is trying to evaluate possible solutions to a number of different problems – if you don’t attract their attention straight away you might never get it.

This will help to ensure that the decision maker can quickly see if your proposal is of interest to them. They will read through the rest of your work if the conclusion is of interest – but they may not get to your conclusion if they have to go through too much detail first.

3. Lead with your conclusion

Focus on the practical positive benefits that your recommendations will bring. Include the benefits to the specific group of people the policy is aimed at and the wider societal benefits such as positive economic or environmental outcomes from your ideas. Include links to further research to support your point.

4. Lose the jargon

It isn’t as though policy is a jargon free zone, but remember that they may not have the same familiarity with academic jargon, terms or acronyms. Clarity and accessibility are key.

5. Highlight the benefits

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