



CPIPR and APC

Writing Workshop

March 2024

www.prb.org

Part 2


Bridging the Research to Policy Divide

What is public policy?

“Public policy generally consists of the set of actions—plans, laws, and behaviours—adopted by a government.”

Source: [Britannica](#)

Public policies can be communicated through various instruments, including: agency guidance and guidelines, court decisions, executive orders, funding priorities, policy documents, laws/legislation, regulations, and rules.



“The good news is that evidence can matter. The bad news is that it often does not.”

Source: Sutcliffe and Court (2005)

Stereotypes Are Part of the Problem

MIND THE GAP

Image:

<https://unsplash.com/photos/a-train-passing-by-a-sign-that-says-mind-the-gap-D08H-6r7U4s>

Stereotypes Researchers May Have of Policymakers

- Limited perspective.
- Distrust (or don't understand) research.
- Responsible for interpreting research and identifying policy responses.
- Actions aren't evidence-based.
- *Partisan.*



Stereotypes Policymakers May Have of Researchers

- Excessive use of technical jargon.
- Inconclusive generalities about theoretical matters.
- Little appreciation of “real problems” and data needed to make policy recommendations.
- Avoid policy implications and recommendations.
- *Ivory tower.*





**How do we bridge the gap
between researchers and
policymakers?**



Bridging the gap:

- Plan for research uptake.
- Engage policymakers.
- Communicate strategically.*

* Assume competence but not expertise.

Bridging the gap through writing:

1. Use clear and concise language.
2. Avoid jargon.



Activity time!

Type a jargon example in the chat and we'll share ideas for alternative words or phrases.

Image:

<https://unsplash.com/photos/white-neon-light-signage-on-wall-mZNRsYE9Qj4>

Bridging the gap through writing:

1. Use clear and concise language.
2. Avoid jargon.
3. Speak directly to issues that policymakers care about.
4. Provide info that allows policymakers to feel confident taking action.

Bridging the gap through writing:

1. Use clear and concise language.
2. Avoid jargon.
3. Speak directly to issues that policymakers care about.
4. Provide info that allows policymakers to feel confident taking action.
5. Propose feasible solutions and/or suggest concrete action steps.

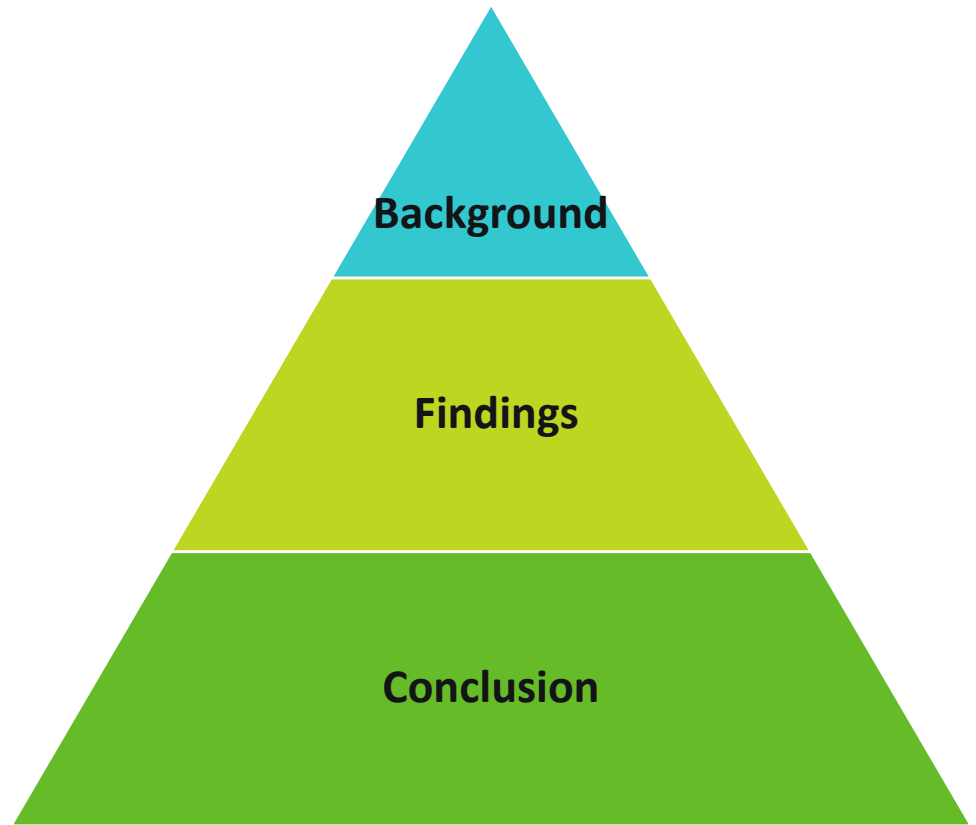
Part 3

Approach to Writing for Policy Audiences

Understanding Academic vs. Journalistic Writing

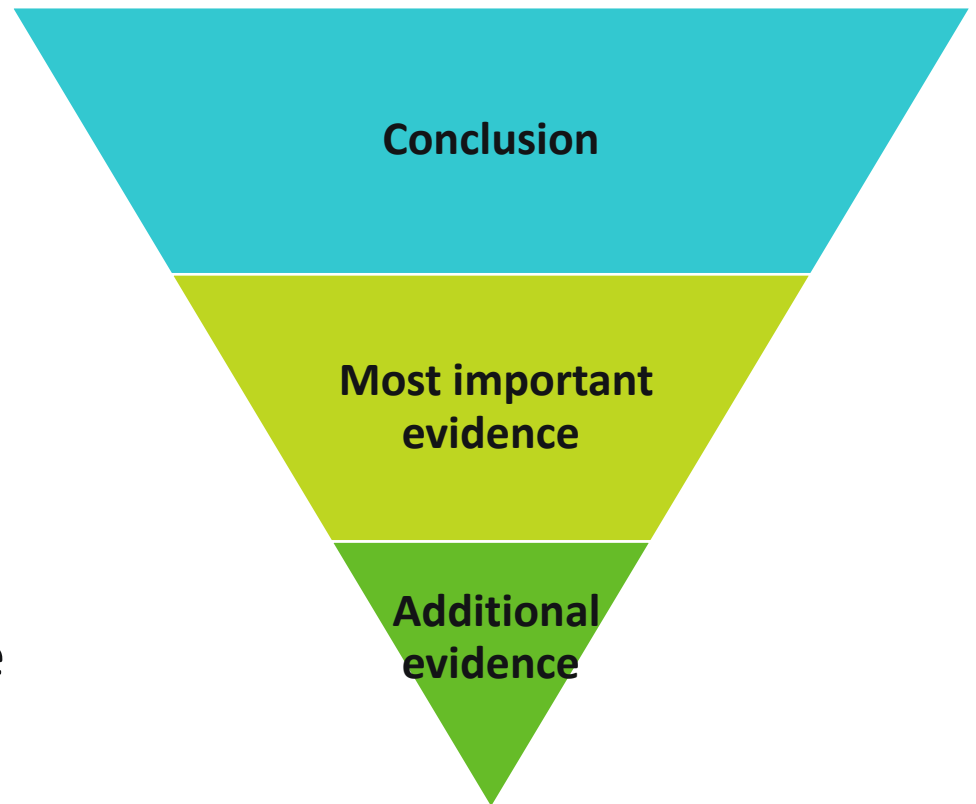
Academic writing

Builds to the conclusion



Journalistic Writing

- Inverted pyramid
- Most important information first
- Begins with the conclusion
- Format used in newspapers, writing for the web, and policy memos



Tips for Writing Headlines to Engage Readers

- State the main finding clearly like a newspaper headline.
- You may describe action needed.
- Aim for about 20 words.
- Must have a verb.

Headline Examples

- U.S. Teenage Births **Hit** Record Lows—and Could **Drop** Further If Contraceptives Were More Accessible
- When High Schools Moved Start Times to After 8:30am, Attendance and Test Scores **Rose**
- Taxes and Health-Warning Labels on Sugary Beverages May Help **Limit** Consumption and **Improve** Health

Begin With a Summary of the Main Message

- Clearly state the problem or issues.
- Summarize the main finding.
- Name implications for policymakers or planners.

Answers the “so-what?” question.

Example: Main Message in First Few Sentences

Children in households that receive federal rental assistance are healthier and miss less school due to illness than those whose households are waiting for help, new research demonstrates.¹

However, up to 75% of renters who need federal housing assistance—including public housing or rental vouchers—don't receive it, data show. Most households that get assistance have incomes below the federal poverty line (\$30,000 for a family of four in 2023) and a sizeable share live in deep poverty.²

Keep These Style Tips in Mind

- Be conversational.
- Define acronyms and technical terms.
- Write in first person (I or we).
- Use active voice (not passive voice).
- Insert citations as numbered endnotes.

Why Use Subheads?

These descriptive phrases with a verb:

- Break up the text
- Highlight the main points for a reader who is skimming.
- Reinforce main message.
- Provide “sign posting,” signaling to the reader what to expect in each section.

Example: Subheads From One Brief

- Subhead: **Parental Incarceration Is Widespread and Taking a Severe Toll on Children's Lives**
- Subhead: **When a Parent Is Incarcerated, Children Are More Likely to Develop Behavioral Problems, Face Homelessness, and Experience Harsh Parenting**
- Subhead: **Screen Students for Parental Incarceration, Rethink Sentencing Policies**

Advice on Data and Graphics

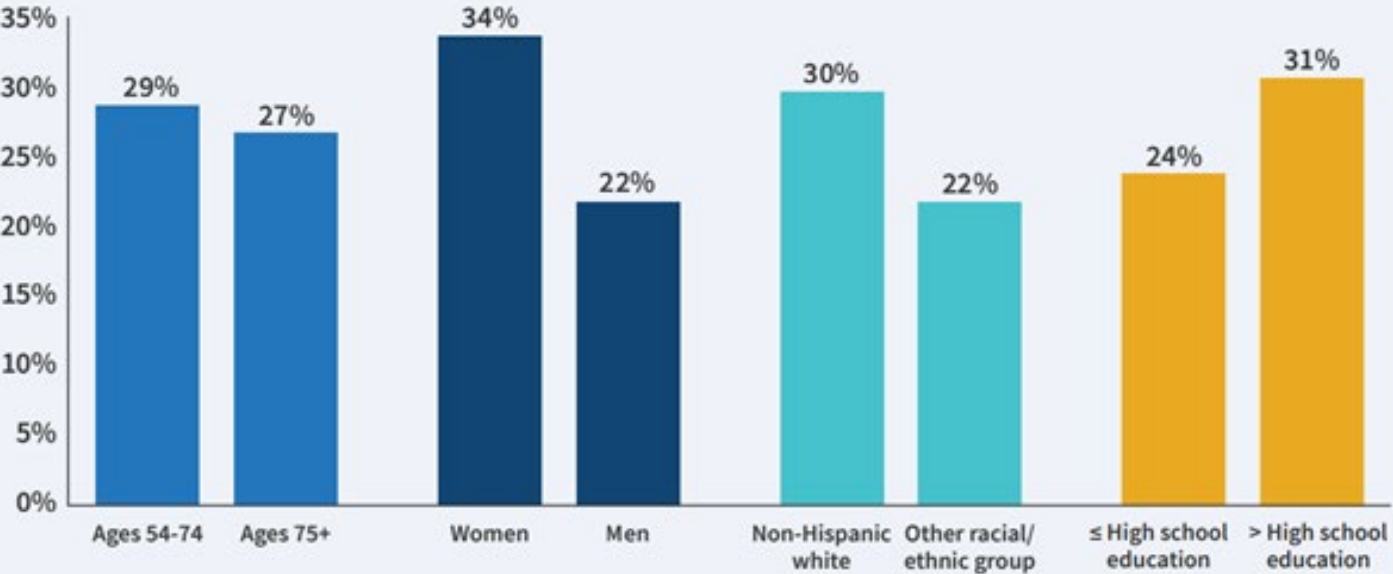
- Bar charts and maps are better than tables.
- No more than 8-10 data points.
- Title should be nontechnical and have a verb.
- X and Y axes clearly labeled.
- Use whole numbers if possible.

Figure Example, PRB Style

FIGURE 1

Female, White, and Highly Educated Older Adults Were Most Likely to Feel Lonelier During Pandemic

Percent of U.S. Adults Ages 54 and Older Experiencing an Increase in Loneliness in 2020 and 2021, by Characteristic



Source: Eun Young Choi et al., "Changes in Social Lives and Loneliness During COVID-19 Among Older Adults: A Closer Look at the Sociodemographic Differences," *International Psychogeriatrics* 35, no. 6 (2023): 305-17.



Part 4

How PRB Can Help

How PRB Can Help

- New research brief series with APC
 - Options:
 - You draft a research brief and we assist with editing and production
 - OR we draft a research brief on your behalf
 - ~1,000 words
 - Typically include simple interactive charts
 - Published on PRB websites and shared through social media
- Sample template available on PRB's website:
 - <https://popresearchcenters.org/tools-training/support-in-disseminating-population-dynamics-research/>
- Short online form to request assistance:
 - <https://popresearchcenters.org/tools-training/support-in-disseminating-population-dynamics-research/>

New and Forthcoming Research Briefs

- [The Rise of the No-Bachelor's Bachelor?](#)
- [Family-Centered Care Matters for Kids With Special Needs, but Many Families Report Challenges With Providers](#)
- [Expanded SNAP Benefits Boosted Food Security During the COVID-19 Emergency, Study Finds](#)
- College Degrees Yield Lifetime Benefits for Disadvantaged Students
- Reasoning With Your Misbehaving Child May Be Most Effective, Least Harmful for Their Development
- College Shapes Black, White, and Latina Women's Work and Family Lives Differently
- One in 10 Americans Are Vulnerable to Coastal Hazards, Older Adults and Urban Communities of Color Are the Most Vulnerable
- Developing a Better Measure of Gender Norms



DR. SHALON IRVING

DIED

ONE WEEK

AFTER THIS PHOTO

WAS TAKEN.

SHE DIDN'T HAVE TO.

MATERNAL MORTALITY RISK IS
3.5X HIGHER FOR BLACK MOMS.
HEAR DR. SHALON'S STORY AT
MYLASTLULLABY.COM

A Recent Maternal Mortality Awareness- Raising Campaign Started With a PRB Research Brief

<https://www.prb.org/news/action-to-address-pregnancy-related-deaths-among-u-s-black-women-urged-by-dr-shalon-maternal-action-project-prb-and-tank-worldwide/>