Preparing an Effective Briefing

A briefing is designed to provide information quickly and effectively about an issue. It is often used to influence decisions or offer solutions. Briefings can be delivered as short written documents or presented in person. You should prepare in the same way for both.

Consider the following issues when putting a briefing together:

What is the purpose of the briefing?

What points do you need to cover? *You need to clarify the constituent parts of the issue and may also be required to make recommendations on how to proceed. You should provide some insight into the key points and considerations so that the decision-makers are best placed to come to a conclusion. Point out areas of potential controversy and suggest the likely impact of any anticipated actions. If you are making a recommendation, you should explore a range of solutions before making a persuasive case for your chosen one.*

Who is going to read/listen to it?

What do they need to know? *Not all detail is appropriate for all audiences; consider who you are writing for. Do not bore them with 'irrelevant' information, or prevent them from making a decision (or answering others' questions) because they are missing a crucial piece of background detail.*

What do they already know?	*What do you need to explain to them?*
What affects them?	*What interests them?*

How will you structure the information?

Purpose *– a statement of the issue or problem in one or two lines, clearly explaining the purpose of the briefing.*

Main Body *– information on the background, current situation and options available to move forward. The information given should be concise, factual, clear, substantiated and unbiased. If information is missing or unavailable, this should be noted. Consider whether figures, graphs, tables or charts would be a more suitable to text, but make sure they're clear and easy to understand.*

Conclusion/Recommendations *– this summarises what you've already said and should include no new information. The conclusion leaves the reader with a clear message and, where appropriate, recommendations on how to proceed. Be aware that some people jump straight to the conclusion!*

What will it look like?

Short *– preferably no more than 2 pages*

Clear *– has a clear purpose, easy to follow, no jargon*

Concise *– well edited, not too wordy*

Reliable *– information is accurate, with notification of missing information*

Professional *– Proof read for errors, good use of white space to look inviting. If your company or department has a house style, it should be followed.*

Briefing document checklist

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BEFORE I WRITE	
Remember the 5 W's: who, what, where, why, when, and HOW!	
Do I understand the purpose of this document (or presentation)?	
Who are my audience?	
Do I understand my audience's needs and what they're trying to accomplish, including any 'trade-offs' or compromises they would be willing to make?	
Do I have all the information I need about the issue in question, including a clear idea of any areas of controversy?	
Have I explored all options?	
What are the main points I'm trying to get across? *Tip: Sometimes it's easier to write if you prepare the conclusion first!*	
ONCE WRITTEN	
Does my briefing have a clear structure – Purpose, Body, Conclusion?	
Is it short (preferably 2 pages or less)?	
Does the document cover the main points?	
Does it include all information that my audience will require, with evidence to back it up?	
Have I flagged any omissions of information?	
Have I come to a clear conclusion?	
Is there any unnecessary information that should be cut out, or detailed information in the main body that would be better incorporated into an annex?	
Have I used jargon?	
Is the document laid out clearly/does it conform to style guidelines?	
Has it been proof read?	