

PADP 6950: Foundations of Public Policy Analysis

Assignment notes for Policy Analysis Paper

(1250 words max -- please use double-spaced, 12 point font, 1 inch margins)

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Given the variety of topics and questions that students are pursuing, there are many potentially appropriate formats for your policy paper. Select an intended audience for your paper and use a format and language most appropriate for that audience. Whatever format you choose, the paper needs to be written in professional language and have a clear organizational structure.

While not a fixed outline, the following elements need to be present in some fashion and addressed as effectively as you can, taking into account in-class discussions, your independent investigation, and the feedback you have received from me so far.

1. **Introduction:** Brief section that announces the document's purpose and intended audience, and previews its contents. Tell the reader what you are going to do and how you are going to do it.
2. **Background:** Conceptualization of the policy or policy problem, citing relevant research and literature where appropriate *about the policy problem*. In other words, at this point you're defining the problem and framing your topic within its broader policy domain (health, environment, education, etc.), describing why it matters, and providing relevant context. Remember, you only have 1250 words, so be judicious in the amount of detail that you provide.
3. **Rationale/Analysis.** In this section I'll be looking for (depending on your topic) you to conceptualize your system, policy, or problem using a microeconomic framework. E.g., is this an information asymmetry issue? A public goods problem? An externality? A debate about economic equity? An attempt to incentive or disincentive certain behavior by altering marginal costs or benefits? Be sure to explain and justify your argument. Again, this section will likely vary depending on on your topic. If you are analyzing an existing policy, you might explain the theory of action behind the policy and how it works in theory. If you are analyzing a particular problem, you might explain what contributes to the problem. If you are proposing a new policy, you might articulate the theory of action for how your proposed policy will work.
4. **Analysis/Discussion:** In this section, you will in essence "make your case." If you are explaining why a given policy is flawed, you might demonstrate why it does not have its intended effect, or why it results in undesirable side effects (again, using microeconomic theory and language). For instance, does the policy create a problematic incentive structure? If you are proposing a new policy, you might explain other potential alternatives and why you think that your policy is better (e.g., more efficient, more equitable, or some other criterion). If you are

examining a policy problem, you might articulate potential avenues for reaching a solution. In addition, it might be relevant to discuss political considerations (e.g., why a tax might work in theory but be politically untenable, implementation challenges, etc.) or other practical issues. For some topics, it might be valuable to explore and/or explain to what extent researchers, experts, and policymakers disagree about the problem and/or potential solutions.

5. Conclusion: Briefly summarize your the motivation for your report, your analysis, and primary conclusions.

*---- Here is where you're limited to no more than 1250 words) ----
References do not count towards word limit.*

6. References that include any academic literature, policy reports, popular press articles, or other citations that are relevant to your analysis. All references should be formatted in a uniform style (e.g. APA, Chicago).