

Hello everyone

Thank you to the Apolitical team for hosting this Workshop today. It is a great pleasure to be here, and to join Carol and Laura.

Laura has just set out a series of top tips for communicating effectively, and my presentation is going to deep-dive into drafting briefings for seniors officials and ministers. I'll share my notes after the call for those that want to read it in slower time.

The most important step I'd recommend you take is to have an objective. To be clear on what you want to achieve through this briefing and why. If you do not have this, you will struggle to write an effective briefing that is targeted, concise and easy for the reader to follow.

But if you do, then you have the most important framing device for your briefing. Everything in your briefing should then be in delivery of this objective.

I would recommend that you note this objective at the top of your briefing. (Could be 1, might be more if it's a particularly important / or long meeting) For example at the top, I would write "the objective of this meeting is to achieve x'. That will not only help you frame the briefing, but also jump out to the reader.

The next section is what we in the UK Civil Service often call the 'points to make'. These are the points that your official or Minister will use to deliver your objective. Good practice is to have 2 – 3 points to make, but this may vary depending on the number of objectives and ultimately, is this a 15 minute 1-1, a one-hour roundtable and so forth.

These points to make should be clearly in delivery of your objective. What does your official or Minister need to land to achieve this. They should be clear, concise and targeted. Your official or Minister may have a certain style (and you should always be mindful of that when drafting) but a recommendation I would make is read these points out. If you struggle, because it's too long or complex, then your official or Minister will too. It needs to flow naturally.

You may also want 1-2 points to watch. These follow the same structure as your points to make, but are more defensive and reactive in nature. Is there anything you expect the individual your official or Minister is meeting to raise. If they do, what do you want to say.

You've now got a clear objective, and points to make to achieve that. You also have your points to watch in defence of achieving your objective. Your briefing should at this point be short and snappy. But you need to support this with background.

I would recommend 1-2 short paragraphs per point to make and watch for your background. Your 'points' are clear but your background enables you to offer further context – to draw out more information about this topic to help your Official or Minister understand the issue, but also in case it's needed in the meeting. They might be pressed to elaborate further or need a little bit more to land their points.

There is more flexibility with background drafting, and they don't need to be as snappy as the points to make and watch but they should still be clear, concise and targeted. It isn't supposed to demonstrate you know absolutely anything and everything about this topic. It is to support the points to make and watch.

Below the background you will have your Annex. This is an opportunity to include any information that your official or minister should be mindful of but not to necessarily use. For example, have they met this person before – you could include key information from that meeting in your Annex.

The length of a briefing will vary based on the length of the meeting. But try and keep it as clear, concise and targeted as possible – the structure I've set out should help with this. You should be mindful that your official or Minister will receive a number of briefings a day. They will always ask if they need more information.

Thank you for your time. I hope this was useful and I look forward to your questions later on in the session. Thank you

Checklist

Objectives:

- Do you have a clear objective?
- Why is this your objective and what do you want to achieve through it?
- Is this meeting an opportunity to advance objectives of your colleagues and if so, why?
- Is your objective clear at the top of the briefing?

Points to make / watch:

- Are they clear, concise and targeted?
- Do they directly support (make) or defend (watch) the objective?
- Are they written in the style that your senior official prefers?

Background:

- Does each 'points to make' and 'points to watch' have a background section?
- Is this section clear and concise?
- Is the content relevant? Does it add context for the senior official or are you adding content for the sake of it?
- Can this section be used by the senior official if required for additional 'points to make' and 'points to watch'?

General:

- Is your briefing clear and concise? Is all the content relevant?
- Have you considered what input you need from others? Why is this important? Does it enable you to deliver their objectives?
- Can you help support your colleagues by having a first go at drafting content and asking them to edit / clear?
- Have you considered additional sections to your briefing such as an Annex or biographies?

Contact: Alex.nicholson@beis.gov.uk