

# Writing for a parliamentary audience

Researchers should adapt the communication of their work for a parliamentary audience to help increase its impact.

Tailoring your communication style can improve dissemination, increase publicity and uptake, and lead to further opportunities. If you don't, you risk wasting an opportunity, having your work ignored, or misunderstood.

## Know your audience

Parliaments are different to governments. Their jobs are to check and challenge government actions, make laws, debate important issues, and represent constituents.

Research evidence is just one factor in parliamentary decision-making; people's lived experiences, other evidence sources, and the political climate at the time will also be considered.

Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff are most likely to use research which is accessible, credible, relevant (to current political debate or local issues), and impartial.

The four parliaments in the UK have different powers. Make sure you engage with the parliament that is most relevant for your research by finding out [what powers are devolved](#).

Whether you are writing a response to committee consultation, a research commission, a guest article, or a report to send to specific parliamentarians or groups, here are some tips for getting your research used in parliaments.

## 1. Make it accessible

Parliamentarians are incredibly busy people. Their work is fast-paced, and they have to digest information and make decisions quickly. They need to know about many different topics to do their job, even if they don't have a background in the area.

You should make it easy for non-specialist readers to understand your work, whether they have 30 seconds or an hour to read it.

This means your writing should be accessible, and find a balance between precision and concision.

It can help to imagine you're explaining the issue to an informed friend, rather than a colleague working in the same field.

To increase the readability of your work:

- Make the content clear upfront, by writing a **succinct but descriptive title**;
- Write in **plain language**, use fewer words, short sentences, and avoid jargon, and
- Highlight **interesting statistics, facts, or an engaging case study** that readers will remember - but don't overload them.

## 2. Select relevant content

Before you start writing, consider what you want to achieve. Do you want to raise awareness about your research findings, give an expert response to a current affairs issue, or do you want to call for a policy or law change based on research evidence?

Being clear about what you want to achieve will help you decide how to select and structure content.

Your audience probably won't have time to read a long research paper, so you will have to select the most interesting and relevant information for your audience and aim.

Additional information, such as methodology and literature reviews, can be provided if requested.

It's important to bear in mind:

- **who you are writing for** (whether it's a committee, an in-house research service, a political party, a specific parliamentarian, or a cross-party group), and
- **what they need** (such as background information, evidence about a particular law or policy, comparisons with other countries, or suggestions for legislative or policy changes.)

You should highlight the key points you want them to take away, even if they don't read to the end. This usually means leading with your conclusions and recommendations, and clearly linking them to the needs of the audience.

Parliamentarians fulfil their roles in many ways, like questioning Ministers, debating topical issues, scrutinising proposed laws, holding inquiries, doing constituency casework, and lots more.

Their work often centres around policy areas like health, education, social security, defence, equalities, and environment.

Be clear about how your research is relevant to a particular policy area, political or local issue.

## 3. Structure it well

A logical structure helps the reader to understand the issue.

There's no perfect structure, but parliamentary briefings often use the following approaches:

- A sequential structure, which moves from describing the **past** (what's the issue, background, context, how did we get here), describing the **current** situation, then the **future** (what are the challenges and opportunities, how could things change, what's next), or
- A '5 Ws and 1 H' structure, which covers **what** (is the issue), **why** (is it of interest), **who** (is affected, the main stakeholders), **when** (are the major impacts and decisions likely to happen), **where** (is it happening), and **how** (will the stakeholders be affected, and how much will it cost).

You should allow readers to skim the document for the information they need by:

- Writing a **summary of key points or recommendations** at the start;
- Using **headings and subheadings** that describe the content of the following section;
- Using **diagrams, figures, or data visualisations** to make information more engaging;
- Using **text boxes** for extra information that isn't 100% necessary, or that doesn't fit in the main text, such as definitions, laws, or case studies; and
- Providing **links** to more detailed information.

Always date your work, and include contact details in case more information is needed.

#### 4. Be balanced

The wide dissemination of your research in parliaments means that different political parties might use it. Consider whether you are taking a political stance on an issue, or if you would prefer your contribution to be politically balanced. You can make sure your work is balanced by:

- Covering a **full range of perspectives**;
- Not giving **personal opinions**;
- Attributing and referencing **sources**, and
- Being clear about **uncertainty, and limitations or gaps in evidence**.

You can get more advice about writing for a parliamentary audience by contacting the knowledge exchange teams in:

- the [UK Parliament](#)
- the [Welsh Parliament/Senedd Cymru](#)
- the [Northern Ireland Assembly](#), and
- the [Scottish Parliament](#).