Overview

How to Write and Communicate for Decision-Making in Government

GovTalk’s purpose is to provide information, incites, tools, tips and examples of how to use the primary communication tools of government to get results. It addresses the skills of formulating ideas and proposals, writing using frequently used government formats and presenting ideas and proposals.

There is no material on how to write academic and research papers for coursework. Such resources are available through Queen’s Student Academic Success Services at https://sass.queensu.ca/. This material does not address issues of external communications and public relations.

Instructor expectations may vary. These models are for general application.

Sources and Appreciation

This service was launched as the result of consultations with students in both the full-time and professional Masters of Public Administration program at Queen’s University. Faculty of the School were also engaged and will add material as it evolves. In addition, major employers of our students were consulted and confirmed the need for more support for communicating within government. The following were particularly helpful sources:

- Johnson-Shoyama School of Graduate School of Public Policy, Universities of Regina and Saskatchewan: Permission was given to use its valuable material and for this the author is grateful.
- The Canada School of the Public Service
- Public Sector Writing, material openly available at www.publicsectorwriting.com
Plain Language: [https://www.plainlanguage.gov/](https://www.plainlanguage.gov/) : This site supports the American government’s Plain Writing Act, 2010 with many helpful resources and ideas.

Writing for Results: [http://www.writingforresults.net/](http://www.writingforresults.net/) : This is an extensive resource based on the Canadian federal government’s approach to writing briefing notes, if there can be said to be one approach. One publication by the author of this website, Rob Parkinson, harvested 35 different federal government briefing note formats. His material is extensive and very useful.

Plain English Foundation, material openly available at [www.plainenglishfoundation.com](http://www.plainenglishfoundation.com)

The Gang: The many colleagues in government, academia, current students and alumni who reviewed the material and provided great advice.

Does Government Speak Differently?

The original purpose of this work was to give students in public administration advice on how to write for decision-making within government. However, as we researched this matter, discussed with colleagues both in academia and in the public service, we realized that the pathways of communications within government are indeed a *terra incognita* for many people. Often government internal communications are characterized as bureaucratic, meant more to confuse than inform and certainly not meant for the great unwashed to understand. Like so many things about government, there is some small truth here, but one that fails to reveal the much more powerful reasons for having unique forms of communication. The first and foremost is that government is complicated. It involves the interface of the political with the administrative. It involves a lot of people doing different things, some for the same purpose, say, within a department, and some for other purposes. Because much of what this training package is about involves an elected official, these forms are meant to serve a democratic values purpose as well. They become the tools to get decision, to inform and to advise.

There is a lot of bumf in what bureaucrats write. There is a lot of bumf in what the private sector does too. Our objective is to equip students to write clearly and effectively to serve their minister, boss or get the decisions they need clearly articulated in order to achieve public police results, not just talk about them or envisage, but actually implement them. Research for this work drew out many comments from senior government officials that the ability to frame a policy issue, to analyze it in all its aspects, to draft a decision and the key messages associated with it are rare and sure gifts for effective public servants.