

# Advice on Giving a Policy Brief Presentation (for undergraduate economists)

Kyle Coombs<sup>1</sup>

Vassar College

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<sup>1</sup>This document adapts core ideas from Jesse Shapiro's "Advice on Giving an Applied Micro Talk" and develops new recommendations with the assistance of ChatGPT (OpenAI).

# Purpose of a Policy Brief Presentation

A policy brief presentation is not a seminar.

Your goal is simple:

*Convey a compelling policy problem, show why it matters, explain what the best available evidence says, and conclude with a grounded recommendation.*

**Keys:**

- Distill complexity
- Foreground intuition over technical detail
- Be honest about uncertainty
- Guide the audience: “Why does this matter?”

# General Principles

## Clarity > Completeness

- Define the problem in one clean sentence.
- State the stakes early.
- Minimum technical detail for credibility.

A policy brief is judged by understanding, not exhaustiveness.

## Guide Your Audience

- Start with a roadmap.
- Transition clearly between sections.
- Recap before recommendations.

## Prioritize Intuition

- Explain mechanisms intuitively.
- State magnitudes meaningfully.
- Avoid notation unless necessary.

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# Structure of an Effective Policy Brief Presentation

- 1 State the Problem & Why It Matters
- 2 Provide Essential Context
- 3 Summarize the Evidence
- 4 Discuss Limitations Honestly
- 5 Present Policy Alternatives & Recommendation
- 6 End with Takeaways

# 1. State the Problem and Why It Matters

Start with:

**What is the problem? Why should the audience care right now?**

**Effective openings:**

- Specific policy puzzle or failure
- Short, vivid fact or statistic
- Consequences if ignored

Avoid long historical digressions; foreground the stakes.

## 2. Provide Essential Context

- Current policy landscape
- Relevant institutions
- Scope and magnitude of the problem

Carefully chosen statistics anchor understanding.

One or two excellent facts > many loosely connected ones.



### 3. Summarize the Evidence

- Group findings into 2–4 key lessons
- Show convergence/divergence across methods
- Explain credibility in plain language

#### Technique

*State the lesson first, then briefly justify it with evidence.*

If a study is central: give intuition, not technical detail.

## 4. Discuss Limitations Honestly

Acknowledge uncertainty:

- External validity
- Identification weaknesses
- Insufficient data
- Open research questions

**Credibility > Unwarranted certainty**

## 5. Present Policy Alternatives & Recommendation

Structure:

- 1 Plausible policy options
- 2 Evidence for each option
- 3 Tradeoffs
- 4 Recommendation

**A good recommendation:**

- Flows from evidence
- Acknowledges uncertainty
- Identifies who benefits or loses
- Clearly states implementation considerations

## 6. End with Takeaways

- Restate problem & your answer
- Emphasize most important empirical insight
- Identify key unknown for future research

Your Final Slide Should Answer:

**What should policymakers remember 24 hours from now?**

# Style, Delivery, and Slides

## Slide design:

- Minimal text (no full sentences unless necessary)
- Use graphs, not tables
- Label axes; annotate important regions
- One idea per slide

## Delivery:

- Speak slowly; pause after key points
- Signpost transitions
- Explain visuals before interpreting
- Rehearse until nothing feels improvised

# Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Starting with too much background
- Diving into empirical design before stating the question
- Listing studies instead of synthesizing lessons
- Overstating what the evidence can support
- Recommendation not clearly tied to evidence
- Ending with new results instead of takeaways

# Final Thoughts

Giving a strong policy brief presentation is a core skill for economists. It requires all the discipline of an applied micro seminar talk, but with a different objective:

Translate rigorous evidence into actionable, comprehensible policy guidance. **Clarity, structure, intuition, and credibility** matter more than technical detail.

Keep it simple, guide the audience, and make choices that reflect your judgment as an economist.