



Writing to facilitate a decision

Not many of us usually make decisions based on written advice from others on a daily basis. When it comes to major life changing decisions, this may happen a few times in our lives. Grevillea Consultants approached some senior managers for their top tips about what they look for in written briefs and recommendations.

These senior management are effectively professional decision makers for complex issues. They rely on other people analysing the issues, checking out options and then providing them with advice on what to decide.

Here is a summary of what they think makes for a good piece of written advice.

Focus

- Lead with the recommended decision
- Be clear and up front about the purpose of the recommendation
- Be very clear about required actions
- Keep the recommendations to as few as possible

Length

- Concise, preferably no more than one or two pages.
- Additional background information or details can be attached.

Structure

- Use a clear structure and logic to layout and write the document
- Use attachments for details. If they want to delve deeper they can use this additional information.

Content

- The document has to help the decision maker to quickly understand the recommendation
- Know what is relevant to the decision maker for making this decision
- Provide a clear, concise outline of the context for the decision
- Present any related issues/decisions affected by the recommendation or required for the recommendation
- Provide a clear outline of the reasons for the recommendation that will help explain the decision if necessary at a later date
- Provide references and links to associated processes or parties associated with the decision so they are easily identified and accessed by the decision maker
- Edit it thoroughly.

Style

- Keep it simple, clear and succinct
- Do not assume the reader has prior knowledge of the content
- Match it to the capacity of the person to focus on it and read it (e.g. effort or time available)
- Write in the language of the decision-maker or use the same type of language the media would use for a general audience
- Use dot points for easier reading
- Avoid jargon