

# Unlocking Academic Excellence: A Comprehensive Guide for Unpacking “How to Write” Policy Briefs

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding the challenge of incorporating student-centered teaching in Bangladesh, this paper explains how changing an assignment pattern can make a difference in learning. The paper focuses on streamlining the process of writing a policy brief as an assignment for both students and teachers. It explains how a comprehensive guidebook can be designed to assist teachers in effectively breaking down and developing an assignment handbook. To understand the rationale behind selecting the handbook, readers need to grasp the perspectives of key stakeholders in the education sector in Bangladesh regarding concepts such as “liberal arts and science education,” “student-centered teaching,” and “experiential learning.” Consequently, this paper begins by outlining the context of student-centered teaching within the liberal arts tradition, utilizing experiential learning tools. It then discusses how Brac University began with the liberal arts education approach for the students of Bangladesh, emphasizing student-centered teaching and the establishment of the School of General Education. The paper proceeds to describe a modification in assignment structure aimed at enhancing student-centered teaching. Finally, it concludes with the author’s reflections on the observed improvements in student writing that emerged from this change in assignment design.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In Bangladesh, training or facilitating faculty members to revise their course outlines to include student-centered teaching approaches can pose a challenge. Many faculty members follow the traditional post-colonial educational models and are unreceptive to student-centered teaching through experiential learning tools.

There is a valuable opportunity to explore pedagogical approaches that highlight the significance of student-centered teaching in the liberal arts tradition, as well as the importance of student engagement and motivation. We can empower students in their educational choices by employing effective strategies for facilitating classroom discussions and thoughtfully designing syllabi and assignments. However, the existing curriculums are often geared towards degrees that prepare students for lucrative careers in specialized fields only. As Becker <sup>1</sup> mentions, LAS curricula may sometimes conflict with the degree programs offered by specialized departments. It is often overlooked in these discussions that universities are fundamentally conservative organizations, with established faculty and leadership being reluctant to modify long-standing systems. This resistance is particularly evident when it comes to collaborating with other departments or relinquishing authority, especially to students. In this case, Bangladesh is no different.

The transition to a student-centered approach entails a shift in the teacher's role from a traditional knowledge transducer to a facilitator and collaborator in the learning process. In a student-centered liberal arts classroom, educators move away from conventional lecture-based formats and adopt more interactive and collaborative activities that encourage students to explore, reflect, and apply their knowledge.<sup>2</sup> In contemplating its importance for delivering quality education, exhibiting increased motivation, enhancing critical thinking skills, and improving the ability to apply their knowledge to real-world scenarios, it is evident that traditional educational models may not fully address the skills necessary for student development. Research on the development of twenty-first-century skills indicates that traditional transmission methods are not the most effective approach for teaching these skills. According to Saavedra and Opfer,<sup>3</sup> students are not acquiring these competencies because they are not being explicitly taught and because they are inherently more challenging to assess compared to factual knowledge retention. Therefore, student-centered teaching that aligns with the overarching objectives of liberal arts education prioritizes the development of well-rounded individuals capable of adapting and thriving in a rapidly evolving world through teaching and learning strategies, such as project-based learning, collaborative problem-solving, and the integration of technology, etc., which may be more effective in fostering the critical and creative thinking skills essential for student success in today's world.<sup>4</sup>

In the context of the increasing enrollment in higher education, the challenges associated with undergraduate education have become a focal point for extensive discussion and analysis. Key areas of concern include poor learning outcomes, student disengagement, low retention rates, stagnant or declining graduation rates, and extended time to degree completion. These issues are compounded by overcrowded lecture halls, insufficient staff-student ratios, a diminishing connection

between research and teaching, and a lack of faculty engagement in undergraduate instruction.<sup>5</sup> Aware of the challenges of the traditional educational model, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed envisioned a university that would offer quality liberal arts higher education in Bangladesh, leading to the establishment of Brac University (BracU) in the year 2001 under the Private University Act 1992.<sup>6</sup> As part of this vision, in 2020, BracU inaugurated the School of General Education, marking a significant initial step toward reinforcing its commitment to mainstream liberal arts education in Bangladesh.

## 2 GENERAL EDUCATION AT BRAC UNIVERSITY: FROM THEN TO NOW

Prior to Fall 2020, the oversight of General Education courses was managed by the Pro Vice Chancellor's Office. In August 2017, the General Education curriculum was redesigned and implemented, enabling each student to earn 42 credits\* focused on enhancing critical thinking, communication, quantitative reasoning, technological proficiency, and global awareness. One of the previous strategies employed to achieve the core objectives of General Education involved selecting a series of introductory courses, known as core or foundational courses, which form the basis of the General Education curriculum and are subject to assessment.

In 2019, Professor Vincent Chang, former Vice Chancellor of Brac University, expressed his interest and the importance of establishing a General Education Program aimed at furthering the objectives of BracU 2.0. In light of that, the School of General Education was launched in Fall 2020 dedicated to offering all BracU undergraduate students a rich and diverse core education before embarking on courses tailored to their major and minor fields of study. Through its interdisciplinary courses and experiential learning activities, the school aims to foster an awareness of the world around them, encouraging students to appreciate the interconnectedness of the social, economic, and environmental challenges they face in their countries.

\* Prior to 2017, students were required to complete 21 credits of General Education courses. The manual for General Education from that time is currently unavailable.

### 2.1 THE SCHOOL OF GENERAL EDUCATION: VISION

The General Education (GenEd) program is designed in alignment with the Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) educational approach,<sup>†</sup> aimed at developing individuals who possess a broad knowledge base, advanced learning skills, a focus on sustainability, an appreciation for diversity, a sense of connectivity, creativity, empathy, and purpose. A variety of courses have been developed and revamped to provide students with a comprehensive liberal arts education, while also equipping educators

† This approach typically prioritizes the development of a comprehensive foundation of knowledge and skills across diverse disciplines. It emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and ethical reasoning abilities that can be applied in a variety of contexts, rather than concentrating exclusively on a single field of study.

with effective experiential learning tools. An emphasis is placed on the significance of diversity. Students gain an understanding of how various social, cultural, linguistic, artistic, religious, philosophical, and historical contexts have influenced society and shaped the thoughts and actions of individuals across the globe. They engage in analytical comparisons of the impacts that community, institutions, and constructs such as class, gender, and race have on the modes of thinking, beliefs, and behaviors in cultural and historical contexts different from their own. Additionally, students are encouraged to foster an inclusive culture that recognizes and values human diversity across race, religion, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation.

## 2.2 CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNING

The objective of the General Education Program, as outlined below, emphasizes the importance of writing as a means to demonstrate proficiency in university-level language comprehension, analytical writing skills, and effective oral presentations. This objective was not completely met through the questions provided to the students for the policy brief assignment (see Image 1) as there was no noticeable improvement in their writing quality.

At this point, Brac University being a partner institution of OSUN since 2020 has been nothing short of transformative, illuminating the profound depths of teaching and learning strategies that inspire engagement in the classroom. As faculty members forged connections and expanded their network through numerous online and in-person workshops, including the faculty development workshops, those who attended discovered the impact that Bard College's Institute for Writing and Thinking (IWT) brings to the lives of students and faculty members. This initiative empowers learners with writing strategies that spark their creative thinking and deepen their conceptual understanding. These powerful writing techniques ignite a profound knowledge across a multitude of subjects, empowering students to express themselves with both clarity and creativity.<sup>7</sup>

## 3 BACKGROUND OF THE COURSE

The course "Introduction to Political Science," coded as POL101, was housed and offered as an elective course by the Department of Economics and Social Sciences which was founded in 2003. As the course was housed in the Department of Economics and Social Sciences, the course was taught narrowly with a strict academic combination of lecturing on different theories, such as population census,

social contract, and elections. This approach did not sufficiently address the interconnectedness and multidimensionality of these topics, nor did it prioritize a human-centered perspective.

With the establishment of the School of General Education in Fall 2020, we officially integrated the course into the liberal arts curriculum and restructured it accordingly. This integration has created a cohesive curriculum that facilitates thematic learning, allowing for a progressive development of knowledge. It enhances engagement by structuring course content around contemporary issues, making learning more applicable and stimulating. Additionally, it promotes active learning through discussions and group work, ultimately fostering a more engaging classroom environment.

Therefore, POL101: Introduction to Political Science, was one of the first courses that underwent significant redesign following the establishment of the School of General Education. This course relied on a traditional teaching approach until 2020, primarily utilizing a term paper and final questions as the sole means of assessment focusing on issues such as population census, international relations, state, elections, etc. These topics have been condensed into an outline that must be completed within a three-month semester for an introductory political science course. Hence, the contents were revised (see Annexure 1) and to enhance the course's effectiveness and promote experiential learning, the policy brief was introduced as an innovative assessment tool.

In 2021, POL101 remained an elective course but was housed and offered by the School of General Education, BRAC University. The course is now based on the principles of political science that will equip students to develop the ability to analyze political phenomena through the examination of interactions among institutions, interests, and ideologies, as well as evaluate the reliability of explanatory narratives. POL101 also helps students recognize the interconnections between domestic and international politics and apply the concepts and analytical approaches discussed in class to address policy challenges on both regional and global scales. The course is designed to provide students with an understanding of essential concepts, methodologies, and discussions in political science by examining significant foundational and innovative works within the subfields of political theory, comparative politics, and international relations. By linking key texts in the discipline to relevant contemporary events, students will be encouraged to critically assess political outcomes and the narratives that explain political phenomena.

As part of the liberal arts curriculum, this course is closely aligned with the primary pedagogical objectives of the School of General Education (SGE). The first objective is to provide students with a broad foundation of knowledge in liberal arts disciplines such as language (writing) and literature, humanities, social sciences, history, philosophy and mathematics that extend beyond their major fields

of study. The second objective aims to equip students for academic success in their undergraduate program by strengthening their skills in critical reading, analysis, writing, and public speaking. Following these overarching guidelines, this course will strive to achieve the specific program objectives set forth by the School of General Education.

## 4 PROGRAM OUTCOMES AND COURSE OBJECTIVES

In 2022, the University Grant Commission (UGC), the establishment responsible for overseeing higher education in Bangladesh, circulated its new template for outcome-based education (OBE) to all private universities.<sup>8</sup> The purpose of this template was to ensure that each program can measure the impact of their courses effectively. One of the ways to do so was to rewrite the program and course outcomes based on Bloom's Taxonomy,\* as instructed by UGC.

Therefore, to teach a course within the General Education (GenEd) curriculum, it is imperative that each course aligns with the Program Outcomes (POs) and establishes its own Course Objectives (COs).<sup>9</sup> The GenEd Program outcomes, POL101 course objectives and the mapping of POs and COs of POL101 with GenED are listed on the following page.

\* Bloom's taxonomy, developed by Benjamin Bloom, is a structured framework designed to classify educational learning objectives according to their complexity and specificity (Bloom's Taxonomy, 2017). It was established to provide a standardized vocabulary for educators to engage in discussions regarding learning and assessment strategies. Specific learning outcomes can be derived from the taxonomy, although it is predominantly utilized to evaluate learning across various cognitive levels.

The six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy are as follows:

Remembering: Recalling facts and fundamental concepts

Understanding: Explaining ideas or concepts

Applying: Utilizing knowledge in new contexts

Analyzing: Decomposing information into its constituent parts.

Evaluating: Making judgments based on established criteria and standards

Creating: Generating new or original work

For additional information, please refer to the following link:  
<https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/BloomsTaxonomy>

<i>Gen Ed Program Outcomes</i>	<i>SL</i>	<i>PO Description</i>
	PO1	<i>Describe</i> a range of local and global issues/knowledge/ideas and their interconnections, beyond their major and minor
	PO2	<i>Demonstrate</i> proficiency in university-level language comprehension, analytical writing skills and oral presentations
	PO3	<i>Apply</i> knowledge towards problem-solving in and outside the classroom, especially through activities that contribute to the SDGs
	PO4	<i>Value</i> diversity and inclusion in race, religion, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, economic and class backgrounds
	PO5	<i>Exhibit</i> sensitive and ethical leadership through course material taught, engaged pedagogical tools, class assignments, teamwork and exposure to real-life problems

*POL 101  
Course Objectives*

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

<i>SL</i>	<i>CO Description</i>
CO1	<i>Explore</i> the issues, problems, and methods employed by political science and its subfields through class readings and discussion
CO2	<i>Analyze</i> political phenomena by examining interactions among institutions, interests, and ideologies and assess the reliability of explanatory narratives
CO3	<i>Evaluate</i> political institutions and systems and their impact on individuals, culture, identity, development, and diversity through the policy brief
CO4	<i>Recognize</i> the interplay between domestic and international politics and their influence on development, migration, and human rights
CO5	<i>Apply</i> the concepts and analytical approaches discussed in class to the development of policies that provide creative and competent solutions to problems of poverty, hunger, inequality, healthcare, living standards, environment, and sustainability

Proper alignment of the aforementioned Program Outcomes (POs) and Course Outcomes (COs) is a fundamental requirement for all General Education (GenEd) courses. The School of General Education is dedicated to ensuring that both faculty and students clearly understand the objectives and goals of these courses, in addition to the expected outcomes. This alignment guarantees that the courses meet the rationale of the revised GenEd framework and comply with the guidelines established by the University Grants Commission (UGC). As such, we systematically map the COs to the POs for each course. Below is the mapping of the course objectives of POL101 with the program objectives of GenEd.

Mapping	PO1	PO2	PO3	PO4	PO5
CO1			●	●	
CO2	●		●	●	
CO3		●	●	●	●
CO4	●	●		●	
CO5	●	●	●	●	●



## 5 POLICY BRIEF

### 5.1 EMERGENCE OF POLICY BRIEF IN POL 101

In the realm of academic writing, the policy brief has emerged as an effective instrument for connecting theoretical knowledge with practical application.

As undergraduate students navigate the intricate landscape of political science, policy briefs offer a valuable opportunity to develop practical skills that are directly relevant in professional contexts.<sup>10</sup> This innovative approach encourages students to refine their research and writing abilities.<sup>11</sup>

The educational advantages of incorporating policy briefs into the curriculum are significant. First, they enable students to create personal development portfolios, which can be instrumental in securing internships\* and future employment opportunities.

Furthermore, policy briefs facilitate engagement with higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy of learning, enhancing students' synthesis and analytical skills. By prompting students to write with a targeted audience and purpose, policy briefs also strengthen their civic engagement, empowering them to articulate complex ideas clearly and concisely.

Beginning in Fall 2020, when the School of General Education officially launched, instructors introduced policy briefs as a significant assignment constituting 35% of the overall course grade. The rationale for incorporating the writing of a policy brief into an introductory-level political science course is to enhance students' knowledge and strengthen their skills in critical thinking, reading, analysis, and writing. This approach encourages a focus on sustainability, promotes an appreciation for diversity, fosters an understanding of complex interconnections, and develops creativity and empathy.

This individual assignment (see Image 1) was announced on the first day of classes, as outlined in the course syllabus, providing students with the opportunity to prepare in advance for their final submission. This also provided students with the opportunity to seek guidance from their faculty members or Teaching Assistants (TAs) for any assistance they may need with their assignment.

The policy brief was an intense writing assignment that all students took seriously. They had multiple sessions with faculty members and TAs to ensure that they were on the right track. The policy brief focuses on a single issue and asks students to think about how they will use their power as "good citizens" to identify ways they might act to address an issue in their community.

\* In Bangladesh, internships are often seen as a necessary component of academic programs, with colleges and universities fostering enduring partnerships with selected internship organizations (Ma et al., 2020). They exhibit a less formal structure and no comprehensive guidelines and are less regulated compared to a regular employee. Additionally, numerous internships may be unpaid or provide only minimal stipends. Interns often engage in these opportunities primarily for experiential learning and networking rather than monetary compensation.

## J. Assessment and Evaluation:

### Assessment Strategy

1. *Worksheets, Presentations, and Exercises:* Assigned worksheets and exercises will give students the opportunity to track their learning, engage in political analysis, and apply insights from the course material to address empirical puzzles. Students are encouraged and expected to actively participate in online discussion sessions and on online discussion boards. Students will also take turns presenting and leading discussion or *adda* on relevant current events.

2. *Quizzes:* Quizzes will test the students' understanding of the covered topics and assigned readings. Additional quizzes may be scheduled at the instructor's discretion.

3. *Policy Brief:* Each student is required to prepare a policy brief that identifies and addresses a relevant issue of their choice. In crafting the brief, students should assume their audience seeks an objective analysis of a current issue. The information presented must include the following components:

- What is the background of the policy issue and its impact on concerned citizens?
- How would you address the problem and what are the intended outcomes?
- What can be some of the limitations or unintended consequences of the policies that you are suggesting?

1 Screenshot of the Assessment and Evaluation from the Course Outline of 2021

However, I had the opportunity to learn about the significance of writing with a conceptual understanding through an assignment development workbook introduced to me by the dean of the School of General Education. She mentioned that she used a workbook\* while teaching the Introduction to Civic Engagement class. Upon reviewing the workbook in greater detail, I recognized how to adapt its contents to fit my course effectively. Through discussions with faculty members teaching POL101, we developed a strategy to streamline the assignment of writing a policy brief for students by creating a comprehensive handbook. However, we found that the simplification process demanded considerable effort on our part as an educator.

\* A Community engagement development workbook was given to all the faculty members teaching the Introduction to Civic Engagement course as a part of the Network Collaborative Course (NCC). This workbook was used for students to help work on their community-based project for the class.

## 5.2 OUTCOME OF POLICY BRIEF

Discovering the art of crafting a policy brief was an opportunity that students wanted to undertake with enthusiasm. However, it is important to remember that the course focused on the fundamentals of political science and not on the intricacies of policy writing. The assignment of writing a policy brief served as an assessment tool for faculty to evaluate students' understanding of the course material.

The course consisted of ten sections, each accommodating thirty-five students, and was taught by a team of three faculty members. After observing and evaluating the new outline until Fall 2021, we concluded that the assignment outcomes were unsatisfactory, largely attributable to a notable prevalence of plagiarism among students. Since the class focused on fundamentals of political science rather than policy brief writing, students often lacked a clear understanding of what constitutes

a policy brief, despite pouring their hearts into writing the policy brief, revealing their insights and passion for the subject as they navigated the complexities of political analysis and advocacy; resulting in submitting term papers or research papers based on the questions provided instead of properly crafting a policy brief.

In response to this challenge, we introduced incentives, including the opportunity for the top paper to be considered for publication on platforms such as the OSUN Global Commons\* aiming to promote academic integrity and earnest effort among students. Global Commons used to allow students the opportunity to publish their creative work. However, this incentive was only exciting for a few. As instructors, we believed it was essential to incorporate additional synchronous and asynchronous sessions to effectively educate students on the concept of a policy brief and the writing process involved in a political science class.

\* OSUN Global Commons is a digital publication dedicated to showcasing student perspectives and insights on a range of critical issues, including sustainability and climate, inequalities, human rights, global justice, global public health, arts and society, and the liberal arts and sciences. Produced entirely by students from OSUN partner institutions, Global Commons features essays, articles, creative writing, and artwork.

More details can be found in the link: <https://opensocietyuniversitynetwork.org/past-projects/global-commons/>

## 6 POLICY BRIEF ASSIGNMENT RESTRUCTURED

The policy brief development process is structured into five distinct stages for students, as outlined in a comprehensive handbook (see Annexure 2). These stages are topic selection, mind mapping, desk research, community mapping, and the final paper.

*Topic Selection:* This initial stage is crucial for completion. Students must understand the nature of a policy brief, which focuses on a *singular issue*. It is essential that they undergo a thorough supportive process to determine their topic. A dedicated week is allocated to this stage to ensure students are well-prepared to progress to the subsequent stages.

*Mind Mapping:* Mind mapping is a thinking tool designed to help you brainstorm. This phase involves brainstorming to identify and define a relevant issue within the community. Brainstorming will help you identify an issue you care about and explore potential ideas for your policy brief. Students will begin to develop their project ideas during this stage.

*Community Mapping:* In this stage, students will research and identify available community resources and stakeholders related to their issue. They should map these resources across the geographical areas most affected by the issue.

*Desk Research:* Students will utilize academic sources to articulate the immediate problem and explore underlying issues, which may include comparative data.

*Final Paper:* In this concluding stage, students will compile all their findings and analyses to produce the policy brief, which should be 2–3 pages in length (double-spaced, approximately 1,500 to 2,000 words).

The stages after the topic selection are catered in the form of assessment which is a progression building towards the final assignment of compiling all the assessments and finalizing the policy brief.

*Assignment 1:  
Mind mapping  
(In-Class Activity)*

Policy brief starts with identifying a problem. You need to follow the instructions below and create a mind map (which can be done digitally or by hand).

*How to make your Mind Map:* Before you start, take a minute to brainstorm the current issues you care about (i.e., food security, women's rights, climate change, elections, traffic, drainage system, etc.). After you are done, let the mind map flow organically within you by thinking about how your policy will make a difference to the current situation.

- 1 A mind map begins with drawing a central image on the paper with branches drawn off of the central theme which should be colourful and evocative
- 2 Label the branches if needed
- 3 Draw offshoots from the branch
- 4 Give each offshoot its own symbol and keywords
- 5 Draw other branches and offshoots of those branches as you brainstorm
- 6 Connect branches to one another through overlapping ideas/concepts (i.e., draw a curved arrow from one branch to another)

*Briefly write a narrative.* Your narrative of the mind map should answer the following questions:

- 1 Describe the topic that you want to work on.
- 2 Why? Does this issue impact your community/city/country directly?
- 3 What is the specific impact of that issue on that community/city/country?
- 4 Are there state/policy-oriented solutions currently being proposed by the government, agencies, or organizations? What are some ways you might be able to take action to address the issue?

*Rationale:*  
*Mind Mapping*

Based on my experience, I have come to realize that mind mapping is not just an exercise; it is an effective tool for breaking down broader topics into a singular focus. It paints a vivid picture, illuminating the path we need to tread, offering a visual representation of our thoughts and aspirations – allowing us to clarify what we aim to address.

Upon completion of the mind map, students are expected to compose a narrative that reflects the content of their mind map. This exercise encourages them to review their research plan and necessitates the translation of the ideas from the mind map into structured sentences.

*Assignment 2:*  
*Community Mapping*  
*(Take-Home)*

Did you research your issue and identify the actors and geographical areas? It is important to know who is already working on the issue and find potential collaborators within that community. Using your community knowledge and Google search list the areas where your issue is mostly affected. Then, create a list of the organizations/groups/entities that are working on the issue with a brief description of what they are working on. You will be provided with a map link to complete the mapping of the issue.

*Rationale:*  
*Community Mapping*

When students undertake community mapping, they are expected to conduct thorough research on relevant data, facts, and locations where the issue is most pronounced. They create digital maps of their areas using Padlet, which is provided by faculty members.

In the realm of policymaking, engaging communities in the mapping process enhances transparency and fosters trust between residents and policymakers. This collaborative method can result in more effective and sustainable policy solutions. Additionally, since policy briefs often rely on data and expert analysis that may not fully encapsulate the lived experiences and needs of communities, community mapping offers a platform for residents to share their insights, concerns, and priorities directly. This leads to more inclusive and equitable policy recommendations.

Therefore, community mapping serves as an exercise for students in policy briefs, allowing them to experience the role of a political stakeholder.

*Assignment 3:*  
*Desk Research*  
*(Midterm)*

What is not desk research? Desk research is not an annotated bibliography, an essay, a report, or a research paper. It does not state, prove, or develop main points and is not a list of summarized articles (Mohajan, 2018).

What is desk research? Desk research will focus on collecting research and forming questions that will help you develop an appropriate policy brief that avoids making assumptions or developing uninformed opinions about the issue you are working on (Mohajan, 2018).

When working on it, it is important to incorporate research that helps define the issue, provides historical context, considers evidence-based solutions, incorporates present conditions of your chosen topic, and evaluates policy options for a specific policy-maker audience. Engaged research in a policy brief uses traditional academic research and knowledge of the political conditions from other credible sources. All students will complete desk research by identifying and reading at least three academic sources that answer the following:

- What is an issues-based academic source that concerns the topic your policy brief addresses;
- What does the research tell you about the nature and scope of the topic or the challenge you are addressing;
- What are the underlying historical, social, or economic root causes of the problem?

Local sources (e.g., newspapers, TV news, etc.) outline what is happening in the country/city. Comparative sources outline what other countries/cities are doing to address the issue that might be a model for the policy brief. Are there examples of solutions that have worked in other communities/cities/countries with the same geographical context that could inform potential solutions for the community/city/country?

NOTE: One of your articles must be from the course outline related to the theme assigned to you. For example: if you decide on nationalism as your theme, one of the three articles should be from the readings we used in the class.

Do not cite Wikipedia, Merriam-Webster, and other similar unreliable sites. Some examples of reliable resources are <https://www.pewresearch.org>, <https://www.jstor.org/>, and [library.bracu.ac.bd](http://library.bracu.ac.bd).

*Rationale:*  
*Desk Research*

Students are expected to conduct comprehensive research and literature reviews at this stage. As this is a foundational course, field data collection is not required; instead, students will focus on secondary research. Through this desk research, students will establish a solid foundation for their projects, refine their methodologies, and enhance the rigor and validity of their findings.

This stage requires a significant amount of time, and therefore it is considered a take-home exam as part of their summative assessment.

*Assignment 4:*  
*Policy Brief*  
*(Final Paper)*

Students will prepare a policy brief that is a neutral paper that clearly defines and frames a key challenge or issue that impacts a community/city/country close to them and outlines a proposed policy brief that works to address the issue.

The final paper should accomplish the following:

- Define the key problem or issue for the study;
- Explain why this problem or issue requires a policy;
- Identify what entities are currently addressing the issue and what actions are working and which are not sufficient;

The grading rubric incorporates the following requirements:

- You have identified the problem through mind mapping.
- You have underlined the causes of the problem/challenge within a particular community/city/country and identified stakeholders and the roles they play through community mapping.
- You have outlined the brief with clear goals and potential outcomes and offered comparative examples of policies that are working to address the current issue. You may use references from other countries with similar issues through desk research.

*Rationale:*  
*Policy Brief Final Paper*

This is the final stage in which students compile all their previous work to complete the policy brief. As part of their final examination, they will submit a comprehensive policy brief that integrates all their prior contributions.

At this stage, the process becomes less stressful for students as they focus on refining their papers and incorporating the feedback provided by their faculty members.



## 6.2 WHY THE HANDBOOK?

The Policy Brief handbook is an electronic file that is uploaded to Google Classroom for students to access. It is essential to provide the handbook to students on the first day of class, as it allows them sufficient time to gain clarity regarding their assignments and assessments for the course. This handbook serves as a dynamic resource that both faculty and students can utilize at any stage of their academic journey, adapting it to meet their individual needs and serving as a reminder of the deadlines for each assessment (see Annexure 2).

This resource is highly effective for promoting student-centered teaching. This instructional approach places students at the forefront of the teaching and learning process, distinguishing it from traditional lecture models that primarily emphasize the teacher's role. As a result, this handbook is revised every two semesters to ensure that the instructional content remains current and relevant.

The handbook provides a detailed framework that integrates interdisciplinary teaching, empowering students to reflect on their lives, communities, and future with a broader perspective. It creates opportunities for experiential learning, complementing classroom instruction with hands-on writing practice for a more comprehensive educational experience.

## 7 JOURNAL (SELF) REFLECTING THE HANDBOOK

Following the introduction of the handbook, I have been monitoring the writing progress of our students. I was content to observe significant improvements in their assessment writing and a deeper understanding of how to connect their course lessons with their work. From 2022, as part of my CLASP Project, I started documenting my reflections regarding the implementation of the handbook and my observations on students' writing and their management of course-related stress. My journals are listed below:

20 DECEMBER 2022

*Journal 1*

The topic selection went better than the previous semesters. Reading the final papers will not be nonchalant. From reading how they wrote their topic to correct their mind mapping; it shows the effort that students are giving on their assessments. Grading can be more invigorating.

*Rationale*

I wrote my first journal towards the end of the Fall 2022 semester. My first entry focused on my analysis of student writings from Summer 2022 and Fall 2022. My initial observation (see Journal 1) was that students demonstrated a genuine effort to comprehend the concept of a policy brief. The week dedicated to confirming their topic before they started to prepare for the assessments outlined in the workbook was comprehensive, and students approached the task with seriousness. The whole week acknowledged their challenge of condensing a broad topic into a singular issue.

During consultation hours, faculty members dedicate one week to assisting students in refining their topics. This also provides us with insight into their understanding of the subject matter and their approach to structuring the policy brief.

16 MARCH 2023

*Journal 2*

Did she think that the handbook is overwhelming? Wow - did not expect students to find this overwhelming. Got a few feedbacks/suggestions from her -

- 1 As the entire handbook was discussed on the first day, she got scared. She did not expect so much information on the first day.
- 2 She thought that the handbook was the entire assessment
- 3 Policy brief was new to them. The students preferred a more walk through setting to write the brief.

*Rationale*

In Spring 2023, a first-year student expressed concerns about the guidebook being overwhelming. This feedback was unexpected, as we had not anticipated such a perception. The student felt that the course was demanding based on my instructions about the course during the first class, particularly in comparison to other courses she was enrolled in, which she perceived as heavily writing-focused. I appreciated her willingness to share her thoughts, as it prompted me to take a step back and clarify how the handbook works. Her feedback prompted me to reevaluate my approach to discussing the handbook with students. Since Summer 2023, I mentioned the handbook on the first day and introduced the handbook to the students and provided it to them after three classes, once they were more settled.

I gradually guide them through its contents as we progress in the course. I am also planning to include additional examples and case studies in my work. As the guidelines appear to be somewhat vague, incorporating real-life scenarios could effectively illustrate those points. Therefore, I will integrate them as well.

13 APRIL 2023

*Journal 3*

Been talking to a colleague who also teaches POL101 and has assigned policy brief as the fundamental assignment. He expressed that he is quite relaxed as his grading rubric is now more specific and giving feedback are also easier. The reason he gave was that the handbook is so into details that students are bound to follow the instructions. If they fail to follow, they lose their marks.

*Rationale*

Journal 3 focuses on how the handbook has streamlined processes for faculty members. Faculty members felt that the handbook is a systematic approach and can enhance efficiency by offering a clear framework for the development of assessments, encompassing the definition of learning outcomes and the establishment of grading criteria. This also ensures that they are evaluating the intended outcomes and offers valuable insights into student learning.

20 MAY 2023

*Journal 4*

Didn't their research skill go up to a different level now? Their capacity to integrate data into their desk research has enriched the depth of their arguments. I was content to observe that many students were plagiarising less. While reviewing the drafts of desk research today, I noticed a clear improvement in both clarity and conciseness.

*Rationale*

The Summer 2023 semester progressed smoothly. Despite the extensive travel commitments that prevented many in-person interactions with the students, I observed that their desk research demonstrated high quality as mentioned in Journal 4. They effectively utilized library resources and the reading materials provided in class. Remarkably, they completed their first drafts of the desk research two weeks ahead of the final submission deadline.

27 MAY 2023

*Journal 5*

The handbook proved useful in other ways - simple things like time management. Students could maintain the deadlines. Last two semesters I have seen how students did not make any last-minute excuses for not submitting their assignments on time

*Rationale*

Effective time management is crucial and should be integrated into our students' daily routines. By mastering this skill, students learn to prioritize their assignments and meet deadlines efficiently. The handbook outlines the due dates for each assessment, allowing students to be aware of these deadlines in advance. This awareness enables them to focus their efforts and complete their work in a timely manner.

27 JULY 2023

*Journal 6*

Summer seems to be challenging. Most students from Section 6 seem to be less interested to even find out what the handbook is offering. Several students have expressed confusion regarding the structural guidelines outlined in the handbook. They appeared to be overwhelmed by the details and uncertain about their application. Albeit, the guidance provided in the handbook was clear and concise, many mind map drafts I reviewed today were still rather lengthy and complex. Some students seemed to struggle with understanding the importance of simplifying their language, suggesting that the key messages of the handbook may not be fully resonating with them. I wonder why? I doubt that this section will be a tough one to deal with.

*Rationale*

The handbook, similar to that of Spring 2023 (see Journal 2), was met with some resistance by the majority of students enrolled in the Summer 2023 POL101 course. This semester presented challenges, as I needed to demonstrate the effectiveness of the policy brief handbook to the students. Consequently, I reverted to my previous approach of introducing and explaining the handbook in a single session. I dedicated an entire class to guiding the students through the policy brief handbook, thoroughly explaining each assessment stage. At this stage, I realized that the approach to explaining the handbook should be tailored to the characteristics and needs of the students in my class.

5 SEPTEMBER 2023

*Journal 7*

It's been quite a few semesters now that we have introduced the handbook as a guide to writing policy briefs. This handbook, after a year, is a relaxing SOP.

*Rationale*

The handbook serves as an excellent standard operating procedure (SOP) for me. Although creating and tailoring these handbooks demands considerable effort and time, they eventually integrate seamlessly into your course and facilitate a natural flow.

12 NOVEMBER 2023

*Journal 8*

By breaking the assignment into smaller assessments, I feel that I can provide comprehensive and timely feedback to the students. Unlike before when I had to read 10–12 pages of papers and grade them, I can now sit with each section with a cool mind and correct them. As a result, a separate feedback session is also included that gives me the space of in-depth discussion with my students.

*Rationale*

Review and feedback sessions enable students to revisit key concepts, clarify any uncertainties, and enhance their comprehension of the material. Constructive feedback offers students targeted insights into their strengths and areas where improvement is needed (see Journal 8). This becomes more effective when feedbacks are given for each section of the assignments individually.

23 FEBRUARY 2024

*Journal 9*

It's an amazing day for me today. Neither because it's raining after several days of extreme heat nor because I inhaled and exhaled deeply after the whole chaos since last month. My reason for writing this is that a senior faculty member asked me about the handbook. He heard from his students (two he mentioned so I am assuming that they are two of my POL101 students) that I give a handbook to do a final paper. He was curious to know how I do it as the students have demanded something similar for his class too.

*Rationale*

When students express the importance of your comprehensive guidebook to another teacher, it demonstrates the positive impact it has had on them and indicates their appreciation for its unique qualities. However, it is more appreciated when the teacher accepts that opinion and asks for guidance to tailor the handbook according to his course.

## 8 CONCLUSION

The handbook we have developed is designed to be flexible, so students' creativity and innovation will not be stifled. It serves as a resource to assist faculty members in transitioning from traditional teaching methods. Since the handbook is distributed among all POL101 faculty members, it promotes collaboration among teachers, departments, and institutions in the development and refinement of assessments.

It is essential to emphasize that these handbooks are most effective when faculty members utilize them to build upon assessments and establish connections between each assessment. These handbooks can be customized to meet the specific needs of the courses and the levels of the students. It is crucial for faculty members to consistently engage with the handbook and facilitate discussions on each step, rather than merely distributing it without further reference throughout the semester. This approach is particularly important for first- and second-year students, who may require additional guidance.



## NOTES

- 1 2015
- 2 Jasmi et al., 2022; Nakkula, 2012
- 3 2012
- 4 Zhanqiang, 2023
- 5 Van Der Wende, 2013
- 6 Raiyan, 2016
- 7 Institute for Writing and Thinking, 2021
- 8 Shahidullah et al., 2020
- 9 Anderson et. al. 2001
- 10 Boys & Keating, 2009
- 11 Biswas & Paczyńska, 2014



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## APPENDICES

- 1 POL 101 Course Content before 2020
- 2 Policy Brief Handbook

<i>Week</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>
1	<i>What is political science, its scope and nature</i> Introduction to Political Science; Historical Developments of Political Science; Subfields of Political Science	Roskin, Chapter 1
2	<i>Key Concepts in Political Science (Power)</i> General types of power; power in the modern state; hegemony; use of surveillance	Roskin, Chapter 2  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9_PjdU3Mpo&amp;t=1s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9_PjdU3Mpo&amp;t=1s</a> (Safe and Sorry – Terrorism & Mass Surveillance)  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHcTKWiZ8sl">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHcTKWiZ8sl</a> (Propaganda Games)
3	<i>The State: Part 1</i> Origin of the State, Explanations of state functions/functionality/ different types of states, an overview of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, and state of nature	Roskin, Chapter 3  Robert Carneiro, “A Theory of the Origin of the State.” <i>Studies in Social Theory</i> , 3 (Menlo Park, CA: Institute for Humane Studies, 1977)  Thomas Hobbes, “The Misery of the Natural Condition of Mankind” and “Creating Leviathan” from <i>Leviathan</i> , 1999, 11-14, 56-58  John Locke, “The State of Nature and the State of War” from <i>Two Treatises of Civil Government</i> , W.S. Oxford University Press: 1999, 14-18 (OPTIONAL READINGS)  Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “The Noble Savage” [from <i>A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality</i> , in <i>The Social Contract and Discourses</i> , Oxford University Press: 1999, 20-23

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|---|---|--|
| 4 | <i>The State: Part 2</i><br>State and the Economy;<br>Center-Periphery Conflict,<br>Population census | Dan Posner, "Why Chewas and Tumbukas are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi." <i>American Political Science Review</i> , 98:4 (November 2004), 529-545<br><br><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyayif_nla8&amp;t=21s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyayif_nla8&amp;t=21s</a><br>(Kashmir explained)   |
| 5 | <i>Political Ideologies: Part 1</i><br>Socialism, Marxism,<br>Communism, Social<br>Democracies        | Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto" in Michael Rosen and Jonathan Wolff (eds.), <i>Political Thought</i> , Oxford University Press: 1999, 345-348<br><br>Gabriel Almond, "Capitalism and Democracy." <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i> . 24: 3 (September 1991), 467-474<br><br>Historical background on capitalism: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIuaW9YWqEU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIuaW9YWqEU</a><br><br>Main video on Marx:<br><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSQgCy_ilcc&amp;t=1s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSQgCy_ilcc&amp;t=1s</a>  |
| 6 | <i>Political Ideologies: Part 2</i><br>Nationalism, Fascism   | Benedict Anderson, <i>Imagined Communities</i> , Introduction, 5-7, 139-140<br><br>Steve Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." <i>Journal of Democracy</i> , 13:2 (2002), 51-65<br><br><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFICRFKtAc4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFICRFKtAc4</a> (Rise of Hitler, fascism)<br><br><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnC-zSdMSRo&amp;t=187s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnC-zSdMSRo&amp;t=187s</a> (Europe's far right)<br><br><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rI_ly1FoSn4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rI_ly1FoSn4</a> (Cow Vigilantism in India)<br><br>Roskin, Chapter 5. |

7	MIDTERM	
8	<i>Elections</i> Different election systems, spoiler effect, gerrymandering, voter turnout, electoral college in the U.S, Bangladesh elections	Roskin, Chapter 11  Ali Riaz, "The Curse of the Two Thirds," Dhaka Tribune, December 2013  Elections - FPTP: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7tWHJfhiyo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7tWHJfhiyo</a> AV: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Y3jE3B8HsE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Y3jE3B8HsE</a> MMP: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTol-sdoSXU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTol-sdoSXU</a> Bonus, Gerrymandering: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qDCGTIForo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qDCGTIForo</a>  Bonus (will help in presidential systems): US elections: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRu_JcarCDY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRu_JcarCDY</a> Electoral college: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgH3gvnN468&amp;t=116s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgH3gvnN468&amp;t=116s</a>
9	<i>Interest Groups</i> Functions of interest groups; how interest groups shape policy, interest groups in Bangladesh	Roskin, Chapter 9  Sabeel Rahman, "Development, Democracy, and the NGO Sector." Sage: 2006
10	<i>Executive, Legislative and Judiciary: Part 1</i> Parliamentary and presidential systems, unicameral and bicameral systems, passing laws, separation of powers	Roskin Chapter 12,13

11	<i>Executive, Legislative and Judiciary: Part 2</i> Law-making, supreme court, constitutions and amendments to the constitution of Bangladesh	Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
12	<i>International Relations &amp; Foreign Policy</i> Cause of war between nations, world systems theory, diplomacy, peacekeeping	Jack Snyder, "One World, Rival Theories," <i>Foreign Policy</i> 145 (2004) Gary Bass, "Are Democracies Really More Peaceful?," <i>New York Times</i> (2006)  Ian Hurd, "Is Humanitarian Intervention Legal?" <i>Ethics and International Affairs</i> , 25:3 (2011)



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# POLICY BRIEF HANDBOOK - A WRITING GUIDE

## POL101: Introduction to Political Science





## Overview

All policy brief papers begin with an idea. For our purposes, we are asking students to identify an issue in a specific community/country/city and propose a specific policy that incorporates research, best practices, and community knowledge on current issues. The themes to focus on are Nationalism & Ethnicity; Regime Type, and the Electoral System.

The following mini assignments will help you build a policy brief during the semester that culminates in your own community and policy brief:

- **Mind Mapping:** It's about brainstorming. Identify and define an issue within a community that you want to work and begin developing a project idea
- **Community Mapping:** Research, identify and write the available community resources who are the actors of your issue. Map within all the geographical areas where your issue is mostly affected
- **Desk Research:** Using academic sources, define the proximate problem and underlying issues (can include comparative data)
- **Final Paper:** Policy Brief (2–3 pages, double-spaced: 1,500 to 2,000 words)



## Assignment 1: Mind mapping (In-Class Activity)

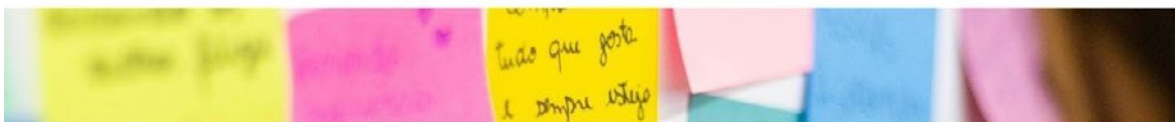
The policy brief starts with identifying a problem:

Brainstorming will help you identify an issue you care about and explore potential ideas for your policy brief.

What is a mind map? Mind mapping is a thinking tool designed to help you brainstorm. Your assignment is to follow the instructions below and create a mind map (which can be done digitally or by hand). When you are done with the mind map upload here.

How to make your Mind Map:

Before you start, take a minute to brainstorm the current issues you care about (i.e., food security, women's rights, climate change, elections, traffic, drainage system, etc.). After you are done, let the mindmap flow organically within you by thinking about how will your policy make a difference to the current situation.



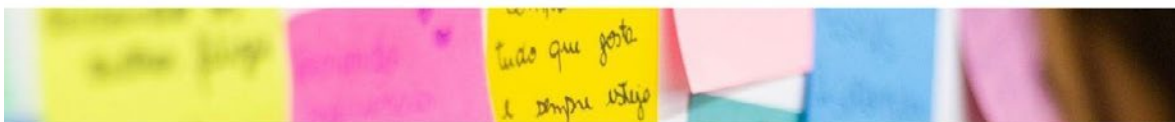


A mind map begins with drawing a central image on the paper with branches drawn off of the central theme which should be colourful and evocative

- Label the branches if needed
- Draw offshoots from the branch
- Give each offshoot its own symbol and keywords
- Draw other branches and offshoots of those branches as you brainstorm
- Connect branches to one another through overlapping ideas/concepts (e.g. draw a curved arrow from one branch to another)

***Your narrative of the mindmap should answer the following questions:***

- Briefly describe the topic that you want to work on. Why?
- Does this issue impact your community/city/country directly?
- What is the specific impact of that issue on that community/city/country?
- Are there state/policy-oriented solutions currently being proposed by the government, agencies, or organizations?
- What are some ways you might be able to take action to address the issue?





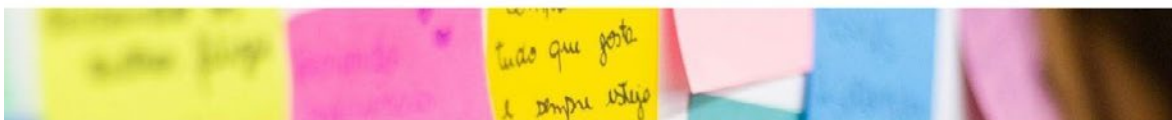


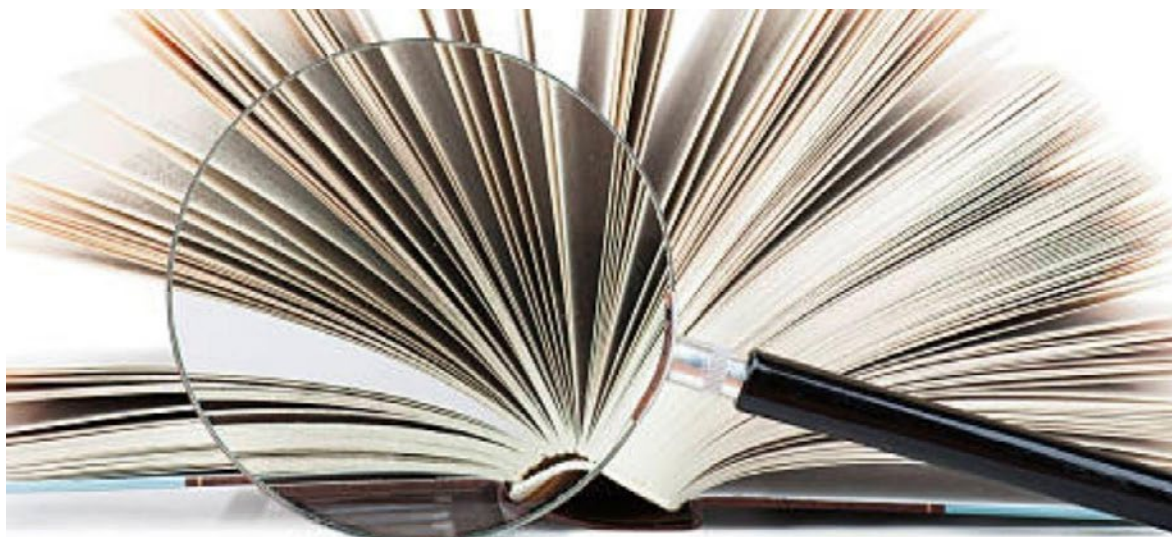
## Assignment 2: Community Mapping (Midterm)

**Deadline: November 08, 2022**

Did you research your issue and identified the actors and geographical areas? It is important to know who is already working on the issue and find potential collaborators within that community.

- Using your community knowledge and google search, pin the areas where your issue is mostly affected.
- Using your community knowledge, google maps and google search create a list of the entities that are working on the issue with a brief description of the organizations that are working on your issue
- You will be provided with a map link to complete the mapping of the issue





### Assignment 3: Desk Research (Midterm)

**Deadline: November 08, 2022**

What is **not** a desk research?

Engaged research is not an annotated bibliography, an essay, report, or research paper. It does not state, prove, or develop main points and is not a list of summarized articles.

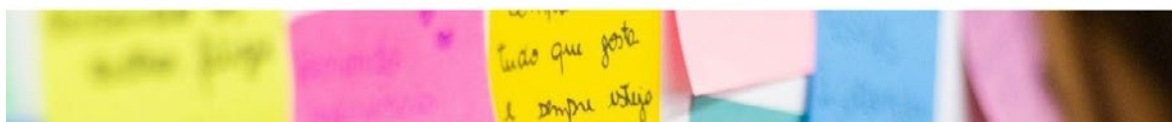
What is desk research?

Desk research will focus on collecting research and forming questions that will help you develop an appropriate policy brief that avoids making assumptions or developing uninformed opinions about the issue you are working on.

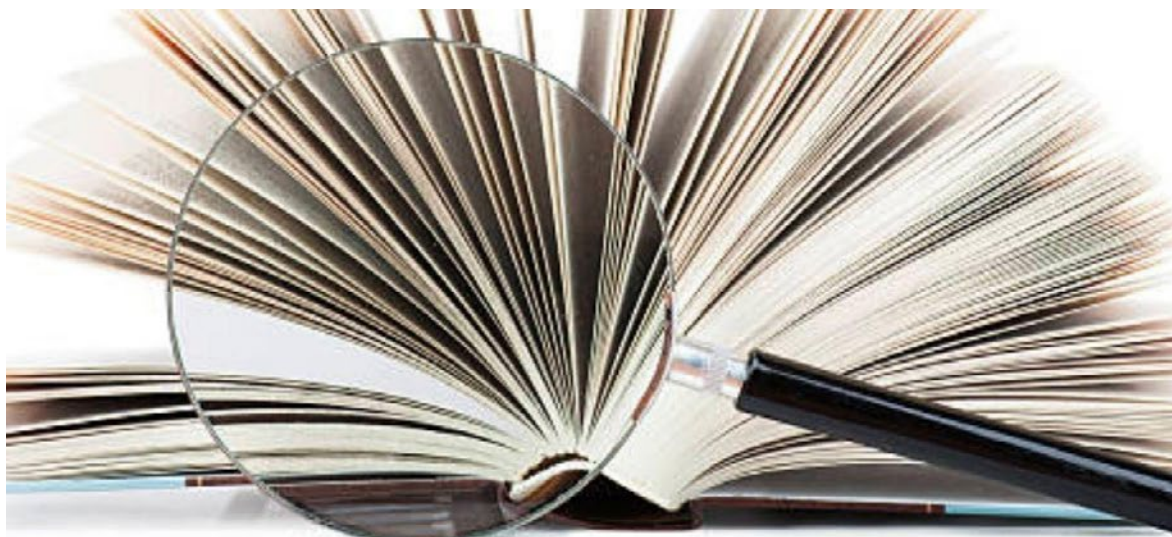
When working on it, it is important to incorporate research that helps define the issue, provides historical context, considers evidence-based solutions, incorporates present conditions of your chosen topic, and evaluates policy options for a specific policy-maker audience. Engaged research in a policy brief uses traditional academic research and knowledge of the political conditions from other credible sources.

All students will create engaged research by identifying and reading **at least** three academic sources that answer the following:

- Issues based source (academic source about the topic your policy brief addresses; what does research tell you about the nature and scope of the topic or the challenge you are addressing; what are the underlying historical, social, or economic root causes of the problem?)
- Local source (eg: newspaper, TV news, etc.) Outlines what is happening in the country/city







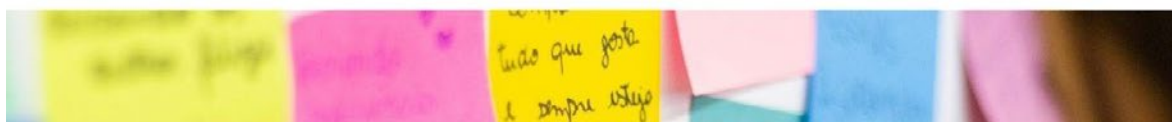
- Comparative source (outlines what other countries/cities are doing to address the issue that might be a model for the policy brief, are there examples of solutions that have worked in other communities/cities/countries with the same geographical context that could inform potential solutions for the community/city/country?)

Note:

- One of your articles **must be** from the course outline related to the theme assigned to you. For example: if you decide on Nationalism as your theme, one of the three articles should be from the readings we used in the class.
- Students must use APA for references
- **Do not cite** Wikipedia, Merriam-Webster, and other similar unreliable sites

Examples of Reliable Resources:

- <https://www.pewresearch.org>
- <https://www.jstor.org/>
- [library.bracu.ac.bd](http://library.bracu.ac.bd)





## Assignment 4: Policy Brief (Final Paper)

**Deadline: December 27, 2022**

The policy brief focuses on a **single issue** and asks students to think about how they will use their own power as “good citizens” to identify ways they might act to address an issue in their community.

Students will prepare a policy brief that is a neutral paper and clearly defines and frames a key challenge or issue that impacts a community/city/country close to them and outlines a proposed policy brief that works to address the issue. Students should explore the relevant readings from their course outline based on Nationalism & Ethnicity; Regime Type, and the Electoral System. The final paper will be created in part through the completion of the Policy Brief.

Final papers should:

- Define the key problem or issue for the study;
- Explain why this problem or issue requires a policy;
- Identify what entities are currently addressing the issue and what actions are working and which are not sufficient;

The grading rubric will incorporate the following:

- You have identified the problem and the underlying causes of the problem/challenge within a particular community/city/country
- Identified stakeholders and the roles they play
- Outlined the brief with clear goals and potential outcomes
- Offered comparative examples of policies that are working to address the current issue. You may use references from other countries with similar issues

