



How to write a policy brief

This is a training tool developed by IDRC



Topics

- Planning your policy brief p. 3-12
- Policy brief template p. 13-26
- Designing the brief p. 27-34
- Checking your work p. 35-36

Planning your policy brief

Work within parameters

A policy brief is:

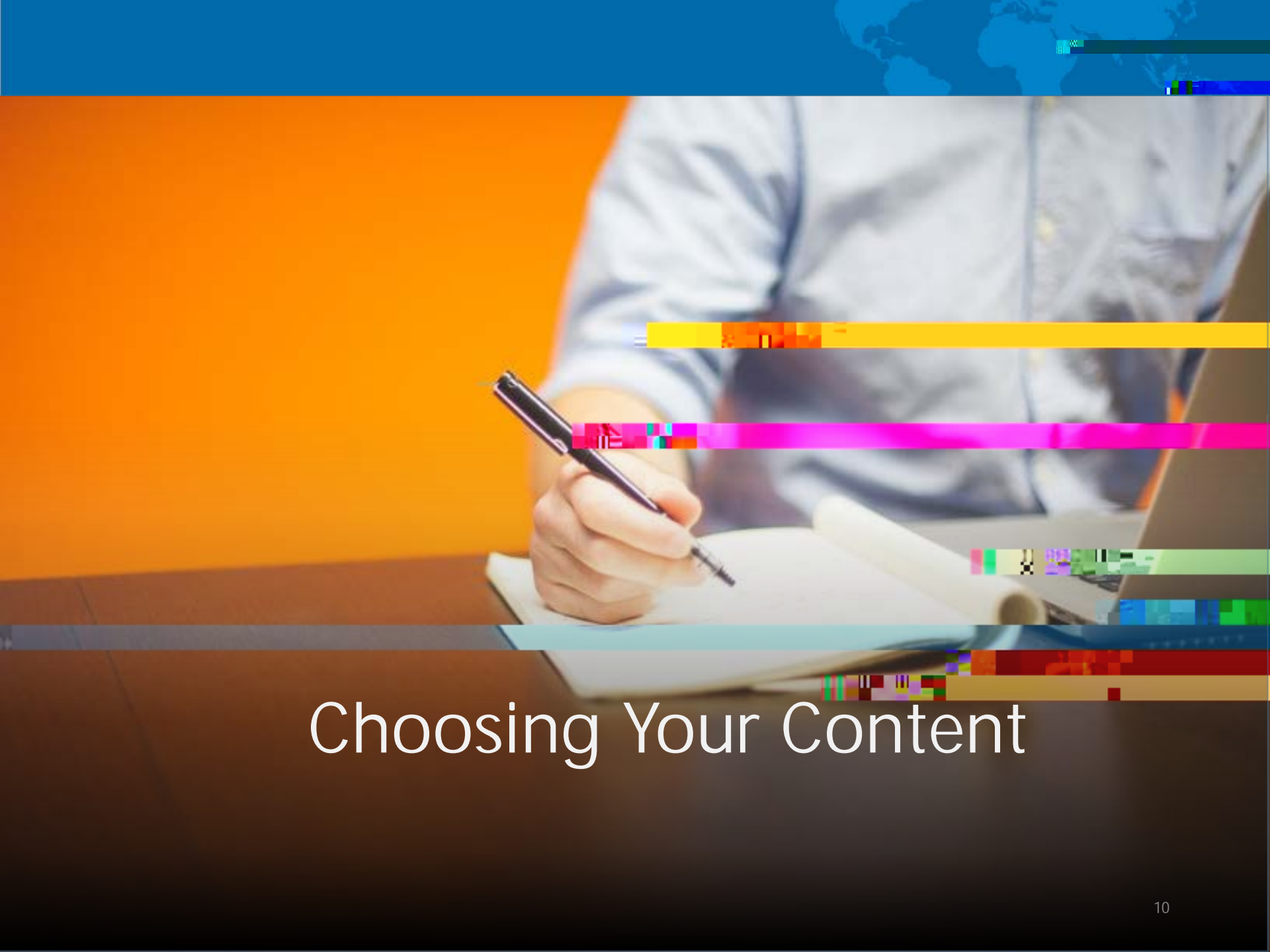
- A stand alone document
- Focused on a single topic
- No more than 2-4 pages (1,500 words)

How can I reach readers?

- What questions need answers?
- What are their interests, concerns?
- What does it take to reach specific readers such as media, decision-makers?

Use the power of persuasion

- Answer the question “What value does this have for me?”
- Describe the urgency of the situation
- Speak in terms of benefits and advantages



Choosing Your Content

Apply a laser focus

- Focus on a single topic
- Define your purpose
- Identify salient points that support the aim
- Distil points to essential info
-



Putting the brief together

Lead with a short statement

The executive statement will:

- Distil the essence of the brief
- Provide an overview for busy readers
- Entice readers to go further
- Appear on cover or top of first page
- Be written last

Introduction

- Answers the question *why*
- Explains the significance/urgency of the issue
- Describes the research objective
- Gives overview of findings, conclusions
- Creates curiosity for the rest of brief

Approaches and results

- Provides summary of the facts
- Describes issue and context
- Describes research and analysis
- Should not be overly technical
-

Approaches

- Explains how study was conducted
- Relates who conducted study
- Describes relevant background
- Identifies method used to collect data

Conclusion: what does it mean?

- Use section to interpret data
- Aim for concrete conclusions
-



Example:

Elephants and Electric Fences.
A study from Sri Lanka EEPSEA 2005

Implications and recommendations

- Implications are what could happen
- Recommendations are what should happen
- Both flow from conclusion
- Both must be supported by evidence

Recommendations: call to action

- Describe clearly what should happen next
- State as precise steps
- Ensure they are relevant, credible and feasible



Example:

Elephants and Electric Fences.
A study from Sri Lanka EEPSEA 2005

Titles: add a little jazz

- Titles are a reference point
- Sub-titles break up text
- Both should entice readers
- Similar to headline writing
- Verb make them more dynamic
- Questions can pique curiosity



Example:

Repair Bill Could Reach \$250 Million

Callouts

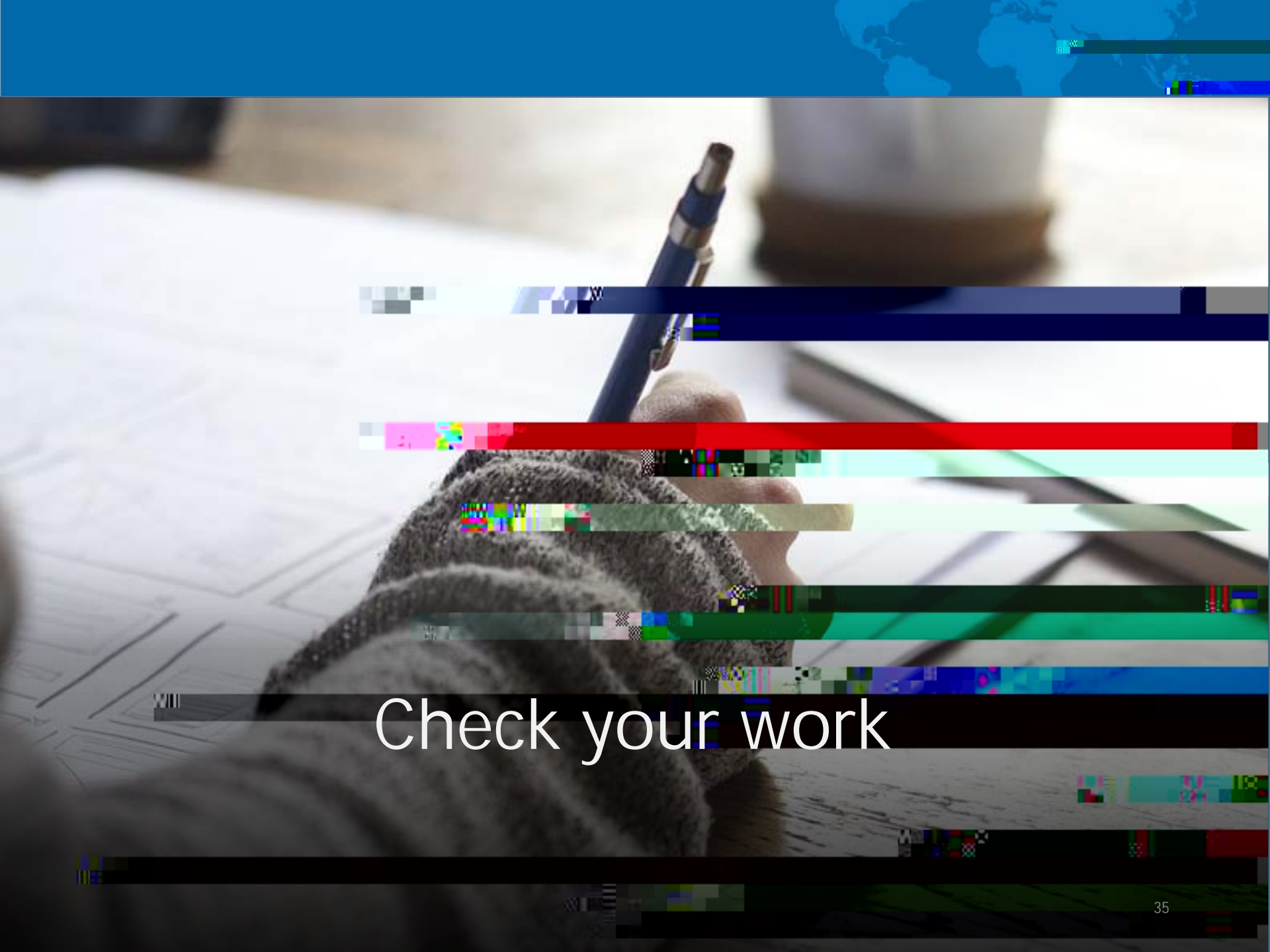
- Sentences or sentence fragments
- Printed in larger fonts
- Boxed or placed in margins



Example:

Bulleted lists

- Pie charts/bar graphs are better than tables
- Graphics simplify



Check your work



Think ahead and look back

- Conduct a 20-second test: what stood out?
- Try to make it more user friendly
- Go on a jargon hunt
- Don't overuse statistics
- Check arguments, proof, persuasion
- Build a Q and A package

