

POLICY ANALYSIS

What is a Policy analysis?

There are several assessments that require an analysis of a policy. In a policy analysis assessment, you may be required to identify a social issue and critically analyse a policy set in place to respond to the issue. You may be required to compare different policy approaches and decide which is the most effective approach. Another assessment may ask you to compare different political parties, their ideologies, and their policies on a particular issue. Therefore, it is important that you understand the assessment task and what you specifically need to analyse.

Analyse the question

Read the assessment question carefully and pay attention to the instruction words like identify, explain, compare, discuss, analyse and so on. It is a good idea to underline key words and phrases. This is called [unpacking](#) the question.

After analysing the question, brainstorm ideas for your response and look for information in your course materials to help support your ideas.

Content

You will usually need to provide a clear, concise and engaging account of:

- The issues under consideration
- The scope and dimensions of the issue
- The current policy situation
- The impact of policies on particular individuals, groups and communities
- Recommendations for action

You can use this list above as a checklist when you are brainstorming and taking notes.

Structure

Your paper needs to be written as a series of well-structured paragraphs. You should include academic references to support your argument in each paragraph. Check the unit guide to see how many references you are required to include in your paper and the word count. It is recommended that you use an assessment scaffold to ensure the sections of your paper are presented in a logical order. Check your class space for a scaffold or create your own. You can download a blank scaffold [here](#).

Start your research using the [notetaking template](#) in this document.

Paragraph structure

Follow these steps to create a well-structured paragraph:

1. Start the paragraph with a clear topic sentence that introduces the main idea of the paragraph.
2. Elaborate on the main idea. Give an example to support your answer and include in-text references to support your position.
3. Explain your position on the topic developing your ideas further using third person ([critically analyse](#)).
5. Write a concluding sentence to end the paragraph finishing off the idea.
6. Write the paragraph using a [formal academic style](#).

To improve the flow between sentences you should include [connectors/linking words](#).

Headings

Check the marking criteria to confirm headings are required for your assessment. Headings identify the content presented in each section of a paper. Headings should be descriptive and concise. There are five levels of heading in APA Style. Click [here](#) to visit the APA website to see how to format your headings.

Follow These Steps to Start a Policy Assessment

Step one - Brainstorm the issue

You will address a contemporary **'problem'** or **'policy'** in Australia.

First, outline some of the broad areas you are most interested in researching. It might be useful to think about key social policy issues:

- Welfare provision
- Welfare States
- Alleviating poverty
- Addressing inequality
- Promoting social cohesion or social inclusion

Step two - Narrow the scope of the paper - according to the marking criteria

In the area you have chosen, think about these possibilities when narrowing the scope:

- Choose a specific principle, such as poverty, inequality, social cohesion, social inclusion; OR
- Choose a sub-area of the broad area; OR
- Choose a specific geographical area;
- Choose a specific level of government: Commonwealth, State, Local;
- Choose a particular population group.

Step Three - Research the issue and find the current policy on the issue and responses to the policy

You may be given a policy, or you may have to find it yourself. Use the [research template](#) on the last page of this guide to help take concise notes.

You will need to provide:

- Knowledge of the relevant social policies.
- Knowledge of the relevant services and organisations.
- Responses from the relevant stakeholders.
- Knowledge of the issues that have been identified by others.
- History of developments and debates.
- Knowledge about significant concepts in social justice debates: e.g., Poverty, inequality, social citizenship, social exclusion, social cohesion, diversity and participation.

Step Four - Develop a scaffold into heading sections for your paper

Check your class space for a scaffold or create your own. Transfer your notes into the scaffold. The more detailed the scaffold, the easier it will be to write your first draft.

Step Five - Edit and proofread

Ensure that you leave time to edit and proofread your assessment.

- Attach an ACAP assignment cover sheet to the word document.
- Proofread all paragraphs for spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Check the presentation requirements specified in the unit outline.
- Check your in-text references and reference list.
- Upload your assessment to Turnitin and check the [Turnitin](#) report fixing any referencing issues.
- Write your final draft and submit.

Where can I find a Policy?

It is recommended that you look at authentic social policy briefing papers and analyse the content, structure and writing style. This will help give you an idea of section headings and relevant content to provide when analysing a policy.

These links may assist in researching different policies in Australia:

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/social-policy-advocacy/position-papers-and-statements>

<https://humanrights.gov.au/>

<https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/>

<https://www.acoss.org.au/policy-advisors/>

<https://vcoss.org.au/>

<https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-policy>

https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1819/Quick_Guides/MentalHealth

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-drug-strategy-2017-2026>

https://www.alp.org.au/media/1539/2018_alp_national_platform_constitution.pdf

<https://www.alp.org.au/about/national-platform/>

<https://www.liberal.org.au/party>

<https://greens.org.au/policies>

Areas to Consider

Bias-free Language

It is essential that you refer to all people with inclusivity and respect. You must strive to use language that is free of bias and avoids perpetuating prejudicial beliefs or demeaning attitudes. When checking for spelling, grammar, and wordiness, you should also practice reading your work for bias. The [APA website](#) contains guidelines for writing about people without bias across a range of topics. It is a requirement of the marking criteria that you write in accordance with these guidelines.

Adapted from apastyle.apa.org (2020) American Psychological Association

Critical writing

While a certain amount of description is necessary to set the context for your analysis, the main characteristic of academic writing is the critical element. The kinds of questions that might be useful to ask yourself when drafting your assessment are:

1. *What is the balance between descriptive and critical writing?*

A useful way to check this balance in your own writing is to use two coloured pens and to mark in the margin whether the lines are descriptive or critical. The balance will change at different points, but you need to make sure there is enough of the colour that represents critical writing.

2. *Why should the reader be convinced by what I've just written?*

Remember that, just as you are asking 'Why should I believe what I've just read?', the readers of your work will be asking the same question of your writing. A critical read through your own writing may reveal gaps in your logic, which you can rectify before you submit it for the critique of others.

3. *Is my conclusion supported sufficiently well by my preceding analysis and argument?*

Check out the conclusions that you have drawn, then locate and check the supporting evidence you provide earlier on. This is a good way of making sure you haven't forgotten to include a crucial piece of evidence. It is also a way of checking that, when your reader comes to the end of your writing, the conclusions make sense, rather than being a surprise, or an unconvincing leap of logic.

4. *Have I included any unsubstantiated statements?*

Sometimes a generalised, sweeping statement can slip through. Generalised statements might be acceptable in conversation, but not in academic writing.

There are three main ways of dealing with such statements:

- present the evidence to support the statement
- re-phrase the statement to sound more cautious e.g.: 'it could be argued ...' or 'this suggests that ...'
- remove the statement

Adapted from Student Learning Development (2009) University of Leicester

Finding supporting evidence

It is important to find journal articles that support your analysis of the issue and the policy. There are a number of key journals you should use to obtain information. Searching within these journals, rather than searching an entire database, can save time and provide you with research that is relevant to your assessment task. are also a good source of information and support.

To help you begin searching:

- Use the list of journal databases below to find your journal articles. These have been hand-picked for their relevance to the field of Social Work
- Watch the [short videos](#) located in the ACAP library website that show you how to search within the Library's online journal resources

Useful Websites

Journal Databases

- [Advances in Social Work](#)
- [The Australian Journal of Social Issues](#)
- [Australian Social Work](#)
- [Critical Social Work](#)
- [Journal of Social Work \(London, England\)](#)
- [Social Indicators Research](#)

Code of Ethics

It is important to include the ethical practice of social workers in your assessment. To do this you should refer to the AASW's (2010) Code of Ethics in your assessments. The Code expresses the values and responsibilities which are integral to and characterise the social work profession.

- [Aust Assoc of Social Workers Code of Ethics](#)

The AASW's (2010) Code of Ethics (the Code) is the core document which informs and guides the ethical practice of social workers. The Code expresses the values and responsibilities which are integral to and characterise the social work profession. It is intended to assist all social workers, collectively and individually, to act in ethically accountable ways in the pursuit of the profession's aims.

- [Australian Council of Social Services \(ACOSS\)](#)

The Australian Council of Social Service is the peak body of the community services and welfare sector and the national voice for the needs of people affected by poverty and inequality. Our vision is for a fair, inclusive and sustainable Australia where all individuals and communities can participate in and benefit from social and economic life.

Sentence Starters

Here is a collection of phrases you can use to build your body paragraphs in your assessments.

Expressing similarities

There are a number of similarities between X and Y.

The effects of X on Y are similar to those of Z.

Both X and Y share a number of key features.

Introducing differences

X is different from Y in a number of respects.

X differs from Y in a number of important ways.

There are a number of important differences between X and Y.

Areas where significant differences have been found include X and Y.

Moving from one section to the next, indicating addition or contrast

Another significant aspect of X is ...

In addition, it is important to ask ...

Unlike Smith, Jones (2014) has argued ...

In contrast to Smith, Jones (2014) maintains ...

Despite this, little progress has been made in the ...

Introducing general criticism

Non-government agencies are also critical of the new policies.

The X has been vigorously challenged in recent years by a number of Y.

These claims have been strongly contested in recent years by a number of Y.

Expressing a causal relationship tentatively

X may have been an important factor in ...

X may have contributed to the increase in ...

X may have played a vital role in bringing about ...

X may have been caused by an increase in ...

In the literature, X has been associated with Y.

Introducing questions, problems and limitations

A major criticism of X is that

A serious weakness with X, however, is that

One of the limitations with this X is that it does not explain why...

One criticism of much of the literature on X is that

The key problem with this explanation is that

The existing accounts fail to resolve the contradiction between X and Y.

Being cautious when discussing implications or recommendations

One possible implication of this is that

The evidence from this X suggests that

There would therefore seem to be a definite need for

A reasonable approach to tackle this issue could be to ...

List of Connectors

Use these transitions words in your assessments to link your ideas and make your writing easier to follow.

Time/sequence

initially
first of all
firstly, secondly
next/then
meanwhile
while
up to now
before/before that
formerly
previously
prior to
after/afterwards
thereafter
subsequently
lastly/finally
soon
simultaneously

Addition

again
and/and then
also
besides
furthermore
additionally
in addition
moreover
not only...but also
as well as
once again
apart from this
another

Cause & Effect

hence
therefore
consequently
as a consequence
accordingly
as a result
because
because of this
for this reason
in that case
since
thus

Generalisation

in general
in most cases
usually
frequently
mainly
on the whole
as a rule
for the most part
typically

Conclusion

in brief
in conclusion
to conclude
in summary
summing up
on the whole
finally
therefore
thus
in short

Contrast

however
nevertheless
yet/and yet
on the other hand
though/although
even though
otherwise
conversely
while
instead
in contrast
alternatively
either...or

Comparison

similarly/similar to
by comparison
likewise
correspondingly
equally important
in the same way
whereas
as well as

Example/analogy

in other words
for example
for instance
such as
as follows
that is to say
in this case
to demonstrate
to illustrate

Highlighting

in particular
particularly
especially
mainly

Conditional

if/even if
unless
whether
as long as
supposing
provided

Referring

who
which
when
where
whose
that

Concession

nevertheless
despite
although
however

Policy Analysis Sample

Empowering Indigenous Communities to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect

For many Indigenous families, the fear and distrust of family services has significant impacts on parenting, safety for children and opportunities to receive help. According to Blacklock (2014), this sense of distrust stems from the past policies of removing children, which have had a profound and enduring effect on the emotional and social well-being of generations of Aboriginal people. In recognition of this harm and suffering, Aboriginal community leaders developed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in the 1980s (SNAICC, 2013). The principle upholds the rights of the child's family and community to have some control and influence over decisions about their children. It also prioritises options that should be explored when an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child is placed in care. The principle has been adopted in legislation or policy in all Australian states and territories. However, recent reviews estimate it has been fully applied in only 15% of child protection cases involving Aboriginal children (ACCP, 2013). Research has shown that where families have greater involvement in decision making in child protection, there is greater trust and less adversarial relationships between families and child protection services (Rodgers & Cahn, 2010; Berzin et al., 2008), hence more concerted efforts to apply the principle can lead to better welfare outcomes for Aboriginal children.

Research and Notetaking Template

Areas for consideration	
<p>Scope of the issue/policy approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the scope of the paper (the parameters and focus) • Specify your population of concern • Identify the key issues and extent of the issues • Explain the currency and significance 	
<p>Current Policy Situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the current policy situation • Identify at which level of government might this issue be addressed • Assess the impact/effectiveness of the current policy /Does the policy achieve its aims? • Strengths and limitations of the current policy 	
<p>Key Issues or Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the key issues that have been raised in relation of the current policy situation • Justify why the policy need to change • State how these issues are related to social policy principles 	
<p>Conclusions and Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarise the key points of your paper • Provide recommendations that are achievable and consistent with your analysis of the issues 	