

Committed to High Quality, Open- Source Analysis

Leeds Policy Institute Style Guide.





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1. Background of the Society

Leeds Policy Institute Society is an upcoming political organisation involved in writing research and policy papers for members of parliament as well as the media and press. We are dedicated to generating data-driven, non-partisan research that delves into issues directly impacting the North of England.

All published research conclusions are screened through our rigorous academic quality assurance checks, where papers are reviewed by our expert Academic Advisory Council as well as other student think tanks across the country. All published research conclusions are that of the individual authors and are not reflective of the society as a whole.

On top of excellent research quality, we rely on well-written, convincing, and impactful publications. As such, the purpose of this document is to serve as a writing and style guide for you, our talented society member. Here, you will be exposed to LPI's general writing philosophy and how this extends to academic and blog-style writing. You will also be provided information on how to approach your data analysis within your reports to ensure that you have a coherent and pragmatic approach to looking at numbers. We have also added grammar resources and our organisational view on the usage of **ChatGPT** and other AI-assisted writing tools.

Finally, this document includes style information for the communications wing of the Think Tank which advises on structuring social media posts, press releases and media coverage.

2. Writing Philosophy

As a grassroots student think tank, our society wins by providing pragmatic and data-driven solutions to the media and politicians which are *valuable*. Yes, creating balanced arguments with formal and straightforward language is important. Being persuasive, convincing, authoritative, and well-written is also important. But, most importantly, your job as a writer is to create value for the reader.

Readers are selfish people; you are probably quite aware of this. If you pick up a text and it's not useful to you, you quickly discard it - even if it was well written. Thus, valuable (and by extension useful) pieces are written with the right readers in mind.

The problem here is that different readers find different uses for the text they read. For instance, how you create value for an academic reader will be completely different for someone consuming an op-ed you've written on the tube. Whilst the academic will be looking for technical terms and airtight, peer-reviewed work, the casual reader will want an entertaining read - maybe even an article that serves to reaffirm their own biases. If you fail to identify and engage your audience, your piece will be overlooked, no matter how thorough or ground-breaking your research is. To avoid this, here are two ways that you can create value:

1. Disagree with someone: The first is to disagree with a person, political group, or organisation. Disagreeing with someone is a good way to make your piece eye catching and useful to readers, especially in academia. People are drawn to controversy as it usually promises new insights and information. You will be engaging in a live discussion, signalling that your research or opinion is relevant to contemporary discourse. If you do choose to do this, make sure you don't just slander your opponent. You want to sound authoritative but don't be a know-it-all.
2. Another effective, yet perhaps more challenging way to create valuable writing is to expose and fill gaps in current literature. This would usually be most suited to a longer, more academic piece as casual readers probably don't have time to read an extensive literature review. This method requires you to carefully identify assumptions, unreliable studies and other gaps in contemporary literature which may not be immediately obvious.

We will not publish work which only reaffirms biases. If your work is not backed by evidence and careful balanced reasoning it will come across as crude and propagandist and will often be off-putting to policy makers. Furthermore, writing with strong ideological biases often fails to say anything new and will thus be of no real interest to academics. On a similar note, there is no point repeating arguments or ideas which have already been reviewed and calling it a 'novel approach'. Always specify what you are doing to develop previous discussion and thought.

Now that we have covered the dos and don'ts of writing and creating value, we will now get into the execution of these approaches within our two main products, research reports and op-eds.



3. Academic Writing

The best way to begin an academic research report is by reviewing existing ideas and adding your own unique input or insight. It clearly demonstrates to readers that new contributions have been made to existing research.

Your academic writing must follow the best scientific approach you can bring to the table. The way to do this is by creating theories and then looking at the data, testing if the data proves or disproves our assertions, and then asking why this is the case. If your theory does not match the data, what can you then infer about the problems of your initial approach? Always be open to adapt your theory to represent the real world more accurately.

Use the same rigorous approach when you find data which reaffirms your expectations. Always ask, why does this data fit my viewpoint, and is there any potential data which could poke holes in my thesis? If there is, add the data to the report and refine your results. Always review and discuss your findings with your peers. This will help you in identifying your positionality and balancing this against counterclaims to test the strength of your argument.

Moving onto more technical writing tips, here is a list of good practices:

- Write in the discipline 'language.' Use words and phrases which are common in the top journals of the relevant field you are writing in as this will make your paper all the more familiar for academics in that field.
- Use formal and straightforward language, only use technical academic jargon where it aligns with how others in the discipline write.
- Avoid an ideologically driven, emotive tone. This should be quite easy if you have a comprehensive data review.
- Reference claims and give proper credit to your sources.
- Write using the Minto Pyramid principle. Main point first, and then go into the data. This is good practice in making your writing concise and persuasive.

For referencing, Leeds Policy Institute requires that you use the Leeds Harvard referencing system, the details of which can be found [here](#). We also recommend that you download [Zotero](#), a referencing manager that automatically creates and manages your citations. This is also the software LPI staff use to share and manage citations across various projects.

It is imperative that academic writing is not impeded by media or political concerns. Our research papers must have an air-tight scientific approach that backs our big conclusions and ideas. It is the role of the Executive Summary to convey the key ideas, and then, the role of the Head of Public Affairs in taking the key conclusions and making them palatable for the correct politicians and media editors in press releases. Of course, do consider that some papers such as policy proposals may be read by politicians - that is the whole point of a reader-first approach - but do not cater your writing ideologically. It is the job of Public Affairs to have the right eyes to see the right research. It is your job to make sure that the politicians and media know that they are being given high-quality, externally reviewed research.



4. Referencing Your Work

For referencing, Leeds Policy Institute requires that you use the Leeds Harvard referencing system, the details of which can be found [here](#). We also recommend that you download [Zotero](#), a referencing manager that automatically creates and manages your citations. This is also the software LPI staff use to share and manage citations across various projects.

We also recommend that you use information from the following academic sources for your research purposes:

- **For academic papers:**
 - [National Bureau of Economic Research](#)
 - [JSTOR](#)
 - [VoxEU](#)
 - [Royal Economic Society Journals](#)
 - [Institute of Economic Affairs \(IEA\)](#)
 - [Centre for Policy Studies \(CPS\)](#)
 - [New Economics Foundation \(NEF\)](#)
 - [Institute for Public Policy Research \(IPPR\)](#)
 - [Oxford Academic](#)
 - [American Economic Association](#)
- **For data:**
 - [ONS](#)
 - [Data.gov.uk](#)
 - [Statistical Datasets gov.uk](#)
 - [Leeds Observatory](#)
 - [Leeds Social Progress Index](#)
 - [NOMIS](#)
 - [OHID Fingertips](#)
 - [StatXplore](#)
 - [Bank of England](#)
 - [House of Commons Library](#)
 - [Gov.UK](#)

The provided list is an extensive one but does not exclude you from finding citations from other sources. However, when straying away from this list, you should ensure that your source has either been published by a prominent organisation like the [OECD](#), [World Bank](#), or [IMF](#), or a well-known individual author if you are going to reference from websites like the Guardian, FT, and BBC. You should also be aware that the IEA, CPS, NEF, and IPPR are all think tanks with certain political leanings. Therefore, when you reference these organisations, you should consider their inherent political biases.

5. Op-ed/Blog Writing

Op-eds (Opinion pieces) and blogs are a form of entertainment. Readers may not be acquainted with technical jargon. Because of this, you must make the language simpler but also more engaging to capture people's interest and keep them reading. Many publications also have different readers and so you must consider how you create value. Highly respected newspapers like the FT will only publish work that uses the top two approaches of creating value and this is particularly evident in their [Letters to the Editor](#). On the other hand, low-quality newspapers are more likely to publish propaganda pieces that reaffirm audience biases. It is good practice to always prioritise creating actual value by exposing gaps or telling someone they're wrong - we do not want our reputation to be a propaganda machine - pieces that reaffirm biases will struggle in being approved by our editorial team.

Though you can use your job title for credibility, please ensure that you make clear that published pieces are your own views and not the view of the rest of the Think Tank. The same goes for pieces published on the Think Tank's blog page.

For your blog posts, we recommend following these guidelines:

Planning:

- Good blog posts are often sharp and opinionated as they aim to spark discussion. You will have to defend these opinions with clear arguments. Don't be afraid to undermine commonly held beliefs or dissent from published opinions.
- Evaluate opposing perspectives to balance and strengthen your line of argument.
- If you are struggling with structuring your points, try the [Minto Pyramid Principle](#), a framework which attracts the attention of readers to a short and compelling story.
- Use specific examples to illustrate your point as this will help the reader visualise what you are saying.

Writing:

- Put yourself and your own opinion in there; when you quote others you must provide your own perspective on what they're saying.
- Vary your sentence structure.
- Vary your language as much as possible.
- Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- Use the active instead of the passive voice. This will give your writing a higher sense of momentum.
- Avoid an overly conversational style.
- Encourage thought or action and appeal to the readers' emotions.
- Every paragraph, sentence, and word must serve a purpose.

Editing:

- Cut words where they interrupt the flow of your writing.
- Make sure you don't repeat words or phrases too often.
- Run it through a spelling and grammar checker.
- Keep the conclusion short and snappy.
- Get another perspective from someone who is unfamiliar with the subject. Make sure it's comprehensible to someone who did not take part in the research!

These are not all concrete boundaries, break any of these as soon as they make your piece boring.



Making life easy for our editors is something we strive for. As such, we ask our writers to do the following when receiving edits:

- If you do not agree with an editor's suggestion(s), please add a comment explaining why. Do not remove the suggestion.
- If you're happy with an editor's suggestions, accept them.
- If an editor adds a comment with some actions, please add your changes to the article as a suggestion. This ensures that the editor can see the before and after.
- Once you've finished making changes, let your editor know – communication is key!

When it comes to formatting your articles, our editors would greatly appreciate if you formatted them in the following way:

[Title]

[Catchy Subheading and Tagline]

[Author byline]

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Ut egestas accumsan tellus, id venenatis mauris. Nam a dui dapibus, faucibus tellus vel, semper nunc. Etiam at nibh tellus. Curabitur ullamcorper ornare ligula, eu cursus enim pellentesque vel. Aenean in odio non lectus eleifend sagittis. Nullam ut hendrerit magna. Curabitur lobortis, leo vel ullamcorper tempor, sem ante aliquam mauris, laoreet venenatis justo nibh quis ex. Maecenas id orci justo. Morbi tortor nisi,

rutrum, arcu magna viverra lorem, sed sagittis felis arcu non justo. Vivamus pellentesque tristique mi eget interdum. Integer dignissim turpis mi. Sed ullamcorper nulla in lacinia tristique. Aenean a faucibus ligula. Donec est mauris, dignissim nec dignissim vel, bibendum sed tortor. Maecenas accumsan congue massa et pretium.

Please keep your articles to a maximum of 800 words in length and credit relevant sources by embedding a hyperlink into your text. Different newspapers have various word counts and referencing practices so please do your research and run your piece through our Editorial and Research team. Once you have our approval, you must send all articles through the Head of Public Affairs. Do NOT send any pieces out to the media where you intend to use LPI insignia without permission. Here is a list of publications which you could write pieces for with no industry contacts:

- [The Guardian Letters](#)
- [FT Letters](#)
- [The Telegraph Letters](#)
- [LSE British Politics and Policy Blog](#)
- [CityTech Library Undergraduate Research Journal \(For Academic Work\)](#)

The Leeds Policy Institute Society also has an extensive network of media contacts. If want a higher chance of being published in the media, we recommend that you look at the following newspapers as these are ones where LPI has industry contacts present:

- [FTAdviser](#)
- [CapX](#)
- [Leeds Gryphon](#)



6. Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar

Simple mistakes can reduce the trustworthy image we want to put out to the public. If this is not your strong point, these three sites are handy in checking the spelling, punctuation, and grammar of typed text:

- quillbot.com
- grammarly.com
- reverso.net

As we are based in England make sure the language is set to British English and not American English.

For more specific questions about abbreviations, capitalisation, numbers, punctuation, and proper names refer to the Oxford English Dictionary style guide.

7. ChatGPT Guidelines

Given how AI still struggles with factual information, its uses in the context of a think tank are limited. We ask our writers to limit the AI usage as follows:

- Limit AI usage for Writing:
 - Do not, under any circumstances, ask Chat GPT to write a text or a passage for you.
- Use AI as an Editor. Some example prompts would be:
 - Right before entering your **complete** text:
 - “I will send you a piece of text about [insert], can you review it as if you were an editor at a prestigious economic journal/and or newspaper?”
 - “I will send you a piece of text about [insert], can you identify all of my premises and the evidence I use to support them?”
 - After the AI response:
 - Proceed to ask questions pertinent to style and argument strength. Do not ask it to re-write sentences for you.
 - If it makes a mistake or misses something you wrote about, ask it to go back and re-assess if its point makes sense. Give it evidence of why you think it is wrong.
 - Use it for syntax analysis:
 - “I will send you two sentences, can you perform syntax analysis on both, and tell me how they differ?”
 - That’s an excellent prompt to compare the meaning of small changes in your sentence. It will give you a breakdown of what “work” each word is doing for you in your writing.
- Use it to point you in the right direction.
 - While relying on it to teach you almost anything is not feasible, you can ask for the general direction of your research:
 - “Who are the main names in the academic discussion of [insert field and sub-field of study]?”
 - “What are some of the most discussed papers or books on this discipline?”
 - “What websites contain reliable data on [insert metric].”



You should try to fact-check its responses whenever possible, but ChatGPT generally does a good job of giving general directions. It is, however, generally not good at giving you the correct citations and sometimes exact paper names that you may request.

When writing your prompt, be very specific with your word choice. make the scope of what you want to cover very well defined, and the content very clear, using keywords related to the topic under discussion.