



Australian
National
University

Department of
Pacific Affairs

In Brief series

Notes for reviewers

Department of Pacific Affairs

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Notes for reviewers

DPA In Briefs present academically rigorous analysis of research findings, conferences and topical events in the region in a concise two-page format, designed to be readily accessible to policymakers, development practitioners, and the academic community. All DPA In Briefs are double blind peer reviewed. In Briefs should be 1250–1300 words in total. In Briefs must be referenced in accordance with [DPA Editorial Guidelines](#), although authors should keep references and endnotes to a minimum. Occasionally DPA publishes an In Brief in the form of an opinion piece. These are assessed on a case by case basis and are authored by someone with standing in the community or region such as a community leader, a civil servant or an activist.

The reviewing process is critical in ensuring that In Briefs are of academic excellence and make a contribution to policy and scholarly debates in the target fields of interest.

In your review, please recommend from the following:

- accept as is
- accept with minor changes
- accept with major changes (and indicate whether you are willing to re-review)
- reject for series.

In making your decision, we ask that you take the following criteria into account:

- originality
- clarity of expression and appropriate academic tone
- policy relevance
- engagement with the academic literature (we don't expect a literature review, but we do expect that the context of the issue, idea, or subject is sufficiently revealed).

We also ask that you draw on your own expertise to comment on the timeliness or other particular relevance of the contribution. As we aim to publish on topical issues, it is crucial that the review process is as efficient as possible. We therefore request reviewers to provide their review within a week.

Additional tips on reviewing an In Brief

While you read, determine the main point the author is trying to make and to whom it's being made. This must be absolutely clear. Flag things you notice, but read the entire draft before commenting.

What to include in your critique

Praise what works well in the draft; point to specific passages. Time is limited (for your response and for the author's revision), so concentrate on the most important ways the draft could be improved. Comment on large issues first:

- Does the draft meet the criteria of an In Brief (above)?
- Are timely, important, and interesting ideas presented?
- Is the main point clear and interesting? Is there a clear articulation of the context for this point?
- Is the draft effectively organised?
- Are ideas adequately developed?
- Does it provide evidence of its claims?
- Does it clearly articulate compelling points for policy audiences? What can be done to spell it out more clearly?

Go on to smaller issues such as awkward or confusing sentences, style, grammar, and word choice. If there are many such problems, there is no need to point out every small error; rather, point out one or two examples of a broader pattern that needs work.

Be specific in your response (explain where you encountered a problem, what you don't understand) and in your suggestions for revision. As much as you can, explain why you're making particular suggestions. Identify what's missing, what needs to be explained more fully, and what can be cut.

How to criticise appropriately

Be honest (but polite and constructive) in your response. Avoid using personal or accusatory language — for example, 'You're not making sense here'. You might refer to the author, the paper itself, or phrase your input as suggestions — for example, 'My suggestion is that you move this idea to another section of the paper'. Try to phrase comments in terms of what the author can do to improve, rather than just stating the negative — for example, 'Please clarify the meaning of this' rather than 'This doesn't make sense'; 'I suggest connecting this point to x idea or work' rather than 'You didn't cite any literature on x'.

Write the review as a short note, or use the comments function in Word to point out particular issues/suggestions where relevant in the text. Keep writing in the draft (even with track changes on) to a minimum.

Anonymise your comments, whether they be in the submission itself or in a separate word document. You can also write comments in an email and the editor will paste them into a word document for the author.

About the Department of Pacific Affairs

Established in 1996 and funded in partnership by ANU and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), DPA (formerly SSGM, the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program) is the leading international centre for applied multidisciplinary research on issues of governance, state and society in the Pacific. Situated within the Coral Bell of Asia Pacific Affairs, DPA seeks to set the international standard for scholarship on the region. DPA undertakes a comprehensive suite of research, education and outreach activities, exemplifying the ANU's strategic vision of uniting scholarly excellence with contributions that make an impact on public policymaking in an area of high national importance.

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