PRODIGEES Policy Labs:
Guiding points for writing our scientific policy advice

Policy-relevant input needs to give clear, concise, actionable recommendations. We might need to provide a brief overview (the relevance of the topic from a given perspective, namely: economic, environmental, governance, society), then delve into few selected issues and give recommendations. Policy briefs should not be longer than 4 pages length, i.e. about 2000 words. Not more!

Remember: decision-makers are operating in a flurry of information – academic knowledge, lobbying, advocacy, etc. – reaching them via direct contacts, dossiers, social media, etc... They are behaving rationally - in their political rationale. Academic policy advice thus needs to be:

- ➢ Accessible (understandable to non-experts, neither too "techie" nor just "dumbed down")
- ➢ Useful to decision-makers (timely and actionable – provide options)
- ➢ Authoritative / trusted (on top of the issue, up-to-date & honest about gaps and own views)
- ➢ Communicated. You need to bring it to the audience – not simply put it on a website.

Questions to consider:
- Who is your audience?
- What is the storyline? – What's the key issue, why is it relevant, what to do about it?
- Any events / current debates your topic feeds into and needs to be ready for? (Timing!)

When writing, imagine the reader of your brief to be a real person (in a specific position). An MP member of a committee, maybe: someone with a genera overview, but no expert. In your mind, speak to them! They are busy people – imagine meeting them in the elevator ("elevator pitch"): come to the point and make it concise!

Structure of a policy piece:
- On the first page: Provide a brief overview (executive summary of max. half-page), followed by recommendations (if different stakeholders, provide targeted recommendations)
- Main body of the text thus has only three pages.
- A diagram or table says a lot more than many words.
- A textbox might be a good host for some illustrative details.

For writing a policy brief:
- Keep it short! (No, short! Yes, really: short!) It needs to be to the point.
- For every paragraph: Main message first!
- No jargon! Your audience might have some general knowledge, but they are no experts.
- Issues are complex. Your task is to disentangle complex issues.
- Present the arguments in a "dry tone", avoid superlatives, and consider counter-arguments.
- Re-read and strip piece of "fluff terms". Have colleagues read/comment the piece.
- Writing a good short piece takes time.

When explaining complexities, imagine sitting at the kitchen table with your grandparent and explain to them. They are clever, but don't have your professional background/knowledge.