Methodological note:
Methodological note: **What makes a good policy paper?** Samuel B. H. Faure Associate Professor of Political Science

I- Definition

- ➢ A "policy paper" is not a purely academic essay

- ➢ A "policy paper" (or "policy brief / position paper") is a document meant to inform decision-makers (governments, international organisations, senior officials) about a specific issue, offering analysis, evidence and clear recommendations

- ➢ It must be accessible, actionable, and targeted. Clarity, conciseness, and actionable recommendations are paramount

- ➢ A good policy paper is concise, evidence-based, solution-oriented, and tailored to its audience

II- Structure and content

While there is no single format, a good policy paper typically includes:

- ➢ **Executive summary** (or short summary)
  - o Summarising the issue, the main argument, the main findings, and key recommendations
  - o Should be able to stand alone: someone can read it and grasp the policy proposal without reading the whole paper

- ➢ **Introduction / problem statement**
  - o Define the issue: Why does it matter now? Use recent data, events, or policy developments
  - o Scope & definitions: Clarify key terms (e.g. "strategic autonomy", "defence industrial base", "national strategic culture", "democratization")
  - o State your thesis/argument: What should be done, and why? Be critical: Highlight gaps in current policy and explain why change is needed

- ➢ **Background / context**
  - o Relevant facts: geopolitical trends; recent policies & proposals; legal / institutional / historical background
  - o Avoid excessive detail. Focus on what is necessary to understand your argument
  - o Stakeholders: who matters (national governments; EU institutions; defence industry; militaries; citizens; parliaments; civil society)

➢ **Analysis**
  o Identification of drivers (what is pushing the problem or opportunity) and obstacles (what hinders)
  o Implications: political, economic, security, societal.
  o Present evidence: Use data, case studies, or expert opinions to support your argument.
  o Address counterarguments: Acknowledge opposing views and explain why your approach is superior.

➢ **Policy recommendations**
  o Clear options (usually 2-4) with pros & cons, feasibility, costs, risks.
  o Prioritize: If you have multiple recommendations, rank them.
  o Be specific: Propose concrete, feasible actions.
  o Consider unintended consequences.
  o Implementation suggestions: who does what, timeline, resources needed.

➢ **Conclusion**
  o Short recap of why the recommended policy path is best.
  o Emphasis on urgency or what happens if nothing is done.

➢ **Annexes / references** (optional)
  o Data tables, more detailed case study, legal text, etc.
  o Full list of sources: use credible, up-to-date, diverse sources.

III- Key Qualities & Good Practice

In addition to structure, a good policy paper should have the following qualities:

➢ **Clarity**
  o Writing should be clear, concise; avoid jargon; define technical terms. Use headings, bullets, diagrams if useful

➢ **Relevance**
  o Focus on what matters to policymakers: costs, political feasibility, public acceptability, timeline

➢ **Evidence-based**
  o Use reliable, recent data; solid sources; draw on empirical examples; avoid speculative claims unless clearly labelled as such

➢ **Balanced / nuanced**
  o Recognize trade-offs, uncertainties, dissenting views. Show you understand both strengths and limitations of your proposals

➢ **Feasibility**
  o Not just wishful thinking: assess political, institutional, financial, legal constraints; propose realistic implementation

> - **Originality / added value**
>   - o It's good to have new ideas or new combinations of ideas, or new empirical findings. Even if the theme is well-covered, the student should try to bring something less obvious or comparative

> - **Audience awareness**
>   - o Tailor the paper to a specific audience (EU Commission, European Parliament, national defence ministry, NATO, etc.). What do they care about? What language / format will resonate?

> - **Timeliness**
>   - o Link to recent events, shifts (e.g. war in Ukraine, changing US policy, technological change, fiscal constraints, public opinion). Show awareness of what is happening now

> - **Legitimacy / ethical / democratic dimension** (especially for theme 4)
>   - o Who has oversight? What transparency / accountability issues arise? How are citizens involved or affected?

IV- Common Pitfalls to Avoid

> - Overly broad or vague recommendations
> - Lack of clear structure or logical flow
> - Ignoring opposing viewpoints
> - Excessive length or unnecessary detail

V- Style and Presentation

> - Language: Use plain, direct language. Avoid jargon unless defined
> - Formatting: Use headings, subheadings, and visuals to guide the reader
> - Citations: Use footnotes or endnotes for sources, but keep them concise

> - Your policy paper must not exceed 2,500 words (excluding the bibliography and appendices)
> - You must use the following font: Times New Romance, size 12, line spacing 1.15
> - The titles of your sections must be in bold, and the titles of your subsections in italics
> - Do not use any colours
> - You must include your first name and surname at the top left of page 1

VI- Final Checklist

> - Does the paper answer the "so what?" question?
> - Are recommendations actionable and targeted?
> - Is the paper visually and stylistically professional?

VII- Specific advice for your four themes

➢ **[Session 8 – 17 November] Rearming Europe**
  o Students should beware of simple "spend more" arguments; must engage with procurement, industrial capacity, supply chains, interoperability, funding sources, if alliances (NATO etc.), and strategic versus operational readiness
  o Useful references:
    ▪ https://www.bruegel.org/policy-brief/governance-and-funding-european-rearmament
    ▪ https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/defence-spending-in-europe-can-we-do-better-without-spending-more/
    ▪ https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/the-uneasy-equation-of-the-future-eu-defence-budget/

➢ **[Session 9 – 24 November] Bringing together national strategic cultures**
  o Need sensitivity to history, identity, threat perception, risk tolerance; how culture shapes preferences for diplomacy vs hard power; how these differ between Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern Europe; how to bring them together
  o Useful references:
    ▪ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU(2025)765785
    ▪ https://www.csis.org/analysis/solving-europes-defense-dilemma-overcoming-challenges-european-defense-cooperation
    ▪ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/strategic-compass-one-year-on/

➢ **[Session 10 – 1st December] Integrating the European defence industry**
  o Issues like regulation, standardisation, subsidies, intellectual property, cross-border industrial consolidation, dependencies (raw materials, tech), "Buy European" policies, competition law, innovation, capacity scaling
  o Useful references:
    ▪ https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/the-european-defence-industrys-future-how-european/
    ▪ https://www.bruegel.org/analysis/european-defence-industrial-strategy-important-raising-many-questions
    ▪ https://www.bruegel.org/policy-brief/european-defence-industrial-strategy-hostile-world
    ▪ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2025)775924

- ➢ **[Session 11 – 15 December] Democratizing security & defence policies**
  - o Public opinion; parliamentary oversight; transparency; civil society; ethical concerns (arms exports, human rights); democratic legitimacy of EU / national decisions; trade-offs between secrecy/security vs openness
  - o Useful references:
    - ▪ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/library/library-blog/posts/think-tank-review-february-2025/
    - ▪ https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/the-extent-of-the-european-parliaments-competence-in-common-security-and-defence-policy/
    - ▪ https://feps-europe.eu/publication/european-defence-for-security-and-peace/