HOUSE OF COMMONS

Committee Staff Skills Manual:
Research, Analysis and Writing Briefings

Contents

Introduction

The purpose of the manual

This manual is designed to help Researchers develop the skills needed to conduct high-quality research for Members. Whether the task is to write a Briefing, identify potential stakeholders or investigate new topics of interest for Members or Committees, the skills covered in this manual will help staff produce research that is accurate, clear, impartial, and fully referenced.

This manual can be used by the Researchers themselves to maintain and develop the skills they have acquired through training. It is also intended to be a resource for anyone responsible for training Researchers, whether they are secondees from the House of Commons, staff of a development organisation, Hluttaw Committee Managers or experienced staff sharing their knowledge.

When drafting Briefings, staff should use this skills manual in conjunction with the *Guide to Writing Committee Briefings* (2017). That guide provides more information about the key components of a Briefing, and step-by-step guidance on how to write each component.

Acknowledgements

This manual was written in 2018 by Rebecca Usden and Nicholas Wade with the advice and translation of Dr. Nay Myo Naing. It was edited for publication by Nicholas Davies.

It is dedicated:

- To all those from the House of Commons who have served the UK's Parliament and supported Myanmar's, for their contribution to this manual and this project.

- To their interpreters – guides in language, culture, and the workings of the Hluttaws – without whom this support would not have been possible.
- To the Myanmar parliamentary staff whose hard work is a vital ingredient for the success of democratic values and democratic institutions in Myanmar.

Conducting research

Providing accurate, impartial and referenced research is one of the most useful ways that staff can support Members. In many parliaments around the world Committee Staff produce Briefing documents for their Committees. The purpose of Briefings is to provide Members with information, and to save them time. Briefings therefore help Members to carry out their role in Parliament.

Research is the first step to writing a Briefing. It means finding information that is useful to Members, using a variety of sources. Conducting research for Members and Committees is a big responsibility. It must be conducted in accordance with the skills and the principles explained in this manual.

1.1 Focusing research

Before you even begin doing research, focus your topic and narrow your search. There is an ocean of information available online and offline: before you enter, be clear about what you want to find. Giving yourself some specific research objectives – known as 'terms of reference' – will save you time when researching and writing your Briefing. Ask yourself:

- What aspects of this issue are Members most interested in?
- What questions are your Members trying to answer?
- What information would be most helpful to them?

The House of Commons suggests considering the headings below for your Briefing. It's not a checklist, and you don't have to include all of them. But, ask yourself, which ones are most relevant to your Briefing? And, once you decide this, start asking yourself questions about each heading. For example, whose biographies should you include? What are the key issues?

You can use these headings, and these questions, to focus and ease your research. The meaning of each section is explained in Chapter Two.
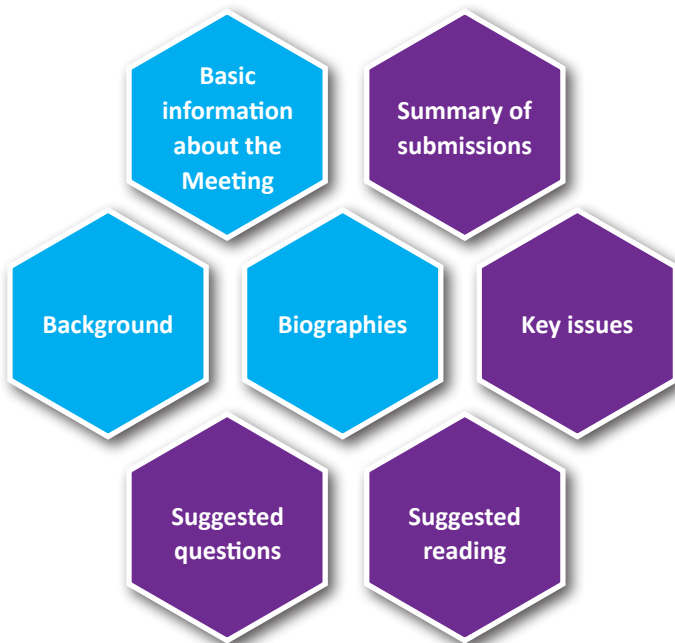
1.2 Using offline sources of information

There is a huge amount of information available online. The challenge is to find up-to-date, accurate and reliable sources. The technical skills described in this manual will help. Remember, some information is not available on-line. Consult offline sources first, before you begin doing internet research. It might be faster and could save you from wasting time searching the internet. Don't forget that sometimes it is quicker and easier to ask a person who already knows the answer.

a) Information from stakeholders

Stakeholders are those with knowledge or information about the subject area of your Committee, because their experience or interests relate to the

same topic. You may have been asked to look at a particular issue for one Briefing; but they might look at it every day of their professional lives! Ask them for information. They might be able to quickly and easily provide you with:

- Information that you request from them, such as evidence, statistics or graphs
- The latest information or research that they have
- Myanmar translations of their work
- The contact details of other stakeholders who can help you.

Examples of possible stakeholders include:

- Ministries
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or Civil society organisations (CSOs)
- Organisations that represent particular groups of people e.g. trade unions
- Academics
- Journalists
- Businesses and companies

Remember, stakeholders might only represent one view on a complex issue rather than all views. So you should note what their perspective is, and ask them to provide evidence (See the sections on Evaluating the Source in this Chapter and on Impartiality in Chapter Three). By collecting their contact details and emailing stakeholders with specific questions when you start writing a Briefing you can significantly accelerate your research.

Example of a Microsoft Word table to store stakeholders' details:

Name	Profession	Area of focus	Viewpoint	Contact
Kate Jones	Former UK ambassador to Russia (retired)	Diplomatic relations between Russia and the UK	She wants closer ties between the UK and Russia	Usually in London kjones@zmail.com 0044 07 28380273
Dr Kecin Joy	Professor of Russian studies, Cambridge University	The Russia economy	He says that corruption is a big problem in Russia	Usually in Cambridge kevinjoy@cam.ac.uk 0044 223 13038
Sarah Smith	Correspondent for 'The Time' newspaper, Moscow	Russian politics	She criticises the Russian governments, and opposes closer relations	Usually in Moscow ssmith@times.com 009 3826 2829
Vladimir Viktor	Former Russian MP (retired)	Russia's military relations	He wans the UK and Russian Militaries to cooperate more	Usually in Moscow viktorv@rmail.ru 009 3476 38372

b) Committee records

Check your own records for any minutes and transcripts of Committee meetings on the topic. They will be useful for the Background section in your Briefing. Also check to see if your Committee has received any complaint letters concerning the topic as these may be useful for the key issues section.

c) Recent plenary debates

If there has been a recent plenary debate on the topic, you should check to see what issues were raised by MPs, and whether the Minister gave any new information relating to the Government's policy. Transcripts of plenary debates can be found on the Hluttaw websites:

Pyidaungsu: www.pyidaungsu.hluttaw.mm
Pyithu: www.pyithuhluttaw.gov.mm
Amyotha: www.amyothahluttaw.mm

If transcripts are not available online, or if you cannot find the information, you could contact the Meetings Department to request records.

d) Hluttaw Research Service Briefings

In addition to providing confidential answers to MPs' questions, the three Hluttaw Research Services each produce public research Briefings on topics of interest to MPs. These are published online and can be used by anyone. Check if the Research Services have produced a Briefing on the topic that your Committee is looking at. It could provide useful information for your Briefing and save you time researching the same issues. Research Service Briefings are accessible at the following websites:

Pyidaungsu: https://pyidaungsu.hluttaw.mm/researches
Pyithu: https://www.pyithuhluttaw.gov.mm/?q=others
Amyotha: http://www.amyotha.hluttaw.mm/?page_id=31189

e) The staff of a related Committee

If other Committees have done work on a similar topic, either in your own House or in another House, then the Committee staff may be able to suggest useful sources of information.

1.3 Conducting research online

Internet search techniques

The internet is a key source of information when researching a topic. But, given the volume of information available on the internet, you will need tools and techniques to find what you are looking for. These are our suggestions:

a) Internet browsers and search websites

There are a number of different browsers that you can use to access the internet such as 'Internet Explorer', 'Firefox', and 'Chrome'.

- Microsoft Internet Explorer will come as standard on many of the computers that you use at work. It is fast and efficient, but has fewer expanded functions than Firefox and Chrome.
- Mozilla Firefox is a fast and effective browser. Mozilla is a not-for-profit developer and does not sell the data it collects from users to advertisers.
- Google Chrome is also a fast and reliable browser. Chrome is owned by Google which uses the data it collects to create targeted adverts.

There are also a number of different search websites that you can use. We recommend that you use 'Google', at the web address www.google.com. When you are typing your search, look for the 'Google' logo on the web-page and the 'G' on the tab, to make sure you're not using the wrong search engine.

Symbols displayed on Google Searches:

b) Choose your search terms carefully

The words that you type into a search website to get results are called 'search terms'. The more words you use, the more information search web-sites like Google will try to find. To ensure that you get the best results from Google, we recommend using a small number of carefully chosen words.

If the first set of words that you use does not work, then try again by adding or removing words. Altering your search terms is the best way to improve search results.

Here are some other tips when typing search terms in English:

- Use the names of things (nouns), because they are easy for Google to recognise.
- You do not need to write prepositions (like 'the', 'in', or 'by')
- You might see some people connect search words using the + sign instead
- There is no need to use CAPITAL LETTERS, or titles like Mr and Mrs with names

Examples:

Hospitals in Yangon

Google   yangon+hospitals

Report on Malaria written by the United Nations

Google   malaria report+united nations

c) Use the minus symbol to exclude words

If you improve your search terms and Google is still delivering unhelpful results, then you can include symbols in your searches. Remember, this should be a last resort and not a first option: improving your search terms is the best way to improve search results.

The minus symbol can be used when Google returns results that you want to exclude. It gives a clear order to Google: do not include this word in your search.

But remember:

- Anything that the minus sign touches will be excluded.
- Make sure the minus sign does touch the word you do not want included.
- Make sure it does not touch any word that you do want included.

Examples:

1) *If you are interested in the city of Manchester, rather than the Manchester United football team, searching for 'manchester' will not be much good because many of the results will be for Manchester United and football. Instead you could search for 'manchester –football'. This will return results featuring the word Manchester but not the word United or football, and that might be more useful.*

2) *You want to research the tea industry in Myanmar, including where the leaves are grown and their quality. But if you type 'myanmar tea leaves' into Google then most of the results are about one thing: tea leaf salad! But if you type 'myanmar tea leaves -salad' then results about the salad disappear, leaving only information about tea production.*

d) Use quotation marks to include words

Quotation marks, also known as double inverted commas, have the opposite effect of the minus sign. They ensure inclusion, not exclusion. They give a clear order to Google: bring me these exact words in this exact order. Putting a single word in quotation marks will ensure that it appears at least once in all results pages. Putting a series of words in quotation marks is useful for finding a quote, or exact phrase, wherever it occurs on the internet.

Remember:

- Putting words in quotation marks means that Google will look for them in whatever way you spell them. You must spell the word correctly, or Google will find no results.

Analysing a Google results page

After you have entered your search terms, Google will display a results page. Don't immediately click onto the first website and start reading! There is information on the results page that can help you, and other parts that could pose a risk to your research. See the example below, of a search for a Hilton hotel in London:
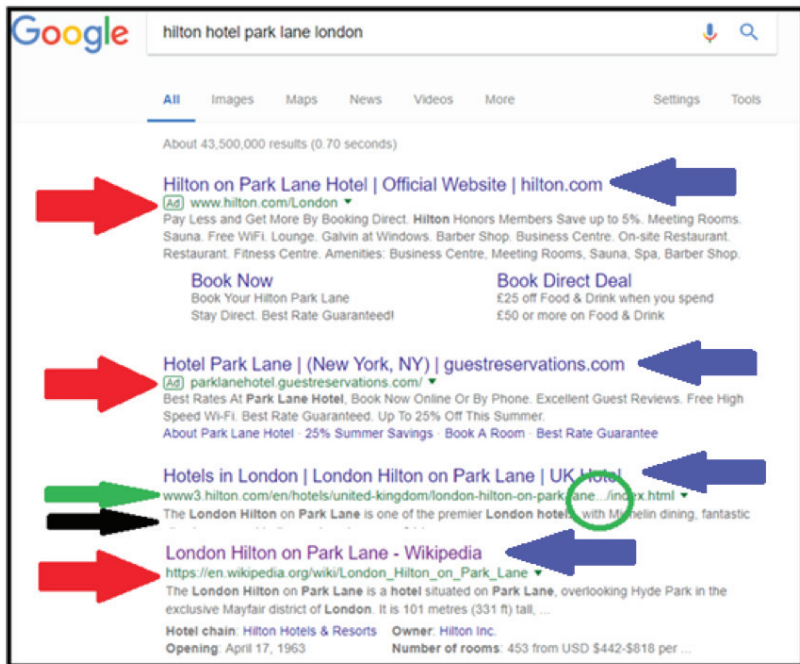
a) 'Open in new tab'

The blue writing (marked with blue arrows) is the title of the web page, and the part that you click on to enter. It is best to right click on these blue titles and then select 'Open in new tab', so that you don't lose the valuable results page and have to type in the search again.

b) Read the titles

Are they relevant? In this example, you can see that the second result is about the Park Lane Hotel in New York: not a Hilton, and not in London, and so not useful for our search and not worth exploring.

c) Use the full URL

A URL is the unique series of letters and numbers that identifies each website. It appears, in full, in your browser when you open an internet page. But, when they appear in green (see the green arrow in the Hilton example) on Google, they are shortened (the […] represents information that has been removed… see the green circle on the example). If you need to copy and paste URLs then do it from the webpage, and not the results page! The results page links are incomplete and will not work.

d) Is the website official?

URLs also offer useful clues about whether a webpage is worth exploring. Look for words that indicate official websites of organisations that you want. In the example, the URL by the green arrow contains the word 'hilton'. That suggests an official 'Hilton' website that is more relevant to our search. Many official government websites for different counties can be spotted, for example, because they have 'gov' in their URLs. E.g. www.mopf.gov.mm or https://www.gov.uk/

e) See the summary

The black writing (marked with a black arrow) is a summary of the website. It shows, in bold, which of your search terms that website contains. How well does the website do? The top two websites in the above examples contain some, but not all, of our search terms. They are less relevant. The third one, however, contains all of them. That's more relevant.

f) Beware of advertisements

The small green boxes shown by the top two red arrows in the example indicate that this is an advertisement. Avoid them. These only appear at the

top of your results page because companies have paid Google to have them there, not because they are useful. Do not click on websites with these small green boxes, because they might mislead you to unhelpful information.

g) Watch out for Wikipedia

The website Wikipedia often appears high up in search results (third red arrow above). Reading Wikipedia is a useful way to find original sources, or to get a sense of background about a topic. Be careful: information on Wikipedia can be changed by anyone without the need to reference who they are, or prove that they are correct. It is not guaranteed that information on Wikipedia is true, or up to date. Because it is sometimes unreliable, you must not reference Wikipedia in your Briefing for Members. Find other sources that you can trust (see the section on Evaluating the Source)

- Don't use Wikipedia at all if the information there isn't referenced
- References in Wikipedia are marked by small numbers, and footnotes (see the Footnotes section)
- If you see a reference number, put your mouse over it to reveal the original source
- Read the original source instead, not Wikipedia

## Examples of how references appear on Wikipedia:

Additional Google search functions

a) Google News and news websites

You can search specifically for news articles by using the 'News' filter in Google (it is currently only available on the English-language version of Google).

Under the search bar, there will be a list of filters including 'Images', 'Videos', 'Maps' and 'More'. If 'News' does not appear automatically, click 'More' and you will find it listed there.
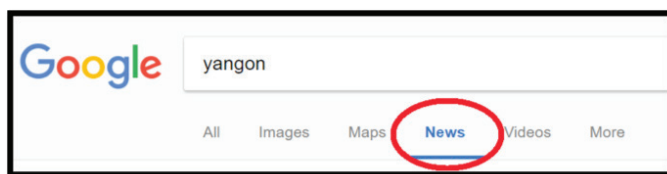
You can narrow your search further by asking Google to list only articles that have been published in a particular time-frame (such as within the past day, week, month or year). Under the search bar, click 'Tools' and another list of filters will appear, including the option to specify the time-frame.

Click the 'News' tab and Google will only show you news articles
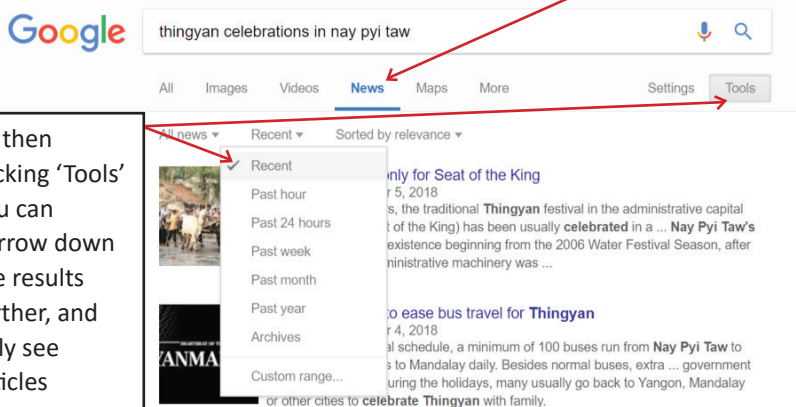
By then clicking 'Tools' you can narrow down the results further, and only see articles published at a certain time

Here are some examples of news websites that you can visit directly to find information for Briefings:

- BBC Burmese – www.bbc.com/burmese (MM)
- Myanmar Times – www.myanmar.mmtimes.com (MM) or https://www.mmtimes.com/ (English)
- Frontier Myanmar – https://frontiermyanmar.net/mm (MM) or https://frontiermyanmar.net/en (English)
- Irrawaddy – www.burma.irrawaddy.com (English)
- Mizzima – www.mizzimaburmese.com (MM) or http://www.mizzima.com/ (English)
- Voice of America – www.burmese.voanews.com (MM)
- Eleven Media – www.news-eleven.com (MM)
- 7 Day Daily – www.7daydaily.com (MM)
- MRTV4 – www.mrtv4.com.mm (MM)

b) Google Translate

Google Translate is a translation website. It is most effective when translating between European languages. But it might have some limited use in at least helping you get the outline of what a source is saying, when translating from English to Myanmar or the other way around. It will not, however, be entirely accurate and it might be confusing. Use it; but use it with caution.

- Use the full website of Google translate at https://translate.google.com/
- On the left, you set the language that you will be translating from. On the right, you set the language that you want it translated to.
- If you copy and paste the text that you want translated into the left side, then Google will produce its translation on the right.
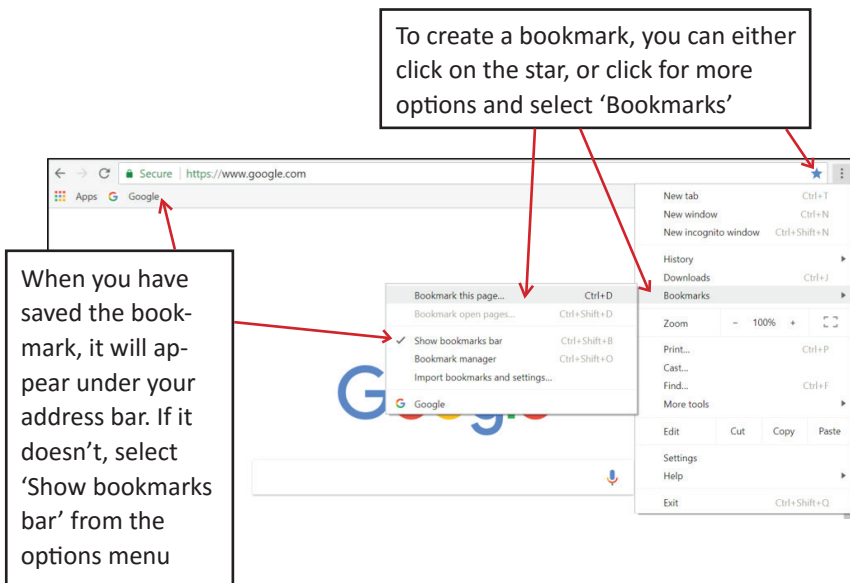
The website of Google Translate:
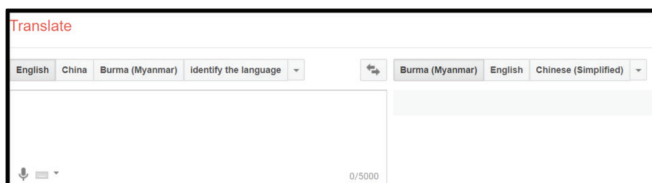
## Keeping the internet sources that you find

a) Bookmarking

You can tag particularly useful websites and save them in your browser for you to find later. Do this by adding them as a Bookmark:

- Use Google, and go to the webpage that you want to save.
- In the top right-hand corner of the browser window, near the address bar, you will see a white star symbol. Click on this to add the website as a bookmark/favourite. It will then appear along the address bar.

> To create a bookmark, you can either click on the star, or click for more options and select 'Bookmarks'

> When you have saved the bookmark, it will appear under your address bar. If it doesn't, select 'Show bookmarks bar' from the options menu

b) The History

This records all websites that you visit, and when. You can search it if you forget a website that you visited. Open the History with the shortcut Control+H, or click on Google's option bar then select the 'History' options.
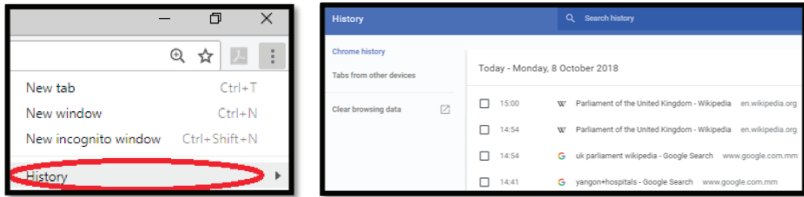
Searching websites for specific web pages

On many websites, you'll see a search function that might look like a magnifying glass (as with the Myanmar Times example below) or a search box (as with the examples from the UK Parliament and the BBC). Don't confuse these search bars with Google! Google searches the whole internet, but these only search the website that you are on.

For example:

- If you use the searches below on the Myanmar Times, only different parts of the Myanmar Times website will be searched.

Using this internal search function could be useful for your Briefing. For example, on news websites, you can search that news site for individual key words that are related to your Committee (such as 'agriculture' or 'farming'; or 'education' or 'school'; or 'health' or 'hospital'). That'll give you the latest news stories to use.

Control+F

Once you have opened a webpage or document, you can scan the page for particular words or symbols using the 'Find Function' also known as 'Control+F'. If you press Control+F on your keyboard whilst on a website, or a document in Word or PDF, it opens a small search box. Type a symbol or a word (or even just part of a word) into that box, and it will find for you every time that word appears in the website or document. By using the power of a computer to scan long pieces of text, you can find what you want much more quickly.

The Control+F search looks different depending on the programme that you open it in:

Remember:

- Control+F only works where you can highlight individual words with your mouse: it doesn't work on scanned electronic copies because your computer sees these as images and not text.
- You must spell the word correctly, otherwise Control+F cannot find the result you want.
- You don't need to type the whole word, because Control+F recognises sequences of letters rather than words.

For example: If you want to find the words 'England' and 'English' then you can enter 'Engl' and it will find both. But if you mistakenly write 'Enlg' it won't find either.

Examples of how to use Control+F

First go onto the webpage or document that you want to search, and type Control+F.

- If you want to find the word 'agriculture' or 'agricultural' then typing 'agri' into Control+F will be fine. Likewise, typing 'farm' in Control+F would find you 'farm', 'farmer', 'farming' etc, because they all begin with those four letters.
- If you want to find the contact details of a company, try typing 'contact' into Control+F when you're on the website's home page. Most English-language websites have a Contact section.
- Most English-language websites also have an 'About' section that provides information about an organisation's purpose, leadership, or history. This can help you decide whether to trust its website. Try typing 'about' into Control+F when you're on the website's homepage.
- You can also type symbols. All email addresses have an @ sign, so if you are looking for an email address then type '@' into Control+F. For statistics, which are often expressed as percentages, try typing '%' or 'per'.

Researching international comparisons

a) Choosing which comparisons to make

Myanmar MPs might be interested in south-east Asian countries, particularly those countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). However, some ASEAN countries are very different from Myanmar, so keep an open mind: on some topics Members might also be interested in comparisons with other countries around the world.

When choosing which countries to compare with Myanmar, you can consider some of these things:

- Is the country culturally and socially similar to Myanmar?
- Is its economy a similar size?
- Does the economy rely on similar sectors?

- Does the country border Myanmar?
- Does Myanmar trade a lot with that country, or have a trade agreement with it?
- Does that country have influence within Myanmar?
- Does Myanmar want to be more like that country?
- Does the country have a similar legal framework to Myanmar?

b) Sources for comparisons

The sources below are some useful resources which bring together information on different countries and present it in a way which makes it easy to understand.

Myanmar

You first need to find detailed statistics about Myanmar itself. Two good websites are:

- The Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU), which is run by the United Nations and funded by international Development Partners. http://themimu.info/mm (MM) or http://themimu.info/ (English)
- The Ministry of Planning and Finance, particularly its Central Statistical Organsiation http://www.csostat.gov.mm/

International statistics

These are just some of the sources that you could use for international statistics on different topics:

- World Economic Forum Competitiveness index:
  http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-index/

- The World Bank (international):
  https://data.worldbank.org/

- The World Bank (Myanmar):
  https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/myanmar

- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):
  http://www.oecd.org/statistics/compare-your-country.htm

- United Nations Development Programme (Myanmar):
  http://www.mm.undp.org/

- UN Statistics Division:
  https://unstats.un.org/home/

- International Energy Agency:
  https://www.iea.org/statistics/

- Our World in Data (from Oxford University in the UK):
  https://ourworldindata.org/

- Nation Master:
  http://www.nationmaster.com/

- Gapminder:
  https://www.gapminder.org/

c) International policy comparison

Finding databases of international policy comparisons depends on the academic interest in a particular policy area. Some areas are better covered by this type of material than others. Below are some examples of policy comparisons which may be useful (note that many do not include direct comparison with Myanmar).

- Constitutions:
  https://www.constituteproject.org/

- Education policy:
  http://www.enic-naric.net/educational-systems-country-profiles-and-other-tools.aspx

- Energy policy:
  https://www.iea.org/policiesandmeasures/

- Health policy:
  https://geographyas.info/health-issues/comparing-healthcare-services/

- Human rights:
  http://unimelb.libguides.com/human_rights_law/comparative

- Tax policy:
  http://www.oecd.org/tax/tax-policy/tax-database.htm

Exercise: Internet search techniques

The following exercises are designed to help you practice some of the skills mentioned in the web searching session.

Try to use Google to find the following information. Different answers are possible, and so answers to this section are not listed in the back of this manual. See what you can find:

1. Find the weather in Nay Pyi Taw for the next 10 days.
2. Find the Myanmar Government's Citizens Budget.
3. Find a research paper published by the Hluttaw Research Service about trade in Myanmar.
4. Find five news articles about the Myanmar Presidential election in 2018 from five different news publications.
5. Find the adult literacy rate in Myanmar in 2014 (find a document which shows this, not a database).

1.4 Assessing accuracy and usefulness

Before you put the information that you have found through research into your Briefing, you must assess whether the information is useful and accurate. You can do this by evaluating both the source and the content.

Evaluating the source

These questions can help you to evaluate the source of a document or article, to assess whether it is useful or reliable:

1. Who is the author? Are they an expert in the issue (i.e. a senior academic or a representative of a respected organisation)?
2. Is it the original source? If, for example, an article or website refer-

ences other sources then try to find and read that source instead of another person's description of it, which might not be accurate or impartial.

3.   Are you familiar with the source? For example, do you know the website that the information comes from? Is it official? Is it reliable? Use the 'About' section on websites to find out about that organisation (see the section on 'Control+F')

4.   Not all sources are impartial. It is acceptable for them to have an opinion, as long as we know what their opinion is and can balance it with other opinions. Does the organisation or publication have a particular agenda or viewpoint?

Evaluating the content

The following questions can help you to evaluate the content of a document or article, to assess whether it is useful or reliable:

1.   What is the date of the information? The latest information tends to be the most useful and reliable.

2.   Is the content internally consistent – do the facts presented in this document make sense together?

3.   Is the document well referenced and are the sources that it references also reliable?

4.   Is the content externally corroborated – are the claims made in this document supported by the facts presented in other documents? Using multiple sources to make one point in your Briefing is the best way to overcome any bias or inaccuracy in one of the sources.

Remember:

It can be healthy to be sceptical. Not everything on social media or the internet is true. Different sources online and offline might not be impartial. There are people who will want to steer your opinion in one direction or another.

The best way to ensure **impartiality** is to include **multiple opinions** on one subject in your Briefing.

The best way to ensure **accuracy** is, where possible, to use **multiple sources** to make one point in your Briefing.

1.5 Speeding up your research

As a reminder, this Chapter has shown you several ways to accelerate your research:

- Focus your research and establish priorities for what you're looking for before you even start searching.
- Consult offline resources before turning to the internet.
- Look closely at a Google results page, to discern what links will be useful to follow and what ones might be misleading
- Don't lose useful websites once you find them. Bookmark your links.
- Use the Control+F search to quickly scan websites, or long documents, for what you want.

Here are some final tips for how to quickly find useful information in a source:

a) Finding summaries within documents

Reading through the whole of every source in detail to decide whether it is relevant to your research would be very time-consuming. Instead, 'summaries' can often be found in different parts of a document.

The skill of summarising is covered in Chapter Two. A summary delivers the key points of a longer piece of writing in a much, much shorter way. Finding these summaries, and focusing on reading them in a document, is a much faster way to gain an understanding of it than reading the whole thing.

- If you are looking at a report, consult the contents page and the chapter headings to see if they describe the kind of issues you are interested in. It might have a section, almost always at the beginning, called 'Summary', 'Executive Summary' or 'Key Findings'. Searching for any 'recommendations' made in the report can also be a useful way of quickly finding out the key messages in a report. If you don't see these headings initially, try Control+F to find them.
- News articles are too short to have contents pages, but often they will still have sub-headings interspersed throughout the text which

can help you judge whether the article is relevant to your research.

- Chapters and paragraphs in any text will often have sentences at their beginning and their end to explain their key points. Read the beginning and end of chapters or paragraphs first. If you find them useful, then read the rest. If you don't, then continue searching.

Creating a clear structure for your Briefing

The purpose of a Committee Briefing is to provide information to Members and to save them time. In the previous Chapter we covered the research skills required to effectively find information. Now it is time to put that information into a Briefing and present it to Members.

A briefing will only be useful to Members if it is clear and easy to understand. The following sections teach you how to ensure that your information – from the structure of your whole Briefing, down to the individual sentences that you write – is presented clearly. We begin with the structure of the Briefing.
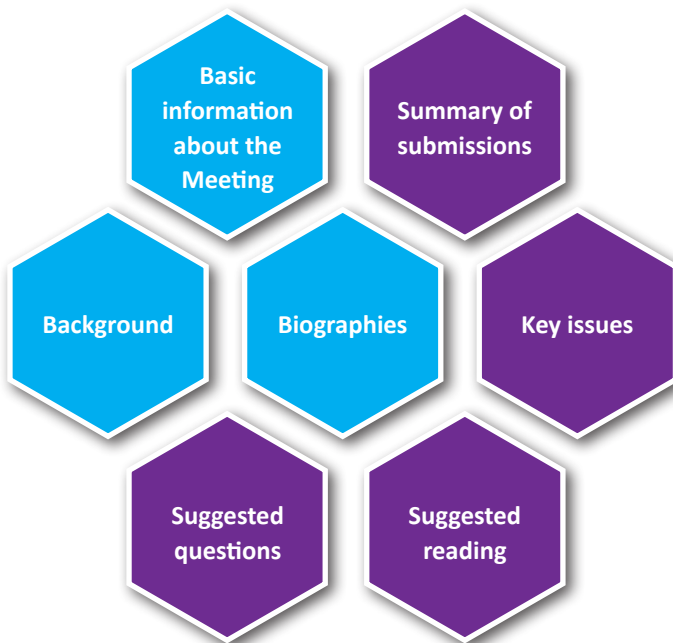
2.1 Headings

Identifying headings is an important aspect of preparing a clear document for Members. Headings help the reader by:

- Breaking up large sections of text, which are difficult to read
- Giving the reader a sense of what the document is about at a glance
- Allowing the reader to focus on the sections they are most interested in.

Main headings

As discussed in Chapter One, we suggest choosing some of the titles in the honeycomb below as Main Headings to include in your Briefing.

Basic information about the Meeting

Summary of submissions

Background

Biographies

Key issues

Suggested questions

Suggested reading

They often appear in this order (see the *Guide to Writing Committee Briefings* (2017)):

- Basic information about the meeting
- Biographies
- Background
- Key Issues
- Summary of submissions
- Suggested reading
- Suggested questions

You do not necessarily need to include all of them. Depending on the purpose of the Briefing and how much time you have, you may choose to focus on certain sections and leave others out.

1. **Basic information about the meeting** tells Members information like when a meeting will take place (time and date), where (place, building, and room), what will be discussed, who will be in attendance, and whether what is said will be public or private.

2. **A Background section** explains the history and the context to the issue you are discussing. Think about what information the Members need to know first, before they read the rest of the Briefing.

3. **Biographies** give information about those who the Committee will meet, such as their employment history, their education, and their views on the topic in question. They might also describe an organisation, with details like its history and what it does.

4. **A Key Issues section** explains why an issue is relevant now, and what implications it might have in the future. What issues are in the news, or being debated by the public now? What aspects of the debate are your Members most interested in? What are the most important topics that they need to know about? What are the problems, or opportunities, associated with the topic?

5. **A Suggested Reading section** is informed by the Key Issues. It contains links and reference to the best and most useful sources that you have read during your research, so that Members can read these sources themselves if they want to.

6. **A Suggested Questions section** is also informed by the Key Issues. In this section, staff can suggest questions that Members might like to ask during sessions or meetings. The Key Issues will be the ones the Members most want to ask questions about.

7. **Summaries of submissions** means that you tell Members, in a few sentences or bullet points, the main arguments of the leading documents that support your Briefing. See the section on summarising in Chapter Three.

Sub-headings

These Main headings can then be followed by sub-headings.

Example

If you were writing a Briefing about the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), then the main heading of the Background section might include sub-headings like:

- Introduction
- ASEAN member states
- History
- Economy/Trade
- Culture/cultural exchanges
- Defence

If you were writing a Briefing about agriculture in Myanmar, then the Key Issues might include subjects like

- Quality of agricultural products
- Environmental impact of agriculture
- Need for investment in agricultural machinery.

These are sub-headings, but they can also have sub-headings themselves. For example, under 'quality of agricultural products' we could create another layer of sub-headings:

- Quality of agricultural Products
  - Crops
  - Livestock
  - Fishing
  - Forestry

Here is an example of how the main headings (red), sub headings (blue), and further sub-headings (green) might look for a Briefing about water shortages in Myanmar:
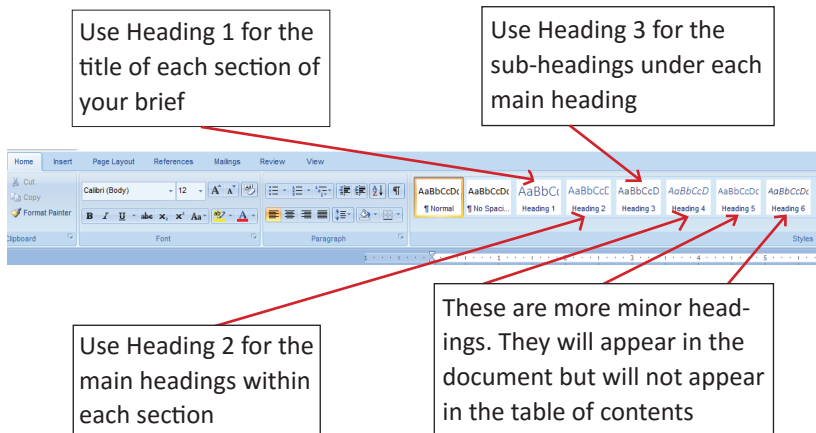
Creating headings in Microsoft Word

In Microsoft Word, these different layers of headings are achieved using the Styles of Heading 1, 2, 3. Be careful though, too many headings and sub-headings will begin to clutter your Briefing and reduce its clarity.
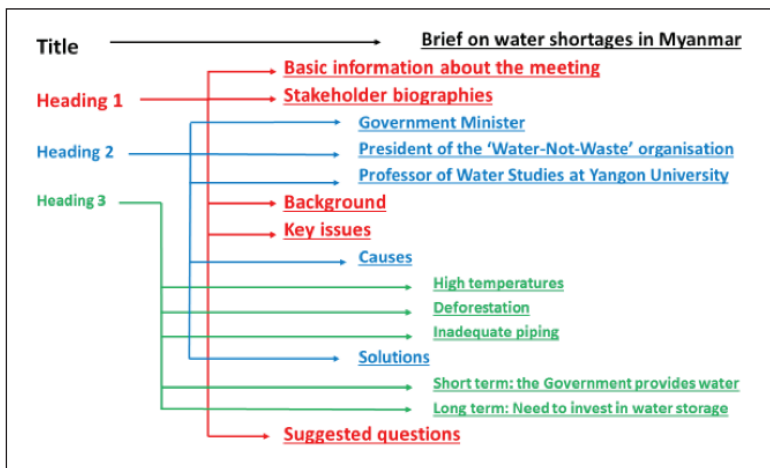
To create a heading:

- Select the text that you want to turn into a heading;
- Go to the 'Styles' section of the 'Home' tab of your taskbar, at the top of Word;
- Select Heading 1 for main heading;
- Select Heading 2 for sub-headings below your main heading;
- Select Heading 3 if it is a sub-heading below Heading 2.

Use Heading 1 for the title of each section of your brief

Use Heading 3 for the sub-headings under each main heading

These are more minor headings. They will appear in the document but will not appear in the table of contents

Use Heading 2 for the main headings within each section

Designating text as a Heading might distort its font and remove the Myanmar text. To fix this, you can select the text in the heading again and change it into the appropriate type of Myanmar font (size/colour). After you have fixed the texts in the Heading into the appropriate font, you can set the changes as the default option to avoid having to change them again.

- Near the box to choose different headings (normally at the right bottom of the box), you will see a small arrow which says 'Style' Clicks on it.
- If you have changed the text in the Heading 1, click the symbol beside Heading 1.
- Choose 'Update Heading 1 to match Section'.
- When you have selected the other texts into Heading 1, it will appear as the format you have set.
- You can change it in Heading 2 and Heading 3 in the same way.
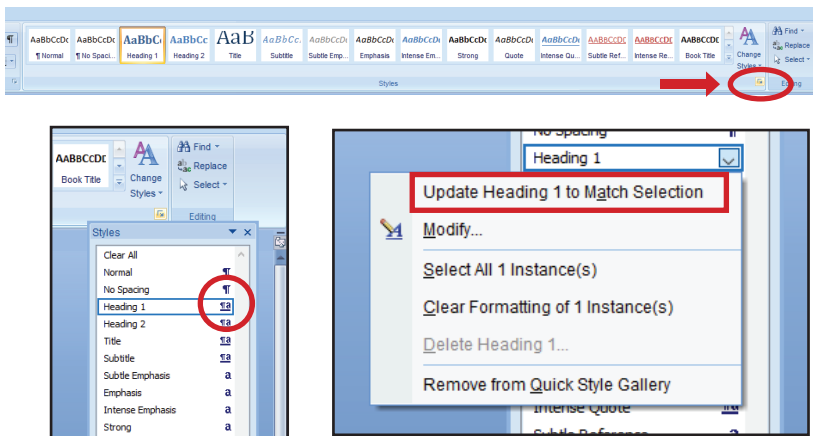
Exercise: Identifying headings

1. Beginning with Main Headings. Can you put the Title and the Main Headings in the best order?

2. Now add to your answers from 1 by considering these sub-headings. Which Main Headings would you include them under?

Exercise: Heading 2 and 3

Storage with wells

Water storage

Minister of Irrigation

Prevention by keeping
water drains clear

Government Ministers

Flood prevention

Storage with dams

Minister for Planning
and Finance

Prevention by constructing
new water drains
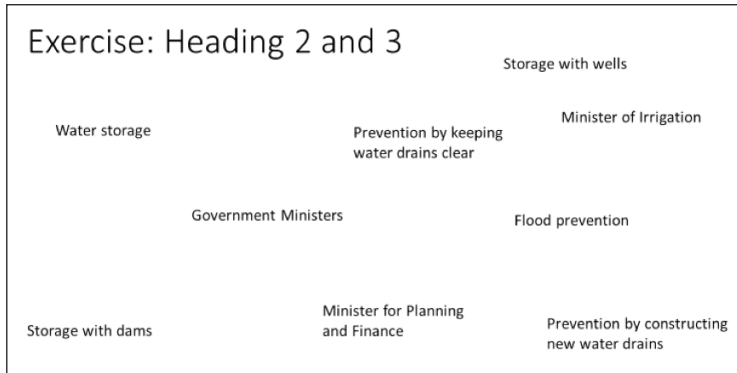
2.2 Tables of Contents

Creating a Table of Contents in Microsoft Word

Contents tables should be included on the first page of the Briefing. They allow Members to see at a glance what is in the Briefing, and on what page they can find the different information: this is a vital way of saving them time.

When you designate text as a Heading, that automatically tells Word to include it in the Contents Table. And, instead of you having to manually type out the contents table yourself, Word can do it itself once you have designated your Headings.
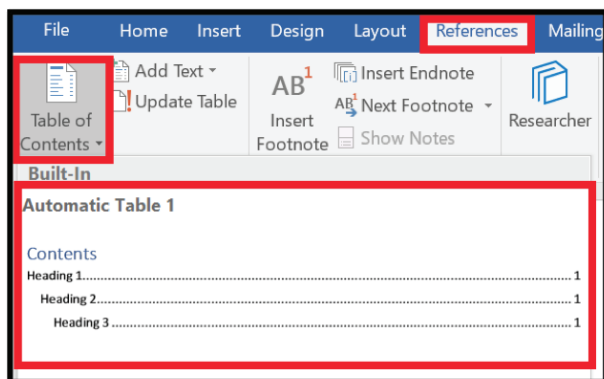
To add a contents table in Word. Firstly, designate text as Heading 1, 2, and 3.

Next:

1) Click at the start of your Briefing
2) Click on the 'References' Tab
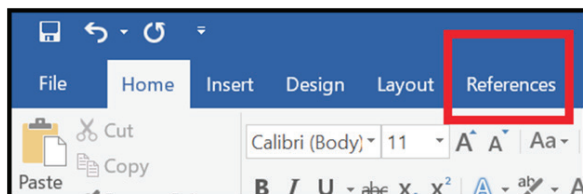
3) Click on the 'Table of Contents' button
4) Select the style of table (The default is 'Automatic')

Again, as with the Headings, you might need to convert the text back into Myanmar Font:

- Select the text in the heading again (even if has become distorted to appear as squares)
- Select the Font drop-down
- Select the appropriate type of Myanmar font

Adding page numbers to a Briefing

After creating the Table of Contents you will also need to add page numbers to your Briefing, otherwise your Members will be unable to match the pages numbers in the Contents Table with the pages of your Briefing.

- Go to the 'Insert' tab on the taskbar at the top of Word
- Select 'Page Numbers'
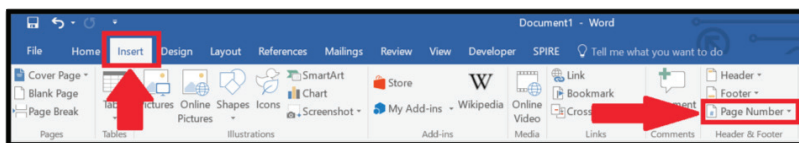
Updating a Table of Contents

Do not try to type directly into the Contents Table. It will not change the Headings elsewhere in your Briefing.

Instead, you should change the Headings themselves and Word will reflect those changes in the contents table. But it will not do so automatically:

- • You must select the 'Update Table' option when you make a change
- • Every time you print the document, Word will ask you if you want to 'Update Table'

To update the table:

- o Click on the Contents Table to select it, and the option to update it will appear.
- o Alternatively, you can find that option under the References tab in the Table of Contents section.
- o When asked, select the option to 'Update entire table'.
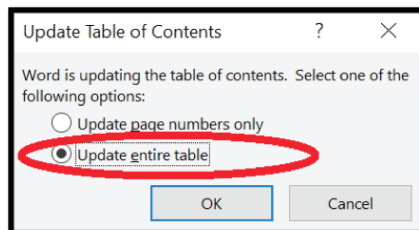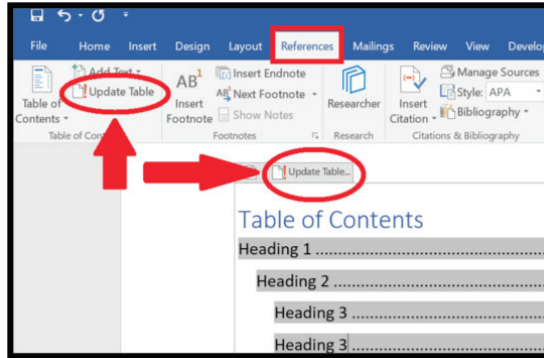
2.3 Headers and Footers

If you want to add text that repeats at the top or bottom of every page in your Briefing – for example the name of your Committee, a page number, or the fact that a document is confidential - you can do this in Word using the Header/Footer feature.

Select the 'Insert' tab and then click on either 'Header' or 'Footer' depending on whether you want the text to appear at the top or bottom of the page. The text that you type into the Header/Footer box will appear on every page of the document.

To edit the Header, double click at the top of the page. To edit the Footer, double click at the bottom of the page. To finish editing either the Header or Footer, double click in the main body of the page again.
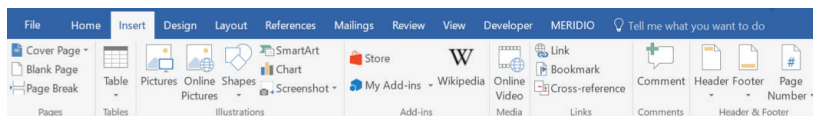
Writing in a way that is useful to Members

In addition to having a clear structure to your Briefing, you must write the information that you have found through your research in a way that is clear. A Briefing that is unclear will not be effective at giving the Members information, and it will waste their time trying to understand you. The purpose of the Briefing is therefore defeated, no matter how good your research was.

In addition to being clear, the information that you provide must also be impartial and accurate. If it is inaccurate and false, or if it is not impartial and presents only part of the evidence, then the Briefing will not be useful to your Members. Providing MPs with an overview of all the available evidence enables them to make well-informed decisions. This Section teaches you how to write in a way that is useful to Members by being clear, impartial, and accurate.

3.1 Clear writing

The fundamentals of clear writing

When writing, many people make the mistake of using longer words and complex sentences. They do this because they think it will give the text a serious and authoritative tone. In fact, it can make your writing harder to understand.

a) Use simple language

- Avoid words that are technical or unnecessarily complex. Use short words where possible.
- Expand acronyms, the first time they are used, in case your Members don't know what they mean. Don't just write 'SDGs' or 'UDHR' but Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Universal Declara-

tion of Human Rights (UDHR). Once you have explained this, then you can use the acronym instead of the full name thereafter.

- Put the most important information first. That is what Members want.

Try speaking before writing: If you are struggling to think of the best way to explain something clearly, first try explaining it verbally to a colleague. This can help you to phrase what you want to say in a way that is easily understandable to another person, and to prioritise the important information.

b) Keep sentences short and simple.

Avoid long sentences, because they can be harder to understand. Avoid repeating something that you have already said. Try to only communicate one idea in each one sentence that you write.

Including bullet points and numbers:
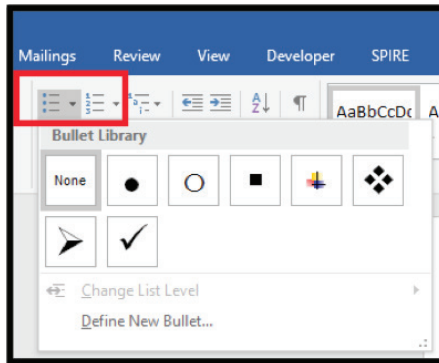
c) Begin with the most important point; follow with the details

Your members are busy, and don't want to wait. Give them the headline first, like in a newspaper article. Next, you can explain how you reached that conclusion by providing the evidence or views of others that it is based on.

Examples of clear and unclear writing:

1. Use bullet points for lists; avoid jargon and unnecessary information:

The three most popular anti malarial drugs are malarone which is atovaquone proguanil hydrocholoride and lariam which is mefloquine and doxycycline which is a common antibiotic in the tetracycline class used to treat bacteria such as staphylococcus aures.

The three most popular types of anti malarial drugs are:

• *Malarone*
• *Lariam*
• *Doxycycline (a common antibiotic)*

2. Put the most important information first; leave out unnecessary information:

Informational about 'Vision Myanmar'

• *In its history it has had five presidents*
• *It was founded in 1995*
• *It recentry changed its logo*
• *It currently has 29,985 members*
• *Vision Myanmar is a charity that supports blind people in Myanmar*
• *People can apply for membership on its website*

Informational about 'Vision Myanmar'

• Vision Myanmar is a charity that supports blind people in Myanmar
• It was founded 1995
• It currently has almost 30,000 members

3.   Use short words instead of complex words. Avoid repetition. Read your sentences out loud to see if you can read them without running out of breath. Split up long sentences into one idea per sentence.

The report identified the recurring issue that pipes had been built with insufficient strength in their fundamental structure to accommodate enhanced volumes of water meaning that they are unable to accommodate water at this volume and they ruptured. Water escapes into the ground, cannot be recovered, and does not reach its intended destination.

One problem, according to the report, is that pipes are not built strong enough to hold high volumes of water. They burst, and this wastes water.

Structuring a paragraph

Think carefully about how to structure each paragraph so that the information you are trying to convey is presented in the clearest possible way. Each paragraph should:

- Focus on one issue
- Begin with an introductory sentence that states what the issue is (See the section on Summarising)
- Develop the issue using succinct sentences – only one point should be made in each sentence
- Only contain information that is relevant to the issue being discussed
- Avoid repeating information that has already been included

Exercise: structuring a paragraph

Read the paragraph in the box below. Where does the paragraph fail to meet the criteria listed above? How could the paragraph be improved?

> In the UK the Monarch is called Queen Elizabeth II. Although the Monarch used to be able to make and amend laws, this power now lies exclusively with the UK Parliament and even though the Monarch must still sign their name to every law passed by Parliament before it can become law of the land, in the current democratic system, the Monarch never refuses and a monarch has not refused to sign a law for 300 years. The Monarch, who is no longer able to make and amend laws, does not express any political views or show support for a political party. According to the Fixed Term Parliament Act (2011), the UK must hold a general election every 5 years, unless the Parliament votes to hold one sooner. The Monarch is responsible for formally appointing the Prime Minister after a general election, but they play no role in the decision of who should be appointed.

3.2 Using quotations

Quoting directly from sources is a very useful way of providing evidence for your Briefing. But be careful. If you copy somebody else's words exactly, but do not use quotation marks, then you are presenting their words as your own.

The Member won't be able to distinguish between your views and those of others. This could lead them to question your impartiality. It is also not true to present other people's words as your own.

This is how to create quotations:

- The quote marks ' " " ' go around the **exact** words that were used in the original source.
- If you only want to quote a part of a sentence, you can show that the full sentence has been shortened by putting three full-stops around the quotation: '…quotation…'

- If you want to add a word to an original quotation, you can do this by adding square brackets: '…quotation… [your addition]… quotation.' Only do this if the quotation does not make any sense without the additional word.
- You can quote a single word if you think it is particularly significant.
- If you are using a long quotation (longer than two lines of text) then you should use a block quote. This is a new paragraph, indented by one tab, and in a smaller font:

> 'Quotation Quotation.'

You must **always reference every quotation** with a footnote to the precise place in a book or the precise webpage this information came from (see Chapter 4). And always mention who said a quotation or where it came from immediately before the quote, or immediately after it.

> E.g: The Speaker said 'quotation';
> Or: 'quotation' according to the Speaker.

Exercise: Using quotations

Find the Myanmar e-Governance strategy (2016 – 2020) online. Using the document, practice your quotation skills with the following exercise:

1. Directly quote the most important sentence from paragraph 3
2. Quote part of the last sentence from paragraph 3
3. Quote from anywhere in the document, but add some of your own words to make the meaning clear.

3.3 Summarising information

A summary takes a long text and shrinks it into a short text. Summarising can be used for:

- Laws
- Reports
- Newspaper articles
- A paragraph or a quotation

Laws or reports might be many pages long, but they can be summarised in a few paragraphs. Newspaper articles might be one or two pages, but they can be summarised in a few sentences. And a paragraph or quotations can often be summarised in one sentence.

Summaries are useful for Members because they allow them to understand the key ideas presented in a long text very quickly, without having to read the whole thing. Because it saves them time, writing summaries of long pieces of information is one of the most useful things staff can do for Members.

The principles of summarising

A summary should be quick and easy to understand. In a summary:

- All of the important information is included, but non-essential information is left out
- Small details are excluded in favour of big ideas
- Similar ideas are grouped together, not repeated.

Whatever you a summarising, you will need to use your skills of analysis to decide what information from the original source to include and what to leave out, as well as how to organise the information so that it is clear to the reader. As a starting point, read through the document you want to summarise and highlight or make a note of the key points. Review your list of points and decide which are essential to the summary, which may be helpful to include, and which are not important.

Introductory sentences

Each paragraph should set out for the Members a new point that is relevant to the overall topic covered in the Briefing. It is helpful to start each paragraph with a sentence that introduces the specific point that is being made in that paragraph. This will help the Members to understand why that paragraph has been included.

This first sentence is called an 'introductory sentence', and it is a summary. It summarises the whole paragraph that follows in one sentence, at the beginning. Adding these introductory sentences to your paragraphs will help Members to understand your Briefing.

Examples:

Agriculture is important for Myanmar's economy. *The World Bank says that it accounts for 29% of gross domestic product (GDP), 50% of employment, and 30% of exports. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, 68% of rural population relies on crops and livestock for their incomes.*

Myanmar is vulnerable to flooding. *According to the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU), over 2 million people are exposed to flooding in Myanmar every year. A UN Habitat report said that both the Monsoon and Cyclones made Myanmar vulnerable, and that the highest risk is in August when the rain is heaviest.*

Summarising newspaper articles or reports

Text of a newspaper article, a short report, or a website (about 1-4 sides of A4) should be summarised into a small number of bullet points.

Example:

This is a newspaper article about shortages of water in Magway, Myanmar.

Reference: Nay Aung, Myanmar Times, Villages in hilly region of West Magawy facing water shortage, 15 February 2017

https://myanmar.mmtimes.com/national-news/mandalay-upper-myan-mar/24629-2017-02-15-04-13-03.html

It can be summarised into a small number of bullet points:

- There is a water shortage in Magway, causing hardship
- Illegal deforestation is one factor that has worsened the shortage
- Another problem is inadequate piping to deliver water
- Local people want the Government to help provide them water

Summarising legislation

Laws or Bills can be many pages long. But by combining together themes covered in different Chapters into individual sentences, they can be summarised in a paragraph (or a list of bullet points).

Example:

Here is an example summary of a law. Remember that this is just one example: there are many ways that this law could be summarised. The example summary is colour coded to show you which chapters of the law are being referred to in each sentence:

The Myanmar National Education Law (No 41/2014) was published on 30 September 2014. It sets out the objectives of national education, including

the development of citizens' critical thinking and the production of a qualified workforce. It details core principles such as the right to education and the independence of schools and universities. It sets the planning and oversight duties of a National Education Commission, including the establishment of a curriculum. It outlines the responsibilities of parents and guardians, teachers, regional Governments and the Ministry of Education. It puts in place a programme of quality assurance at every level of education.[1]

[1]The Myanmar National Education Law (No 41/2014), 30 September 2014

xxx Chapter 2

xxx Chapter 3

xxx Chapter 4 and 7

xxx Chapters 8, 9 and 11

xxx Chapter 10

Note that not every chapter is summarised. For example, Chapter 1 on 'Definitions' does not contain information that is new or significant and so it is not included in the summary. Note how some other chapters are grouped together, where they contain similar information.

Exercise: Summarising

1.   Write introductory sentences that summarise these paragraphs:

a.   Dengue fever is carried by mosquitos, and according to the Myanmar Times the disease killed 140 people in Myanmar in 2015 and 54 in 2016. Mosquitos also carry Malaria (which the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates killed 240 people in Myanmar in 2016), and mosquitos carry the Zika Virus.

b.   According to an article in the Myanmar Times, 'In cities such as Yangon and Mandalay, people throw garbage wherever they want, which blocks the water drainage. Ko Si Thu, who lives in Mandalay, says that 'waste is not cleaned out of this main drainage, so, when it rains, water overflows. People often carelessly dump household waste into the drains.''

c.   The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) says there are 1.3 healthcare workers for every 1,000 people in Myanmar, whereas the WHO says that there should be at least 2.3. In 2016, the Myanmar Times reported that there were not enough doctors in Myanmar to counter diseases like tuberculosis. According to a report in Frontier Myanmar, 'the continuing shortage of qualified staff is due to a failure to retain their skills in Myanmar after they graduate as well as to inspire them to study medicine or nursing in the first place'

2. Read these different articles about water shortages in Myanmar. How would you summarise the main points?

a.   http://www.7daydaily.com/story/92133
b.   http://www.7daydaily.com/story/84293

3. Look up the 2011 Microfinance Law. How would you summarise it in a paragraph, combining the different Chapters into themes like in the example of the 2014 National Education Law above?

3.4 Identifying key issues

Identifying 'Key Issues' involves reading a variety of different documents relating to the same topic (such as plenary debates, meeting minutes, NGO reports, submissions and news articles), and being able to spot themes in the points that are being made across these different documents. These themes are your key issues.

When trying to build a list of key issues, ask yourself the following questions:

• What are the most important elements of the bill/policy?
• If the Committee has already held a meeting on this bill or policy, what were the main issues of debate?
• Has the Committee received any complaints or comments about the topic? If so, what are the major problems/concerns?
• Have several submissions commented on the same issue?
• Have there been any events that have affected this bill/policy, or have made it a focus of attention?

- Is the topic controversial? Has it been in the news? Why?
- Are there are any reports on this topic published by NGOs?

If you are identifying key issues for a Committee Briefing, it can be helpful to discuss your initial list with a colleague and your manager before you begin to draft the 'Key Issues' section. You may also wish to ask your Chair or Secretary for their key issues relating to the Bill or topic, to ensure that you cover them. Each of the individual issues that you identify will be listed under its own sub-heading, after your main heading of 'Key Issues' (See Chapter Two for Headings and Sub-Headings)

For more guidance on drafting a Key Issues section, refer to Section 8 of the *Guide to Writing a Committee Briefing* (2017).

Example:

Imagine you are researching the topic of reproductive health in Myanmar. Across the various documents you have read, you notice that the issue of maternal and newborn health features prominently. You also see that several documents focus on sexually transmitted infections. In addition, you observe a number of references to the difference between the reproductive healthcare that is available in urban areas compared to rural areas. You also see that the reproductive health of adolescents and young people is raised on several occasions.

You may therefore begin a list of key issues that includes:

- *Maternal and newborn health*
- *Sexually transmitted infections*
- *Reproductive health in adolescents and young people*
- *Comparison of reproductive healthcare in urban and rural areas*

As you read more about the topic, you may find further information that relates to the key issues that you have already listed, as well as noticing other themes which you then add to the list.

3.5 Writing suggested questions

If your Briefing is for a stakeholder meeting, public hearing, a Committee visit or seminar, you may wish to include some suggested questions for Members to ask. The questions that you suggest, based mainly on the Key Issues that you identify, might be used by Members in a Committee meeting to find out more information. For that reason, it is especially important that they are written clearly. But, in addition to being clear, they must also be relevant to the topic and effective in gaining the information that Members want.

There are other tips for writing suggested questions in Section 9 of the *Guide to Writing a Committee Briefing* (2017). Remember, follow the rules of clear writing when you write questions (See Section 9). Here is some further advice:

a) Make questions as short and clear as possible

Read your questions out loud, because that is the best way of judging whether they are clear.

Long questions are more difficult to understand. If a Member can't understand the questions then they can't ask them.

Don't be tempted to try to ask multiple questions in one: it won't work, and it will confuse people. If you have three questions, for example, then ask one clear question and then two 'follow up questions' rather than one long one.

For example, you can ask 'What are your planned levels of spending on the health sector this year?', and then the follow-up questions of 'and next year?' or 'What were they last year?' can be very short.

Here is how it might appear in your Briefing:

- *What are your planned levels of spending on the health sector this year?*
  - o *And next year?*
  - o *What were they last year?*

b) Confirm that a problem exists; then ask about the solution

Members often examine issues because a problem has been reported. You might have found news articles, reports, or stakeholder contributions describing this problem.

For example:

'Is there a shortage of doctors in Myanmar?'

'Are drains blocked with waste a leading cause of flooding?'

'Do mosquito-borne diseases remain prevalent in Myanmar?'

Firstly, ask the witnesses for their view.

In your view, does this problem exist? How bad is it?

It is valuable to hear views about the cause and severity of any problems that might face Myanmar.

Secondly, ask a question about the solution:

What steps should we take/what steps are you taking to resolve this?

Parliament's role is to improve the lives of the people, so after identifying the problem always ask what the solution can be.

c) Ask questions that find ways of measuring what is being said

Try to find ways of measuring a policy, a problem, or a solution. These numbers and measurements will allow you to make comparisons with other countries or the situation in the past. It also allows a way of checking whether progress has been made in an issue: have the numbers changed, or improved, since the Committee last asked?

Examples of the kinds of questions the Committee can ask to measure what the witnesses is saying with numbers:

- *What is the timeframe involved: how long has this been a problem, when will a solution occur?*
- *How many times has a problem occurred before?*

- *How many people are affected?*
- *How many organisations have been involved?*
- *What statistics are available?*
- *What examples of the problem or the solution can the witnesses give to demonstrate what they are saying?*
- *How can the examples they give be checked and proved?*
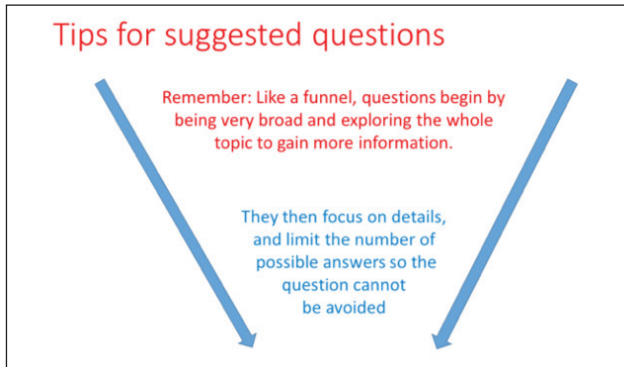
3.6 Writing impartially

Impartiality

Impartiality is the most important part of working as Parliamentary staff. It is the reason why Members trust staff to do their jobs well. It means that you, as staff, must not be seen by Members to favour one political perspective over another, or one viewpoint over another.

Example:

There is debate about whether to open a mine in a village. Some people are in favour, because it will bring jobs and the mining company has promised to build a school and a hospital. But some other people are against the mine, because they say that it will cause pollution and damage farms while giving little money back to the village.

Perhaps it is your village, and so perhaps you have a strong view…

But, to be impartial, your work must:

- **Exclude** your own opinion, showing no sign of what you personally think. In the mine example above, Members should never be able to detect your own opinion from what you write in your Briefing.
- **Include** a wide range of perspective on the subject, without favouring or criticising any of them. In the mine example above, you would accurately report the arguments both in favour and in opposition to the mine and describe who is making them.

One key aspect of being impartial is **referencing** (see Chapter Four). In the mine example above, you can include praise and criticism for the mine. But, by referencing, you:

1. Show that the opinions in the Briefing are somebody else's, and not your own
2. Show that you have included a range of opinions
3. Show where you got the information from, so Members can read it themselves

In addition to carefully selecting your sources and then referencing, to be impartial you also need to take care with the words and the language that you use in your Briefing.

Impartial writing

We can demonstrate impartiality by:
- Writing with neutral language (be careful when using adjectives and adverbs, or phrases that might sound positive or negative)
- Distinguishing between fact and opinion
- Use evidence to back up everything you say and make sure it is fully referenced
- Ensuring that a range of different views are mentioned

Examples: Write with neutral language

❌ *Even though the law was passed in 2015, the Government has only just begun to implement the reforms.*

> → This is not neutral language because it suggests that you think the Government should have begun to implement the reforms sooner.

✔️ *The law was passed in 2015 and the Government began to implement the reforms in 2018.*

> → This gives the facts about when the law was passed and when the implementation of the reforms began, without either praising or criticising the Government. The MPs can make their own judgement about whether the Government should have begun the reforms earlier.

❌ *The Government has completely failed to consider the environmental impact of the proposal.*

> → This is not neutral language because it suggests that you think a) there will definitely be an environmental impact and b) the Government is wrong not to pay more attention to it.

✔️ *There is no evidence that the Government has considered the possible environmental impact of the proposal.*

> → This is only gives the facts about what was included in the Minister's statement and does not use critical language to describe it. This sentence can be fully substantiated by evidence.

❌ *Parliament is slowly reviewing the excellent Energy Bill. This process is taking a long time and causing delays.*

> → Again, this is not neutral language. It praises the Bill and criticises parliament.

✔️ *Parliament has begun reviewing the Energy Bill, to assess whether it should be amended. This process began two months ago. It is scheduled for completion in 3 weeks.*

> → This is only gives facts, without the value judgements.

Examples: If you do cite an opinion, show whose opinion it is (not yours):

✗ *The Bill has three main weaknesses.*

✓ *The NGO identified three main weaknesses with the Bill.*

✗ *The project will help to reduce poverty in rural areas.*

✓ *The Minister stated that the project will help to reduce poverty in rural areas.*

✗ *Parliament is slowly reviewing the weak Energy Bill, to consider improvements. But this process is taking a long time.*

✓ *The NGO 'People Against Climate Change' wrote to the Committee to say that the Energy Bill is weak, because it does not include measures to reduce carbon emissions. But the NGO also argued in its letter that the review process is too slow because this is an urgent problem that needs a solution soon.*

Exercise: Impartial writing

Please read the following sentences and suggest a more impartial way of phrasing them.

1. China has become a huge problem in South East Asia because it uses its wealth to dominate trade and economic development.
2. The leader of the Party said that foreign companies have made the economic situation worse. The Deputy Leader agreed that this is a major issue. So all foreign companies should be banned.
3. Housing has always been an issue in the South of the country, and this has got worse recently.

Chapter Four

Referencing

Once you have found the information through research and included it in your Briefing, you must create a reference for it. A reference is a way of showing where the information came from. It allows others to find and check that information for themselves.

Referencing is very important. It:

- Demonstrates impartiality, both by proving that an opinion is not yours and by showing who the opinion – if you have written one – does belong to;
- Shows your Members what sources you have consulted and that you have consulted a range of sources;
- Demonstrates clarity, because your Members and Manager can read the original source that you consulted. This is especially important if you have summarised, because they can see the source in its entirety if they want;
- Allows you to remember where you got the information from, and which sources you consulted, weeks or months or even years later.

But in order to do this, references must be clear and easy to find. The following sections shows you what styles of referencing you can use, and how to use them effectively.

4.1 Footnotes

Footnotes versus Endnotes

The main ways of providing references are as footnotes (which appear at the bottom of the page on which the statement is made) or endnotes (which appear at the end of the document.) There is no real difference between footnotes and endnotes. They serve the same function of providing

information about sources and have the same format. But footnotes are often preferable because the information is available to the reader without them having to turn to the back of the Briefing.

Here is how to create a footnote:

1. Click on the point of the sentence where you want to insert it (usually at the end).

water shortage in East Magway. Deforestation had

2. Click on the 'References' tab

File   Home   Insert   Design   Layout   References
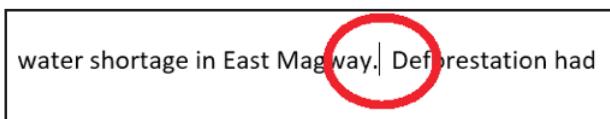
3. Click 'Insert footnote'
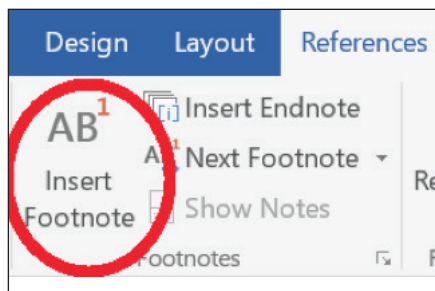
(Note: Instead of steps 2 and 3 you can instead use the shortcut Ctrl+Alt+F to create your footnote)

4. A footnote number appears by the word, and a corresponding section at the bottom of the page where you can insert your reference.

water shortage in East Magway.[1] Deforestation had

_____

[1] Myanmar Times, *Villages in mountains in West Magw*

Deleting the number will delete the footnote.

The numbers update automatically when you add or remove footnotes.

Format of footnotes

When you use footnotes for references, the format should always be exactly the same.

Do not only paste links (URLs) into your footnotes unless they're accompanied by other information: they're useless by themselves in paper Briefings because Members cannot click on them to open them, and they only tell Members very limited information about the source.

You should tell your Member exactly where you got the information from, who wrote it, and what date it was written and accessed. The date is important, because information can change over time and become obsolete. Members benefit from knowing when you wrote it, and when you found it. If it is helpful to add a link than you can, but only if it is in addition to the categories listed below.

Use this format in this order, and include as many of these points as you can:

- AUTHOR (or organisation/media outlet that produced a document)
- TITLE (normally in italics, but not essential)
- PUBLISHER (if a book)
- DATE of PUBLICATION
- PAGE NUMBER (if it is a direct quote from a report, book or document)

- • DATE ACCESSED (for digital articles or documents) in square brackets

AUTHOR/ORGANISATION, TITLE, PUBLISHER, DATE, PAGE NUMBER, [DATE ACCESSED]

Examples:

Htoo Thant, *Myanmar Times, New digital tax collection system to launch next year*, 11 October 2018 [Accessed 17 October 2018] https://www.mm-times.com/news/new-digital-tax-collection-system-launch-next-year.html

Swe Nyein, Global New Light of Myanmar, *Individual imports from nine border crossings exceed Ks14 billion*, page 5, 28 September 2018

Ministry of Planning and Finance, *Myanmar Citizen's Budget Year 2017-2018*, 31 May 2017, page 13 [accessed 23 July 2018]

Pyithu Economic & Financial Development Committee, *Minute from the meeting of 05.10.18 with Ministry of Trade*, 5 October 2018, page 2.

4.2 Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks mean that, in a digital document, when you click on a word it automatically opens a website. It is one way of allowing people to directly read an online source for your research, by clicking on the words that you wrote based on that source.

But be careful, because hyperlinks cannot be used on paper documents: only digital ones, accessed through an electronic device.

If you need to create a hyperlink then here is how:

1. Highlight the words that you want to reference.

was a water shortage in East Magway.

2. Right click, and select 'Link'. It will produce a box where you can insert a URL 'Address'.
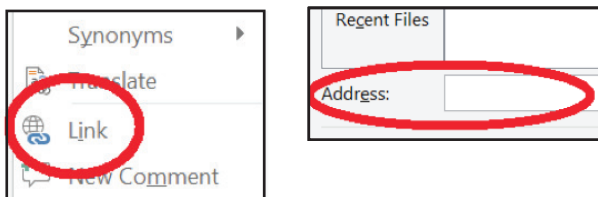
3. Got to the original website where you got the information (in this example it is a news article). Highlight the URL, and Copy.

4. Paste that URL into the 'Address Section' and Click 'OK). Your words will now have a blue hyperlink that leads to the internet.
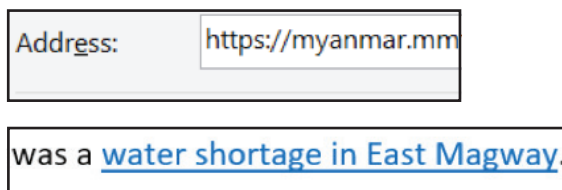
4.3 Citing legislation

When you need to cite a specific law, you must use a slightly different format of citation. For a Myanmar law:

NAME of LAW (including date passed), SECTION or PAGE NUMBER

For a foreign law:

NAME of FOREIGN GOVERNMENT OR PARLIAMENT, NAME of LAW (including date passed), SECTION or PAGE NUMBER

Examples:
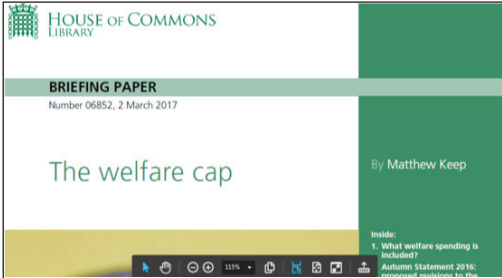
[Myanmar] Citizenship Act 1982, p44
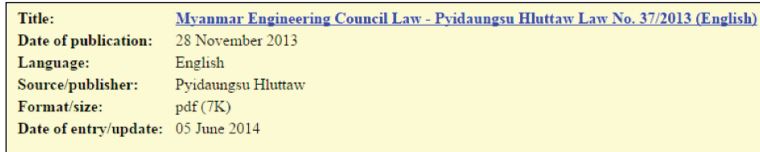
[Foreign] UK Act of Parliament, Enterprise Act 2016, Section 8

(Note: an Act is a law that has been passed by Parliament; a Bill is a proposed new law that is still being discussed by Parliament).

Exercise: footnotes and references

The following examples provide all the information you need to create a footnote. Use the format and tools described to create a footnote.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Suggested answers for the exercises

Exercise: Identifying headings

1.

2.

Exercise: Structuring a paragraph

Here is where the paragraph failed to meet the above criteria:

| In the UK the Monarch is called Queen Elizabeth II. Although the Monarch used to be able to make and amend laws, this power now lies exclusively with the UK Parliament and even though the Monarch must still sign their name to every law passed by Parliament before it can become law of the land, in the current democratic system, the Monarch never refuses and a monarch has not refused to sign a law for 300 years. The Monarch, who is no longer able to make and amend laws, does notexpress any political views or show support for a political party. According to the Fixed Term Parliament Act (2010), the UK must hold a general election every 5 years, unless the Parliament votes to hold one sooner. The Monarch is responsible for formally appointing the Prime Minister after a general election, but they play no role in the decision of who should be appointed. | The first sentence does not introduce the issue.

One sentence contains several different points and is difficult to follow.

Information is repeated.

This information does not directly relate to the issue being discussed in the paragraph |

Here is how the paragraph could have been improved

| In the UK system of government, the Monarch mainly plays a symbolic role without exercising political or executive power. Although the Monarch used to be able to make and amend laws, this power now lies exclusively with the UK Parliament. The Monarch must still sign their name to every law passed by Parliament before it can become law of the land, but in the current democratic system, the Monarch never refuses. It has been 300 years since a monarch refused to sign a law passed by Parliament. The Monarch does not express any political views or show support for a political party. The Monarch is responsible for formally appointing the Prime Minister after a general election, but they play no role in the decision of who should be appointed. | The introductory sentence clearly sets out the issue that is going to be explained in the paragraph. |

Exercise: Using quotations

(Examples)

1. 'The e-Government system enables the government agencies/ organizations to provide effective services through ICT technology as a useful tool.' *(This is important because it summarises the purpose of the e-Governance system)*
2. According to the strategy, governments are 'moving towards people-centred approaches'
3. Developments in e-Government processes can ultimately 'increase supply of and demand for ICT business in the country' (para 4)

Exercises: Summarising

1.
   a. 'Mosquitos carry several deadly diseases in Myanmar'
   b. 'Drains blocked with waste are a reason for flooding'
   c. 'There is a shortage of medical professionals in Myanmar'

2.
   a.
   - The government will provide water to villages in Mandalay Division
   - The cost of this distribution is KKM 20 million
   - The number of villages facing water shortages is rising
   - Education about sustainable practices is part of the solution to shortages

   b.
   - The Rakhine municipal government is funding the construction of wells and lakes to help resolve water shortages
   - 120 wells and lakes are planned
   - Those in need of water now can contact the government, and the government will provide water

3.

Myanmar Microfinance Law (2011)

The Myanmar Microfinance Law (No13/2011) was published on 30 September 2011. It aims to facilitate, and regulate, the provision of micro-finance to grassroots people. The law establishes regulatory institutions to shape and supervise micro-finance policy. It explains their powers, and the relationship between them. It includes the formation, licencing, activities, and auditing of the institutions that provide micro-finance. It explains the regulation of microfinance institutions, and the punishments that can be placed on them of they break the rules. The final chapter includes miscellaneous measures, including how the regulatory bodies will be funded and supported, what taxes will apply to microfinance institutions, and what the role of the Ministry will be.

| Chapter 2 | Chapters 3-6 | Chapters 7-10 |
| Chapters 11-14 | Chapter 15 | |

Exercise: Impartial writing – suggested phrasing

1. China has significant financial resources and actively trades with and invests in countries in South East Asia.
2. Leading members of the Party stated that foreign companies have had a negative impact on the economic situation.
3. The evidence shows that, over the past X years, the quality and availability of housing has decreased in the South of the country.

Exercise: footnotes and references

1. House of Commons Libary; by Matthew Keep, Briefing paper: The Welfare Cap, 2 March 2017

2. Myanmar Engineering Council Law 2013

3. ZawNyunt, *Battle heats up for key seats in coming by-election*, Myanmar Times, 22 March 2017 https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/25414-battle-heats-up-for-key-seats-in-coming-by-election.html

4. UK Government, Equality Act 2010, Chapter 15