

Writing Key Messages and Title

Learning Objectives

At the end of this module, you will be able to:

- **Describe what makes a good key message**
- **Distill your policy brief content down to 2-3 key messages**
- **Describe what makes a good title**
- **Develop an effective title for your policy brief**



Elements of the Key Messages Section

What is a Key Message?

- Distills essence of your brief into succinct points
- Should motivate your audience to act now
- A key message may summarize information already in your brief, but could *also* be:
 - new information that provides a sense of scale,
 - a surprising correlation,
 - a sense of urgency about the issue (trend), or
 - a correction of a commonly held misconception.



Key Messages – Key Elements

A key message is what your audience needs to know to motivate them to act now!

- Summary of important points and/or conclusions from your policy brief
- Speaks to your audience; motivates them to take action
- Can be presented as a piece of new information that conveys a sense of urgency about the issue or corrects a misconception
- May be in paragraph form or bullet form

Key messages are not slogans!

Case Study Example

Helmet Law Case Study: Key Messages

Motorcycle Helmets Not Hats

The Case for Enforcing Certified Motorcycle Helmet Use in Vietnam

Summary

- After the passage of Vietnam's 2007 motorcycle helmet law, there was NO significant change in the risk of death among motorcyclists (Ho Chi Minh City Study)
- 80% of motorcycle helmets in Vietnam are not certified and hence NOT crash-worthy
- Wearing a certified motorcycle helmet can reduce the risk of motorcycle head injuries by 69% and fatalities by 42%
- Increased enforcement by police of the quality of motorcycle helmets is the most cost-effective way to reduce fatalities due to motorcycle crashes



Globally, road traffic injuries are the leading cause of death for young people ages 15-29 years, accounting for 1.25 million deaths – more than from violence, HIV/AIDS, and malaria. These deaths are projected to climb from the 9th to 5th overall leading cause of death between 2013 and 2030. In Vietnam, per capita road traffic deaths have remained relatively unchanged between 2001 and 2010 (~13 per 100,000 population), making it one of the deadliest in the Western Pacific region. Motorcycles and mopeds continue to be the vehicle of choice in many low- and middle-income countries, including Vietnam, where they represent 95% of the registered vehicle fleet and are involved in 88% of road deaths from head injuries. Helmets, of certified quality and worn correctly, can reduce the risk of serious injury during a crash by 69% and death by 42%.

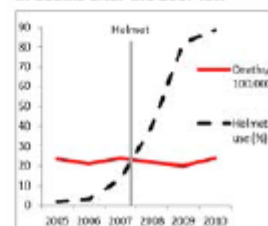
Vietnam's 2007 motorcycle law increased helmet use among motorcyclists from 40 to 90%, however the Vietnam Consumer Safety Association found in 2008 that 80% of helmets worn by motorcyclists were not crash-worthy. Without helmet quality enforcement, consumers opt for low-cost, lightweight "paper helmets", leading to ongoing injuries and deaths. Beyond the tragedy of early death, these injuries are costly (~\$2,400 USD in direct medical costs and 54 weeks of lost normal activities from brain injury per person).

Supported by Current Data

A hospital-based study in Cu Chi District found that while helmet use rose from <5% to 88% between 2005 and 2010, there was no significant change in the number of deaths during this time period.



Rising helmet usage did not lead to a drop in deaths after the 2007 law



Key Messages Criteria

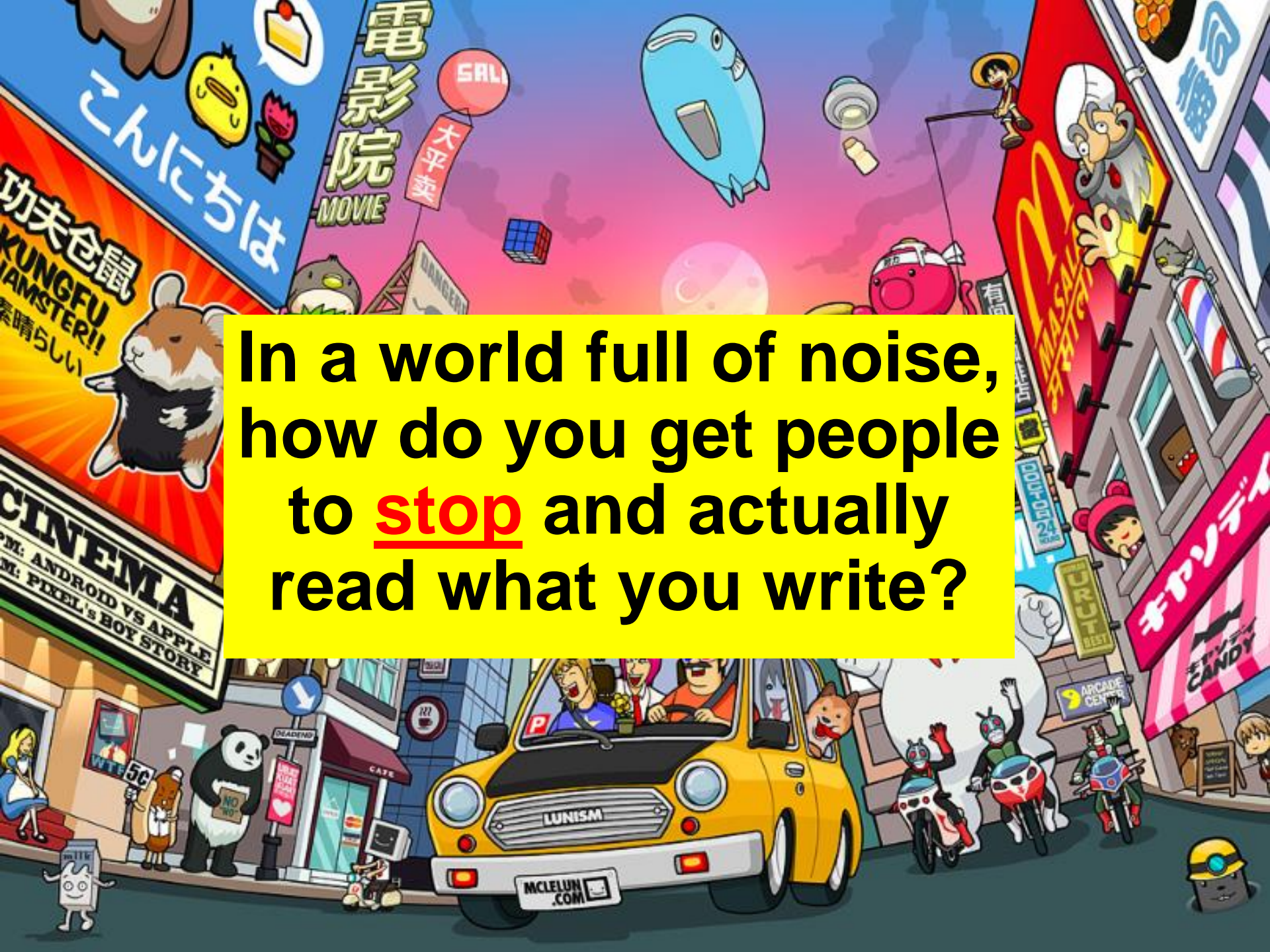
Key Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appears on first page• Short; limited to 1 paragraph or bulleted list• Concise; clearly distills essence of brief• Compelling; motivates reader to keep reading	
	<i>Is the problem being addressed clear?</i>	

Group Exercise

Activity: Review Sample Policy Briefs

- **Read and discuss the Key Messages/Summary section in:**
 - The Price of Smoking: The Case for Increasing Kentucky's Cigarette Tax - USA
 - Policy brief on improving access to artemisinin-based combination therapies for malaria in Burkina Faso
 - Water and Safe Clinics Policy Brief – Sierra Leone
- **As you read, consider:**
 - Does the presentation of the key messages meet the criteria listed in the Policy Brief Checklist?
 - Is this a format or approach that might work well for your own Key Messages section?

The Title



In a world full of noise,
how do you get people
to stop and actually
read what you write?

Title – Key Elements

A good title...

- **Predicts content.**
- **Catches the reader's interest.**
- **Reflects the tone or slant of the piece of writing (framing!)**
- **Not too long - limit to 15 words or less!**



Structure of a Title

- **The hook**
- **Key words describing the brief**
- **Location**

Motorcycle Helmets Not Hats

The Case for Enforcing Certified Motorcycle Helmet Use in Vietnam

Creative Ways to Generate a Title

S T R E T C H your thinking:

- Copy out of your draft a sentence that could serve as a title.
- Write a question beginning with What, Who, When, or Where.
- Write question beginning with How or Why.
- Write a question beginning with Is/Are, Do/Does, or Will.
- Pick out of the brief some concrete image—something the reader can hear, see, taste, smell, or feel—to use as a title.
- Think of a familiar saying, or the title of a book, song, or movie, that might fit your brief. Then take the title you just wrote and twist it by changing a word or creating a pun on it.
- Find two titles you've written so far that you might use together in a double title. Join them together with a colon [:].

Case Study Example

Helmet Law Case Study: The Title

Motorcycle Helmets Not Hats

The Case for Enforcing Certified Motorcycle Helmet Use in Vietnam

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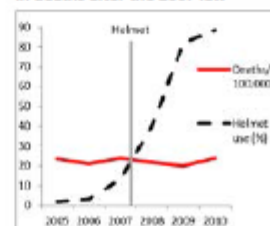
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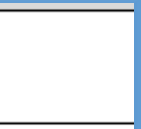
Rising helmet usage did not lead to a drop in deaths after the 2007 law



Title Criteria



Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Short: 15 words or less• Attention-getting/memorable	
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Title Criteria

Motorcycle Helmets Not Hats

The Case for Enforcing Certified Motorcycle Helmet Use in Vietnam



Title

- Short: 15 words or less
- Attention-getting/memorable



Group Exercise

Activity: Review Sample Policy Briefs

- **Read and discuss the titles for each of the following briefs:**
 - The Price of Smoking: The Case for Increasing Kentucky's Cigarette Tax - USA
 - Policy brief on improving access to artemisinin-based combination therapies for malaria in Burkina Faso
 - Water and Safe Clinics Policy Brief – Sierra Leone
- **We will look at how the titles fit the structure presented here, and consider these questions:**
 - Does the presentation of the key messages meet the criteria listed in the Policy Brief Checklist?
 - Is this a format or approach that might work well for your Title?

Example 1:

The Price of Smoking

The Case for Increasing Kentucky's Cigarette Tax

- ☐ Does it follow the structure?
 - ☐ Is there a hook?
 - ☐ Key terms?
 - ☐ Location?
- ☐ Is it short? (15 words or less)
- ☐ Is it attention-getting?

Example 2:

**Policy brief on improving access
to artemisinin-based combination
therapies for malaria
in Burkina Faso**

- ☐ Does it follow the structure?
 - ☐ Is there a hook?
 - ☐ Key terms?
 - ☐ Location?
- ☐ Is it short? (15 words or less)
- ☐ Is it attention-getting?

Example 3:

Water and Safe Clinics

- ☐ Does it follow the structure?
 - ☐ Is there a hook?
 - ☐ Key terms?
 - ☐ Location?
- ☐ Is it short? (15 words or less)
- ☐ Is it attention-getting?

Your Work Group Assignment

- **Break into your mentor groups and work on your Key Messages section and Title of the Policy Brief Template.**

END
