

Writing *Findings*

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) publishes short briefing papers – *Findings* – which set out the main findings from projects.

Their purpose is to inform policy and/or practice, not to stand as a formal record of the research.

Most projects are expected to produce a draft *Findings* as part of their contractual agreement with JRF. (As a rule we will only print one *Findings* from each project.)

Findings are designed for quick reading by influential people who are too busy to read long reports, learned articles or books. *Findings* should be short, to the point and written in plain English.

Findings should concentrate on presenting either what is genuinely new knowledge in the field and/or on what makes an important contribution to an ongoing debate. They are not intended to be a comprehensive summary of the research project.

The length of these briefing papers never exceeds about 2,300 words (or four A4 pages). The first page is devoted to a quick-fire summary of the key points (in the form of bullet points): this is all many readers look at.

There is an established series style which each *Findings* needs to work within.

Submitting a draft *Findings* is a contractual requirement for most projects. However, a *Findings* is not always the right medium for the message. JRF may decide not to publish a *Findings*. This should not be seen as a judgement on the quality of the work.

Deciding on content

When deciding on the subject matter for your *Findings* you should consider the messages from your project which are:

- **new**;
- **timely** in relation to an ongoing debate;
- ones where there is a particular need to **persist** with an already established message.

If your work is very wide-ranging, it may be necessary to pick out a particular angle and a particular readership.

The target readership for *Findings* is those who are likely to have a direct influence on policy or practice in the UK. Assume that the reader is a busy person – e.g. a senior civil servant, an MP, a Director of Social Services or a user group representative – who wants to grasp the gist of the findings within a few minutes. He or she may have no specialist knowledge of the subject and may not understand phrases that are everyday language to those working within the field.

Process

Send the draft *Findings* to your liaison person at JRF. If they feel that the *Findings* could present your work more effectively, they may send it back to you for rewriting. The ‘final draft’ needs to have incorporated any necessary comments from other people, e.g. members of any Advisory Group. Otherwise it will be passed through to the Communications Department, whose staff co-ordinate the detailed editing, production and distribution of the series.

Provide copy in Word format, in straight single-column text. Any figures will be redrawn by the designer in the series style – please supply the raw data as well as the figure itself. Use word counts to gauge the length of texts (it is not possible to judge this by mimicking the final design).

Communications Department staff will undertake any necessary editing and this may vary considerably in extent. However, any changes will be discussed with you.

Once a final edited draft has been agreed with you, our designer will lay out the proofs according to our house style, including redrawing any figures or tables. (Please note, we don’t as a rule send out proofs of *Findings*.)

Wherever possible, we will coincide the publication of the *Findings* with that of the full report. *Findings* are published on JRF's website. Copies may also be printed for direct mailing or distribution through relevant events.

Format

The format is as follows: a front page summarising the key points; 1–3 pages of text expanding on these points; two short concluding sections describing the methodology and stating where to obtain further information; plus some standard details supplied by JRF.

Title

Keep the title simple and descriptive. It should give a clear, at-a-glance indication of the subject so that readers can make a quick decision as to whether or not to read further, and also so that the *Findings* shows up well in online search results.

Front page

Findings are not intended to build up to a finely argued conclusion. Start with a brief introductory paragraph, then summarise the main findings in a series of separate bullet points, giving prominence to any which are unexpected and surprising. This initial summary will appear on the first page. **Always bear in mind that many readers may go no further than this.** However, you should make sure that any information mentioned on the front page in the bullet points is backed up in the main text.

Conclusions

As a general rule, leave readers to draw their own conclusions and concentrate on a simple presentation of what you have found out. Any statements on implications for policy or other general conclusions should appear in a reasonably brief section at the end of the front page and again at the end of the main text. You should clearly flag conclusions as such, using the third person: for example, 'The researchers conclude...'.

Background

Although a brief scene-setting paragraph may be necessary at the start of page 2, don't dwell on the objectives and the background to your work.

Notes

Omit references to previous research unless they are vital and include these in the text in the simplest form. Do not use footnotes or endnotes.

Illustrations

Include tables, graphs, diagrams, quotations and factual examples when they convey a point more vividly than continuous prose (but see the section on 'Length').

Quotes

Consider using direct quotations where the project included interviews, surveys or focus groups. These can add considerable power and immediacy to the research.

Always attribute quotes, even if only broadly to preserve individual anonymity (e.g. mother, social worker). Because of the length restrictions, try to keep quotations short (editing if necessary) and choose one single quotation to illustrate individual points.

Methodology

Include a short section 'About the project' at the end of the *Findings* giving essential notes about methodology (such as sample size or the date of fieldwork). Avoid technical detail and do not dwell on methodology in the main text.

For further information

In a concluding paragraph, you may give contact details (name, address, telephone, email etc.) of the person who can provide more information about the project. JRF will add in details of how to get hold of any fuller report.

Style

Keep paragraphs short and sentences simple: it is often better to list the main points in a terse, telegraphic style than to dress them up in elegant prose. Avoid using the passive wherever possible. Avoid all jargon, including technical terms and acronyms. See JRF's ['Writing style guide'](#) for more general points.

Findings – however controversial, politically sensitive or moving the subject matter – **should always be presented in a dispassionate and factual style**. They should never take the form of a polemic. Nor should you comment on policy which does not relate directly to the actual findings of the project.

To help keep an objective tone, do not use the first person plural. Use 'The study found...' or 'The researchers found...' *not* 'We found...'.

Keeping content up-to-date

If for any reason you have been restricted to using data that is some years out of date, make sure you relate this wherever possible to the current situation or are very clear about the reasons for this.

Length

Conciseness is key to the *Findings* style. The main summary will never extend beyond the front page.

Bear the following word counts in mind when preparing the draft:

- the front page holds no more than about 280 words and pages 2–4 no more than about 2,000 in total;
- each figure and table will 'cost' about 165 words for those which will fit within one column, or about 320 words for more complex ones which need two columns;
- quotes and bulleted lists help the reader but will affect the word count as they take up more space on the page.

Please note: these are maximum lengths. Don't feel obliged to 'pad out' your text to meet either of the guideline word lengths. Drafts exceeding these word lengths will be edited to fit.

Further information

For examples of past *Findings*, see: www.jrf.org.uk