

When the Recipe Calls for Shortening: The Difference between Final and Brief Evaluation Reports

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During report writing times we often get this question: “What is the difference between a Final Evaluation Report (FER) and a Brief Evaluation Report (BER), other than the fact that one is shorter than the other?” The answer does indeed not go far beyond the obvious.

Here is why the BER is by necessity shorter than any FER you may be writing for a primary objective:



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A primary objective in most cases is a policy objective, often involving adoption and implementation. In all cases where the objective includes implementation, your evaluation requires outcome evaluation, meaning you will collect lots more data than you would with an objective that is less far-reaching and involved, like a non-primary objective.

Let’s look at an example. For an MUH outdoor area objective you would collect both process and outcome data. Most likely that would include key informant interviews (KII’s) with apartment managers and surveys with tenants. For the outcome evaluation you would have to collect observation data of cigarette litter at targeted complexes before and after policy adoption. Moreover, you might have an additional wave of KII’s after policy adoption as well as policy record reviews.

In contrast, let’s say you have a non-primary objective aimed at increasing the diversity of your tobacco control coalition. For evaluation activities you may conduct KII’s with potential new partners, training participant satisfaction surveys, and a coalition survey. The write-up of the report for this objective will be much more limited. So, the most obvious reason for the brevity of Brief Evaluation Reports is that the intervention is less involved, calling for fewer evaluation activities.

Even with fewer evaluation activities to report on, are there other ways in which a non-primary objective can be written up more briefly? Here are some tips on how to keep it short and to the point:

Have a look at the sample final evaluation report in the *Tell Your Story* guide. Similar to that example, a brief evaluation report would have a short **background** paragraph leading into the **objective**. The rationale for choosing the objective can be much shorter. The **intervention** section can also be more streamlined. Just provide enough detail so readers can understand what strategies you used. In the **evaluation methods** section just identify your evaluation design, the purpose and type of evaluation activities, and then move on to describing the sampling, data collection and analysis for each of the

evaluation activities. In the **results** section, present and interpret only key findings, (these could even be in bulleted lists) accompanied one or two graphs and tables if appropriate. The **conclusions and recommendations** section should have not more than two or three paragraphs assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the intervention and evaluation, and suggesting changes or next steps that may be worth pointing out to others that pursue similar objectives.

Remember that it actually takes more skill to write concisely. How to reach that good balance between brevity and enough detail so others can learn from the path you took can be difficult to arrive at. As always, keep your audience in mind. Apart from knowing what you did to get to results, what really matters to them are any insights about your intervention and evaluation that they could learn from.



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To see some examples of well-written Brief Evaluation Reports, visit the [Evaluation Tools](#) page of our website in the File Cabinet. Look for the section on Reporting towards the bottom of the page.