
Tool

Get Smart Subject Brief

What It Is

A prudent question is one-half of wisdom.

–Francis Bacon

A concise, 2- to 5-page report on a specific topic.

Beginning with the Korea Negotiation Initiative (KNI) the 3S team developed the concept of a **Get Smart Brief**, that is, a request to an expert (which we most definitely were *not*) for information about some particular aspect of our work.

The aim was to make a reasonable ask of busy people. The briefs we requested were focused and directed often by one key question that we were asking to have answered. As we developed our own research team based in Boulder, CO and Brussels, we directed some of the briefs to them, but more commonly they were sent to academics and researchers with think tanks and NGOs.

What to Use It For

- To ‘get smart’ on key topics to gain more grounding in the details or dynamics of a conflict or the major players involved.
- To give our team members the information we needed to plan a choreography of actions and meetings that would help us build Access, Credibility, and Trust.

How It Works

We get wise by asking question, and even if they are not answered, we get wise, for a well-packed question carries its answer as a snail carried its shell.

–James Stephens

Step 1. Spend time to clarify the question that you are seeking to have answered. You may well find that the time spent on that is itself as instructive as the answers you get back.

Step 2. You can focus the Get Smart Subject Brief on specific needs that are:

- Instructive (e.g., background on the history and effect of sanctions on a country in the conflict)
- Analytical (i.e., the dynamics or patterns in country-to-country relations)
- Comparative (e.g., summary of positive – and negative – denuclearization models and precedents)
- Prescriptive (e.g., recommendations for risk reduction)

Step 3. The final form of a brief may take shape in-house through a combination of desk research and

If you do not know how to ask the right question, you discover nothing.

–W. Edwards Deming

expert interviews or it may be outsourced to trusted researchers.

Step 4. Consider unconventional sources when developing these briefs. For example, you might collect and analyze a leader's Tweets on a given subject to identify patterns.

Keep in Mind

- Consider collating a list of highly trusted sources – online and in person. These might include think tanks, academic institutions, credible news sources, and individual experts.
- Do not exclude politically biased sources in conducting research. This will allow you to see all sides and to track competing narratives that you will need to address.