

Quick Start: Your First Decision Brief

Choose one current workplace decision. Use this guide to produce a short account of what you know, your realistic options, your next step, and when you will reconsider. You can begin before reading the full book or completing the workbook.

1. Choose a decision you can move forward

Pick a specific choice: whether to accept extra work, how to respond to a disputed account, or whether to expand a promising project. Avoid a broad goal such as “be a better leader.”

Write the decision in one sentence. Identify when it needs to be made and who has authority to make it. If someone else decides, your task may be to recommend an option or request clarification.

Use a decision with enough time for deliberate thought. Allow more time when the stakes or uncertainty warrant it. A worksheet does not replace required procedures or relevant expertise.

2. Open the decision brief and the closest example

Choose [reusable_sheets/decision_brief_fillable.pdf](#) to type answers, or print the one-page [reusable_sheets/decision_brief.pdf](#). You can also duplicate the Markdown sheet. Save a separate copy for each decision, then close and reopen it to check your entries. Keep answers brief and use a separate note for longer responses.

If your difficulty is...	Read this example
Competing commitments	The Overloaded Team: worked_examples/overloaded_team.pdf
A disputed account or accusation	A Disputed Decision: worked_examples/workplace_conflict.pdf
Promising but incomplete evidence	A Promising Pilot: worked_examples/incomplete_evidence.pdf

Each example contains a short scenario and a completed brief. All three are illustrative. Borrow the questions and reasoning habits; choose limits and actions appropriate to your own situation.

3. Define the decision and examine the situation

Complete Sections 1 and 2 of the brief. State the outcome you want and separate facts from assumptions. Record important unknowns, deadlines, resources, and responsibilities.

In **The Overloaded Team**, Maya's plan shows 64 available project hours and 84 hours of estimated demand after the new request. She can verify what the plan records, but the durations remain estimates. She does not assume the internal report can move without checking its users and next week's capacity.

For your decision, ask: “What can I point to as evidence?” If you cannot verify a claim, label it as an assumption or an open question. Do not fill a gap with confidence alone.

4. Compare options before choosing

Complete Section 3. List two or three realistic options and the main benefit and tradeoff of each. Include further investigation or waiting when useful, along with the cost of delay. Avoid making your preferred option the only reasonable-looking choice.

Maya considers deferring the new analysis, moving the internal report, and seeking a smaller scope with added capacity. Each addresses a different constraint. None makes the capacity conflict disappear without a tradeoff.

Choose, Act, and Review

5. Test the preferred option

Complete Section 4 using the three questions:

Test	Ask yourself
Right	Does this respect my principles and responsibilities to others?
Smart	Does the evidence support it, given the risks and constraints?
Sustainable	Can I support its demands and accept its likely consequences over time?

Give a reason for each answer. If an answer is no or uncertain, identify what must change or be checked before proceeding. Do not treat a favorable answer on one test as permission to ignore another.

Maya prefers moving the report, but only if its users can accommodate the delay, next week's workload fits, and the director approves. Her preferred option is a conditional recommendation, not a new commitment.

6. Name the next action and review trigger

Complete Sections 5 and 6. Write your decision or recommendation, its main reason, the first action, who must act, and by when. Name any approval needed before implementation.

Set both a review date and a specific change that would make you reconsider. Examples include a missing approval record, a revised workload estimate, or evidence that contradicts your original assumption.

Maya's first action is to check dependencies and present the options to the director. Until priorities are changed, the team continues its existing commitments. A forecast exceeding available capacity triggers another review.

7. Check that the brief is usable

Read it as if you were the person receiving the recommendation. Can that person tell what is being decided, what evidence supports it, what remains uncertain, and what happens next?

Replace vague instructions such as "communicate better" with an action someone can carry out. Keep estimates labeled. Record unresolved questions instead of implying that every answer is settled.

Your first brief is ready when it names a defensible next step and a review point. That next step may be a decision, a request for approval, or a specific investigation. You do not need certainty before recording your reasoning.

8. Return to the review sheet

At the review point, use [reusable_sheets/decision_review_fillable.pdf](#) for typed answers, [reusable_sheets/decision_review.pdf](#) for printing, or a copy of the Markdown sheet. Read the original brief before assessing what happened.

Compare expectations with evidence. Check which assumptions held up, whether you carried out the action as intended, and what was outside your control. Separate what you could reasonably know then from what you learned later. Record an interim assessment if the result is still developing.

Choose a specific adjustment and decide whether to close the review, continue, or revise the decision. A favorable outcome does not prove sound reasoning; an unfavorable outcome does not prove flawed reasoning.

Continue with the book and workbook

Use the book to understand the methods and the workbook to practice a difficulty your brief exposed. Start with the relevant topic: intelligence analysis for assumptions, uncertainty for missing evidence, conflict for a disputed account, or the personal decision framework for competing principles and priorities. You do not need to complete all 38 workbook drills before using the brief again.

Keep the brief and its review together with a date and descriptive name. Repeated use gives you a record of your reasoning and what you changed through experience.

Think clearly. Act wisely. Hold the line.