Make Your Point With SCQA

You know the work. Help someone else see the question that matters.

Use this when: You need a decision, a useful update, or a proposal someone can understand without joining every meeting.

Leave with: A short SCQA brief, with a clear ask and the evidence still in view.

Start here

1. Name the reader and the decision or understanding they need. Begin with context they can recognize.

2. Describe what changed, the question it raises, and your current answer. A complication can be an opportunity; it does not need manufactured drama.

3. Read both versions aloud. Keep the evidence and uncertainty beside your recommendation. Ask someone who disagrees whether the brief represents the situation fairly.

Assemble both versions on paper

Story first: write your Situation, Complication, Question, then Answer in that order.

Answer first: write your Answer, then Situation, Complication and Question.

In both versions, follow with the evidence, uncertainty, and what you need from the reader. Use a separate sheet for each version, read both aloud, and choose the order that helps this reader. The worksheet does not generate a brief automatically.

Who is this for?

Name what they already know, not only their job title.

S · What is already true?

Shared context. Keep it short and checkable.

C · What has changed?

A tension, obstacle, new opportunity, or consequence.

Q · What question does that raise?

One question your answer can actually address.

A · What is your current answer?

Your recommendation or explanation, in plain language.

What supports that answer?

Facts, sources, or observations. Separate estimates from evidence.

What is still uncertain?

What could change the recommendation?

What do you need from the reader, and when?

A decision, correction, help, or simply understanding.

How should the brief open?

Options: Story first / Answer first

A question worth staying with

What would someone who disagrees with me say I have left out?

The thinking behind it

Nic asks leaders to build shared language across different ways of seeing. A clear brief gives another person enough context to question your answer, not just approve it.

Read Stop Chasing Psychological Safety by Nic Payne.

Where this tool comes from

SCQA grows out of Barbara Minto's work on structured thinking and the Pyramid Principle. Her materials call the introduction the SCQ Framework: Situation, Complication, Question. The answer supplies the main point. This independent adaptation adds an explicit ask and a place for uncertainty; it is not an official Minto course.

Barbara Minto's original approach

Worked example

A community service has a four-week appointment wait. Evening slots may help, but staff cover is uncertain. The brief asks for a limited trial with a clear staffing condition—not a promise that longer opening hours will solve everything.

Who is this for?: Service director, who knows our current opening hours

S · What is already true?: People currently wait four weeks for an appointment.

C · What has changed?: Requests for evening slots have increased, but evening staffing is not yet confirmed.

Q · What question does that raise?: Should we trial one evening session each week?

A · What is your current answer?: Run a four-week trial only if staff volunteer for paid cover and daytime appointments remain available.

What supports that answer?: The booking team logged 18 requests for evening appointments last month. This is a small sample, not a demand forecast.

What is still uncertain?: We do not yet know how many people would attend, or whether the proposed cover is sustainable.

What do you need from the reader, and when?: Approve planning the trial by Friday, subject to staff agreement and a review after four weeks.

How should the brief open?: Story first

Clarity makes the reasoning easier to question. That is part of the point.

This is a paper worksheet. The interactive Lab provides the interactive controls and calculations.

Optional: Get Nic's notes.

Hope is rebellious.