

The summary is *negotiated*; the report is not

One mechanism of institutional communication — why a report's headline summary can be smoother than its body, using the IPCC's line-by-line summary approval as the clearest case.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How This Guide Works

This is part of **Incognati Civics**, applying the field-guide format to the way institutions communicate — press releases, official statements, guidance documents, corrections, embargoes — the packaging between a record and the public, examined the same way regardless of which institution or which side it favors. Each specimen goes deep on one mechanism, with primary documents, regulations, and nonpartisan scholarship listed in full on the references page.

INCOGNATI CIVICS — INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

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Executive Summary vs. the Caveats

Summa Non Totum

Governing precedent / case IPCC Summary for Policymakers approval process **Status** Recurring in major institutional reports

OBSERVED SPECIMEN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES OF LARGE REPORTS

*The IPCC's underlying scientific chapters are written and reviewed by scientists, but its **Summary for Policymakers** is approved line-by-line by government delegations, who negotiate wording — a documented, unusual process. More generally, an executive summary is written to be quotable, so it can soften uncertainty, drop scope conditions, and lead with the strongest line, while the body carries the confidence levels and limitations. The summary is where an institution decides what you remember; the body is what it actually found.*

THE HOOK

Almost everyone reads only the summary, so its framing becomes the report.

THE MECHANISM

Summaries are drafted for impact and, in some cases, negotiated; the body carries the caveats, confidence levels, and dissents that a summary can smooth over.

Field mark: when a report is quoted, read past the executive summary into the body — the caveats, confidence levels, and scope conditions the summary smooths are where the real finding lives.

See the full references page for complete citations.

References

every source checkable at the link provided; DOIs given where the source has one

PRIMARY SOURCE · IPCC

IPCC, “Procedures” — approval of the Summary for Policymakers line by line by member governments.

<https://www.ipcc.ch/about/procedures/>

Documents the unusual line-by-line government approval of the SPM versus the scientist-authored underlying report.

REFERENCE

GAO / institutional reporting standards on executive summaries reflecting the full report.

<https://www.gao.gov/>

Nonpartisan practice that summaries should faithfully represent a report's findings and limitations.

Reading an Executive Summary: A Gut Check

four questions before the summary becomes the whole report in your memory

1 Read the body

The summary is the sales pitch; the body is the finding.

2 Find the confidence levels

Bodies state uncertainty the summary often drops.

3 Ask who wrote it

Some summaries are negotiated; the science chapters are not.

4 Note the scope

Summaries can generalize past the conditions the study covered.

INCOGNATI CIVICS

The Series Continues

This is Specimen No. 5 of the Institutional Communications section within Incognati Civics. The full queue of twelve specimens is listed on the cover. This section joins Elections, Federal Laws, and Official Data Reporting within Civics, with local government planned beyond it. The Incognati Atlas catalogs the underlying patterns across all of it.