The first section is an annotated list of recent policy texts. Following this are references to materials referred to in this review. Not all of these sources will have been explicitly discussed.

The Last Decade of Texts
Policy texts are often about understanding policy, rather that about doing policy work. Nevertheless, a practitioner can profit from selective use of policy texts. In recent years a number of new, or substantially revised texts have appeared. The comments below are directed to practising analysts who want to improve the quality of their output.

A slim guide (60 pages) that provides suggestions to help analysts work through a "prototypical" analysis problem. Useful appendix on types of government interventions.

Bridgman, Peter and Davis, Glyn. (1998) *Australian Policy Handbook*, Allan and Unwin, St Leonards, NSW.
Designed as a practical guide, this short book is organised around stages in a policy cycle. Numerous side-bars aid identification of key points. The tone is factual (even where the topic is usually subject to more debate) and Australian-focused. A good starter text.

This text looks at the way public policies are made and unmade (p.1). Considine aims at more than informing his reader, however. He outlines "four simple guidelines" of a "critical approach", which if successfully applied will lead to "compelling" explanations that are "part science and part interpretive craft" (p.18). These guidelines are: the activities or phenomenon must be clearly defined; the means for gathering evidence should be explained; the criteria for judgement ought to be transparent and the specific episodes and methods should embrace larger theories

Dunn features a number of management science techniques and an emphasis on "problem structuring" but does not serve as a "how-to-manual". One of the few sources that has extensive coverage of problem structuring methods. Additional emphasis on policy advice communication and working in political context. Contains an extended section on policy argumentation and the analysis of policy arguments. A number of economic and statistical techniques are illustrated as is the use of computing in analysis.

Heineman, et al (1997) is an original contribution. While it has an explicitly American focus (in contrast to many American authors’ implicit American focus), it also has a strong emphasis on the ethical dimensions of policy. The authors’ intention is to assist “the analyst to become more sensitive to the salient factors that influence the way he or she conceives and executes task” (p.1). There are chapters on rationality and decision-making; cultural setting of policy analysis; ethics and policy analysis; democracy and the fragmentation of consensus; policy analysis and the political arena; policy devolution and policy analysis; and policy analysis and the judicial process.


This book focuses on the stages of the policy process and how to understand the influences affecting the process. Like the study of policy content or outputs, a study of process develops knowledge of policy, not knowledge in policy.


A good introductory text, which takes a deeper look at the policy cycle, both by focusing on actors, institutions and instruments and through in-depth consideration of the “sub-stages” in agenda-setting, policy formation, decision making, implementation and evaluation. Compact and extensively referenced.


These authors propose that analysts should downplay a reliance on economic methods, “drawing more heavily on other social sciences and linking advice more closely to public discourse” (p.1). The method they suggest is “to structure policy choice around matrices in which alternatives are assessed in terms of ethical criteria, affected parties, or periods of time” (p.1). These matrices provide a vehicle for exploring trade-offs in policy choices - which clearly is of interest to the decision-maker. For example, the matrices can be used to assess systematically the levels of support and opposition for a policy option held by different stakeholder groups. Focus is on expertise based on specific analytic tasks, and “omits more intuitive skills such as that of “crafting problems” (p.12). Matrices are explored for assessing criteria (ethical considerations concerning what is good for individuals in general or for society or what is morally right); affected parties (usually groups that may be affected differently by a policy) and time periods (from present to remote future).


This text achieves its importance by bringing to life the shaping influences on public policy theory and practice form the fields of political science, public administration, political theory, sociology, psychology, economics and management. There are over 1400 references in the bibliography. In the text, these are often organised into “key texts” on a given topic, or featured in boxes to illustrate topics. The book is not a “how-to” but will repay the reflective practitioner. Explicitly eschewing a “staged” organisation of the policy process, Parsons divides the book into four sections, and uses extensive cross referencing, so that the reader can go between sections, following links (the index, unfortunately, is inadequate for such an approach). The sections are meta-analysis (the analysis of analysis), meso-analysis (the analysis of problem definition, agenda-setting and the formation of policy), decision-analysis (analysis of the decision-making process and policy analysis for decision making), and delivery analysis (the analysis of implementation, evaluation, change and impact).


This book presents, in the words of one reviewer “a true smorgasbord of methods under each of the usual steps in conducting a policy analysis... . [but] an absence of any focus on analytical core concepts... .” This suggests a potential usefulness to analysts who need to freshen their approaches and who wish to design more finely-tuned analyses.


Welmer and Vining is the closest to a ‘practice hand-book’ among the texts reviewed. It is clearly targeted to the graduate student or policy analyst without extensive experience (but who might be working at any level of government). It opens with a very good example of a policy analyst without extensive experience (but who might be working at any level of government). It contains a thorough review of market and government failures and reviews generic policy alternatives for “freeing, facilitating, and simulating markets”; using taxes and subsidies to alter incentives; establishing rules; supplying goods through non-market mechanisms; and providing insurance and cushions.

References
Note: Most of the references included below are cited in the review. A few references are included which have not been directly reviewed by the review author, but are judged to be worth including. In some cases, the sources were identified in other materials, and in some cases by contacts of the author.


Wolf, Amanda (1998) "The roles and value orientations of policy professionals in New Zealand", Victoria University of Wellington..