Technical Communication: Introduction to Memoranda

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Let’s revisit that idea of “audiences”
Remember the definition & implications of “interest”

Interest = participation in advantage and responsibility.

- can be dependent on the potential *benefit* or *harm* to the individual
- can be dependent on an individual’s *responsibility* for it
- can also be dependent on an individual’s intended *use* for it
Interested audiences are *stakeholders*.

stakeholder = anyone and everyone who has something at stake in your project

Audiences of technical writing cannot ask immediate questions, but still have something at stake.
Consider the memorandum: a report, usually internal to the company, that provides a formal record of your work and serves as the building block for other types of reports; the memorandum is one genre of writing.

(Johnson-Sheehan, 2005; Woolever, 2005)
You write a memo for your supervisor.

But who might read it?
Who may be the memo’s stakeholders?
Remember—each reader will have a different stake in your document

A project engineer, a lawyer, and an accountant are unlikely to read a report for the same purpose.

Likewise, the project engineer, lawyer, and accountant each know—and don’t know—different things.

So what do you do?
Let’s detour to consider the high school essay

essay = another genre of writing

Image Source: [http://assets.inarkansas.com/77867/writing-essay-typing-working-on-computer.jpg](http://assets.inarkansas.com/77867/writing-essay-typing-working-on-computer.jpg)
Genres are the conventions and expectations people have for different types of communication.
What type of organization is expected in a conventional high school essay?
A conventional high school essay has

- An introduction
- A body
  - Supporting paragraph 1
  - Supporting paragraph 2
  - Supporting paragraph 3
- A conclusion
One way a memo differs from an essay is in its organization:

1. Introduction
2. Body
3. Conclusion

(essay)

1. Introduction
2. Conclusion
3. Body

(memo)
In technical memos, we use three sections:

- Foreword
- Summary
- Discussion

\{ \text{foreword + summary} = \text{overview of entire memo} \}
These three sections provide different types of information, at varying degrees of detail, for different stakeholders.
The foreword establishes context and states

- The problem, which is the subject of the report
- Your job (task) with regard to that problem
- The purpose of the report
The summary presents

• The main actions you took
• The main findings of your project
• The implications of your findings
• Any recommendations you have
The discussion

- Re-establishes the context
- Gives all the important details
- Gives supporting proofs and arguments

The discussion is for specialist readers.
So a memo consists of

- Overview
- Foreword
- Summary
- Discussion
The foreword states the problem, your job, and the report’s purpose using three statements

- Problem statement
- Task statement
  - criteria
  - constraints
- Purpose statement
Criterion =
a standard on which a judgment or decision may be based

((Webster’s 9th New Collegiate Dictionary)
So the provided criteria tell you what you need to do to get the job done

• “Design a computer game that can be played by someone who cannot read.”

• “Design a bicycle frame that can safely support a rider who weighs 250 pounds.”

• “Design a circuit that can light a bulb using human-generated power.”
Constraint = a constraining condition, agency, or force

(Webster’s 9th New Collegiate Dictionary)
So a constraint is a limit you are working under or within:

- “You have eight weeks to produce a working prototype of the computer game.”
- “You must only use the materials provided by our supplier in your bicycle frame’s design.”
- “Since this design is intended to aid third-world countries, your budget for the human-powered generator and circuit is only $100.”
The foreword, then, provides context by answering three questions

• What’s the trouble?
• What am I supposed to do about it?
• What’s this report for?
The summary answers four questions

• What actions did I take?
• What were the findings or results of these actions?
• What do they mean?
• What, if anything, should be done?
Another way a memo differs from an essay is in its format.

A memo has a heading containing:

- The names and titles of those receiving it
- The name(s) and title(s) of the writer(s)
- A detailed subject line
- The date
To: Paul Conn  
Manager, Anderson Hardware Division

From: Alberta Mack  
Project Team Leader, Draper Software Division

Subject: Proposed restructuring of New Development project teams

Date: January 11, 2017
To: Paul Conn  
Manager, Anderson Hardware Division  
Wolverine Computing

From: Alberta Mack  
Project Team Leader, Draper Software Division  
Wolverine Computing

Subject: Proposed restructuring of New Development project teams

Date: January 11, 2017

Dist: Marty McFly, Software Division Manager, Wolverine Computing
Memoranda (or memos), then

- Are often written for a variety of stakeholders (a mixed audience)
- Have overviews made up of forewords and summaries
- Use headings for each section and subsection
Remember—the three main elements of memos are

- A heading
- An overview
  - Forewords
  - Summaries
- A discussion (sometimes called “Details”) with subsections
It is “foreword”

• not “forward” (wrong word)
• not “foreward” (not even a word)
A little more detail

Foreword
• Problem statement (often two sentences)
• Task
  • any criteria
  • any constraints
• Purpose statement (of document, not of project)

Summary
• Actions taken
• Findings
• Implications
• Conclusions
• Recommendations (if any)

Discussion
So what is a memo?

Header

Overview

- Foreword
  - Problem statement (often two sentences)
  - Task statement (your task or job, with any criteria and/or constraints)
  - Purpose statement (of document, not of project)

- Summary
  - Actions taken
  - Findings
  - Implications
  - Conclusions
  - Recommendations (if any)

Discussion (Details)
References & Acknowledgement


*The majority of the contents from these slides came from Dr. Erik Hildinger’s previous slides for the E100-250 course.*