

MEMORANDUM

TO: My Students
FROM: K. E. Holbert
DATE: August 3, 2006
SUBJECT: How to write a technical memorandum

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide instructions on the preparation of a technical memorandum. Given below are the proper format and structure. The most important issue to address is, of course, the knowledge content of such a document.

The memorandum format is straightforward. Center the title at the top of the page, and label it simply "MEMORANDUM" using all uppercase letters as shown above. After skipping a couple of lines, on the left side of the page list the recipient(s) (TO), the author name(s) (FROM), the date, and a short phrase providing a unique reference for this memo (e.g., a contract number). Occasionally, an intermediate label (THROUGH) appears between TO and FROM listing the individual(s) who must sign-off on the memo before sending it to the recipient (e.g., your boss when you are writing a memo to your boss's boss). Print the memorandum, which is often single-spaced, with the first page on company letterhead to make it official. It is accepted practice that the author initials the document to verify that he/she not only wrote it, but also read the final printed version and checked its accuracy.

A short memorandum contains three main sections: (1) an introduction, (2) the body of the memo, and (3) the summary or conclusions. The most important parts of the memo are the introduction and summary since many reviewers (including your bosses) will read only these two sections---if a fact is important, make sure to present it in one, if not both, of these parts of the memo. The location of both the introduction and summary sections should be visually apparent at first glance. There are two easy ways to accomplish this: (1) label the sections as *Introduction* and *Conclusions*, or (2) insert an extra line between the body and the specific section (e.g., as demonstrated in this memorandum). A long memo will generally take the first approach, and in fact, if the memo is several pages long, there may be several subdivisions of the main body with appropriate section labels, and, of course, pagination. Labeling sections in any document aids the reader in understanding the main idea(s) being presented within. As in any writing task, the English usage should be accurate and spelling should be checked---avoid nonstandard abbreviations.

The contents within the body of the memo should fully explain the details regarding the subject at hand. As a rule, the introduction should tell the reader what you are going to tell him; the body should detail those things as a minimum that you need to tell her; and lastly, the conclusion section should tell the reader what you have just told him. The introduction includes a statement of the subject and some background to set the stage. The introduction should contain a one-sentence statement detailing the purpose of the document. Highlight the primary details in a clear, concise manner within the main body; this may include the significant findings, alternatives considered, and results that clearly support the conclusions. It is perfectly allowable to have equations, tables and figures in a memo, and even references as necessary.

With the proliferation of Microsoft Word, it is worthwhile to learn how to use features such as defining *styles* for body text, equations, captions, references and headings (with automatic section numbering). Along with automatic numbering, the *endnotes* feature allows placing references at the end of the document; and the *cross-reference* feature provides for repeating a reference (number) throughout the memo. The insert *caption* feature creates titles and numbers for both figures and tables. By using the caption feature, the figure or table number can be embedded in the document text using the cross-reference feature thereby preventing errors in the text and preventing the need to renumber manually when a new figure or table is inserted.

The conclusions section wraps things up. Summarize the primary results and make any recommendations, if applicable. The conclusions should be brief and to the point. Techniques to highlight an important point include the use of italics or underlining. To ensure your job security, remember: *your boss will be evaluating your memos on a regular basis for the rest of your employment.*