

ENGL 379: technical writing
fall 2007
memorandum format

heading

The heading of memorandums is designed to allow a reader to understand what he or she is looking at, and decide quickly whether he or she should read it. The heading has four or five parts, appearing in this order. The "subject line" should be brief, but clear.

To:

From:

Subject:

Date:

cc:

purpose

Because many messages cross a reader's desk (or computer screen) daily, the first thing she is likely to ask upon seeing one is "Should I read this?" The "purpose" section answers that question. A very direct opening like "The purpose of this memo is to ..." is perfectly acceptable. It may be addressed to me.

summary

The summary is a brief recounting of the entire memo, including discussion/background, conclusions, and recommendation. Its placement as the second section allows a reader who does not need to know the details to stop reading.

background/discussion

The discussion/background describes the method by which the conclusion was reached. This section provides details of the subject and the justification for the conclusion. In almost all cases this is the longest section of the memo -- (eg., five paragraphs of an eight-paragraph memo, or two pages of a three-page memo). It is directed to those who need to know details -- laboratory assistants and clerical staff, for instance.

In the case of a progress report, this section will include estimated costs, possible personnel, available facilities and supplies. It may take a narrative form.

conclusion/action

This makes some sort of conclusion from the issues and problems described in the "Background/Discussion" section. It also describes where you intend to go from here.
