

MEMO

TO: [Readers' names and job titles]

FROM: [Your name and job title; Group #]

DATE: [Current date]

RE: [What the memo is about, highlighted in some way]

Introduction

A distinguishing characteristic of a policy memo is that a summary of the document's conclusion(s) and recommendation(s) is placed at the beginning of the memo. Open the memo by explaining the purpose of your memo, summarizing the problem or situation about which you are writing, and by providing a very brief summary of the conclusions/recommendations you have reached during your analysis. The rest of the memo is designed to support the conclusions or recommendations you present.

Issue for analysis

Here is where you provide the reader with your full definition (i.e., your problem statement). You should answer the question "What's wrong?"

Background

Here you should answer the questions, "How did we get into our current predicament?" and "What is there about the history of our issue that might constrain the range or affect the nature or quality of our response?" Insights from research — historical, biological, environmental, toxicological, psychological, anthropological, sociological, criminological, demographic, economic, whatever — should get a respectful "lessons-learned" review. Key traditions or antagonisms or widespread misconceptions should be mentioned, and controlling laws or judicial precedents should be cited. Telling your issue's story chronologically is usually the best approach.

Current situation

Here, in a longer section, you should answer state-of-play questions. "What's happening now?" "Who's involved?" "What demands are being made?" "What responses are being elicited?" "What are the areas of agreement?" "What are the various players missing or refusing to admit or pretending not to see?" "What's likely to happen next?" "What's the best and the worst we can expect if we do nothing but watch?"

Problems and solutions [or, simply, Solutions]

List the problems logically and discuss candidate solutions for each, pointing out advantages and

disadvantages. When analyzing some issues, a “problems-and-solutions” section makes less sense than simply a “solutions” section. There may be just one problem, and it may be perfectly obvious. Or there may be a collection of problems that must be solved together.

Recommendation [or Recommendations]

Here you recommend a strategy or a selection of strategies to resolve the problem, being careful to alert your reader to the risks and inadequacies of each option and the conditions under which your own suggested ordering would likely change. The tone of this section should be objective. Your recommendations should reflect seasoned judgment, not issue commitment. You’re an analyst, not an attorney, not a salesperson, not an editorialist, not even — or not yet — a policy maker. It is your obligation to illuminate, not to shade.

References

List your references.