

Mechanical Engineering Memorandum

To: Mechanical Engineering Students
From: Mechanical Engineering Faculty
Date: August 27, 2002
Subject: Memo Writing Procedures
CC: Professor Maureen Mathison, Mara Berkland, Communication Consultants
Attachments: 2

Memos are the primary form of written communication in the Mechanical Engineering (ME) program. Memos are routinely used in engineering courses for two reasons: to prepare you for the workplace, where you must routinely inform colleagues of the progress of your work, and to provide a concise, effective way to communicate with your instructors about class assignments.

The purpose of this memo is twofold: 1) to provide accepted guidelines for writing memos and 2) to present a model of a well-written memo that you can use when writing your own memos. These guidelines provide a consistent way to document your work in ME classes, but these guidelines can also be adapted to the workplace after you graduate. The following guidelines will be discussed in this memo:

- What a memo should look like
- What a memo should include
- Why you are writing the memo
- How you will be graded

What a memo should look like

The memo is a brief communication (1-2 pages, single-spaced, double-spacing between paragraphs, each paragraph is flush left, 12-point font for body and 10-point font for footer, 1-inch margins, page numbers, plus attachments). You are writing to busy people who want to access information quickly. You must economize your ideas and present them as concisely as possible. Attachment 1 is a “style sheet” that shows you what a basic memo should look like for an ME class.

What the memo should include

Always look at the memo as a **three-part communication**:

1. The main point and a preview (this includes the heading and the first one or two paragraphs)
 - The **heading** (To, From, Date, Subject, CC, Attachments) provides a quick summary of who is involved, why the memo is being written, and a date.
 - The first one or two paragraphs include a brief summary of needed **background**, a sentence that clearly states the **purpose of the memo**, and a **preview** of what will be discussed.
2. The discussion of the topics
 - The preview lists the main topic(s) of your memo. You will write one or more paragraphs about each topic. (Notice that this memo preview three topics. Each topic is signaled by a heading, and then each topic is briefly discussed in a few paragraphs).
3. A review of what has been said

- The final paragraph should remind the reader of what is important. This paragraph can restate the main ideas or benefits, restate action that must be taken, or include recommendations for future actions. Include a contact number or e-mail address so that the reader can easily follow-up with you.

Note: Attachments are additional. In general, for ME students, attachments will include calculations and/or visuals. Attachments are referred to in the memo and must be properly labeled so that the reader clearly understands why the information is there.

To whom you are writing the memo and why

For ME students, the purpose of a memo is generally to inform instructors and members of project teams who are to be informed of the progress of a class assignment and/or team project. Before you begin writing, you must decide **who** you are writing to and **why**.

First, **decide who your readers are**. They fall into two groups, a **primary audience** and a **secondary audience**. The primary audience includes the person(s) listed on the "To:" line. The primary audience is your most important audience and usually needs information for decision-making purposes. Remember, however, that some critical primary audiences are not always listed. Examples of primary audiences include co-workers, senior managers, customer support, marketing, patent officials, regulatory authorities. Memos can always be distributed to the **secondary audience**, who might use the information in a variety of ways. You send the memo to these people out of courtesy. Usually, this audience is defined in the "CC:" line.

Next, **decide why you are writing the memo**. Your reader should know exactly why he or she is reading the memo. The most difficult sentence to write in a memo is a **statement of your purpose**. Ask yourself, "Why am I writing this memo?" Here are some common key phrases that express the purpose of a memo: You are transmitting information, submitting a request, making an announcement, presenting a proposed idea for approval, and so on.

How you will be graded

This memo outlines the basics of how a memo should be written. However, since memos will vary in content, you are responsible for including information in the memo that is **appropriate** to the assignment and **accurate** in its technical information. Attachment 2 provides a "quick reference" of what your instructors (and future managers) expect in a memo. First and foremost, your grades on a written project will reflect the appropriateness and accuracy of your information, but your grade will also reflect your adherence to the requirements of a memo (see Attachment 2).

Summary

This memo provides you with the basics of writing memos in your classes and later in the workplace. Remember to use this memo as a general model for writing your own memos, but also remember that requirements for the content of memos will vary from class to class. When in doubt, ask your instructor for help and clarification.