Shippensburg University-Department of Geography & Earth Science
Memorandum

To: Geography 230 Students
From: Kurt Fuellhart
Subject: An introduction to memo-writing
Date: Use the date the memo is due

INTRODUCTION
The information that follows will introduce you to the process of writing memos. You will find that the task of writing a memorandum is not a difficult one if you keep these tools for good memo-writing in mind and within reach. You should use this document as an example of memo form and style, and your work will, in part, be evaluated on the extent to which you follow these guidelines. By doing so, your memo will be clear, concise, and effectively communicate the required information to your reader.

IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEMOS AND ESSAYS
Before you begin to write your first memo for this class, you must understand the differences between writing memos and writing essays. Memos are frequently used in business and professional settings where the goal is to communicate a series of facts, ideas, and findings—often supported by data—effectively and concisely. One of the distinctions is that you do not normally put detailed / complicated tables and graphs in the body of your memo. Instead you use the body of the memo to describe, analyze, and assess the importance of the information you are writing about. The details—tables, graphs, charts, etc. are included as “Attachments” at the end of the memo. These attachments are always referred to in the text so your reader knows to look for them. For example here, Attachment 1 provides details on some differences between a memo and an essay (this is your cue to now flip to the end of the memo to see Attachment 1).

As the table in Attachment 1 makes clear, a memo is very unlike the essays you write for other classes, and it is important that you appreciate the difference in style. In short, a memo exists for a very specific purpose: to convey information to a colleague, an associate, your boss or a client.

MEMO FORM AND STYLE
Your memo will be approximately five single-spaced pages, typed in a conservative font (Times New Roman or another similar serif font is best). Use a font size between 10 and 12 points. While your text will be single-spaced, double-space between paragraphs. Always include:

- Topical headings/subheadings to divide your work;
- Page numbers—ALL pages should be numbered … including your attachments and bibliography on the bottom right;
- In-text citations and citations on all of your attachments using the author-date format;
- A bibliography . . . (note: the bibliography pages does not count towards your five pages);
- Attachments (maps, tables etc.) that should each appear as separate pages—each clearly titled—at the end of the document (and again, these do not count toward your five-page limit).

In your introductory section (and you should always have one), address your reader and let them know very clearly why you’re writing the memo. You can and should speak to the person directly, as though you were having a discussion, because that is the memo’s purpose.

Creating Headings & Subheadings for Organization
An intro is a must. What is your memo about, how did you research it, and what did you find? All summed in a few sentences!

Come up with a heading scheme (1st level, 2nd level, etc.) to organize your work. This is a first-level heading.

Your attachments should be introduced in order. Always mention each attachment in the text.

For each attachment, describe the key points, but don’t recite the entire thing. Pull out the meaning—cite key figures or ideas.

An occasional bulleted list (like this) is permissible. Such lists should be short (5 or 6 bullets) and only used when you judge that they are the most effective way to say something. If you require more room, use an attachment.

2nd level headings. In this case, the format of the heading is fine, but never leave a heading dangling in space like this. Move it to the next page if you need to. Also: don’t have a first level heading directly followed by a second level heading without text in between. You need at least one sentence between them to introduce what is to follow.
Use subheadings to divide the sections of your memo, and try to make them explanatory. Think of each one as a headline. Instead of just using the heading "Airline Deregulation" for example, you might write, "Airline Deregulation Sets the Stage for Lower Fares." And then go on and explain why. This lets your reader anticipate the main point of the section. Use a system of subheadings that makes visual sense and be consistent in your use of the system that you devise. For example, in this memo, my first level headings are ALL CAPS, bold, and underlined. My second level headings are just bold. My third level headings are just italicized.

**Page Numbers Help your Reader Navigate**

These should appear on each and every page, including your attachments, bibliography and any other material that you use. They should be in the same font as the rest of the memo (though you can reduce their size if you wish). The page numbers should be consecutive – that is, start at one and keep going. Do not start over when you get to your bibliography or attachments.

**Citations are Required**

You must cite the sources of information that you use. Failure to properly cite your sources is a good way to reduce your grade to a zero. You should be proud of the research you have done and the materials you have gathered – show it off! The “Citing your Sources” section of the course web page goes into much more detail on this, but the bottom line is that each general idea or specific piece of information that you take from another source must be cited. You should have at least one citation per paragraph if you are doing your job right. Hopefully you will have more than that, since multiple sources that agree – or in some cases conflict—make your story more compelling.

You will use citations in three places. The first is when you cite a general idea. For example I might say: some research has reported that the deregulation of the airline industry has reduced overall fares for consumers, but the geographic nature of these changes has varied (Morrison and Winston 1995; Goetz and Sutton 1997). To cite the idea I have simply listed the author(s) and the date. If you have used more than one author, list them all starting with the earliest publication date and inserting a semi-colon between each author(s).

The second place you will use citations is when you use quotes. Use quotes very sparingly, as your job is to gather information from a variety of sources and analyze it – not to simply parrot what others have said. If you need to use a quote you would cite it as follows: “On average, deregulation has led to fares 22 percent lower than they would have been had regulation continued” (Morrison and Winston 1995, 13).

Finally you will use citations on each of your attachments. That is, on each attachment, below the table, map, graph, etc. you will list the sources that helped you create the item. Since your items may have required multiple sources of information, list them all.

**Bibliography**

Your bibliography for your final project should be in the format I have provided you on the web site. Be sure you have formatted each type of source correctly. Note that if you can’t find a specific date for a web-source, use the current year. All sources of information, whether they are used in the body of your memo or in the attachments, must be listed in your bibliography. Do not include the annotations from your annotated bibliography.

**More Information on the Use of Attachments**

As we have discussed, memos often include attachments – and the memo that you will write for this class will have several. Because your attachments form the backbone of your work, we need to clarify a few things.

Your attachments should be named simply “Attachment 1: Airfares in the USA”, “Attachment 2: Airfares in Europe”, etc. and should be added at the end of your memo in the order in which you introduce them in the text. As you write your memo, make sure that you refer to each attachment in the body of the memo and briefly summarize
the attachment in the text. For example, you might say something like: “As Attachment 3 indicates, the GDP of the United States has risen in recent years both in constant and nominal dollar terms.” Then go on to cite specific figures and analyze further. What you are looking to do is to make the key points, trends, and “stories” that your attachments tell more accessible to your reader.

You will have gone through the work of collecting and presenting your data as attachments, so make sure you direct the reader to them in the appropriate place in your memo!! You can do this by saying, for example, "As the map in Attachment 6 confirms..." or "We have attached two tables (Attachments 5 & 6) in order to provide you with an idea of..." Don’t forget to cite the sources of any data tables, maps, charts, etc.

Carefully completed attachments can be an excellent way of helping your readers to understand your ideas. Don't skimp here.

Attachments: Formatting

First – and please read this carefully – you may not simply print off tables, graphs, maps, etc. from outside sources and paste them into your project. That is unacceptable you and you will receive a failing grade. While you may use such information as a base for your attachment (for example, a map that a company publishes), you must add significant value and content to that map so that it fits the story you are telling.

Attachments: Tables

You should design your tables so that they are easy read. It is not hard to construct tables in most word processing programs or spreadsheet programs (such as Microsoft Excel). Avoid too many "bells and whistles" - such as color and shading. Usually, simple black and white tables, with effective uses of borders and fonts look neater when printed and are easier to read. All tables must have a title (e.g., Attachment 3) and all sources must be listed. Many people the use the ARIAL font in tables for easier reading. That is what I have done in Attachment 1.

Attachments: Figures and Graphs

Like tables, figures and graphs should be designed so that they convey the information you are trying to present in a clear and effective manner. Again, unless you have a good quality color printer, black and white figures and graphs will often look the best. In any case, use your colors and symbols wisely and in ways that make sense. All axes should be labeled and the relevant units indicated. In most cases, simpler is better. Just because Excel and other programs allow you to do all kinds of fancy things doesn't necessarily mean that those things are any good. Remember to put a title on all of your figures (e.g, Attachment X) and to list all of the sources of information you used to create your figure. Making good figures and graphs takes time – be prepared to spend that time on Excel or whatever other program you use to insure your material is effective. See Attachment 2 (this is your cue to go to the back of this memo), Unemployment in Pennsylvania, for an example of a graph.

Attachments: Maps

A good map includes as many details as necessary to perform the function for which it was produced -- but not too much extraneous material. You will have to make many design choices to ensure that your map has all of the required information, but that it is not too "cluttered" and difficult to read. Maps will frequently have multiple sources of information that go into their construction. Remember to list them all

Notice what We Just Did

At the beginning of this major section “Memo Form and Style” I presented you with a bulleted list of important subjects. Following that list, we then went through sub-sections (denoted by sub headings) for each of those topics. The point is that you should try to style your memo so that the sequence of the discussion, and therefore the analysis you are presenting, is easy to follow and is evident to your reader.
THE ORDER OF THINGS

When you have completed your work you will need to put it together into one coherent project. A critical formatting guideline is that I should never be able to tell where one person’s work stops and another starts – either because you have different fonts, font sizes, etc. (a sure way to fail), a lack of page numbers on all pages, or because the style of writing changes drastically. Your team will need to get the project done in time not only to put it together physically, but also to carefully proofread it for form and style. You should put your final project together as follows:

1. The main body of the memo
2. Attachments, each on their own page, in the order introduced in the text, labeled with a title at top and page numbers
3. The bibliography
4. Put your memo together with a staple – NEVER, EVER waste money on fancy covers

SUMMARY

Every memo you write should have a short summary or conclusion. In this section, in no more than 5 or 6 sentences, you should boil the key point(s) of your memo down to a brief statement that summarizes what you found and why it is important. Memo-writing will be a new activity, and therefore a challenge, for many of you. If you use your resources wisely, however, it will be an exciting challenge, not an overwhelming one. Consult this guide frequently as you work, and make sure that you consult the grading criteria. In addition, you are welcome to visit me during office hours and by appointment. Good luck.

Acknowledgments:
I would like to thank Dr. Amy Glasmeier, Professor and Chair of the Department of Urban Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for sharing her ideas on Economic Geography projects.
### Attachment 1: Differences between a Memo and an Essay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIFFERENCE IN:</th>
<th>MEMO</th>
<th>ESSAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>A particular person / group</td>
<td>Often ambiguous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Intro., data, analysis, summary:</td>
<td>Intro., thesis, argument, conclusion:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prove information</td>
<td>Prove a point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>List-like, straightforward, goal oriented</td>
<td>More broad and abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body of writing</td>
<td>Short connected discussions followed by a</td>
<td>Increasing detail followed by conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>project</td>
<td>summary.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitions</td>
<td>Direct, straightforward language.</td>
<td>Link ideas of previous paragraph with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subheadings serve as transitions.</td>
<td>next paragraph’s central point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachments</td>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>Usually not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:
Society for the Differences between Memos and Essays (2012)

Title should be Attachment # followed by a brief descriptive title. Arial font is OK in tables.

If you have more than one source for an attachment, list them line by line beginning with earliest publication date.
Again, Arial is ok for graphs. As above, make sure your graph is titled, labeled, and designed to be as simple as possible. As always, a source is required. Make sure to choose the right type of chart for the data that you have. In this case, the data are a simple time series, for which a line chart works best.

Source:


Compile your project in the correct order and secure with a staple. There should be no reports covers or additional title pages used. The first page of your memo is the first page I should see.