

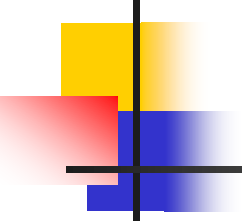
Memos, letters, short informal
reports, progress report, and
e-mail





Introduction

- Memos and letters are brief and relatively informal documents, yet many technical professionals spend more time writing these familiar forms, in hard copy or as e-mail, than they spend on any other communication task.
- Both memo and letters may become important parts of a project record.
- They may serve as the basis for important decisions, with effects as significant as those of a large proposals or articles published in the best journals.

- 
-
- The structure of both memos and letters is flexible enough to be useful for a wide variety of purposes, including proposals, requests for information, trip reports, complaints, inquiries, records of telephone conversations, or calls for meetings.
 - The memos or short informal reports is a one- to four-page document, usually single spaced and usually written to someone within writer's own company or organization.



The structure of memos and short reports

- They share common structure: easy to read and short.
- Forward: the statement of the problem
- Summary: the main results and other important information a manager needs to know
- All of the reports move from general to particular through the report.



The functions of memos and short reports

- The view of reports and memos stresses their persuasive nature.
- The writers provide support for current readers. They are also providing crucial documentation for future readers.
- Progress reports are written before the entire project is completed.
- Short reports can serve a wide variety of functions: complementary, request.

- Downloaded from <http://www.sagepub.com> at NANYANG TECH UNIV LIBRARY on June 11, 2015

To: name of reader, job title
 reader's department
 reader's organization
 address of reader's company

From: name of writer, job title
 writer's department
 writer's organization
 address of writer's organization



Formatting –cont.

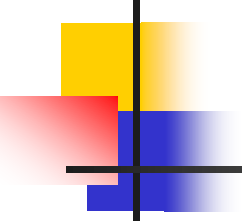
Subject: Title of report

Date: Date

Dist: distribution list of other
people receiving the report

Encl. : Enclosures

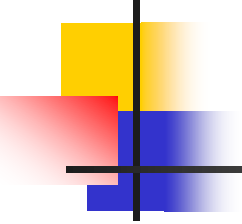
Ref: References

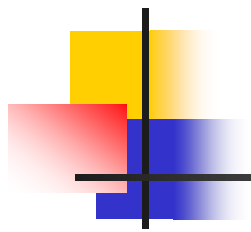
- 
-
- Often, memos and informal reports are written on company letterhead, special company stationery that has the company's name, address and phone number already printed.
 - If the memo or report is written on letterhead, then it is not repeated in the *To*, *From*, or *Distribution* items



The difference between memos and letters

- The memo form is used for communicating within an organization, never for an outside audience.
- The letter is used for communicating outside an organization.
- The feasibility report prepared for exclusive use within a company will be accompanied by a memo of transmittal, and a report prepared for a client will be covered by a letter.

- 
-
- In e-mail communication, no distinction is made between memo and letter or between files that will be transmitted to the next office and files that will be transmitted across the country or around the world.
 - Gone are the social signals and organizational images communicated through letterhead.



Reaching your audience

- You must address the information needs of your recipient.
- In your search for a persuasive strategy, consider what your reader already knows about the situation you are addressing.
- Ask yourself how this reader is likely to react to what you are saying.



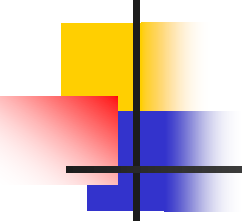
Brevity and focus

- Though memos and letters are frequently many pages or screens long, it is recommended to use these correspondence forms for brief accounts of single issues, with a goal of one-subject, one-page for each document.
- The subject should be specified in the subject line, and the content should relate to the stated subject.
- For two subjects, write two documents.



Design for emphasis

- For hard copy memos and letters, visual presentation is crucially important: memos look like memos; letters look like letters.
- However faithfulness to outward appearance is not enough to ensure effective communication.
- Though your memo or letter may be brief, do not assume that every word will be read with interest and rapt attention.

- 
-
- Ask your self how you can best design your page for a reader who may not read straight through or who may spend only a minute or so skimming what you have written.
 - Make judicious use of bullets, numbered lists, headlines, and bold type to emphasize the ideas you want to get across.
 - The burden of calling attention to key points rests on you, not the readers.



Memo format

- Though the exact placement of elements in the heading of memos will vary from organization to organization, the content remains constant: memo headings identify date, recipient, author, and subject.
- Memo headings perform important reference functions.
- The prominence of the date provides a chronology for the issue under consideration.

Internal Correspondence

General Specifics Research Corporation

DATE: 5 April 2004
TO: Marion McSputz
Director, Research and Development
FROM: Ryan Ashker *RA*
Staff Scientist
RE: FUNDING REQUEST: CHARACTERIZING AND MAPPING
WETLANDS IN AMAZONIAN SAVANNAS

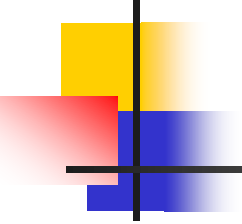
I am requesting a budget of \$135,000 to develop a strategy for characterizing and mapping seasonally inundated wetlands in Amazonian savannas. The savanna wetlands of the Amazon Basin are not well understood, and they appear to have a significant impact on global biogeochemical cycles as well as a key role in maintaining global biodiversity.

In order to develop a strategy for characterizing and mapping seasonally inundated wetlands, I propose to do the following tasks, over a period of two months:

1. Determine which currently operating satellite sensors can be used to detect inundation. My evaluation will be based on the spatial, temporal, and spectral resolutions of the sensors.
2. Determine the amount of in situ fieldwork necessary to characterize seasonally inundated savanna wetlands.
3. Use river stage and precipitation data to determine the timing of low and high water periods.

I have attached a detailed budget as well as maps of the wetlands area. Please call me at extension 3-3090 if you would like to discuss this project.

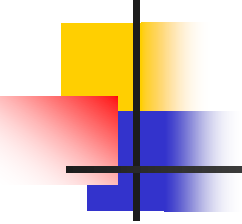
Enclosures (2)

- 
-
- The date locates each action and may be important later if you are involved in legal action.
 - Organizational titles and levels of responsibility may influence the relative weight a reader will give each communication.
 - The subject line carries most responsibility for flagging readers.
 - The subject line need to present a concise statement of the topic and to contain information that will tell a reader whether the memo is immediately important.



Memo organization

- The contents of memos are extremely malleable.
- Once you identify your purpose and audience, you can shape your text more precisely than for other technical documents.
- Develop strategies for organizing and presenting your content to a specified audience.

- 
-
- Three-part organization for memos.
 - 1) Open with an overview: tell readers exactly why you are writing and what they will gain from reading.
 - 2) Develop your point and provide supporting arguments.
 - 3) Summarize your point and to request or suggest follow-up action.

Internal Correspondence

General Specifics Research Corporation

DATE: 5 April 2004

TO: Marion McSputz
Director, Research and Development

FROM: Ryan Ashker *RA*
Staff Scientist

RE: FUNDING REQUEST: CHARACTERIZING AND MAPPING
WETLANDS IN AMAZONIAN SAVANNAS

PROPOSAL

I am requesting a budget of \$135,000 to develop a strategy for characterizing and mapping seasonally inundated wetlands in Amazonian savannas.

WORK PLAN

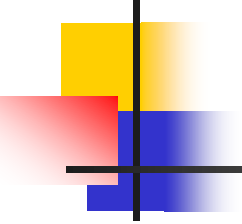
In order to develop a strategy for characterizing and mapping seasonally inundated wetlands, I propose to do the following tasks, over a period of two months:

1. Determine which currently operating satellite sensors can be used to detect inundation. My evaluation will be based on the spatial, temporal, and spectral resolutions of the sensors.
2. Determine the amount of in situ fieldwork necessary to characterize seasonally inundated savanna wetlands.
3. Use river stage and precipitation data to determine the timing of low and high water periods.

CONCLUSION

I have attached a detailed budget as well as maps of the wetlands area. Please call me at extension 3-3090 if you would like to discuss this project.

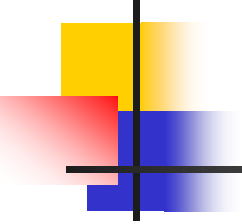
Enclosures (2)

- 
-
- Consider adding internal headings to give your reader a quick preview of contents.
 - If your memo is more than one page, include a heading that will allow your document to be reassembled if pages become separated.
 - Always indicate the presence of attachment or enclosures with a notice at the bottom of the page.



Memo style

- Memos are utilitarian forms, less formal than letters.
- Memo writers initial their documents in the heading and do not sign their full name.
- Memos are personal: use “I” and “you”
- A memo is an internal document, so formality is not required.
- Aim for a style that is efficient and cordial.

- 
-
- Memos become important parts of historical archives.
 - Do not put any personal thing in the memos.
 - Your memo may need to be reviewed.



Letter format

- Most organization have a “house style” for letters, with standards for indentation, spacing, and punctuation.
- The widely used block style is both attractive and functional.
- Subject line is not required, but it provides a preview for the recipient.

18886 Hollister Ave.
Santa Rosita, California 93069

4 returns

2 returns

2 returns

_____.

_____:

- _____
- _____

2 returns

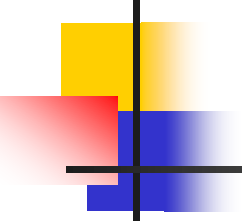
4 returns

2 returns

2 returns

2 returns

c: David Neuman

- 
-
- Modified block: paragraphs are indented, and date, closing, and signature are aligned approximately two-thirds across the page.
 - Indicate the presence of enclosures.
 - Do not start with “Dear Sir” or “To whom it may concern”: check the name of the recipient.



Letter organization

- Letters must be designed to reach the specific reader named as recipient, the specific readers named as co-recipients, and unknown readers who are likely to read the document at some time later.
- People usually use three-part organization for letters.



Three part organization for letters

- Open with an overview: tell the reader exactly why you are writing.
- Middle section: develop your point.
- Final section: summarize your point and suggest follow-up action. Use typographical and page design features to highlight key points.



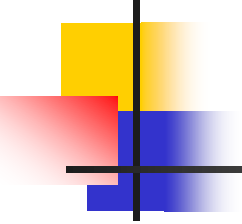
Letter status

- A letter is highly personal and official: You speak directly to the intended reader with the salutation “Dear”, and you close the letter with your signature.
- The letter may bear your company letterhead and highlight your administrative level: official form.
- Letters written on organizational letterhead elay the weight of your office and affiliation



Reaching your e-mail audience

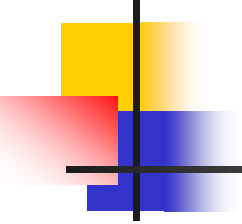
- While e-mail is good for sharing ideas and information, the volume of e-mail in networked writing environments frequently leads to cognitive overload.
- If you want your e-mail messages to be read, you will have to consider that the recipient of your message may be receiving dozens of messages along with yours.
- Try to alleviate cognitive overload by writing a straightforward, information-dense subject line.

- 
-
- Keep your message brief: one screenful for one message.
 - Use page design features like bulleted and numbered lists.
 - Achieve and maintain credibility: don't send junk e-mail.



Evolving conventions

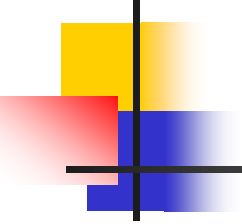
- E-mail can function as either memo or letter.
- With e-mail, you need to make some decisions on your own, often mixing practices depending on your relationship with the recipient of your e-mail and your purpose for writing.

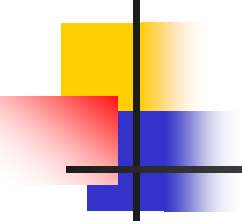
- 
-
- When you write to people outside of your own organization, it is helpful to include an e-mail “signature” at the bottom of your message, with your full name and additional relevant contact information.
 - When you write to people with whom you do not have ongoing relationships, it is courteous to open with a salutation.
 - Always assume that verbal restraint and careful editing are valued qualities in professional settings.



The status of e-mail

- E-mail is a technology in cultural transition, appearing to flourish much time-honored company, university, and laboratory practice connected with hard copy memos and letters.
- Much of what happens for both writers and readers of e-mail is constrained or made possible by software design.

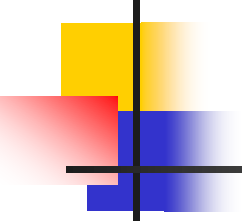
- 
-
- Most e-mail systems present writers with a template: date and author's name are already filled in; names of others who should receive copies of the message are easy to insert.
 - Most templates have no space for anyone's title.
 - But nothing in electronic communication prevents it from becoming a form with rigid and elaborate social signals.

- 
-
- The legal status of electronic messages is complex and ambiguous.
 - Some organizations are openly monitoring e-mail, and employees have been dismissed for what an employer considered inappropriate or unprofessional comments.



Memos and letters as part of a continuum

- Your memo or letter may not be the last words on a subject.
- Your document may create additional communication tasks, and its relevance may extend well beyond any time frame you can imagine.
- Create electronic files of memos and letters for further reworking into additional documents.

- 
-
- Most e-mail systems provide filing and storing options, though some e-mail users prefer to download important documents.
 - Do not be overly dependent on writing as a method for communicating ideas.
 - Be prepared to talk on any subject you have written about.