

University of Portland - Mechanical Engineering
Engineering Technical Letters and Memoranda

Name(s) _____

The content of most engineering letters and memoranda can be organized into four main parts: summary, background, discussion, and conclusions. Depending on the intent and length of the letter or memo, each part can be as short as a single phrase or as long as several paragraphs¹. Most letters and memos are less than two pages. The following elements should be included. Headings are only appropriate for long letters.

Summary - Objective and overview. Within the first two sentences, the purpose of the letter or memo is clearly stated. The important recommendations or conclusions are summarized.

Background - Provides context for the discussion and educates the reader so they can understand the discussion.

Discussion - May include a brief description of methodology, relevant findings, interpretation of data, and other significant items.

Conclusions and Recommendations – Should recapitulate results and conclusions, brief explanation of significant “errors”, and recommend future work or action.

Courteous Closing (Includes your contact information)

References - Should be of sufficient quantity and quality, and cited properly with in the text. Bibliographic information is included as a footnote.

Additional information to the written text is often required. Typical attachments include:

Attachment 1* - Results (If only one or two small figures or tables are required, they may be embedded in the letter/memo, if they are large, they should be an attachment). Tables and figures:

- All figures and tables discussed in text, but self explanatory
- Numbered and properly titled, contain units, axis labels
- Referenced (if information not created by author)
- Appropriate to communicate effectively

Attachment 2* – Test Set-up: clear and self explanatory, photos, sketches...

Attachment 3* - Data: self-explanatory data sheet; proper symbols and units

Attachment 4* – Calculations: clear and self-explanatory, sources cited

Additional attachments as required

Writing Quality

- Single spaced, no more than 2 pages
- Properly addressed and contact information (to whom, date, etc)
- Writing: clear, complete, and concise with proper mechanics (spelling, punctuation, grammar, and paragraph and sentence structures)
- Proper tense, third person, semi-formal writing

¹Refer to the UP School of Engineering's *Writing for Engineers* handbook for assistance.