

To: CSU Northridge students
From: Prof. Jeff Wiegley
Subject: Memorandum Format Specifications
Date: 09/27/04

One of the purposes of a Computer Science degree is to prepare students to handle a wide variety of complex issues that arise in industry in a professional manner. As a member of industry responsible for the success of applications, systems, networks and other projects it will be your duty to report to supervisors and managers about the details and nature of your performance and requirements.

You should take great care to accurately and concisely document your needs, actions and performance. Not only for the purpose of informing others about your needs and requirements but also for the purpose of securing the limits and levels of your responsibilities, authority and accountability (three key components for success on projects). Failure to obtain the necessary approvals and signatures often ends up placing blame or additional work on you for decisions and mistakes made by others. Failure to properly notify others about your needs in a timely fashion often results in a failure of your projects.

Reports and requests should be informative, concise, accurate and professional. Do not waste time with flowery wording or long winded introductions. Your supervisors will not want to waste time reading it and it wastes your own time writing it. Like a legal contract, often the less you say the better (as long as you do not omit important or relevant information).

A good template for presenting such information in a professional manner is the traditional "memorandum" format. If you are a student in a course instructed by Professor Wiegley you may be required to submit course assignments using a memorandum format. Such documents are to be prepared using a traditional, simplified memorandum format. This document itself is presented to you in the appropriate format.

Criteria for the memorandum format consists of:

- Paper of a plain white stock suitable for copy machines or common printers
- Paper dimensions are exactly 8.5 inches wide by 11.0 inches tall (US Letter standard)
- All margins are exactly 0.75 inches
- All text will be presented in a plain (sans-serif) font style such as "Helvetica" or "Arial".
- Text that is part of the memorandum header is produced using 12 point font.
- All other body text is produced using 10 point font.
- Body text may be visually separated from header material with a simple paragraph border.
- Line spacing is single spaced. (baseline skip is equal to 120 of font point size)
- Spacing between paragraphs is exactly 6 points.
- All paragraphs are justified (do not use ragged-right paragraph style).
- The indent of the first line of a paragraph will match all other lines of that paragraph.
- Length should be as short as possible without the omission of pertinent data. (a single page if possible)
- written in a neutral, third person perspective where possible

When writing reports, and requests, your document should be concise and to the point. It should clearly address issues such as:

- What is the topic that is being reported on or requested?
- What analysis or justification exists to support the position taken?
- What are the consequences or importance of the material being presented or requested?
- Who is to take responsibility for the request or actions described?
- When will the actions be completed or when are the resources needed?
- How much costs will be incurred or how many people are required?

The list of topics presented here is not intended to be complete, necessary or sufficient in all cases but rather an example of the types of information that is relevant and needs to be addressed to obtain success.