To: CE427 Students
From: Dr. T. Kofke
Date: September 15, 2004
Subject: Memo Format for CE 427 Preliminary Reports

**Summary**  Your ability to communicate in memo format is crucial to your future success. During your careers, most of your communications will be in the form of memos. Therefore, I am requesting that your team’s preliminary report is in memo form. This memo describes the format of a memo in general, the expected content of the preliminary report, and it will refer you to other references on memo writing.

**Discussion**  A memo is a basic document that is used to communicate results. Memos that describe technical results are typically 1-5 pages. Memos that summarize action plans from a meeting are only 1-2 pages. If a memo is more that 1-2 pages long, it should have a summary section, as shown above. Your team’s preliminary report should not be longer than 1-2 pages, so it does not need a summary section. Even if you do not have a distinct summary section, your memo should start with a clearly stated purpose. The purpose of your team’s preliminary report is to inform me (as your supervisor) of your plans for carrying out your assigned experiment.

The plan to grabbing and keeping the reader’s attention is important to the success of your memo. There are plans to writing a memo that are listed in the Purdue website, [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/pw/p_memo.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/pw/p_memo.html). Read it, besides being well written, the author has a good sense of humor.

The typical components of a memo are:

- Header,
- Purpose,
- Summary,
- Discussion,
- Action or Conclusions (or Future Work), and
- Attachments

*Header:* The header contains information at the top of the memo. It tells who the memo is to, whom it is from, the date that it was sent, and a detailed subject. When the subject is vague, it may not peak the recipient’s interest, or the recipient may not know why he or she was included in the distribution list. The web site [www.ecf.utoronto.ca/~writing/handbook-memo.html](http://www.ecf.utoronto.ca/~writing/handbook-memo.html) has an excellent description of memo headings.
**Purpose:** State your reason for writing the memo immediately. A busy person will scan the purpose and determine the importance of your memo. If the purpose is not instantly clear, your recipient may not read your memo.

**Summary:** A short memo might not have a summary section. It will have the purpose as a stand-alone statement, and proceed on to the discussion. A longer memo will have a summary statement. It is similar to an abstract, it should state the purpose, (you won’t use a separate purpose section), importance, and summarize the main points of the subject of the memo. As you saw above, I did not use a purpose section, but I think the summary section got straight to the purpose. Refer to the Toronto website listed above, there is a great example.

**Discussion:** For your team’s preliminary report, this section should have the following content:

- General statement of the industrial importance of the phenomenon to be studied
- Objectives of the experiment
- Description of experimental apparatus and operating procedure- (can refer to attached schematic and operating procedure)
- Description of experimental plan
  - variables to be measured
  - number of trials planned
- Plan for analysis

In general, the discussion section of a memo can be divided into logical subsections to make the document flow smoothly. The Toronto website gives good suggestions for order and breaking a discussion section into subsections. The Purdue website also has great advice, such as using bulleted lists when possible. In addition, the Virginia Tech Website [http://www.writing.eng.vt.edu/workbooks/memo_format.html](http://www.writing.eng.vt.edu/workbooks/memo_format.html) gives an example of a technical report written in memo format in which the discussion section is broken into subsections.

**Conclusion (or Action or Future Plans):** This is the wrap-up of the memo. If your work is part of an ongoing project, you may choose to call this section Action or Future Plans. If you are done with the project, you will call this section Conclusion(s). For your team’s preliminary report, this section can simply be a statement of when you are scheduled to carry out the experiment.

**Attachments:** The attachments that you add should be listed, and for your preliminary reports the attachments should include:

- Schematic of experimental apparatus
- Detailed operating procedure