



Business Memo Guidelines

Nearly all injects released at MWCCDC events call for the submission of a business memo, so it's important to be able to compose inject responses accordingly. This guideline has been written to address numerous questions received by the MWCCDC Consortium concerning feedback reports calling for improvements in business communication skills. Specifically, what can teams do to improve such skills?

The business memo is a communication to management, sometimes to upper management, where the higher the management level, the less the main body of the memo should focus on technical detail.

The business memo is in contrast to a technical or lab report which is likely more familiar to the college student. The latter follows a logical progression with an introduction, purpose, procedure, data, and conclusions. Many inject submissions have read like a technical report instead of a business memo.

Business memo requirements are completely different from a technical report where there is a need to drive quickly to the bottom line in crisp high level terms. There is a need to write in plain English using general descriptive terminology for the non-technical manager. The business memo should describe,

- What did you do?
- What did you find?
- What will you do in the future?

Inject response authors should be attentive to exactly what is requested in the respective inject, particularly the deliverables. Once again it is surprising how often an inject response will miss the mark of what is required. The judging team has worked towards a standard inject format that includes explicit deliverables. Use these deliverables as an outline of the response and address all deliverables.

If some deliverables are not attainable within the time frame of the inject, you should still respond, documenting what you have completed. Partial credit is better than no credit. However, in your response you should acknowledge what's lacking, and why it wasn't completed, and possibly when it will. In the real world, managers will want to know this, and communicates that inject requirements have been understood and are not simply ignored.

Many injects call for technical details, implementation, or imply the need for technical discovery and reporting. Such details should not be in the main body of the memo but referenced at a high level in general terms. Technical reporting of data, tables, output from systems and tools, scripts/code, &c. should be various attachments or appendices that the manager will reference. It is important to properly label, identify and describe every attachment or appendix. Out of tools and tables may seem obvious without a title or label to those applying a tool or making a table, but managers are often bewildered without identification. If the attachment data is from a tool, identify the tool and how it was used, indigenous on a particular VM, or from a particular VM with various targets.

In the real world the manager is likely to focus only on the body of the memo and ignore the attachments/ appendices. The manager might delegate another technical expert for a second opinion. However, in the MWCCDC, judges all have significant management experience while having excellent technical skills. Be assured your technical attachments/ appendices will be scrutinized.

It's oversimplified, but the business memo is somewhat like the opposite of the technical report where the conclusions come first.

It's suggested that teams seek assistance from technical writing instructors at their respective institution. These are frequently a part of the English department. Submit written inject samples for review and solicit instruction specifically for the team. Injects are adjudicated in part for style and clarity of thought/ communication.

Part of adjudication of injects entails assessment of format, and though this is clearly a minority of adjudicated score, it can make the difference for top performing teams.

An effective approach by some teams is to name their team rather than simply identify by team number. It's best to name their team like a business network management entity. In fact, treating the team as a business will accrue other benefits towards career preparation. This is clearly beyond the scope of business memo guidelines, but the team might include vision and mission statements. Teams should avoid names and logos that are intended for humor, names such as 'Red Team Crushers' and the like. Inject responses should strive towards professionalism in appearance and content.

Development of a team logo and specific business memo format is helpful towards uniformity and consistency of communication. Even the selection of font is important, and should be used consistently throughout your memo. An exception would be that output from tools can be left in native font.

There are serif and non-serif fonts. Serifs are the artistic, added lines to a font, such as,

New Times Roman

Generally serif fonts are considered better for readability in printed documents, while non-serif fonts are more easily read electronically. Since injects are read electronically, a non-serif font is recommended. These include Arial, Cambria, Verdana, Helvetica, and Helvetica Neus. A non-serif font is more crisp in harmony with the needs of a business memo.