

Progress Report: Memo or Letter Format

A progress report is an intermediate report designed to communicate information, usually to your immediate supervisor. These reports are used to inform your supervisor on the present status of your project. As a result, these reports only exist for a short period of time and are usually eventually destroyed.

At this point, your project has probably collected a large amount of information - you need to decide what information must be communicated in this report. Your supervisor is usually looking for several things:

1. Confidence that your team is doing its best to move the project along.
2. Information that your supervisor needs to make decisions about the project. Your supervisor may need to make decisions on: project staffing levels, company resources (including \$), project timetable, and even whether to continue the project.
3. A “nugget” of information that can be communicated to upper management.

The header format for this report is shown on the next page (not including the box!). The header provides information to the reader on where the memo came from, what it is about, who it was sent to, and how it should be filed. Many companies have a formal document management system, so the “file” information might be important.

Fictitious Chemical Company
MEMO

To:

From:

Date:

Subject:

Copies:

File:

The project report usually contains the following sections:

1. Introduction

Why are you doing this work? What are the objectives? Why is this important?

Why is your team working on this? What are the potential benefits to this work?

2. Discussion / Analysis

What did your team do? How did your team do it? What did you find out?

3. Conclusions / Recommendations

This section should have only a summary of material already discussed in the Discussion / Analysis sections - do not introduce new material here. Conclusions are items that are supported by your direct work. Recommendations are derived from the conclusions.

For instance: "This work found high levels of mercury in the lake fish. The recommendation is that people should not eat these fish."

The main body of the progress report is usually mostly text and no more than a few pages.

Tables and figures are placed after the main body of the report and are not counted as part of the page count.

Comments about Tables and Figures

1. If you can say something graphically, do it. Figures are preferred to tables.
2. A lot of information can be conveyed in a figure or table. Write the report text after the tables and figures are designed.
3. Each figure and table must have a clear communication objective. All figures and tables provided must be referenced and discussed in the report.
4. All figures and tables must be numbered with a caption. For tables the caption is usually at the top while for figures the caption is usually below the figure.
5. A table is a visual comparison of data. Tables are usually limited to no more than one page in length. Tables in an appendix may be many pages in length and may contain detailed, raw data.
6. Reference the figure or table before discussing it in the report.
7. Tell the reader in your text what they should see in the table or figure and the conclusions they should arrive at. Don't assume that they will reach the same conclusion as you. Make sure that your conclusions are really supported!
8. Do not use exponential notation in figures - scale the values in the table. Align the decimal points in a particular column. For a preliminary design, use only about 3 significant figures (including cash values).
9. Use descriptive axis labels on figures, not just variables.
10. Use descriptive captions on figures and tables.