

WRITING ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS

The writing assignments are designed to help develop your ability to write a good memorandum, abstract, executive summary, legal brief, etc. This ability is a basic requirement for success in the kind of professional-level jobs in business, government, etc., that (I expect) most of you aim to seek after graduating from college. Developing this ability will also help you to write more effective papers in other courses.

You are asked to select one of the three questions listed on the attached page. Each question requires you to address a specific question that is linked to a document that is an assigned reading from the Course Pack (or website). Clearly, your first step is to read and reread the document carefully in order to gain the best possible understanding of (i) the basic problem, question, or issue that the author of the document is addressing, (ii) the concepts and ideas that the author employs, and (iii) the argument that the author brings to bear on this problem. Then, based on your understanding of the document, you should prepare a brief written memorandum that responds directly to the question.

You should suppose that your audience is a boss or supervisor who has not read — and does not know much about — the original document, but he or she needs to know something about what it says and therefore has given you this assignment.

Your reader is a busy person, who wants the answer to be presented in clear, accurate, and concise language. Your reader (a) does not want to be distracted by side issues or arguments of secondary importance, (b) certainly does not want to be distracted by errors of spelling, punctuation, grammar, or composition, and (c) and will not have the time to reread your memo several times in order to figure out what you are trying to say.

So you should draft your memo with care. Very few people can compose perfect (or even adequate) sentences, paragraphs, and pages in a first draft. (I certainly cannot, and probably you cannot either.) In my experience, well organized and clearly written memos (or longer papers) emerge only after multiple revisions (and word processing technology facilitates such repeated revisions.)

This is not research paper. I do not expect you to consult or to cite any sources other than the original document to which the question refers — in fact I recommend against your going to other sources in completing this assignment. (Secondary sources — including textbooks, Wikipedia, etc. — that purport to describe original documents are sometime inaccurate.)

Your final product should be free of errors of composition, grammar, and spelling (remember that the spell-checker of a word processing program does not catch all spelling errors, let alone other errors), easy to read and understand, and clear in its meaning. It should also be brief — aim for about 500 words (two double-spaced pages). Of course, your memo should also demonstrate an accurate understanding of the original reading.

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Your work will be evaluated on the basis of the following *criteria* that are weighted as shown:

Criterion (A): basic composition (spelling, punctuation, and grammar) [20%];

Criterion (B): clarity, precision, and readability of sentences [20%]

Criterion (C): overall organization and presentation [20%]; and

Criterion (D): demonstrated accuracy of understanding of the original reading [40%].

With regard to criterion (D), to the extent you do not write *in your own words* and instead simply quote or paraphrase extended selections from the original document, you do not demonstrate that you understand that reading. (And remember that whatever words you do put within quotation marks must exactly duplicate the words in the source document.) Furthermore, if you lift phrases and sentences out of the document *without* putting them in quotation marks and properly attributing them to the original author, you are committing *plagiarism*, which is a serious ethical and academic infraction. And to lift phrases and sentences — let alone more extended sections of text — from other sources (such as textbooks, encyclopedias, journal articles, web sites, etc.) and to try to pass them off as your own writing constitutes an especially serious variant of plagiarism. (See the *Academic Integrity* statement in the course syllabus.) Submission of a plagiarized writing assignment will result in a grade of F on this assignment; submission of a second plagiarized writing assignment will result in a grade F in the course and a referral to the UMBC Academic Conduct Committee.

FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES

1. The first writing assignment is due in class on Monday, October 26. Both writing assignments must be completed if you are to receive a passing grade in the course.
2. You should type (or word process) the final version of your memo if you possibly can. Please type double-spaced. Your typing certainly need not be up to professional standards (e.g., errors can be corrected by hand) and its quality will not affect your grade. If you cannot type at all, please write *in ink and double-spaced* (or on wide-lined paper) as legibly as possible.
3. Please type or write on standard sized paper. Fasten the pages together with a staple or paper clip. Please do *not* put your paper in an envelope, folder, plastic binder, etc.
4. The suggested length is about 500 words (about two double-spaced typewritten pages). In no case should you exceed 750 words.
5. Please keep these instructions; they will apply to the second writing assignment also.
6. It is always advisable to make and keep Xerox and/or electronic duplicate copies of any paper, in case the original is mislaid or lost.