

# **MAXWELL IN DC ORIENTATION SPRING 2024**

Tuesday, January 16, and Wednesday, January 17

## **HANDOUTS**

Writing for Policymakers: The Washington Policy Memo

and

An Analytic Model for Making Information Actionable

Prof. Fulton Armstrong

# NOTES

# HOW TO WRITE AN INFO MEMO

Writing a memo, like any writing, is a personal process. With experience, each writer discovers the best way that he/she prepares, drafts, and hones a memo. Nonetheless, there are seven basic steps to all memo writing.

1. Assess what your **READER NEEDS**.

Put yourself in your reader's shoes.

Think of the scope of the topic and key questions to answer.

Determine what the reader *really* needs – not just what is requested.

2. Gather and challenge **INFORMATION**.

Take only the notes that you need to establish landmarks in your data.

Don't build your information linearly; build it more like a Christmas tree.

Mark questionable information and gaps.

3. Look for **PATTERNS** in your information.

Find common points and parallels in your data.

4. Formulate your **THESIS SENTENCE** or **BLUF**.

Capture your *essential* message.

Make sure it's digestible.

Have it reflect the structure of your memo.

5. Build your **PARAGRAPHS**.

Open each with a topic sentence that helps reader.

Use bullets whenever appropriate.

Present facts and other argumentation.

Keep it easy to read, easy to follow.

### Basic, Simple Structure

- Grab attention and give BLUF
- Frame the issue with necessary facts – what, how much, where, when.
- Show the drivers – the why and how.
- Say where things are headed and why it matters.
- If appropriate, report what's being done to deal with the issue.

6. Give the draft a rigorous **SELF-EDITING** and **REVIEW**.

Make a copy of your draft so dearly beloved language is safe, and then start scrubbing.

Check logic and use of information.

Check structure, grammar and language, scrutinizing every word, sentence, and paragraph.

7. Take a **BREATH** and **REPEAT** until you're happy.

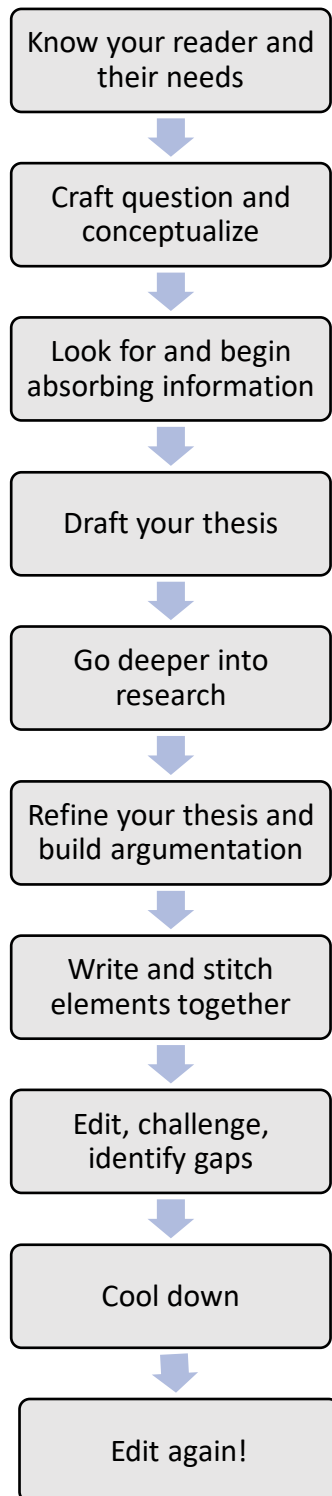
Set it aside to cool off a while, and re-read.

Ask a friend or writing buddy to “murder board” it for you.

8. **ENJOY ...** and set aside a copy to read in a couple weeks or months.

## NOTES

# How do I write good memo?



Although each of us prepares papers differently, most successful memo writers go through various stages.

- Conceptualizing the problem and defining what our reader “needs”
- Planning the approach and product
- Looking for and absorbing information
- Developing a hypothesis
- Going deeper into research, information
- Refining the hypothesis while considering alternative explanations
- Writing segments and then stitching them together
- Reviewing information and adjusting text as warranted
- Editing and polishing

## In other words ...

Know your reader and his/her needs

- Know where you want to go

Craft the question; conceptualize

- Make it yours, in your words
- Determine style, approach

Plan

- Timeline
- Define universe of sources
- Think about filling, overcoming gaps

Wade into the information

- Ankle or knee deep
- Get familiar with issue dynamics
- Take spare notes
- Fill in analytic worksheet

Rough out a hypothesis

- Set up “scientific” method
- Channel bias and assumptions
- Use it to give research focus

Go deeper into research

- Test your hypothesis
- Identify and fill gaps
- Take notes

Refine your hypothesis into a thesis and build your argumentation

- Organize notes against hypothesis
- Honestly adjust hypothesis

Begin assembling, stitching and writing

- Words >>> sentences >>> paragraphs

Read and edit

- Challenge
- Think about gaps
- Edit!!!!

Edit

- Edit, polish, refine

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Issue Memo Building Blocks

**Thesis**

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**Framing (Basic info)**

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**WHY is it happening?**

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**What will happen?**

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**Why does it matter?**

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**Other Analytic Points**

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Building Analysis**

**Thesis**

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**Framing**

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**Drivers & Trends**

Driver

Trend

Driver 1:

Driver	Trend

Driver 2:

Driver	Trend

Driver 3:

Driver	Trend

Driver 4:

Driver	Trend

**Scenarios**

Scenario 1:

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Scenario 2:

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**Wild Cards**

Wild card 1:

Wild card 2:

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**Implications**

Implication 1:

Implication 2:

Implication 3:

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**Other Points**

## “SUGGESTIONS AND CAUTIONARY HINTS”

*Adapted and augmented for writers of analysis from essays by E.B. White*

1. Place yourself in the background.
  - Your mood and temper are secondary.
  - Don't affect a style; be natural.
  - Know the difference between opinion and analysis.
2. Write in a way that comes naturally.
  - Relax and write in your own voice.
  - Add in formal touches later.
3. Work from a suitable design.
  - Think through what you want your product to look like – length, approach.
4. Write with nouns and verbs.
  - Adjectives and adverbs don't make your case; they feel like manipulation.
5. Revise and rewrite.
  - You will discover serious flaws; fix them.
  - Pride doesn't come from the first draft.
6. Do not overwrite.
  - Rich, ornate prose is indigestible.
  - Overstatement kills your case.
7. Avoid the use of qualifiers.
  - They are rather unhelpful, very unnecessary, little valuable, and pretty boring.
8. Do not affect a breezy manner.
  - The lack of discipline suggests an overconfidence that readers care about your every whim.
  - Don't waste people's time.
9. Use orthodox spelling.
  - It's not rite to put readers thru such abuse.
10. Do not explain too much.
  - People don't need your details, and they don't need you to be overly explicit (especially with adjectives and adverbs).
11. Do not construct awkward adverbs.
  - Don't do it even if you're writing tiredly.
12. Avoid fancy words.
  - Showing off turns people off.
  - Save the jargon for people who don't need to read your work.
13. Be clear.
  - Clear?

# How to Write Good



Two classic sets of rules.

## Frank L. Visco (June 1986 issue of *Writers' Digest*)

1. Avoid alliteration. Always.
2. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
3. Avoid cliches like the plague. (They're old hat.)
4. Employ the vernacular.
5. Eschew ampersands & abbreviations, etc.
6. Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are unnecessary.
7. It is wrong to ever split an infinitive.
8. Contractions aren't necessary.
9. Foreign words and phrases are not apropos.
10. One should never generalize.
11. Eliminate quotations. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: "I hate quotations. Tell me what you know."
12. Comparisons are as bad as cliches.
13. Don't be redundant; don't use more words than necessary; it's highly superfluous.
14. Profanity sucks.
15. Be more or less specific.
16. Understatement is always best.
17. Exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.
18. One-word sentences? Eliminate.
19. Analogies in writing are like feathers on a snake.
20. The passive voice is to be avoided.
21. Go around the barn at high noon to avoid colloquialisms.
22. Even if a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed.
23. Who needs rhetorical questions?

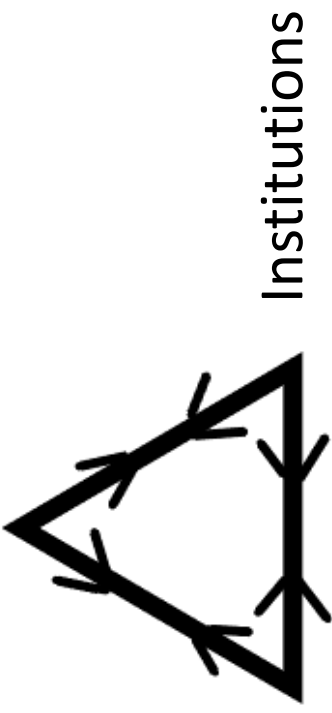
## William Safire's *Rules for Writers*

1. Parenthetical words however must be enclosed in commas.
2. It behooves you to avoid archaic expressions.
3. Avoid archaic spellings too.
4. Don't repeat yourself, or say again what you have said before.
5. Don't use commas, that, are not, necessary.
6. Do not use hyperbole; not one in a million can do it effectively.
7. Never use a big word when a diminutive alternative would suffice.
8. Subject and verb always has to agree.
9. Placing a comma between subject and predicate, is not correct.
10. Use youre spell chekker to avoid mispeling and to catch typograhpical errors.
11. Don't repeat yourself, or say again what you have said before.
12. Use the apostrophe in it's proper place and omit it when its not needed.
13. Don't never use no double negatives.
14. Poofread carefully to see if you any words out.
15. Hopefully, you will use words correctly, irregardless of how others use them.
16. Eschew obfuscation.
17. No sentence fragments.
18. Don't indulge in sesquipedalian lexicological constructions.
19. A writer must not shift your point of view.
20. Don't overuse exclamation marks!!
21. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences, as of 10 or more words, to their antecedents.
22. Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.
23. If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is.
24. Avoid trendy locutions that sound flaky.
25. Everyone should be careful to use a singular pronoun with singular nouns in their writing.
26. Always pick on the correct idiom.
27. The adverb always follows the verb.
28. Take the bull by the hand and avoid mixing metaphors.
29. If you reread your work, you can find on rereading a great deal of repetition can be by rereading and editing.
30. And always be sure to finish what

# What are drivers?

Interests

Borrowing from the “3-i framework” ...



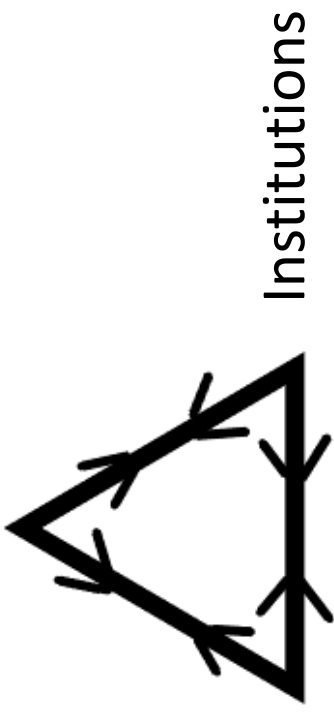
In our PERSONAL lives ...

Interests	Ideas	Institutions
Work	Education	Parents
Food	Religion or values	Boy/Girlfriend
Love - Sex	Political thought	Husband/Wife
Family	Ideology	Colleagues
Home	Imposed expectations	Friends
Transportation		Political party
Entertainment		Employer
Recreation		
Challenges		

drivers

# Interests

Borrowing from the “3-i framework” ...



In our NATIONAL lives ...

Interests	Ideas	Institutions
Power/influence	Self-definition	Leadership
Needs	Nationalism	Abilities/constraints
Desires/ambitions	History	Economic structures
Wealth	Concepts/logic	Intermediation
Economic performance	Values	Inclusion
	Ideology	Topography/geography
		Climate

drivers {

DRAFT - EXAMPLE

Name: Good Student

## Building Analysis

**Thesis** Efforts to discourage Central American migrants from trying to enter the United States have failed to reduce the flow and, by ignoring the reasons for people's displacement, are actually fueling pressures for them to leave their homeland.

**Framing** Estimated 1 million people apprehended in U.S. at or near Mexico border in 2019. Dramatic change in composition. In 2008, 90 percent were Mexicans. Now Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans represented nearly three-quarters, with two-thirds composed of families or unaccompanied children. Trump Administration increasing arrests, returns, refusals – hoping to show “door is closed.” Numbers entering U.S. going down, but departures from homeland remaining steady.

Drivers & Trends	Driver	Trend
Driver 1:	Pull factor: people think they can safely arrive in U.S., get jobs, and make a better living than they can at home.	Obama and Trump policies – including mass deportations – have sent a clear signal. This driver has become less strong.
Driver 2:	Corruption undermines everything in “sending” countries – undermining even positive programs in security, economy, education, medical, etc.	Despite internationally sponsored efforts, corruption remains extremely corrosive. Governments are tied up in scandals, undermining vigilance and clearing way for my corruption.
Driver 3:	Violence, extortion, rape, and insecurity have presented families with an existential challenge. People feel unsafe in own communities.	While violence ebbs and flows, over years it has become much worse – because of gang power struggles, lack of police, and people's sense of isolation.
Driver 4:	Gangs are invading families – stealing away youth – because families have been weakened by economic decline and inability to adapt to role of women. Youth are desperate and vulnerable.	Worsening economic conditions – including lack of opportunity – favors gang influence. Gangs are increasingly filling the void left by weak government presence -- even providing social services.

**Scenarios**  
 Scenario 1: The “push factors” continue to produce growing number of people desperate enough to leave their countries – despite risks. Trafficking will increase, and ever-more creative means will be attempted to move migrants northward. “Northern Triangle” governments show little/no ability or desire to stop the flow; corruption is too deep.

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Scenario 2:

Although less likely, stories of tragic consequences for migrants trying to reach/enter the U.S. could deter their departure – leaving them in place with ever-increasing levels of dissatisfaction. Popular suffering seems unlikely to shake up governments, to make them begin caring, and humanitarian crisis will be increasingly likely.

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**Wild Cards**

Wild card 1: Another hurricane or earthquake *could* further devastate vulnerable communities, driving even more desperation and attempts to lead.

Wild card 2: Political tensions *could* spark such violence that popular movements convince governments to get serious about rooting out corruption and ensuring that international and national aid reaches the most needy – thereby reducing suffering and “push factors.”

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**Implications**

Implication 1: Based on the more likely scenario, would expect more migration – in quantity and in desperation – as people give up all hope and turn their fate over to alien-smugglers. Elites apparently feel little/no incentive to improve governance and pay for the institutions – and anticorruption efforts – necessary to address the underlying drivers.

Implication 2: Surging “push factors” are likely to fuel internal tensions – between people and government; among political parties; etc. – and between countries. Central Americans passing through Mexico, for ex., have already caused stresses there. The same will happen between Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

Implication 3: Youths in affected societies are growing up with education deficits and, in many cases, psychological issues that will further complicate solutions and progress in the future. Malnutrition condemns many children to a life with poor health, without necessary skills, and little chance of becoming contributing members of society.

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**Other Points**

Mexico has played an enforcing role – stopping many migrants – but has not provided leadership in long-term problems, such as growing the economies.

Class and racial divisions have long contributed to inequality and, often, neglectful attitudes toward expanses of affected countries.

Anti-immigrant sentiment among some sectors in the United States apparently does not deter new arrivals.

Migrants from Central America generally become good, contributing members of U.S. society. Insofar as parents’ own education permits, they encourage children to study hard.

Although U.S. political debate does not reflect it, most studies show that the U.S. benefits greatly from the low-cost, effective labor of Central American migrants.

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# Structure of a Simple-form Analysis

*Main, Basic Elements to Satisfy Your Audience's Needs*

