

Underline

Spell out month, eg. August 28, 2012



UNCLASSIFIED

Date

ACTION MEMO FOR THE SECRETARY

Note use of **bold**.

FROM: (Your name)

SUBJECT: Action memoranda are **two pages** in length using Times New Roman 14 pt font and 1-inch margins

Recommendation

That you (succinctly state the issue, including specific action(s) requested of the Secretary). The recommendation is usually just one sentence, although in rare cases it can be longer.

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

Background

Action memos are used to convince a principal to do something. They are not used simply to outline a problem or issue. Drafters should use short, concise sentences in the active voice. Since they are limited to two pages, single spaced, you must write economically and persuasively. **Do not adjust margins/font/spacing to fit more text!**

Action memos are written in the first person – the “royal we.” For example, “We believe the Canadians are ready to support our resolution in the U.N. Security Council.” They are also written to Secretary Kerry or another principal, so don’t refer to her in the third person. Thus you would say, “Our recommendation is for you to call Canadian Foreign Minister Baird and explain the rationale behind our resolution,” **not** “Our recommendation is that the Secretary call....”

For our purposes, you should divide your memo into four sections with appropriate headings written in bold type: **Recommendation, Background, Current Situation and Conclusion**. You may add additional headings if you believe it will help you make your case more effectively. But remember, the real estate of an action memo is extremely valuable. Use it wisely.

Memoranda in the State Department do not contain footnotes or citations within the text. If the source of a statement cries out for attribution, either because it is controversial or novel, simply state the source in the text, eg. “U.S. labor

unions argue that NAFTA has cost the United States 4 million jobs.” **Spell out all acronyms**, unless they are familiar to most people.

Current Situation

The Background section is where you provide general information about the issue at hand and provide the context for the decision you are asking the principal to make. In the Current Situation section, you provide the most recent developments. Is a vote in the U.N pending? Is the border dispute with Mexico ripe for resolution? Is Secretary Kerry planning a trip to Canada?

Tell her what the options are for resolution, and the implications of those options. This is the place where you make your case for action. Remember, the Secretary is extremely busy. *Why* should he do what you are proposing?

Conclusion

This is the place where you hammer home your case for action. Spell out exactly what you want the Secretary to do. “We recommend that you meet with FM Baird and get his buy-in on a series of measures to relieve congestion around the Ambassador Bridge between Detroit and Winsor, Ontario. Remind him that this issue has festered for decades. If asked, tell him you would support a task force to examine all the options.” A common problem with action memos is that they often contain little action.

Don’t simply repeat your recommendation from page one. Provide additional reasons to convince the Secretary he should leap to his feet and do what you are suggesting.

Attachments:

You should attach a separate sheet of paper with a list of the sources you consulted for your memo. Cite these using standard bibliographic citation style.