

# Writing memos

NSOE Communications Studio, 2024

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# Know the purpose of your memo



## Analytical

Summary and analysis of:

- Problem
- Objectives
- Stakeholders
- Possible approaches



## Advocacy

Makes recommendations:

- advocates for a particular policy agenda or approach

# Who is your audience?

Ask:

- Can they do anything about the problem?
- What constraints might they have?
- Are they resistant or likely allies?

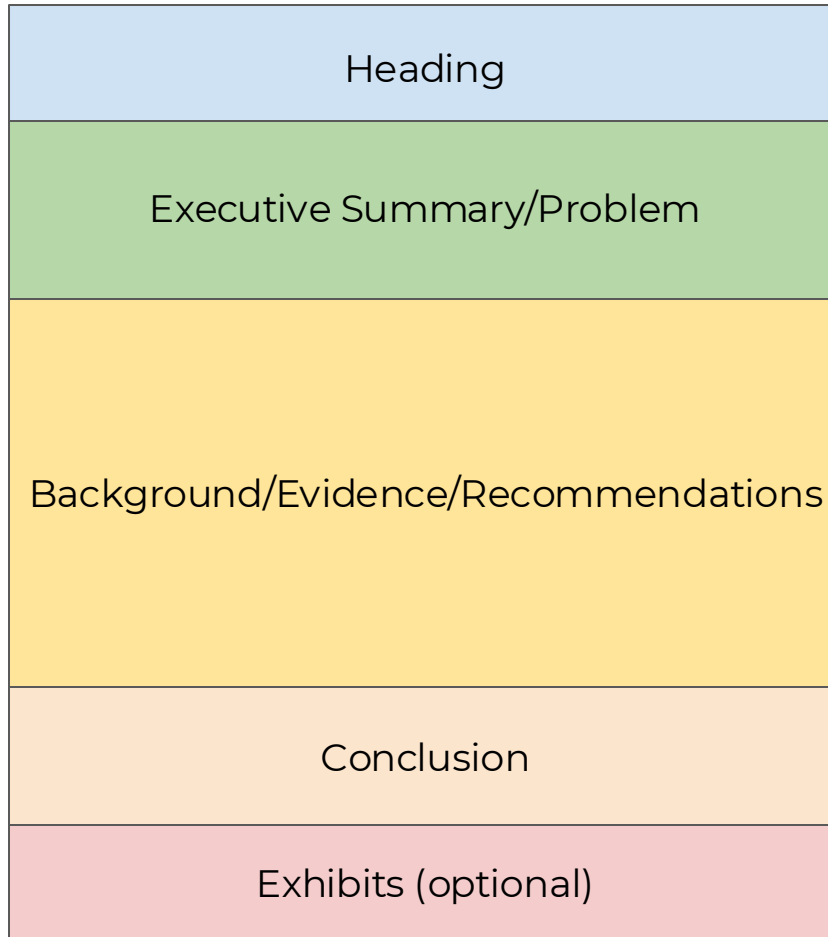


# Best Practices

- Add your Bottom Line Up First (BLUF)
- Clear and concise style
- Concrete verbs
- Minimize passive voice or flowery language.
- Specific, informative headings and subheadings
- Make it skimmable
- Background/Executive Summary that summarizes main points and recommendations
- Visuals – Ask: Is it helpful to understanding the memo?

# Basic Memo Structure

\*This will vary across  
concentrations



# Text-based

**To:** Andrew Ruben, VP & Tyler Elm, Senior Director, Corporate Strategy and Business Sustainability  
**From:** [redacted], Master of Environmental Management Candidate, Nicholas School  
**Date:** 20 March 2012  
**Subject:** Wal-Mart Sustainability Strategy & Business Value

### Executive Summary

In its quest for gaining additional business value through sustainable ventures, Wal-Mart's mission and vision are not necessarily transparent to the public. Wal-Mart's strategy is a focus in furthering profits and the growth of the business through sustainable sources rather than an inherent and vocal desire to take part in environmental stewardship. The three primary areas of focus for Wal-Mart's new business strategy are sustainable food, electronics, and textiles - the most successful of which being the latter.

The approach Wal-Mart is using seems to be lacking in several key aspects, yielding unfruitful results. With the following alterations paralleling the Strategic Environmental Management (SEM) Strategy, Wal-Mart can hope for not only more lucrative results but also a clearer conscious to boost.

- Invest in Firm Human Capital
- Strict Regulatory Compliance
- Philanthropic Contributions
- Invest in Community Where the Firm Operates
- Corporate Citizenship

### Additional Items to Follow Include:

- Hire specialized environmental staff
- Advertisement

### Strategic Environmental Management

*Invest in Firm Human Capital.* Wal-Mart is known for seeking suppliers with low cost items, and in turn purchasing at a low cost. Although Wal-Mart does not like to purchase items in bulk for the uncertainty of the length for how long an item might stay on the shelf, it is in the best interest of the company to begin to forge relationships with suppliers. By ensuring a certain amount of a product will be purchased when possible, this can ensure both quality and in some cases cheaper product supplied by a supplier. Additionally, such as the case with sustainable fisheries, this will also aid in supply chain management.

*Strict Regulatory Compliance.* Wal-Mart has done an excellent job in this area to date. For example, in the textile industry Wal-Mart uses the USDA and Global Organic Textile Standard for their international guidelines on organic cotton, the most stringent guidelines possible. Additionally of 150 third party certification companies for the supply chain process, Wal-Mart only approved of seven they believed were the strictest. This shows diligence and perseverance towards their goals.

# More graphics

## Shifting Sands: Keystone XL 2019 and the Reach of Executive Power

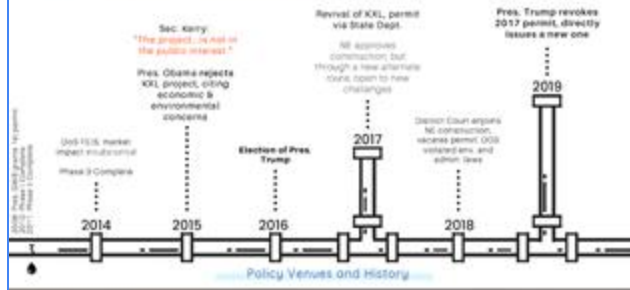
### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2019, President Trump revoked his prior authorization of a Department of State permit for TransCanada's Keystone XL pipeline and issued a new permit directly from the White House. This permit swap is an attempt to excise existing legal challenges and bypass established and foundational federal environmental and procedural laws. This new permit should be opposed on grounds of executive overreach, in conjunction with ongoing action about the pipeline's significant environmental and human rights impacts. KXL is environmentally, economically, and socially nonviable and its construction and operation are not in the American public interest.

### POLICY SUMMARY

This specific KXL policy revokes the 2017 Department of State (DOS) permit that revived the project after its 2015 cancellation, and shifts a new permit to the president. The issue here is judicial and administrative: the 2017 permit was challenged, and found to have not adequately followed APA and NEPA. Environmental assessments were ordered redone<sup>1</sup>. The new EO is meant to sidestep that. The White House argues that if the president both creates and issues the permit, environmental assessments of any kind are not required as it is agencies that are required

to perform them when permitting, and President Trump is not an agency<sup>2</sup>. This has significant negative implications for future attempts to stop environmentally harmful transboundary projects while damaging agency actions can be reviewed under administrative law and legally challenged for violations of federal environmental policy. presidential action can only be reviewed to see if it has violated the Constitution<sup>3</sup>. President Trump has given environmentally unfriendly presidents carte blanche to transboundary projects.



### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States and European officials continue to finalize proposed sanctions in the event Russia invades Ukraine, and European dependence on Russian fossil fuel exports complicates these proceedings. Fossil fuels are Russia's primary export and a major tool for geopolitical control since the Cold War. The EU's commitment to a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2030 threatens Russia's long-term control over global energy markets but also leaves European countries at risk during this immediate period of international tension. Damage to infrastructure, increase in prices, or even a complete shutdown of exports amid potential conflict may leave the European countries with insufficient power, monumental energy bills, or with the right policy - a chance at a greener future.

### ENERGY SCENARIOS

- Damaged Infrastructure**  
In the event of conflict, natural gas infrastructure may be damaged, particularly in Ukraine which transports 1/3 of Russian natural gas exports [1].
- Shut Downs Transit in Ukraine**  
Putin has demonstrated a desire to reduce transit through Ukraine, temporarily shutting down transit in 2009 [2]. Gas transit fees make up 4% of Ukraine's GDP [3].
- Payment Complications**  
Sanctions on Russian financial systems may hinder natural gas purchases. Sanctions to the Swift Financial system have thus been taken off the table [4].
- Increase in Fuel Prices**  
Price increases may be market-driven due to competition for scarce resources or from Russian sanctions.
- Full Shut Down from Russia**  
Experts are divided on the chances of a full shut down of Russian fossil fuel exports, but it remains a possibility.

### EU ENERGY PORTFOLIO

In line with the Paris Agreement, the EU has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% before 2030 [5]. As part of this plan, Europe has shifted away from fossil fuels. 34% of EU's power now comes from renewable energy [3]. However, 22% of the EU's energy still comes from natural gas [6]. 35% of which is imported from Russia [1]. A draft of the EU's Green Energy Taxonomy conditionally listed natural gas as a green energy source, dividing European leaders with more progressive energy leaders branding the move as "greenwashing" [6].

### NORD STREAM 2

Germany is considered the most vulnerable of the big European powers, as the EU's largest consumer of natural gas [2]. The recently completed Nord Stream 2 pipeline connects Russia with Germany under the Baltic Sea. This \$11 billion investment is completed but inactive as it has not received regulatory approval [3]. Germany has phased out coal and nuclear power, leaving pipelines from Russia and renewables as the nation's two most viable energy sources. Despite this, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has expressed an openness to sanctions against the pipeline, weakening Putin's economic leverage [3].

### NATURAL GAS PRICES

Natural gas prices tripled last year from the economic boom associated with the end of COVID-19 lockdowns [7], leading to what is considered the worst European energy crisis since the 1970s [1].

# Heading

To: Timothy Geithner, Secretary of Treasury (WRITER'S AUDIENCE)

From: Michelle (Min Eun) Jeon, Policy Advisor (WRITER'S NAME AND TITLE)

Date: 2/20/2012 (DATE)

RE: Overcoming the Obstacle: House Speaker John Boehner (MAIN IDEA)

Should be informative



# Executive Summary

- a short summary of the entire memo
  - States the problem
  - Explains why important
  - Presents recommendations
- Includes the **BLUF**



# BLUF for your audience

**B**ottom

An effective BLUF distills the most important information for the reader ([Sehgal, 2016](#)).

**L**ine

**U**<sub>p</sub>

**F**ront

Quickly answer the five Ws: who, what, where, when, and why.

# BLUF in the Executive Summary

1. Describe an issue

\*Make sure to write about a focused policy problem and not just a broad issue!

1. Narrow to a policy problem  
(why is it important?)

What's the difference?

Issue: The geopolitics of the Arctic are shifting.

1. Advocate for a policy position

Problem statement: The U.S. government lacks tools to protect its interests in the Arctic

Example from Harvard Kennedy School Communications Program ([www.hkscommprog.org](http://www.hkscommprog.org)), Harvard University

# Executive Summary Sample

RE: Increasing community engagement in climate hazard mitigation projects and policy

## **Executive Summary**

Sea-level rise, which may top 12 inches by 2050 according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, threatens Carteret County's shorelines. An extra foot of water will flood critical infrastructure and homes during hurricanes *and* during sunny-day high tides. An equitable response to these climate hazards will require citizen participation, but the necessary level of meaningful engagement is challenging for any local government. To ensure citizen participation in climate hazard mitigation projects, I recommend: 1) establish a citizen-led climate adaptation commission, 2) promote transparency by hiring a risk communications specialist, and 3) partner with local groups to host community-education event and make use of their communications channels.

Source: India Mackinson, 2023

# Executive Summary Sample

## Executive Summary

Sea-level rise, which may top 12 inches by 2050 according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, threatens Carteret County's shorelines. An extra foot of water will flood critical infrastructure and homes during hurricanes and during sunny-day high tides. An equitable response to these climate hazards will require citizen participation, but the necessary level of meaningful engagement is challenging for any local government. To ensure citizen participation in climate hazard mitigation projects, I recommend: 1) establish a citizen-led climate adaptation commission, 2) promote transparency by hiring a risk communications specialist, and 3) partner with local groups to host community-education event and make use of their communications channels.

States the  
problem

Why it's  
important

Recommendations

Source: India Mackinson, 2023

# Evidence/Recommendations

## Recommendation 1 and Evidence

### Robustly Fund CCS and Advanced Power Systems

- While the Administration's Fossil Energy request for 2017 was their largest to date, it is still slightly below 2016 enacted levels. Congress should meet or exceed previous funding levels for the recently-restructured "CCS and Advanced Power Systems" program within the Fossil Energy budget.

## Recommendation 2 and Evidence

### Fund Carbon Use and Reuse

- The 2017 budget proposal does not request any funding for the Carbon Use and Reuse activity. However, value-added products provide necessary cost reductions that allow for earlier and more effective CCS deployment and there is increasing private sector interest in carbon utilization, as demonstrated by the Carbon XPRIZE. As a first step, Congress should add to this momentum by providing \$10 million for the Carbon Use and Reuse activity within the Carbon Capture subprogram.

## Recommendation 3 and Evidence

### Protect Demonstration Funding through the Clean Coal Power Initiative

- The Clean Coal Power Initiative (CCPI) began in 2002 and is a cost-shared partnership with industry to develop and demonstrate cleaner coal power generation technologies at the commercial scale. The 2017 budget proposal requests that Congress include language to allow up to \$240 million in existing CCPI funds to be used towards the R&D budget, which would pull funding from potentially promising large-scale projects. Congress should leave these funds where they are in order to enable additional CCS deployment.

## Recommendation 4 and Evidence

### Request a CCS Cost-Reduction Plan from DOE

- 2017 is a first step, but accelerating clean energy technology can't be done in a single year. Like SunShot, CCS needs a long-term commitment. Congress should request the DOE produce a detailed, multi-year plan with the goal of cost-competitive CCS deployment. This plan should include both the large-scale pilots in the 2017 budget and future demonstration projects.

**Informative,  
bolded  
subheadings!**

**Sentence-level  
organization:**

- clear and concise
- 1 idea per sentence
- concrete verbs

# Conclusion

- Restate key recommendations
- Include big picture, overall goal, or need

## **Sample conclusion:**

Climate change is a complicated problem, but this part of the solution is simple: we need CCS to meet emissions goals; we need to lower technology costs to deploy more CCS; and we have a proven model for cost reduction in SunShot. With the facts before us, “SunShot for CCS becomes a rare no-brainer for climate policy.

# Citations and References

- Cite all outside sources
- Keep in-text citations consistent
  - might be parenthetical or footnoted (check with supervisor or instructor)
- Only use high-quality references

## References

03

1. Friedman, L., & Davenport, C. (2018, November 9). Judge Blocks Disputed Keystone XL Pipeline in Setback for Trump. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/09/climate/judge-blocks-keystone-pipeline.html>
2. Doc. No. 2019-06654. 84 Fed. Reg. 13103 (April 03, 2019). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/04/03/2019-06654/authorizing-transcanada-keystone-pipeline-to-construct-connect-operate-and-maintain-pipeline>
3. McCoy, C. (2019, April 30). Energy EOs in Depth: New Presidential Permit for Keystone XL and Changes to Presidential Permitting. *Environmental & Energy Law Program - Harvard Law School*. <https://eelp.law.harvard.edu/2019/04/energy-eos-in-depth-new-presidential-permit-for-keystone-xl-and-changes-to-presidential-permitting/>
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7. Hefflinger, M. (2019). *Keystone Pipeline Spill History*. *Bold Nebraska*. <http://boldnebraska.org/keystone-pipeline-spill-history/>
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10. Bell, A. (2014). *Beyond the hype, Keystone would yield few permanent jobs*. *Reuters*. [www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-keystone-insight/beyond-the-hype-keystone-would-yield-few-jobs-idUSBREA2D08620140314](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-keystone-insight/beyond-the-hype-keystone-would-yield-few-jobs-idUSBREA2D08620140314)

KXL also wasn't intended to increase domestic supply—most KXL oil is intended for export<sup>9</sup>.

# Reminder: Best Practices

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