**Formal Progress Report or Memo Format?**

**READ THIS FIRST!!**

Purpose of a Progress Report

Progress reports are commonly used in business and industry to keep clients / funders / government regulators / bosses and others updated about your efforts on their behalf. In essence, progress reports are a form of communication between a funder that describes the current status of a project that has been started but is not yet completed and allows the reader to make or re-make decisions based on new information. The reader deserves to know how your team is spending the money invested in this project and whether the project will be done well and on time.

It may seem prudent to hide concerns or failures. Don’t. First, this is unethical. Second, the reader is in a position to help resolve the issues. The reader may allocate more funding, extend the timeline, approve a material substitution, or offer other help.

You owe your reader the truth, but you also need to provide a context. If you are experiencing issues, address them in the Discussion, but use the Conclusion to offer a Plan of Action to get back on schedule, get back on budget. etc.

Formal Progress Report Format

* Use a Formal Progress Report when communicating with those **outside** your organization: Clients, customers, government regulators, funders, and others.
* Your project may be long and/or may involve a substantial investment. In either case, your client / funder may require more than one progress report. Ex., When building its shuttle program, NASA required subcontractors to submit periodic status reports (ex., Quarterly Reports).

Memo Format

* Use a Memo Format when communicating with those **inside** your organization: Your boss, the head of your department, the C-suite, and others.
* Examples of internal projects requiring progress reports might be: Construction of a new site, a systems integration project spanning a year or more, or collaboration with a university research team testing a prototype over a period of months.

Audience and Professional Tone

* The **primary audience** for most progress reports is executive, the person (or people) making financial decisions based on your information.
* A **secondary audience** is likely to be experts / technicians (those who understand the theory behind your information or those who will use your product or process).
* In either case, the tone of your progress report needs to be professional: Complete, truthful, and respectful of the audience’s need to make evidence-based decisions.
* To help create a formal tone: Use third person (ex., “the report” vs. “our report”) and complete sentences. Do not use casual language or offer opinions without evidence...
* Proofread to help ensure credibility for your report.

This Template

* This template starts with an example of a Formal Report Title Page. Use the Title Page when writing for audiences **outside** your organization.
* The template continues with a Memo Format. Use this example when writing to those **inside** your organization.
* In both types of progress reports, include the subheads and information that follows.
* CAUTION: Don’t mix / match the Formal and Memo styles.

**Writing Tips**

* If at work, try to find a previous Progress Report published by someone in your work group. You can use this example for length, tone, headings, etc.
* If your client supplies a progress report format, use the client’s format. This is often the case with government-funded projects.
* If at school, use this template for preparing your progress report.
* Writing Tips and other prompts in this template appear in blue. Be sure to delete the blue text boxes when you are finished writing your report.
* When you are done, make sure your final version is clean. Under the Review tab, click the down arrow under “Accept” and then chose “Accept All Changes.”  Then click the “Tracking” button to disable tracked changes. Your final report should be free of any mark-ups or comments.

**Formal Progress Report**

**PROGRESS REPORT: NAME OF PROJECT**

[insert graphic or photo of product as appropriate]

Your Name

Name of your Department

Name of your Institution / Company

Date

**ABSTRACT**

This is a 2-3 sentence overview of the project: One sentence on background (when it began and why the project is necessary). One sentence on key activities captured in this report. One sentence on what comes next in the project.

The Abstract is a stand-alone piece (no reference to figures or tables in the text) and appears at the bottom of the report title page. Use an Abstract if your report is 10+ pages.

**Writing Tips**

* Remember: Use the Formal Progress Report format for readers outside the company.
* Use Calibri for report heads and subheads.
	+ Use UC for MAIN heads, and U&LC for Subheads.
	+ Click on the sample for font sizes.
* Use 12 point Cambria for text.
	+ Line spacing for text: Use single spaced, as is common in professional reports.
	+ Indents: Use 5-space indents for all paragraphs in the document.
	+ Skip lines between paragraphs and subsections for easier reading.
	+ Margins: Use a ragged right margin vs. justified to avoid white gaps in the text.
* Title: Make the title accurate. If it’s the Third Quarter 2019 Progress Report, say that.

**To:** Name of the reader(s)

**Memo Format Progress Report**

**From:** This is you or you and your teammates

**Date:** Date you send the memo

**Re:** Title of your Progress Report

**cc:** Name(s) of others who will receive this progress report

**Attachment:** Any other document(s) you are sending with the progress report

**Executive Summary**

* NOTE: Notice how the text begins directly after the memo subheads. Do not include a separate title page for a Memo Progress Report.

**Writing Tips for Memo Headings**

* Remember: Use the Formal Progress Report format for readers outside the company.
* Every memo must include the four basic headings in this order: To: / From: / Date: / Re: (or Subject: ).
* Note that the text after the basic headings is lined up for easier reading.
* **TO:** U.S. business practice is to list first name or initial, then last name. Omit “Mr.” “Ms,” etc. Readers are those who are overseeing a project and who may need to take some action based on your report’s information.
* **FROM:** Your name. Use the same format: First Name and Last Name or Initial and Last name. If you are writing a team report, list the authors’ name alphabetically by last name.
* **RE:** Use a two-part title here as your reader probably receives and reviews many documents every day. Ex., Progress Report #2: Smart Wheelchair Project. Now the reader knows what type of document it is (an FYI) and the topic of this particular progress report (Smart Wheelchair). At this point, no action is required of the recipient other than to read the report.
* **CC:** List others who need the information in the progress report – but who are not responsible for any action plan. Use the same format: First Name and Last Name or Initial and Last name.
* **ATTACHMENT:** If you are sending your Memo via email, your Formal Progress Report is the attachment. Otherwise, for internal progress reports, you may wish to attach other documents such as financial spreadsheets, product designs, and so on.
* **Proprietary Information:** When emailing those outside the company, be cautious about sharing intellectual property and proprietary information (ex., designs, market share).

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Both Formats May Have the Following Sections**

The Executive Summary is included when the report is long and /or when the reader in a hurry. S/he may read only this portion of the report, so it has to contain all the important parts. The Executive Summary typically runs about 10% of the original document. Use an Executive Summary only when your report is 10+ pages or when you have been asked to do by the reader.

Locate the Executive Summary before the Table of Contents, if you have one, and before the Introduction if you do not.

What to include:

* Name of project
* Thesis statement (WHO should do WHAT and WHY)
* Progress to date
* Problems with solutions or actions
* A revised timeline
* Whether the project will be finished on time.

You might want to reuse the topic sentence from each major section of the report as a place to start. Example of a topic sentence about progress to date: “As of July 19, 2019, hiring of staff is on schedule, but construction of the prototype has been delayed by one week.”

An example of a thesis statement for a progress report: “Based on delays in software development, XYZ Company should expect the new ABC app to launch with a revised delivery date of July 19, 2020, but with the same budget of $150,000.”

What to omit:

* Graphics
* Examples
* Calculations
* Attributions and credit lines (those appear in the report itself and in the References).

**Writing Tips**

* Use the headings provided, but add your own text.
* Use a formal tone: Third person, complete sentences, no casual language, no opinions.
* Proofread to help ensure credibility for your report.

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**Writing Tips**

* Use a T of C when your Progress Report is 10+ pages or if your reader has asked for one.
* Find the T of C feature under References on the Word toolbar.
* Double check – on the Final Draft – that the pages in the T of C are listed correctly.
* You may wish to label your References in an Appendix.
* Be sure to delete the Writing Tips after you have used them.

# INTRODUCTION

**Background**

Progress reports keep clients / funders / government regulators / bosses and others updated about your efforts on their behalf. In each case, the reader deserves to know how you or your team is spending the money invested in this project and whether the project will be done well and on time.

In the Introduction, make sure that you give the audience enough background to understand the context of your progress report. If it is the first report, say that and refer to the date the project began. If it is a subsequent report, recap what was discussed in the first progress report and use this as a transition to the Discussion of what has taken place since then. If you are producing only one progress report, you can refer to it as “the” progress report for your project.

In either case, you need to offer a brief (1-2 sentence) assessment of the status of the project (it’s going well, it’s encountered some setbacks). Also, this is the place to acknowledge any outside help you have received (people beyond your team or organizations beyond your own department).

**Context**

A good test for this section is to imagine how well it would orient you should you read it a year from now. Also, your audience reads many reports, memos and other documents every day. You cannot assume that the reader will remember your particular project. You must offer a context for your project.

Remember: Be sure to include a transition from the Introduction to the Discussion.

**Audience Tips**

The primary audience that you are writing to may or may not be a *subject matter expert (SME)*. If an executive reader, you may have to define common engineering terms such as *stress*, *force*, or *acceleration*. However, if the reader is familiar with your particular design or research problem, don’t insult him / her by “talking down.” Either way, make sure that the reader is fully informed before s/he reads the discussion.

NOTE: Your reader may be an SME who is functioning as a decision maker. This reader will be equally interested in financial and technical considerations.

**Writing Tips**

* Create your own subheads to guide the reader through the text and to introduce new topics.
* Be sure to use ASME style for any in-text citations.
* Refer to extra material available in the appendices.

# DISCUSSION

The Discussion covers two topics: What’ve you’ve completed and what remains to be done. Before you address these topics, start with a brief assessment of your project to date. Caution: You do not need to be apologetic for circumstances outside of your control. Ex., A key supplier who goes out of business. Similarly, you want to avoid being overly optimistic. Ex., If you are ahead of schedule and behind on expenditures, be careful not to promise new deadlines and a smaller budget. Once you have offered it, your revised date becomes the need deadline, and you are considered “late” if you don’t meet the new date. The same applies to revised budget promises. Remember, you cannot predict every eventuality. You may need the full time and budget when you encounter issues in the future.

**Work Completed**

* Depending on the formality of your report, you may wish to offer this information in list format. Executives in particular appreciate receiving information in graphic formats that speed reading time.
* What do you list? Re-read your proposal to see what you promised and by when. Then index your progress against this list and give completion dates.
* How much detail do you offer? This depends on your reader. Sometimes a simple list will suffice. Other readers may want resumes on staff you have hired (you would refer the reader to an Appendix in this case), the mathematics underlying the choice of Design A over Design B, and so on.
* Most experienced readers know that the timelines in proposals are just that – proposed. However, if the deadlines have been assigned to you, you must meet them or explain why you haven’t been able to do so. Missed deadlines belong in the next section.
* NOTE ON RESEARCH: If you do refer to secondary research, be sure to use ASME style for in-text citations and offer a References section as an Appendix.

**Work Yet to Be Done**

* If you used a list format in Work Completed, you must use a list format here.
* Work Yet to Be Done lists tasks remaining and dates for completing.
* It includes any deadlines you missed along with the work you promised to do but haven’t yet completed.
* If this is one of a series of progress reports, confine the Work Yet to Be Done to those steps you’ll discuss in the next progress report. Don’t keep listing all the steps for several years’ worth of reports.

**Possible Other Sections**

If you have encountered serious issues in your project, you may want to suggest an action plan to bring it back on course. Action Plan items might include setting a schedule for testing of a substitute material, or identifying other sources for hiring talent, or finding additional partners to help with product testing.

The idea behind an action plan is to 1) show your reader that you are aware of and not hiding any issues and 2) that you are capable of solving problems as they arise. You want to inspire confidence in the reader that, ultimately, the project will be successful.

It may be appropriate to include a section called Additional Resources Requested to discuss additional resources from the reader. You may ask for an extension on a delivery date, or more money for market research, or time release for a staff member whose expertise you need. Your reader will not be surprised by requests such as these, but be sure to explain and justify why they are needed.

See the next pages for tips on Graphics.

Remember: Be sure to include a transition from the Discussion to the Conclusion.

**Writing Tips**

* Remember: Readers are interested in what you’ve done, but they also are assessing whether they need to get involved in your project.
* Respect their expertise: Support your claims with evidence. Opinions, statements with no context, casual language all undermine the legitimacy you are trying to build for your project and yourself.
* Respect their time. Keep your discussion items as brief as possible without omitting key data.
* Graphics: Where possible, consider using graphics to speed up delivery of information. See the next page for tips on Graphics.

## Graphics in Progress Reports

Whenever you use graphics in a technical document, you will default to using ASME style. The following is an example of how to properly label Figures and Tables. Note that graphs are considered Figures and should be labeled as such. Remember, Figures and Tables are not stand alone; you must refer to them within the text.

Graphics commonly used in progress reports include timelines, tables with budget numbers, and product sketches and photos.



**Figure 1:** **Title of the Figure.** Use a phrase, not a sentence, for the title. If you include a caption, place it here. A caption can point out information important to interpreting the data.

**Table 1: Title of the Table.** Use a phrase, not a sentence, for the title. If you include a caption, place it here. A caption can point out information important to interpreting the data.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Bell crank design** | **Weight (oz)** | **Strength (lb)** |
| **Design 1** | 0.8 | 100 |
| **Design 2** | 0.7 | 110 |
| **Design 3** | 0.6 | 90 |

 More tips on Graphics are included on the next page.

Remember: Be sure to provide a transition from the Discussion (the body of the report) to the Conclusion (the final section).

## Graphics Tips

* Executive readers appreciate subheads, brief paragraphs, lists, and graphics – all of which speed up delivery of information.
* SME readers expect data to be properly displayed in graphic formats, so use figures, graphs, and tables to illustrate concepts and summarize data.
* Before writing, decide which data is best displayed graphically and which in text.
* Be sure to refer to the graphic in the text before presenting the graphic. Ex., “As shown in Figure 1, under stress, Design #1 broke at the Xxx point, and the team moved to consideration of Design #2.”
* Be sure to place the graphic where you refer to it in the text (vs. locating all graphics on a page at the end of the discussion).
* Keep all parts of the graphic together (ex., do not split Tables between pages). If needed, start the graphic on a new page to keep it together.
* Similarly, keep all numbers and their units of measurement on the same line (ex., 25 mm, 13 cycles, ¼ inch).
* Place Figure titles below the figure and number your Figures sequentially.
* Place Table titles above the table and number your Tables sequentially.
* Center Figure and Table titles.
* Use Calibri for titles and captions for graphics to distinguish them from the report text.
* Use white space and/or lines to set off your graphics from the text to make reading easier.

# CONCLUSION

This section includes:

* Overall progress of your report. You want to end with this overall summary vs. leaving the reader focused on 1-2 problems that remain.
* What remains to be done before the next progress report or until the project is completed.
* Timeline / plan for finishing these tasks.
* Whether or not the project will be on time.

This section provides closure for this portion of the project, and indicates steps that may need to be taken. This last is of particular interest to readers because it indicates their involvement beyond the progress report.

Remember, you don’t introduce new information in the Conclusion. Instead, you recap the major points of the progress report: What went well, what needs work, any additional resources needed, and a possible action plan.

Your last sentence should look forward to the next progress report – or the conclusion of the project.

**Writing Tips**

* As the author, you want to appear engaged, helpful, and credible. This is the note to end on – your expectations for the next stage (or the completion) of the project.
* If appropriate, offer a meeting, be available for questions, offer documents beyond those in your Appendices, and so on.

# REFERENCES

Place all sources here and use The American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) style.

You can find ASME citation resources on the course BlackBoard site, the ASME site (<http://www.asme.org/shop/proceedings/conference-publications/references>), and the University of Missouri at <https://libraryguides.missouri.edu/mae/asmecitation>.

For example:

[1] Lastname, F. M., Lastname, F. M. and Lastname, F. M., Year of Publication. Title of Book*.* Publisher, City, ST of publication.

[1] Watt, J. H. and van der Berg, S.A., 1995, Research Methods for Communication Science, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA.

**Citation Tips**

* Keep a list of your sources as you use them.
* Remember, ASME uses a number vs. alphabetical order listing for References.
* You may wish to use an Appendix for your References.

# APPENDIX A: TOPIC OF APPENDIX A

Before you begin to write your progress report, you must make decisions:

* what information is best displayed in text format?
* what information is best displayed graphically?
* what information is critical to the reader’s understanding of the project – and which can be offered as supplemental material in an Appendix?
* Note: Appendices are particularly useful when you have a mixed audience (executive and technical readers, for instance). The primary reader might be an executive, while the secondary reader is an SME who will appreciate the additional data you provide in an Appendix.
* Typical types of information included in appendices for a progress report include:
	+ Computations
	+ Printouts
	+ Schematics
	+ Diagrams
	+ Charts
	+ Tables
	+ Revised Task Schedules
	+ Timelines
	+ Bios of Personnel Involved

Your first appendix is titled Appendix A: Topic of Appendix. Your second appendix is called Appendix B: Topic of Appendix, and so on. If you include graphics in your Appendix, label them as Figure A-1, Figure A-2, Table A-1, Table A-2, and so on. Label graphics in Appendix B in the same way, Figure B-1, Table B-1, and so on.

Note that each Appendix begins on a new page. Also note that each Appendix should be introduced somewhere in the text portion of the report. Ex., “Detailed lab results are provided in Appendix A on page x.”

**Writing Tips**

* Note the different size fonts in the header.
* Remember: The singular is Appendix, but the plural is appendices.