Recommendation Report and Presentation

You already know how to do persuasive essays and research papers

It is common in university writing classes to assign persuasive essays and research papers that argue for a specific thesis. The thesis is usually stated in the first paragraph along with some background context, and subsequent paragraphs present evidence and arguments in support of that thesis, often ignoring or slighting contrary positions. This type of writing is similar to newspaper editorials and partisan political pieces.

The "recommendation report" is a bit different

However, another type of writing that is common in corporate environments is a report that defines a problem, presents relevant information, and proposes possible solutions. These reports are designed to support decision-making by superiors in the organization, and may or may not make a recommendation about the final decision or policy. Journalists also write these kinds of reports for readers who need to make evidence-based decisions on political candidates or propositions. The purpose of such reports is to allow the reader to make a wise decision based on objectively presented evidence.

Getting started on your recommendation report

Think of a company, an organization or an institution with which you are connected. Some possibilities:

- Cal Poly Pomona or another campus
- A student club
- A community
- A business
- A non-profit organization
- A church, temple, mosque, or synagogue

Now think of a problem the organization has. It could be something like:

- Poor customer service
- Obsolete technology
- Poor response time
- Missed opportunities
- Poor performance
- Lack of market share
- Wasteful or inefficient practices
- Poor morale
- Poor attendance
- Lack of resources

Defining the Problem

Problem definition is crucial. One important tip: Don't start by blaming people. Problems are usually larger than one or two people. It is also hard to sell a solution that involves putting blame on particular individuals.

Define the problem by asking questions such as

- What makes you think there is a problem?
- What is happening?
- What should be happening?
- When is it happening, and how often?
- Where is it happening?
- With whom is it happening?
- How widespread is it?
- Why is it happening?

Of course, the last bullet is often the key to a good solution. However, the other questions are essential if you are going to have an accurate assessment of the causes.

Sometimes the problem is simple. For example, say the company's forklift is old, polluting, and unreliable. Should it repair the old one or buy a new one? If it buys a new one, what kind? From what manufacturer? Other problems can be complex. For example, a student club schedules events, but no one shows up, or people show up but the event is poorly organized. What should the club do?

For a more detailed analysis of the process of problem solving, look at the handout "Defining and Solving Problems."

Work step-by-step over time (This project cannot be done the night before it is due.)

Your project will have the following steps:

1. Define the problem
2. Gather information through interviews and research
3. Develop criteria for success
4. Identify possible approaches
5. Apply your criteria to choose the best approach
6. Write a report of your findings
7. Create a multimodal presentation of your findings using PowerPoint, Prezi, a video, a website, a poster, or other media.
8. Present your project to the class, pretending that they are the actual audience for the proposal. (Note: In the online version of this course, we may have to use an alternative approach.)

Your report should define the problem, present your criteria for evaluating approaches, propose several possible solutions, explore the pros and cons of each solution, and make a recommendation. Your written report should be 5-6 pages long. Your presentation, in whatever form it takes, should be no longer than five minutes. A PowerPoint should have no more than nine slides, a video should be no longer than three minutes (to allow for in-class introduction and contextualization), etc.