Chapter 4

Hiring Recommendation Memo

4.1 Goals—reading for content, writing memos

The purpose of this assignment is for you to put yourself on the other side of the job application process. Instead of acting as job applicant, you will pretend that you are the person who requested the new employee.

You have two goals. The first is to assess honestly the applicant's presentation of her or his qualifications for the position she or he is applying for. The second is to present your conclusions in a persuasive memo, either recommending that the applicant be granted an interview, or that the applicant be turned down.

Bear in mind that your memo is not a hiring recommendation but an interview recommendation. If you recommend an interview, the memo should be a guide to the interviewer, who may not be you, about what the candidate might be asked in the initial interview. The initial interview is designed to confirm relevant knowledge and experience for the position. You, the Senior Engineer, are the best judge of what those things are. In short, the reasons you give for interviewing the candidate are the things the candidate will be asked to talk about.

4.2 Audience assessment—Personnel Director

This memo will be addressed to the Personnel Director of the company (us) from the Senior Engineer (you). Write it as a memo with proper formatting [HO91, Chapters 12 and 13]. You will need the first four items of the normal heading, as well as the optional `Enclosure:`, since you will be attaching your memo to the application and résumé.

You must use your imagination for this assignment, putting yourself into the position of a Senior Engineer who has just received an application from someone you don't know. Therefore, even if the résumé you are reviewing is from your lifelong best friend, don't refer to her or him by first name! For this assignment, you don't know each other.

4.3 Writing process—persuasive writing

4.3.1 How to go about persuading the personnel director

First, decide whether to grant an interview for the position. Try to be as realistic as possible in your evaluation; base your decision on a careful study of the job advertisement, on how closely the applicant's qualifications match, and on how well the job letter and résumé are written. Don't worry if you want to recommend that the applicant not be granted an interview: you will turn this memo directly in to us, and he or she need never see it. (Of course, most students do a good enough job of selecting job openings that they are well-qualified for the job—don't be unreasonably picky.)

Start by saying whether you are recommending that this applicant be interviewed for the position or not—the most important information should always appear at the beginning of a memo, and of most technical documents. The applicant's name should appear immediately, both in the *Subject* line and in the first sentence of the body.

If you decide the person deserves an interview, persuade your personnel director to call her/him in. The tone can be very formal: "We should grant an interview to Joseph P. Undergraduate for the position of technician

in underground wiring." Or you can be very casual: "We've got a live one for digging ditches! Check out Joe Undergrad." You'll probably be most effective if you match your style to the Personnel Director's tastes. If you are not sure, it is better to be a bit too formal.

Remember, you will be attaching your memo to the applicant's letter and résumé and sending the packet to the Personnel Director. The first thing she will read is your memo. She will know nothing about the applicant, other than what you tell her. Therefore, be specific and detailed. Don't say something like "Her summer at Lockheed qualifies her ... ." Say rather, "She designed voltmeters at Lockheed, which qualifies her to work on ... ."

Also, make it clear what position the applicant is applying for—the company may have more than one position open. Present your applicant's strongest qualifications first—remember, you are selling this person to the director. If you have reservations ("This person's qualifications are excellent, but her résumé was sloppy, so she may be a careless worker ... ") put them last. Emphasize the positive.

If you decide to recommend that the person be turned down, state all the negative things about the application first. Then, if you are unsure, and want to say some positive things, stick them at the end. Remember, the first impression of the person reading your memo will be based on what you say first. It's very startling to read a memo that begins with positive statements about an applicant, and ends with a recommendation not to interview.

If you want to soften the negative tone, you can start with something like "Although Ima Genius has excellent grades, she has no experience or training in computer engineering ... ." The word *although* warns the reader that what follows is not evidence for the case you are making.

Remember that you are only recommending this person for an interview, not for the job itself. Don't say "We should hire Joe Wong as ... ."

4.3.2 Memo format versus letter format

Memos are usually formatted differently from letters—mainly because doing so is traditional, but also to keep people from accidentally mailing out internal memos.

One difference is that memos usually do not indent anything—everything starts at the left margin. However, many businesses have adopted a "block" style for their letters, which also has no indenting.

Memos usually have four or five fields at the beginning:

To: The name and mail-stop of the recipient.

From: The name and mail-stop of the sender.

Date: The date and, often, the time the memo was sent.

Subject: A concise summary of the memo (for example, *Interview John Doe as a tech writer*). Making a subject line both concise and specific is an art—practice it!

Don't assume that the reader has read the subject line. Repeat anything important in the first sentence or two of the body of the memo.

Re: *Re* is the Latin ablative form of *res* and means *referring to*. It is used to refer to a previous document or file. Some people mistakenly use *Re:* for *Subject:*—it may be used in addition to a subject line, but should not replace it. For example,

Subject: Interview Jane Smith for project manager
Re: Job opening 89-103, application 89-1139

The way the UNIX mail program builds *Subject:* lines for replies contributes to the misuse of *Re:*.

Cc: A list of additional recipients. The letters stand for *carbon copy*, even though almost everyone uses photocopies. On a letter the list of names goes at the end, but memos put everything at the beginning.

Enclosure: A list of attached documents. You should have this filed for your memo, as you will be attaching a résumé and job application letter.

You must include *From*, *To*, *Date*, and *Subject* fields, but *Re*, *Cc*, and *Enclosure* fields are only included when they are needed.

No salutation or other greeting is needed in a memo—get to business right away. Similarly, no closing is needed—say what you need to and stop.

In many businesses, it is common to initial memos next to your name in the *From* field, rather than signing at the bottom. Either place is OK, but you must initial or sign a memo, to show that it is the final draft, and not an earlier one that needed to be changed. Dr. Karplus prefers signing at the bottom, to indicate that the memo has ended, and that there are no more pages, but Mr. Scripture prefers the more traditional initials by the *From* field.

4.3.3 Writing in class

You will write this memo in class and turn it in immediately. Plan what you want to write, make yourself an outline if you like, then write the memo as neatly as possible. You may make a second draft if you have time.

The only preparation you should do ahead of time is to read this assignment and the appropriate chapters of the book, and have your own job letter and résumé ready for others to read. Do not try to write this memo before class!