

**Memo Accompanying Technical/Quant Tasks:** Professor Radhika Jain (Introduction to Information Systems and Technologies/ 45-80 students) includes a memo assignment in her stock portfolio analysis assignment so that her students a) practice professional writing and b) reflect on the purpose and outcomes of their stock analysis.

### Prompt

You are working for a mutual fund manager at a boutique investment firm downtown. The fund manager has been looking for new investment opportunities [...] She has asked you to identify five firms in IT industry listed on one of the U.S. stock exchange. Using these five firms she wants you to create an IT portfolio. You are required to create a fictitious stock portfolio by investing a total of \$100,000 in five firms in the IT industry. Since she is new to the IT industry she first wants you to do some basic research using historical pricing.

Your primary tasks are:

- i. Complete the stock research as per the instructions in Parts A through D and then,
- ii. Prepare a business memo as per the instructions that makes a recommendation based on the findings of your research. [Guidance on memo-writing is part of assignment sheet.]

### Notable Features

In groups of 3 • real-world genre • writing to explain technical analysis

### Scaffolding

Radhika spends class time going over memo features and functions. To further scaffold, students could practice writing shorter memos earlier in the semester and respond to each other's writing in groups.

**In Radhika's words:** Students love the analysis part but not so much memo writing which I think for them is more of a craft. So I try to give as much structure to the memo in the instructions as I can which helps. But overall this has been one of the most fun and rewarding assignments.

**Persuasive Presentation and Reaction Notes:** Professor Jared Peifer (Management and Society / 90 students across 2 sections) assigns a group debate on an ethical issue in business management so that his students a) develop oral communication skills and b) practice making evidence-based claims drawn from course content. Students in the audience complete “Reaction Notes” so they, too, are practicing skills rather than watching passively.

## Prompts

**Persuasive Presentation:** Students might debate, for example, the ethics of GMO labeling, company monitoring of employees’ social media accounts, or direct-to-consumer advertising of pharmaceutical drugs. The instructor divides the class into several groups and each is assigned a topic and a position (“pro” or “con”) to take in the debate. Every group receives two case studies that present arguments on each side of the issue. The groups use these along with outside research to formulate their own claims supported by evidence.

**Reaction Notes** After both teams are finished with their persuasive presentations, students will have about 10 minutes during class to type their reactions. Those who give the persuasive presentation are also required to write a reaction note. Reaction Notes are “low stakes” writing, and meant to encourage students to type out their thoughts right away. Reaction Notes will be graded. You will not be graded on grammar or spelling or paragraph structure because it is understood that 10 minutes is not enough time to finesse these details. Each reaction note can earn up to 1 point.

## Notable Features

In groups of 5-6 • scaffolded formal assignment • active listening activity • clear presentation purpose  
• presentations spread across the semester

## Scaffolding

Students have an in-class workshop early in the semester on claims, evidence, and analysis • They have outside-of-class workshopping sessions • students repeat reaction notes after every debate, building the skill over time

**In Jared’s words:** The Reaction Notes are a routine exercise so the students can practice identifying claims and evidence. Like going to the gym every week. By the end of the semester, most students have figured it out, but not all of them. I give them individual feedback like “this is not strong support evidence of the claim you identified. Read the section on claims and evidence on the syllabus again.”

**Data Visualization Assignment:** Professor Anna O’Connell (CIS Data Visualization / 70 students) assigns a data visualization project that is shared via final group presentation so that students practice using Python/Tableau to communicate meaningful stories.

## Prompts

In this project, you will create a visualization-based data driven story that tells your viewers about how unequally our public/private resources are distributed/available/used in our states/cities/neighborhoods. Examples of resources include schools (public/private/charter), access to green spaces (parks, playgrounds, trees), access to grocery stores (not just delis), typical commute times, access to child care/health care, and so on.

This first project needs to be done using python (or R) based interactive data visualization libraries. The second project will use tools such as Tableau. In both projects, you need to put together all your visualizations as a data driven story that is either an explanation- or exploration- or a combination based.

At the end of the semester, all groups present their data-driven stories.

## Notable Features

In groups of 5 • scaffolded • combines visual and oral communication skills development • assignment includes core questions to guide storytelling (who is your target audience? What are the takeaways one will have after viewing your story? What is your communication purpose?)

## Scaffolding

Assignment has many interim deliverables (rough sketch, draft, feedback meeting with professor). This semester, Professor O’Connell is also experimenting with having students share “the one big idea” in one sentence with the whole class.

**In Anna’s words:** [In a progress-update] student discussion, they share their progress with the rest of the class and I assign class participation points this way.

**Memos to your supervisor:** Professor Valerie Watnick (Fundamentals of Business Law/ 80 students) assigns a short memo as a high-stakes project worth 10% of the final grade, so that her students practice communicating about course content in the context of a real world genre.

### Prompt

You work for a construction company named Prestige Construction (“Prestige”) in Queens. Prestige frequently must get insurance before you begin a big job in your area. You have become aware of [the following court case](#) decision from August 2020. In a one page, single spaced memo (To, From, Date and Re: headings) to your superior, using 12 point font in 500 words or less:

In an opening sentence, tell your superior why you are writing this memo and the main point.

Then, explain the facts, decision and legal reasoning of the above court decision with regard to the fraud claim only. Discuss the type of court that made this decision and what the court below decided.

Next, explain in a separate paragraph what this decision means to your company on a practical level. How do you protect your company so that you are sure to have worker’s compensation insurance when you need it for construction projects?

### Notable Features

Short • real world genre • clear purpose • can easily progress from low- to mid- to high-stakes

### Scaffolding

This assignment lends itself to a scaffolded sequence, such as three similar short memo assignments across a semester. Students apply feedback from the previous memos to each new assignment. Alternately, Valerie often has students revise and resubmit one memo based on her own or peer feedback.

**In Valerie’s words:** Students “accuse” me of being an English teacher but I really believe people learn substance by putting their thoughts down in writing [...] after editing I am noticing a marked improvement in the final drafts. It is a pleasure to see.