

## **Questions to ask as you proofread a memo**

### **Clarity**

What kind of a memo is this? (statute, analogical, predictive, persuasive?)

Does the author make this clear?

What is the author's conclusion?

### **Organization**

Does the author let the reader know early on what s/he plans to do in the memo? How?

Does the author clearly state the main points and label each section?

Does the author keep the same focus during the memo, or does s/he shift from topic to topic?

Is it clear how each paragraph fits into the overall memo?

### **Substance**

Does the author correctly interpret the ideas, concepts s/he is discussing? Do the facts seem right? If the evidence is controversial, have they given proper references? If not, point out the error.

Does the author offer an original and thoughtful discussion of the issue?

Does the author offer reasons to support his/her main points?

Do you find the reasons compelling?

### **Academic Integrity**

Do you think that this entire memo is original, or do you suspect that some of it was copied or paraphrased from another source?

Are quotes properly cited? Are references properly cited?

Finally, check for **Grammar and Style** by checking to see if author followed these rules:

#### *Plain English Rules*

- Avoid Redundancy: surplus words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs
- Avoid Compound Construction
- Focus on the actor, the action and the object
- Use base verbs, not nominalizations (verbs turned into nouns)
- Prefer the active voice (the subject does the acting)
- Use short sentences
- Avoid large gaps between subject, verb and object
- Put conditions and exceptions where they are clear and easy to read
- When necessary, make a list
- Modifiers
  - Put modifying words close to what they are modifying
  - Avoid nested modifiers
  - Clarify the reach of modifiers
- Choose your words with care
  - Use concrete words

- Use familiar words
- Do not use technical jargon when it is not necessary
- Avoid shotgunning (using lots of words hoping one may stick)
- Use words of authority with care
- In rule drafting, use singular and present tense
- Avoid elegant variation
- Avoid noun chains
- Avoid multiple negatives
- Avoid cosmic detachment—include people
- Use strong nouns and verbs
- Avoid sexist language
- Punctuate carefully and correctly (rules on 85-100)
- Cite your sources!
  - Use quotation marks correctly

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Y/ N</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Clarity and Organization</b>		
<b>Substance</b>		
<b>Academic integrity</b>		
<b>Grammar/Style</b>		
Avoid redundancy		
Avoid compound construction		
Focus on actor, action, object		
Use base verbs, not nominalizations		
Use active voice		
Use short sentences		
Avoid large gaps between subject, verb and object		
Make conditions and exceptions clear		
When necessary, make a list		
Use modifiers correctly		
Choose concrete, familiar words, avoid jargon		
In rule drafting, use singular and present tense		
Avoid elegant variation		
Avoid noun chains		
Avoid multiple negatives		
Avoid cosmic detachment		
Use strong nouns and verbs		
Avoid sexist language		
Punctuate carefully and correctly		
Cite your sources!		