

Making Recommendations



Background

In businesses, government, and nonprofit organizations, it is common to write recommendation reports that help people with authority to make decisions. These reports require planning, and this handout is designed to describe strategies for putting recommendations into writing. In particular, we'll look at the recommendation section of a report. This section is commonly used to provide overall recommendations, to support those recommendations, and to help the audience make a particular decision. Below is an excerpt from a sample recommendation memo in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis, which occurred in 1962. This historic confrontation occurred during the Cold War and is considered by some to be the closest the world has come to nuclear war.

Things to Notice

- ⇒ **Audience:** The audience for this excerpt is the president and his counsel. The authors wrote this memo to help guide officials in making a decision in response to a high-stakes situation.
- ⇒ **Structure:** The beginning of each paragraph provides a piece of the overall recommendation, and each proposition is supported with reasoning. The authors also provide potential outcomes of their recommendations. The way the argument is constructed helps its intended audience to make a decision with the right information.
- ⇒ **Use of Language:** This memo excerpt uses a professional, persuasive tone. The use of strong verbs helps to incite the reader to take appropriate action.

This agency's first priority is to eliminate the missile threat from Cuba. To do so, it recommends that the president implement a naval quarantine on offensive military equipment headed to that island. The quarantine is a measured response that will inhibit Soviet plans in Cuba with significantly lower risk of casualties and escalation than air strikes. Moreover, if accompanied by dialogue with the Soviet Union, a quarantine could effectively lead to Moscow's removal of the missiles. The United States should seek approval of the quarantine from the Organization of American States in order to lend it further diplomatic weight.

Operationally, the U.S. Navy would establish a quarantine line and signal ships approaching it to stop for boarding and inspection. As a first warning, a nonresponsive ship would receive a shot across the bow, and as a second warning, a shot fired into the rudder to stop the vessel. Any ship determined to be delivering offensive weapons to Cuba, regardless of port of origin, would be turned back.

Although this agency prefers a quarantine, it recommends simultaneously preparing for air strikes and invasion in case such measures become necessary to eliminate the missile threat. The United States should reinforce its naval base at Guantanamo Bay, raise military alert levels, and take steps to protect U.S. shipping interests in the Florida Strait. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have separately identified such preparatory measures.

As part of any response, this agency supports continuing reconnaissance missions over Cuba and strengthening air defenses in the southeastern United States. Finally, the United States should advise the Soviet Union that any attack from Cuba will be seen as an attack from the Soviet Union itself and will prompt a commensurate U.S. response.