

# GOVERNMENT

## D. Impact of Geography on Governmental Policy

Project Code: G-d.0

### ZONING BOARD DECISIONS

In a memorandum (memo), advise a local zoning board on the use of land for the development of a shopping center. You will consider the impact of urban sprawl and the national and state requirements in your decision making.



# STUDENT PROJECT

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Student Name

Sample Draft  
2008



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**PROJECT TASK**

In a memorandum (memo), advise a local zoning board on the use of land for the development of a shopping center. You will consider the impact of urban sprawl and the national and state requirements in your decision making.

**DIRECTIONS**

The students should:

1. Read the Scenario.
2. Read through the Guidelines.
3. Review the scoring categories to determine where you can receive credit for your work. Discuss this information with the Project Monitor.
4. With your Project Monitor, determine a timeline for completing the project. The Project Monitor and student will specify dates for each CHECK POINT listed in the Project Steps. After the Project Monitor and student meet on the specified date, both must initial the CHECK POINT.
5. Use the project guidelines to complete the project.
6. Submit the project for scoring by the due date.

**PROJECT COMPLETION REQUIREMENTS**

Upon completion of the project, the students must submit these documents for scoring:

- *Student Activity A: Urban Sprawl and the Proposed Project*
- *Student Activity B: Impact of State and National Land Use Guidelines*
- *Final recommendation: Memorandum*

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

These websites are suggested as additional resources for students.

For content support use:

Online Government Course at [MSDE.mdk12online.org](http://MSDE.mdk12online.org)

- User name: government
- Password: student

Within this course, the following lessons relate to this project:

- Unit 3, Lesson 5: *State and Local Legislatures*
- Unit 6, Lesson E: *Land Use*

**Smart Growth Resources**

- Online versions of the Smart Growth resources from National Geographic are available at [www.mdp.state.md.us/national\\_growth/index.htm](http://www.mdp.state.md.us/national_growth/index.htm).
- Additional information regarding Smart Growth can be found at [www.mdp.state.md.us/smartintro.htm](http://www.mdp.state.md.us/smartintro.htm).



**Memorandum Writing Support**

For additional information about writing a memorandum (memo) students can access the following collegiate website for additional instructions and a sample:

- [www.owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/590/01/](http://www.owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/590/01/).



## SCENARIO

Zoning boards are charged with the responsibility for making land use decisions for our local communities. Their decisions should comply with national, state, and local guidelines intended to protect the environment and to limit urban sprawl. Zoning boards also face pressure from the people who live in the communities that they serve. Zoning boards, for example, tackle issues such as overcrowded schools and traffic congestion caused by population growth. As a result, zoning boards must strike a balance between complying with the regulations and addressing the needs of a growing population.

A local zoning board has received an application from the ABC Development Company to construct a shopping center and parking lot within a local community. Your services as a consultant to this local zoning board have been requested. Your job will be to recommend the best location for the proposed shopping center. In order to make this recommendation, you will:

- Examine the needs of the community;
- Consider the public input that the zoning board has received from local residents;
- Evaluate the national and state regulations that impact the shopping center location; and
- Recommend a course of action for this proposal to the zoning board.

Your recommendation will be a memorandum (memo) that could be sent to the zoning board members.

This recommendation must address:

- A description of the zoning board's responsibility to the community;
- An explanation of urban sprawl and its relationship to this project;
- An evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages for each possible shopping center location;
- A recommendation for the shopping center location; and
- A thorough explanation for the recommendation that can be used by the zoning board to address the community as well as state and national officials

*Check Points do not indicate approval of student work.*



**PROJECT STEPS**

**Part 1: Examining the Town’s Situation**

To understand the situation that your town’s zoning board must consider, you will examine the background information provided in *Student Resource A*. This information will describe the town’s goals as well as comments from the public regarding the proposed project.

Read *Student Resource A* which describes

- the Background
- the Proposed Shopping Center Locations
- the Zoning Board Log: Citizen Comments on the Shopping Center Location

**CHECK POINT**      Date \_\_\_\_\_      Student/Monitor Initials \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 2: Where does this development fit in the “Big Picture?”**

You must also consider how the development of the shopping center may impact your community as well as the regions surrounding this town. Complete *Student Activity A: Urban Sprawl and the Proposed Project* to analyze this development’s possible impact on urban sprawl in your community.

**CHECK POINT**      Date \_\_\_\_\_      Student/Monitor Initials \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 3: How do state and federal land use guidelines impact the zoning board’s decision?**

You must consider how federal and state regulations and/or programs could impact where the shopping center is located. Using the *Student Resource B: Consider the Guidelines National and State Regulations for Land Use*, complete *Student Activity B: Impact of State and National Land Use Guidelines* to analyze the role of the state and national government in making land use decisions.

**CHECK POINT**      Date \_\_\_\_\_      Student/Monitor Initials \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 4: What is the best location for the shopping center?**

Examine all of your activity sheets. Using *Student Activity C: Considering the Options*, evaluate each of the possible locations for the shopping center. Record the advantages and disadvantages of each location on this table. Using this information, what action should the zoning board take? Explain your decision in the What action should the zoning board take on the proposed shopping center project? section.

**CHECK POINT**      Date \_\_\_\_\_      Student/Monitor Initials \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

*Check Points do not indicate approval of student work.*



**Part 5: Prepare your recommendation for the local zoning board...**

*Student Activity D* is provided to help you prepare your final recommendation to zoning board. It provides information about writing a memo and key questions to help you include all of the important information for your final product.

This recommendation should address:

- A description of the zoning board's responsibility to the community;
- An explanation of urban sprawl and its relationship to this project;
- An evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages for each possible shopping center location;
- A recommendation for the shopping center location; and
- A thorough explanation for the recommendation that can be used by the zoning board to address the community as well as state and national officials.

**Part 6: Write your memo to the zoning board****CHECK POINT**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student/Monitor Initials \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_



## PROJECT SCORING CRITERIA

## Overview

You are provided the scoring criteria as a tool to track your progress on this project. All the activities included in the project are designed to help you consider the issues thoroughly and thoughtfully; organize your thinking; and prepare the final presentation or memorandum.

However, some of the activities do not contribute to your score. Activity Sheets that contribute to your score will be clearly marked. The entire final recommendation contributes to your score for the project.

*Each activity has been designed to help you thoroughly and successfully complete this project. It is essential that you complete all the requested activities.*

**Student Activity A: Identifying urban sprawl and the project's value to the community**

You should complete all of *Student Activity A* to support the development of your final recommendation. You will be scored on your definition of urban sprawl, your understanding of why some would consider this an example of urban sprawl, and your cost-benefit analysis for the community.

**Progress Indicator**Check\* 

Have you:

Defined urban sprawl?

Identified why some would consider this an example of urban sprawl?

Weighed the costs and benefits of this project for the community?

**Student Activity B: How do state and federal land use guidelines impact the zoning board's decision?**

You should complete all of *Student Activity B* to support the development of your final recommendation. You will be scored on your examination of how the national and state land use guidelines impact the zoning board's decision.

**Progress Indicator**Check\* 

Have you:

Have you described how the land use guidelines provided by the national and state government impact this project?



**Final Product: Your memorandum (memo) for the local zoning board...**

**Progress**

Check\*

**Indicator**

Have you demonstrated your understanding of:

The zoning board's goals and land use responsibilities?

The issues that the zoning board must consider?

The complex land use decision that the zoning boards will make?

Have you

Explained your recommendation thoroughly?

Included details and examples to support your recommendation?



**STUDENT RESOURCE A: THE BACKGROUND**

- There is no shopping center in the town. Families must travel 25 miles one way to the nearest shopping center.
- The town council wants to increase the amount of money in their treasury by attracting new business and industry to the area. The additional money from taxes would allow the town to do additional projects.
- The ABC Development Company has proposed to construct a shopping center with a grocery store, a dozen other stores including a dry cleaner, restaurant, card store, drug store, bank and sandwich shop. A parking lot that will provide enough spaces will be constructed to accommodate customers.
- The ABC Development Company has submitted plans for a plot of land that they would like to use for the shopping center project.
- The ABC Development Company has requested an upgrade of an important access road. The road is currently two lanes. The development company has stated that a 4 lane highway will be required.
- Some local citizens are excited about the prospect of creating new jobs, starting new businesses, and drawing new people to the community, thus expanding the town's tax base.
- Other citizens are concerned about the possible consequences of the proposed locations for the shopping center.
- The zoning board will have to consider the possible site locations based on the goals of the community, land use regulations, and citizen input.
- There has already been intense debate among the town's citizens about the proposed shopping center.



**STUDENT RESOURCE A: PROPOSED SHOPPING CENTER LOCATIONS****Wetlands**

- Sometimes referred to as swamps or marshes, these wetlands are the habitat for many animal species.
- The bald eagle, a species classified as “threatened,” nests in this location.
- This valuable resource is responsible for storing rainwater, filtering and cleaning water, and controlling flooding and erosion.

**ABC Development Company Site**

- The company has proposed a location for the shopping center for the zoning board to consider.
- The site that the company would like to develop for the project is considered open space which means there is currently no development on this land.

**Tree Farm**

- Currently, a family-owned tree farm exists in close proximity to the proposed shopping center site.
- The family is planning on expanding the tree farm to include a nursery business.
- The tree farm provides a habitat for some species, and helps minimize run off and soil erosion.

**Historic Site**

- The founder of the town’s childhood home is located within walking distance of the proposed shopping center project.
- Local citizens have worked hard to preserve the architectural significance of the site.

**Open Space**

- A large area of green, open space is next to the proposed location for the shopping center.
- This land had been set aside by the zoning board so that it could not be developed.

**School**

- The local high school and its athletic facility are located within walking distance from the proposed shopping center site.

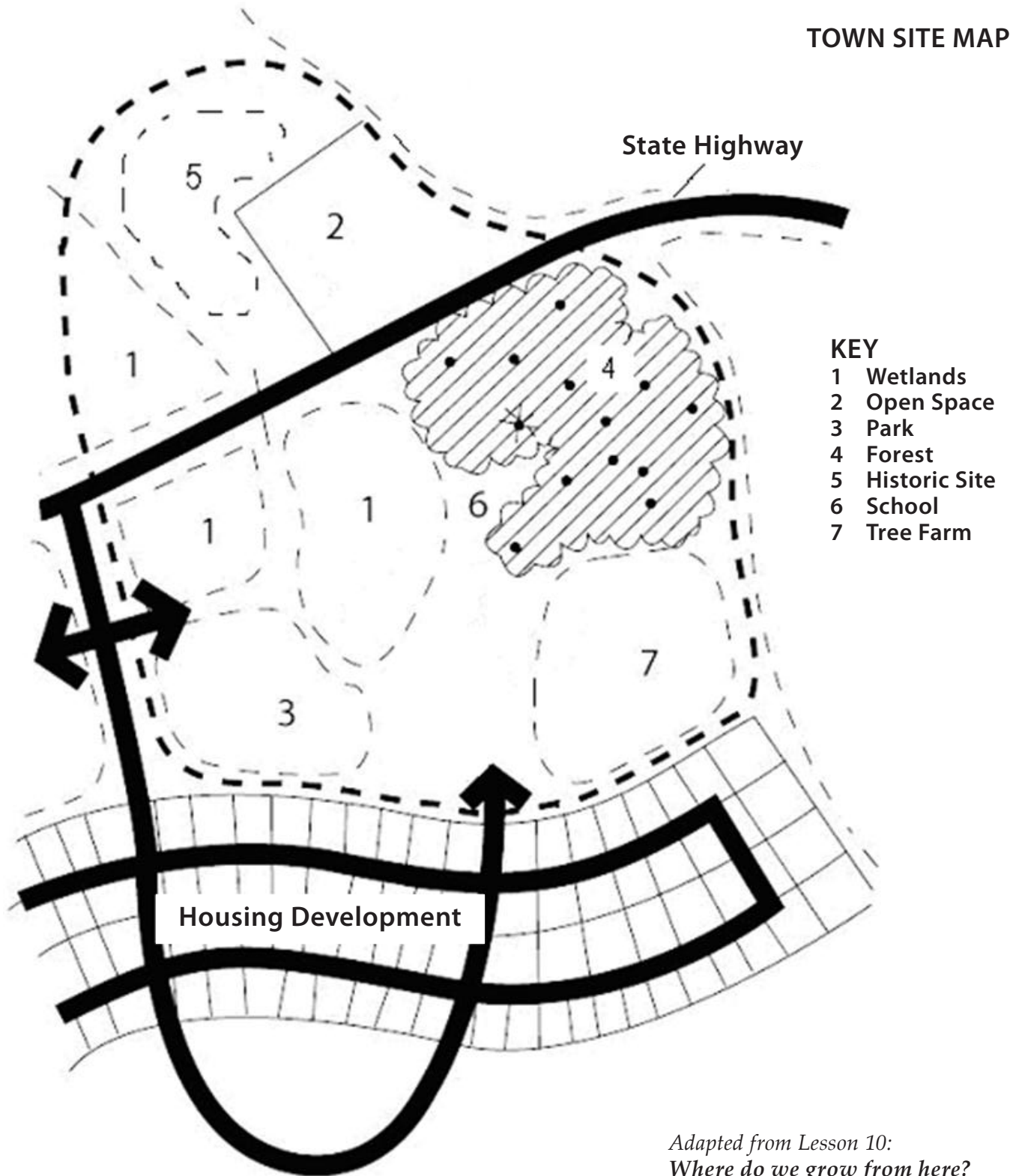
**Park**

- A park and playground are located adjacent to the local high school campus.



STUDENT RESOURCE A: PROPOSED SHOPPING CENTER LOCATIONS

TOWN SITE MAP



Adapted from Lesson 10:  
*Where do we grow from here?*

**STUDENT RESOURCE A: PROPOSED SHOPPING CENTER LOCATIONS****Zoning Board Log: Citizen Comments on Shopping Center Location**

**Environmental Activist:** I don't see why we have to overdevelop here at all. The real problem with this world is the desire to build on every piece of land. There is no room left on the planet for the trees and the animals. And we certainly don't need any more competition for business in this town. Who needs money anyway? We have so many natural resources here that we should limit our growth in favor of nature! Also, if we decide to grow, we should stick to the town center instead of sprawling out to the rural sections of town. We can't keep building these roads and destroying natural habitat.

**70 Year-Old Woman:** My great-grandmother and great-grandfather met in this town. Their wedding reception was held at the town founder's home. My friends and I have started a petition drive and we already have 400 signatures to protect this historic landmark from your bulldozers. So don't think for a minute that you will tear down that beautiful home, or we'll be picketing.

**Mother with 3 Teenagers:** I can't believe that someone would put a historic home or a stupid eagle before the convenience for shopping and job opportunities. We need this shopping center, and we need it now! My children have to travel a great distance to go to the movies now. When the shopping center is built, a movie theater will be closer to our neighborhood which means our children will be safer. This shopping center will also provide job opportunities for part time jobs for our young people and full time employment for adults in our community.

**ABC Development Company Lobbyist:** The economic development of the shopping center supports the community with all of its shopping needs. It will provide additional tax revenue, full and part-time jobs for your citizens. The project will support and provide opportunities for the small entrepreneur to open new business. We assure you that our plan for the shopping center will minimize the environmental impact.

**Tree Farm Owner:** What will happen to the forest that borders my farm? My plans to expand my business could be hurt by the shopping center development. My tree farm has also provided numerous environmental benefits to the town as well. I am fearful that the government will forget the benefits of my farm and exercise their right to take my property for this development project. I will not be able to continue my livelihood and no amount of money will be able to compensate me!



## STUDENT RESOURCE A: PROPOSED SHOPPING CENTER LOCATIONS

## Zoning Board Log: Citizen Comments on Shopping Center Location (cont'd.)

**Historian:** The home of the town's founder should be preserved. Additional research projects are planned to examine the hand crafted woodwork and architectural features included in the home. It would be travesty to destroy this rare architectural beauty.

**Community Member:** With the price of gas these days, traveling a great distance to shop is too costly. By locating this shopping center closer to our homes, we can save money. In addition, we could reduce air pollution from our cars. We won't be traveling 25 miles one way to go to the store!



**STUDENT ACTIVITY A: URBAN SPRAWL AND THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

Answer the following questions regarding urban sprawl and the proposed development under consideration.

In your own words, define urban sprawl. *(This is a scored question.)*

Urban sprawl is:

What are some characteristics of urban sprawl?

How does urban sprawl impact communities?

How would the shopping center project help the community?



**STUDENT ACTIVITY A: URBAN SPRAWL AND THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

Why would some citizens argue that this project could create urban sprawl? *(This is a scored question.)*

Do the benefits of the shopping center outweigh the costs to the community? Explain. *(This is a scored question.)*



**STUDENT RESOURCE B: CONSIDER THE GUIDELINES: NATIONAL AND STATE REGULATIONS FOR LAND USE****WILDLIFE GUIDELINES**

**Federal Guidelines:** In 1999, the United States listed the bald eagle as a threatened species. As a result, the federal government issued a series of guidelines for states to use when considering the protection of this national symbol. These recommendations include considerations for development surrounding the nesting locations and migratory patterns of the bald eagle.

**State Guidelines:** Maryland has established a number of rules that guide the treatment of the bald eagle. These regulations include limiting building near an eagle's nest during the 6 month nesting cycle. In addition, a tree that contains an eagle's nest or that are within 100 feet of an eagle's nest can not be cut down until that nest has been abandoned for 2 years.

**SMART GROWTH GUIDELINES**

In 1997, the Smart Growth initiative was adopted to address the problems associated with sprawl within the state. This program has three goals:

- To support and revitalize existing communities by targeting state resources to support development in areas where the infrastructure (roads, water, sewer, etc) is already in place or will soon be in place;
- To preserve the state's most valuable farmland and critical natural resources before they are forever lost;
- To save taxpayers millions of dollars in the unnecessary cost of building the infrastructure required by sprawling development. (Infrastructure projects include road construction and developing water treatment facilities.)

Maryland's Smart Growth program continues to allow local authorities to make land use decisions; however, the state uses its funding decisions to influence where and how local authorities develop the land. In other words, the state rewards local decision makers with state funds for growth related projects such as highway construction when they make decisions that align with Smart Growth's priority funding areas. If a local government decides to develop a project outside of a priority funding area, the state will not provide financial assistance.



**STUDENT RESOURCE B: CONSIDER THE GUIDELINES: NATIONAL AND STATE REGULATIONS FOR LAND USE****SMART GROWTH PROGRAMS**

**Priority Funding Areas:** Priority Funding Areas (PFAs) are areas within the state which are already developed and have the necessary infrastructure in place. This includes all 157 incorporated cities in Maryland as well as the area around the Baltimore and Washington beltways. Counties may request additional areas be designated as PFAs. However, these requests must meet state guidelines for water and sewer, density, and population growth projections.

**Critical Areas:** All land that is within 1000 feet of tidal waters and wetlands are considered “critical areas.” These areas receive special protection and development of these wetlands requires special permits.

**Historic Preservation Tax Credits:** The state offers a tax credit (a savings on taxes) to developers who reuse and/or renovate older or existing buildings in a project. The tax credits are intended to help cover the costs of rehabilitating historic, commercial, or residential properties.

**Rural Legacy:** This initiative allows landowners to work with local sponsors to compete for state funds to protect large tracts of farm land, forests, or historical sites from development.

Source: [www.mdp.state.md.us/national\\_growth/index.htm](http://www.mdp.state.md.us/national_growth/index.htm)



**STUDENT ACTIVITY B: IMPACT OF STATE AND NATIONAL LAND USE GUIDELINES**

Read the **Student Resource B: Consider the Guidelines: National & State Regulations**. Use the information in this resource to explain how the Smart Growth initiatives impact the possible sites for the shopping center.

Smart Growth Programs & Goals	Which possible site(s) could be impacted by this program?	How would the site(s) be impacted by this Smart Growth program?
Priority Funding Areas Program goal:		
Critical Areas Program goal:		
Historic Preservation Tax Credits Program goal:		
Rural Legacy Program goal:		

How do the state and national land use guidelines impact the local zoning board’s decision making? *(This is a scored question.)*



**STUDENT ACTIVITY C: ZONING BOARD DECISIONS**

Using all of the information that you have examined, evaluate the pros and cons of placing the proposed shopping center on the sites listed below.

	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<b>Wetlands</b>		
<b>Tree Farm</b>		
<b>Historic Site</b>		
<b>Open Space</b>		
<b>School</b>		
<b>Park</b>		

What action should the zoning board take on the proposed shopping center project?



**STUDENT ACTIVITY D: PREPARING YOUR MEMORANDUM**

Use the following as a guide to help you prepare your memorandum.

Memorandums (memos) are written to a small audience to inform them about a policy decision or company program. Memos are written with a certain format and include:

- an opening statement,
- a body, and
- a conclusion.

**Memo Format**

**To:** *Identifies the audience for the memo*

**From:** *Identifies the person who is sending the memo*

**Date:** *Tells the date when the memo is sent*

**Subject:** *Describes what the memo will discuss*

In the memo's opening, the author explains why the memo is being written. The author will outline what information will be presented in the memo.

The body of a memo usually includes the main points that the intended audience must consider. For each point, details and examples are used to support the author's points.

A clear, concise conclusion should tell the audience what action to take after considering the information provided in the memo.



**STUDENT ACTIVITY D: PREPARING YOUR MEMORANDUM**

What is the purpose for your memo?

Who will read your memo?

What points must you address in the memo?

What information and details from the activities that you completed will you include to support your statements?

How will you organize the information included in the memo?

What action should the audience take as a result of this memo?

