

General Memo Writing Guidelines

Composing a Memo:

- Like most business correspondence, memos need to be short and direct, easy to read and understand. This means that the first step in writing a memo is thinking carefully about what you want to say and how to say it clearly and briefly.
- This brainstorming can be surprisingly time-consuming, but is necessary to write a memo that can be read quickly and easily.
- Expect to revise your memo like you would a school paper: the first draft you write will probably *not* be clear and concise. Consider giving it to someone else to read to see if what you've written makes sense to them.
- Memo Subjects: Choose a representative phrase that immediately tells the reader what the memo will be about

Memo Formatting:

- Memos have one-inch margins around the page and are on plain paper (not stationery)
- Use a professional font and black color
- All lines of the memo begin at the left margin, except the MEMO line (which can be centered)
- The body of the memo is single-spaced, with two spaces between paragraphs
- Second-page headings: If your memo is more than 1 page long, use a subsequent page header that includes who the Memo is addressed to, the page number, and the date.
- The sender usually signs the Memo next to the FROM line, using initials, first name, or complete name
- **Don't** add a greeting between the memo heading and body.
- Some organizations have special memo forms or pre-made templates. If not, use the "MEMO" (or "MEMORANDUM") label and heading shown here to format your memo.

Memo Tone:

- Writers communicate tone through word choice (10-cent words vs. "plain speech"), the verbs they use (commands vs. declarative verbs), and sentence structure (complex vs. simple).
- Memos inform the reader of new information and often instruct them on how to act based on that information. In this context, you need to be specific and detailed without including unnecessary (i.e. time-wasting or confusing) information and without insulting your reader's intelligence.
- To make appropriate decisions about the content you include and the style and tone you use, you need to think carefully about who your audience is, what they already know, and what you want them to do with the information you're giving them.
- Because memos usually circulate "in-house," they can have a more informal tone than correspondence with outsiders. Remember, however, that what counts as "formal" or "informal" is defined in terms of each organization's culture, so pay attention to your audience and context.

Memos Sent as Email:

- A lot of business communication once circulated as print memos is now circulated via email.
- For professional emails that work as memos—that inform and instruct the reader to do something—use a format like the one modeled in the body of this example, remembering to use direct, clear language and specific directions.
- Email programs will fill in the To/From/Date lines and prompt you for the Subject, so you don't need to use the full memo heading. Unlike in printed memos, however, use a greeting to begin the body of the email memo.

**SEE NEXT PAGE FOR SAMPLE BUSINESS MEMO AND MORE SPECIFIC
MEMO-WRITING INSTRUCTIONS**

MEMO

TO: Tata Motors Employees
FROM: Prabir Jha *PJH*
DATE: September 3, 2011
SUBJECT: How to Write a Business Memo

Begin with an introductory paragraph—very short, often only 1-2 sentences long—that clearly states the purpose of the memo to the reader. If the memo is responding to or following up on a specific situation or meeting, state that in the first paragraph.

For easier reading, format the content of your memo into short paragraphs. Paragraphs made of a few lines of text with white space between them are easier to read. Writing short paragraphs also encourages you to break your information into bite-sized chunks for easy comprehension.

Consider Using Formatting:

Use formatting—such as headings and bulleted or numbered lists—to format information organized in steps (for example, instructions) in the body of the memo. Using this kind of formatting:

- Breaks information down into manageable chunks,
- Which makes it easier and faster for the reader to process.

End the body of the memo with a concluding paragraph that clearly informs the reader what action they need to take.

Finally, end the memo with your (the sender's) [email address](#) and/or [phone number](#) for people to contact with questions.

END TEMPLATE



After reviewing this template, remember that our Academic Writing Center staff can help you to develop killer memos for your classes, coops, or internships!



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