

## 10: Memos

### Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Describe the purpose of a memo
- Identify the proper format of a memo
- Explain how to effectively organize a memo's content

Once the dominant form of communication in the workplace, **memos** typically serve as a tool for **internal communication** within organization. Memos can update policies and procedures, announce meetings or organizational changes, or inform the internal audience as needed. The truth is, there are lots of different occasions to write memos. We use memos to distribute progress reports, meeting minutes, incident reports, directive, and responses to an inquiry.

Memos are an accepted method of communication within a specific business, company, or institution. The fact that memos are only used internally makes them different from letters, emails, and texting, which can be used inside and outside of the workplace. The successful operation of a company depends on memos for communication between the employees of the company. They are often (but not always) written from a one-to-all perspective, broadcasting a message to an audience, rather than a one-on-one, interpersonal communication. Memos may be used to update a team on activities for a given project or to inform a specific group within a company of an event, action, or observance.

### Memo Purpose

A memo's purpose is often to inform, but it may occasionally include an element of persuasion or a call-to-action. All organizations have informal and formal communication networks. The unofficial, informal communication network within an organization is often referred to as the grapevine, and it is characterized by gossip, rumors, and innuendo. On the grapevine, one person may hear that someone else is going to be laid off and start passing the news around. Rumors change and transform as they are passed from person to person, and before you know it, the word is that they are shutting down your entire department!

One effective way to address unofficial speculation is to spell out clearly for all employees what is going on with a particular issue. If budget cuts are a concern, then you could send a memo explaining the changes that are imminent. If a company wants employees to take action, they may also issue a memo. For example, on February 13, 2009, upper management at the Panasonic Corporation issued a declaration that all employees should buy at least \$1,600 worth of Panasonic products. The company president noted that if everyone supported the company with purchases, it would benefit all (Lewis, 2009). While memos do not normally include a call-to-action that requires personal spending, they do usually represent the organization's interests. They may also include statements that align business and employee interests.

### Memo Format

Memos are typically brief, concise, organized for readability, and addressed to targeted audiences with specific subject lines. A memo's format provides employees with clear and easy access to information. The message is direct. In order to be easy to navigate, a memo follows a specific format. Usually, we start by typing the word Memo or Memorandum under the letterhead. (Note that there are memo templates available to you in Microsoft Word.) If there is no letterhead, start by typing up the name of the company on top of the page before you write the word Memo or Memorandum. Then, follow with a heading block.

### Organization of a Heading Block

To: Date:

From: OR To:

Date: From:

Subject: Subject:

The **recipient** can be a single person or a group of people. If you are writing the memo to one person, use the person's name and job title. If you are writing to a group of people, use the name of the group rather than a list of specific names. For example, we can

address a memo to The Sales Team. The sender should always include their name and their job title. The **subject line** is very important and should be used responsibly. It must be brief and concise while specifically indicating the main point of the memo. Note that every major word should start with a capital letter (prepositions and articles are not capitalized in subject lines and titles in general). Some companies prefer that the subject line is also in bold.

#### Example of a Heading Block

To: Student Support Services  
From: Greg Brown, User Support Technician  
Date: December 1, 2020  
Subject: Server Outage on Friday, December 4

You will fill in the information, and then you will begin your memo. If it is a longer memo (longer than a few paragraphs), you may also wish to use section headers. Remember that we do not start the memo with any type of salutation (such as, "Dear Assistant Managers"). Also note that the order of the parts of the memo heading block varies according to different companies' expectations.

Unlike emails and letters, memos do not have a closing and signature. Instead, in the past, the writer would indicate that they really wrote the memo by initialing by their name in the paper heading using blue or black ink. Or, if a memo was typed up by another person, it would be taken back to a supervisor for approval, and the person who typed the memo would initial at the bottom of the memo like this, for example: /jc. However, in today's workplace, most employees write their own messages on their own computers, so this is rarely done anymore.

Finally, in the days of paper, memos also indicated attachments. If a memo arrived on a desk with the notation "Enclosure" it meant that there was supposed to be something paper clipped to the memo with additional information. And, if the recipient saw nothing paper clipped, it was immediately clear that something was missing. It is for this reason that you often see in an email a paper clip icon for the attachment button or notification. The following link shows an example of a paper memorandum.

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject\\_specific\\_writing/professional\\_technical\\_writing/memos/sample\\_memo.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/professional_technical_writing/memos/sample_memo.html)

## Memo Content

In a standard writing format, we might expect to see an **introduction**, a **body**, and a **conclusion**. All these are present in a memo, and each part has a purpose. The introduction in the opening uses a declarative sentence to announce the main topic. If there are any effective dates or due dates that need to be presented, they should be presented in the first paragraph to ensure that they are not overlooked.

The body elaborates or lists major points associated with the topic, and the conclusion serves as a summary. It is quite common at the end of the memo to encourage readers to follow up with questions or comments and to provide contact information for their convenience. Throughout the memo, we need to pay attention to the tone to maintain goodwill.

#### Example of Memo Format and Content

To: All Employees  
From: Maya James, President, Blue Lake Community College  
Date: September 21, 2020  
Subject: Future Expenditure Guidelines

After careful deliberation, I have determined it is necessary to begin the initial steps of a financial stewardship program that carries Blue Lake Community College through what appears to be a two-year cycle of a severe shortfall in revenue and subsequent necessary legislative budget reductions.

Beginning October 1, 2020, the following actions are being implemented for the General Fund, Auxiliary Fund, and Capital Fund in order to address the projected reductions in funding for the remainder of this year, 2020/2021, and for the next year, 2021/2022:

- Only purchases needed to operate the university should be made so that we can begin saving to reduce the impact of the 2021/2022 budget reductions.
- Requests for out-of-state travel will require approval from the Executive Committee to ensure that only necessary institutional travel occurs.
- Purchase, including in-state travel and budget transfers, will require the appropriate vice president's approval.

Please understand that we are taking these prudent steps to create savings that will allow BLCC to reduce the impact of projected cuts in expected 2021/2022 legislative reductions. Thank you for your cooperation. Please direct any questions to my office at (530) 218-3976 or email at [officeofpresident@blcc.edu](mailto:officeofpresident@blcc.edu).

#### ✓ General Business Memo Tips

- **Audience Orientation** - Always consider the audience and their needs when preparing a memo. An acronym or abbreviation that is known to management may not be known by all the employees of the organization, so if the memo is to be posted and distributed within the organization, your goal should be clear and concise communication at all levels with no ambiguity.
- **Professional Tone** - Memos are often announcements, and the person sending the memo speaks for a part or all of the organization. While it may contain a request for feedback, the announcement itself is linear, from the organization to the employees. The memo may have legal standing, as it often reflects policies and procedures.
- **Subject Emphasis** - The subject is normally declared in the subject line and should be clear and concise. If the memo is announcing the observance of a holiday, for example, the specific holiday should be named in the subject line--for example, use "Thanksgiving Weekend Schedule" rather than "Holiday Observance."
- **Direct Format** - Memos are always direct, meaning they get to the point quickly and the purpose is clearly announced.
- **Objectivity** - Memos should contain just facts and should have an objective tone without personal bias, preference, or interest on display. Avoid subjectivity.

All links live as of June 2021.

This work "Writing Effective Memos" is a derivative of "[ENGL 145: Technical and Report Writing](#)" by Amber Kinonen, "[Open Technical Communication](#)" by Tiffani Reardon, Tamara Powell, Jonathan Arnett, Monique Logan, and Cassandra Race, and "[Professional Communications](#)" by JR Dingwall, Chuck Labrie, TK McLennon, and Laura Underwood, used under a CC BY license. "Writing Effective Memos" is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#) by Iva Balic.

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