

2.5.18: Memos

Learning Objectives

- Identify key features of the structure and format of memos
- Write an internal memo

Memorandums, or memos, are quite similar to email messages. Memos, like emails, also contain a “To” and “From,” a meaningful subject line, and states the reason for the communication immediately in the message. Memos also require strong organization in the body of the message for readability, and a call for action at the end. However, memos differ due to stricter formatting conventions and do not require a closing phrase nor a signature.

Here is an example of a traditional interoffice memo:

To: Jason Harris
From: Olivia Alvarez
Date: March 1, 20XX
Subject: Employee Appreciation Spotlight

Jason,

Our yearly employee appreciation dinner will be held on Friday, June 10. Due to your excellent performance in the last year—especially your work in the Northwest Region!—we would like to feature you as one of our spotlight employees. As a part of this spotlight, we would love to give everyone a chance to get to know you better. If you are interested, please write a short (250 words or less) paragraph about yourself. If you’re not sure where to start, here are a few question prompts:

- What is your favorite hobby?
- What is your greatest personal achievement (outside of work)?
- What is your favorite thing to eat?

Please let us know if you’re interested by March 15, and if you are, please submit your paragraph by March 30.

Looking forward to seeing you there!
Olivia

As you can see from this example, a memo has well-defined formatting. The address block is always single-spaced and includes “To, From, Date, and Subject.” The body of the memo is formatted in block paragraph structure, double-spaced between paragraphs. The author of this memo does a good job utilizing bullet points to further organize the information for ease of reading. Also notice the overall look of the text on the page with equal spacing for left and right margins.

Write an Internal Memo

Similar to an email, you should pay attention to the following points when composing a memo:

- Audience
- Purpose
- Style
- Heading
 - Date
 - Subject Line
 - CC
- Body
- Format
- Closing

Audience

Not everyone needs to read every memo—and most people don’t want to sort through unnecessary mail—so you should be considerate when deciding who to send your memo to. When deciding how formal or informal your tone should be, consider

whether your recipients are supervisors, peers, subordinates, or some combination of those groups. And remember, your readers are busy. They don't have time to waste on long-winded, confusing, or disorganized information. That means your memo must be organized, informative, and succinct.

Purpose

The purpose of a memo could be to announce a change in policy, an upcoming event, or a personnel action. They may solicit more information or request that someone take action. They may be written to persuade someone to support an initiative or change a policy. They can also be used to thank or praise someone.

Style

The writing style seen in a memo is succinct and professional. You do not want to be pretentious or too formal if you are talking to your colleagues. Ostentatious language, jargon, or complicated syntax will make you sound stuffy and pompous. Instead, write short sentences in the active voice to maintain a cordial, straightforward, and conversational style. Generally, your tone should be neutral or positive, but there are cases where memos are used for complaints or reprimands. In these situations, use caution. You never know who will ultimately read the memo, so be aware of the effect of your words.

Heading

The heading should include:

- Date: Write the full name of the month (January 3, 2016) or its standard abbreviation (Jan. 3, 2016).
- Subject: Make the subject line concise and accurate, since that often determines where or how the memo will be filed and even if it will be read. (In some instances, this line will say "RE:" which is short for "Regarding").
- CC: List names of other people who will receive copies of your memo. The "cc" line can be placed in the heading, next to the heading, or at the bottom of the document. The term "cc" is short for "carbon copy," a holdover from the days when memos were written on a typewriter. Some writers now use a single "c" for "copy." This line is optional; it won't be found on every memo.

Body Paragraphs

The opening paragraph states your purpose for writing so that readers can quickly grasp the memo's content and significance to them. Focus your reader's attention on main ideas, not details and digressions. Be plain, direct, and brief and remember that most memos are less than a page.

Format

Decide on a pattern of organization that best suits your purpose. The two most common for memos are deduction and induction. A deductive style of writing a memo presents ideas in decreasing order of importance and assumes the reader is acquainted with the topic. Most memos use this pattern. To write in a deductive manner, place supporting facts in subsequent sentences for readers who are unfamiliar with the subject. Background information should be presented last. A memo written in an inductive fashion presents ideas in increasing order of importance. If you must give bad news or if your reader may not understand the main idea without prior preparation, use this form. Lead up to the most important idea and then present that idea at the end of the memo.

If your memo is more than two or three paragraphs, you may want to add body headings for your body paragraphs. Use headings that capture the section's key topic and set them in bold.

Closing

Finish with a courteous and clear call for action. Tell your reader precisely what results you expect to follow from reading your memo. It may be helpful to include deadlines. Close the memo with an invitation to give feedback or request further information.

Take a minute to test your knowledge about writing memos. Click on the interactive below for more practice.

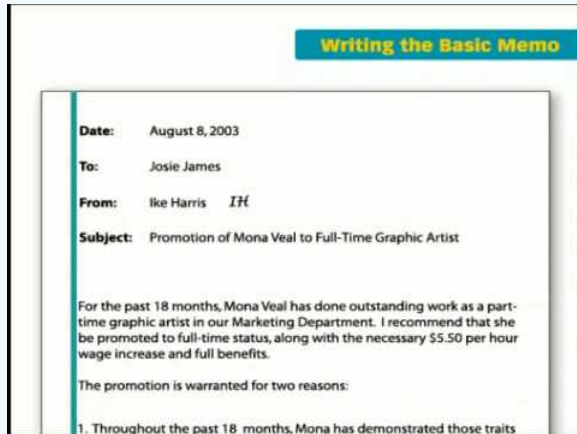
? TRY IT

A link to an interactive elements can be found at the bottom of this page.



watch it

Here is a video that covers the basics of writing a memo quite nicely.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/bcsfm/?p=140

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