

Effective Writing Center – Student Resources

Writing Effective Memos

A **memorandum** or **memo** helps members of an organization communicate and share information that is relevant to people within the organization. While business letters allow members of an organization communicate with people *outside* the organization, memos usually contain information that affects those within a particular organization. They allow members or departments within an organization to communicate and relay information. Memos frequently address a small or large group of people, but some of the memos you write may be intended for one person.

Memos often share new information, like changes to schedules or benefits, or they may encourage the reader to take an action, such as attend a meeting or use less paper. Your aim in writing a memo is the same as with other professional correspondence: You want to quickly and effectively communicate your purpose to your reader.

When preparing to write a memo, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the memo? What will it tell its recipient(s)?
- Why do the recipients need this information?
- What are the most important facts that the recipients need to have?
- Is there a change that will be occurring? If so, what is the change and when will it occur?
- Is there an action that the recipients need to take? If so, exactly what do they need to do? How do they take this action?
- Is there any information (contact names, numbers, URLs) they need to have in order take this action?
- Is there any accompanying documentation (reports, forms, charts) that the recipients need? (These can be included as attachments to the memo.)
- Why do the recipients need to take the action? What are the benefits? How will it affect them?

The text of the memo should be relatively short; one page is a good rule of thumb. While you don't want to omit any information that the reader needs, it's also important to keep explanations short and simple. This will increase the likelihood of getting your point across, because most people will read a short, concise memo right away. Discuss *only* what the reader needs to know, but include information about where to obtain additional information if necessary.

Resources

Colorado State University – Writing Business Memos

<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/documents/memo/>

CUNY WriteSite – Writing Business Memos

<http://writesite.cuny.edu/work/formats/memos/index.html>

Purdue's Online Writing Lab (OWL) – Memo Writing

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p_memo.html

Sample Memo

Date: Date of memo (example: January 1, 2007)

To: Person(s) to whom the memo is primarily addressed
(examples: James Brown, Director of Communications *or* Estates and Litigation Department)

cc: Name of anyone else who receives a copy

From: Author of memo, usually followed by his/her handwritten initials

Subject: or **Re:** Concise statement of the memo's topic
(example: Enrollment in New Benefits Program)

Recipients of memos often read them in a hurry, so it helps to write short sentences and paragraphs. It's also important to clearly explain the reason for the memo in the **first paragraph**. For example, if this memo informs employees that they must enroll in a new benefits program, the first paragraph would explain that the organization has decided to implement a new insurance program and that all employees need to enroll within the next thirty days.

The **following paragraphs** (if there are any) will include any accompanying or supporting information. In the benefits enrollment memo model, the second paragraph might explain the reason(s) for the change in benefits, and inform the readers of how the changes may (or may not) affect them.

A memo's **final paragraph** should clearly state the specific action(s) that the readers need to take. This final paragraph might inform the recipients that they may enroll in person, by mail, or online, and include specific information about where and how to enroll (office locations, addresses, URLs, etc.). It would also remind the readers of the deadline as well as listing the contact information of benefits specialists, in case employees have questions or concerns. Finally, it would emphasize the benefits or positive outcome of the policy changes.

Attachments. If including reports, charts, or other accompanying information, always mention this at the bottom of the page.

Copy to:

If anyone who isn't included in the "To:" group above needs to receive a copy, list the name here.