

# A guide to writing memos



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Memorandums, or memos for short, are used in place of formal letters for internal communication. These may be used in the workplace to present information, to provide directions or reminders, or to propose an idea.

While memos are often succinct, they can be very difficult to write precisely because you need to get straight to the point to get your ideas across. A poorly written one may confuse your superiors or your colleagues, and precious time may be wasted when they prepare their own memos to seek clarification on what you wrote. This article provides some tips that you can follow to impress your colleagues with your memo writing skill.

## **Before you write**

Before you put anything on paper, consider the following first:

- Audience. Who are the intended recipients of your memo? Knowing your audience will not only allow you to identify who to address it to, but also determine the tone of the document you will be writing.
- Purpose. The purpose of the memo will also affect how you write the document. Providing a list of instructions will require a more formal and professional tone, while an announcement regarding a company outing or party may be written in a festive manner.

## **Parts of a memo**

Memo formats may differ depending on the workplace. Most, however, have the following parts:

- Label. Some offices require for this document to bear the label “MEMORANDUM” or “MEMO” at the top of the page so that your readers will immediately know what type of document it is. However, not all workplaces have this rule. Do make it a point to study the standard memo format followed in your office so you can adjust accordingly.
- Heading. The memo heading contains the following details:
  1. To: This is where you write down the recipients of the memo. Addressees may be colleagues (do write their full names and job titles) or units or departments within the office.
  2. From: Write down your name and job title
  3. Subject: Indicate the reason for the memo
  4. Date: Note the complete date
- Body. Use this section to provide the pertinent details regarding the issue at hand. Try to be as specific and concise as possible.
- Conclusion. The conclusion is usually just 1-2 sentences long and indicates what action you are expecting from the recipient of the memo.

## **Tips to be effective at memo writing**

Below are tips you can follow to make sure that you produce memos that are consistently well-written.

- Be SMART. Memos should be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. Be clear not only about what you want to say, but what you expect your reader to do.
- Don't use informal language. Memos, by their nature, need to be written in a professional manner. As such, do avoid colloquial language.

- Be succinct. As mentioned earlier, memos should go straight to the point. Avoid flowery language and adding unnecessary details so that your readers will know exactly what you're trying to say.
- Present the main point within the opening paragraph. Make it easier for your reader to understand what the memo is about by stating the gist of it within the first paragraph. Salutations are not necessary in memos.
- Break down the memo. If your memo is long, consider breaking it down into smaller chunks to make it easier for your readers to understand what you want to say. Consider using subheadings to break down sections of your memo. If, you want to raise several points in your memo, you use bullet points to make it easier for your readers to understand each specific issue that you will bring up.
- Don't use emotionally-charged words or language. Never use emotive words, even when writing about issues such as a team member's poor performance at work. Doing so will make your report seem subjective. Maintain professionalism by outlining the details using a detached but polite tone. For instance, instead of saying that a colleague shows "unprofessionalism", you can instead provide concrete examples of his/her conduct to justify your memo.
- Proofread. Before you release the memo, make sure that you proofread it to see if there are any factual, grammatical, or spelling errors in what you wrote. You may also want to review it to see if there is a way for you to simplify it further to make it more easily understood by your audience.

Practice makes perfect, so try to draft your own memos and ask a colleague to review them to hone your memo writing skills.

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