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How to Write a Business Memo

By Linda Elizabeth Alexander

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A business memo helps members of an organization communicate without the need for time-consuming meetings. It is an efficient and effective way to convey information within an organization.

Use memos rather than letters when you are communicating within your organization, including members of your department, upper management, employees at another company location, etc.

Memos solve problems either by introducing new information to the reader like policy changes or new products being introduced, or by persuading the reader to take an action, such as attend a meeting, rinse the coffeepot when empty, or change a current work procedure.

The writing style of a business memo is somewhat formal but it doesn't have to sound intimidating. Your aim in writing a memo is the same as with other correspondence: You want to effectively communicate your purpose to your reader.

Memos are most effective when they connect the purpose of the writer with the interests and needs of the reader. When planning your memo, be sure to think about it from your reader's perspective: Pretend you are the recipient and ask yourself:

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1. How is this relevant to me?
2. What, specifically, do you want me to do?
3. What's in it for me?

Heading Segment

Begin the memo with a heading segment, following this format:

(centered and bold heading) MEMORANDUM

TO: (readers' names and job titles)

FROM: (your name and job title)

DATE:

SUBJECT: (specifically what the memo is about)

Make sure you address the reader by her or his correct name and job title. Courtesy titles are not necessary but make sure you spell everyone's names properly and don't use informal nicknames.

Use a job title after your name, and hand write your initials by your name. This confirms that you take responsibility for the contents of the memo.

Be specific and concise in your subject line. For example, "computers" could mean anything from a new purchase of computers to a mandatory software class for employees. Instead use something like, "Turning Computers off at Night." This also makes filing and retrieving the memo easy.

Opening Segment

Begin your memo by stating the problem—that is, what led to the need for the memo. Perhaps a shipment has not arrived, a scheduled meeting has been canceled, or a new employee is starting tomorrow.

After stating the problem, indicate the purpose clearly: Are you announcing a meeting, welcoming a new employee, or asking for input on adopting a new policy about lunch hour length?

Discussion Segment

In the discussion segment, give details about the problem,

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Don't ramble on incessantly, but do give enough information for decision makers to resolve the problem. Describe the task or assignment with details that support your opening paragraph (problem).

Closing Segment

After the reader has absorbed all of your information, close with a courteous ending that states what action you want your reader to take. Should they hand email their reports rather than hand in hard copies? Attend a meeting? Chip in for someone's birthday cake? A simple statement like, "Thank you for rinsing the coffeepot after pouring the last cup" is polite and clearly states what action to take.

Traditionally memos aren't signed. However, it is becoming

more common for memos to close the way letters do, with a typed signature under a handwritten signature. Follow your company's example for this.

Except for memos that are essentially informal reports or instructional documents, make the memo no more than one page long. In a memo, less is more.

Summary Segment

If your memo is longer than a page, you may want to include a separate summary segment. This part provides a brief statement of the recommendations you have reached. These will help your reader understand the key points of the memo immediately.

To further clarify your meaning, keep these formatting ideas in mind:

Headings help the reader skim for sections of the document.

Numbered and bulleted lists make information easy to scan. Be careful to make lists parallel in grammatical form.

Font sizes, underlining, bolding, and italicizing make headings and important information stand out.

As in all technical and business communications, long paragraphs of dense text make reading more difficult.

Therefore, keep your paragraphs short and to the point.

Now that you know how to write a proper memo, you can be sure that your readers will understand your intentions.

Linda Elizabeth Alexander writes marketing copy for nonprofits and other businesses. Visit her website TODAY for other informative business writing articles.<http://www.write2thepointcom.com/articles.html><mailto:lalexander@write2thepointcom.com>

Business Writing Secrets Vol. 1

By Christos Varsamis

One of the most important aspects in the business world is writing. It is the critical process of communication inside a corporation and of course in the B2B (Business to Business) and B2C (Business to Consumer) trade.

Writing memos, letters and reports is the daily task for the employers and the executives inside the company. Every firm follows some specific rules for their communication needs but they all have as a cornerstone of their standards these critical questions:

INITIAL ANALYSIS

1. What is it?
2. What is the purpose of the document?
3. When is it due?
4. How much time should you spend preparing it?
5. What key information should you cover?

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

1. Who are the readers?
2. What is their knowledge of the subject?
3. What is their opinion of the subject?
4. What actions do you want them to take?

PRESENTATION ANALYSIS

1. What format should you use?
2. What style should you follow?
3. In what order should you present the information?
4. What attachments should you include?

INITIAL ANALYSIS

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What is it?

The first question asks you to identify the type of business communication you are going to write.

What is the purpose of the document?

You must identify what is the purpose you are writing for. You must be as specific as possible. For example, you can write a memo for a specific problem with a client in your corporation.

When is it due?

If you have a deadline for completing your letter or memo then the procedure is easy but if you don't , then you must determine by yourself all the facts you need for completing your document.

How much time should you spend preparing it?

You must estimate the time you are going to spend for the preparation of your document. For example, 8 hours for contacting a business proposal letter is reasonable but spending 8 hours for a memo is not reasonable at all.

What key information should you cover?

That question defines what kind of information you should include in your memo, letter or report. For example, should a business proposal letter contain all the technical requirements for the potential prospect or not?

Who are the readers?

In this step you must identify who is the reader. Is it a co-worker or an important client?

What is their knowledge of the subject?

This is very important. Think wisely who are your readers. Do they have a decent knowledge about the subject or they don't know anything about it. If they have a great familiarity with the subject, then you don't have to explain much. If they have basic familiarity then you must explain more in order to be understandable. Finally, if they don't know anything about the subject, you must analyze it in detail and take nothing for granted.

What is their opinion of the subject?

Knowledge of a subject is not the only issue on your writing acceptance from your readers. The opinion they have about it has the same importance. Your primary task is to identify if they have a positive , negative or neutral opinion about your subject.

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In most cases when the readers have positive or neutral opinion there are no serious problems for the writer. On the other hand, when your reader is negative on the subject you are dealing with, you should be extra careful with your letter or memo.

What actions do you want them to take?

If you have a clear goal for what you expect your readers to do, then your writing will be more successful. Don't forget to clarify the action you want your readers to do.

What format should you use?

Before you start formatting your document ask if your company has a formatting standards. Most of them have specific standards for writing letters, memos and reports. In that case you should follow them.

What style should you follow?

Style is the way you use words, abbreviations, punctuation, and other elements. If your corporation use a specific style, use it. Otherwise follow the commercial standards available. Capitalization is an element you should use systematically. You must capitalize proper nouns and the first word of sentences.

In what order should you present the information?

The Classic standard applies here too, which is the introduction, body, and conclusion.

The introduction informs the reader what the subject is all about and provides all the necessary information the reader needs to understand.

The body emphasizes and analyzes the subject .During that process always keep in mind that your points should be stressed according to their importance. The most important should be first.

The conclusion sums up the points given in the body and directs to an action to be taken.

What attachments should you include?

The last question asks you to identify if and what kind of attachments you may need for your project. Sometimes extra information helps the readers to understand better the subject you have prepared.

Christos Varsamis is an internet marketing consultant and the creator and publisher of



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