

Memo Writing

Whether it is for Commerce or MBA studies or for projects in the workplace, business writing always focuses on two things: practicality and precision. Business writers meet this demand, in part, by using common formats and templates for everyday business communication. Predictable formats, such as those used to frame memos, help writers organize their information and help readers anticipate the kinds of information included. These templates keep the logical structure of the document transparent, enabling reader and writer alike to access information efficiently. While memos may not be the most creative form of communication you'll encounter, they can be among the most efficient and practical communication tools you'll use.

Purpose

Memos are brief internal documents. They tend to be circulated to a limited number of people and are intended to offer the reader short updates, announcements, summaries, etc. Occasionally, memo contents are multi-faceted (a regular monthly update of miscellaneous information from Human Resources, for example), but most of the time, they address a single matter.

Format

For this reason, the actual content of the memo is kept very brief, usually 1-2 pages in length. The standard format of memo includes a headings section, often printed on company letterhead, that outlines the date, recipient, writer, and subject, followed by the body of the memo. When writing the "subject" line, try to be as precise as possible. A subject line that simply says "staff update" could refer to anything. On the other hand, one that reads "staffing changes, finance department" gives the reader a clearer idea of what is to come.

The body of the memo follows the headings. Here, precision and clarity are crucial. The information contained must be concise and complete, outlining the purpose of the memo, the pertinent background or contextual details, and the action required in response. Try structuring your memo with these three sections in mind: purpose, details, and action. The opening and closing sections of the memo—the purpose statement and the action statement—should stand as single paragraphs, 1-3 sentences in length. The purpose statement tells the reader why the memo is being written. The action statement tells the reader what is required or requested of him or her in response to the memo. The middle section outlines any necessary descriptive, contextualizing, or background details and may include several short paragraphs, bulleted lists, and/or headings.

Memos may also include a supplement line (indicating, in capital letters, who wrote and in lower case letters, who formatted the letter) and, if necessary, an enclosure or attachment line indicating the number of documents included with the memo.