

How to Write a Memo

“In the office, personality is often judged by how you communicate”

A memo is a brief written informative and persuasive document designed to be read quickly for action

A memo stays inside the company; if it goes outside, it's a letter and more out, it becomes a report. Memos are usually and should be one page

The general Memo format:

TO: (readers' names and job titles/ office)

FROM: (your name and job title/ office). Omit titles

COPIED: A "blind copy" might go to a person who should be informed but who is not directly involved.

DATE: (current date)

SUBJECT: (what the memo is about, highlighted in some way)

Header/ Subject: Is a compact block of information at the top of a memo. Be specific and concise.

Purpose: Immediately gives the reason for writing. Answer the journalist's questions: who, what, when, where, and why.

Discussion: Since memos are filed for future reference, include sufficient background information like the names and titles of the people involved, or the dates of earlier memos related to the one you are writing. Employ subheadings like situation, problem, and solution.

Summary: A summary does more than describe the contents; it should be a miniature version of the memo. Put all your important information up front.

TIPS:

- **Get Personal.** Use words like I, you, and we and address readers correctly
- **Be conversational.** Write the way you talk. "Use contractions," Start with the old information to the new.
- **Don't show off.** Avoid scholarly, technical, or smothered jargons and words.
- **If you're not sure, check.** Avoid errors and omissions. Use active verbs.
- **Don't be trite.** Avoid regrets.
- **Visualize the reader.** Pretend you're having a face-to-face discussion or a telephone conversation with the memo recipient. Avoid puffing up your writing to make yourself appear more important.

- **Make the bottom line the top line.** Memos often begin with a statement of a problem, discuss why the problem exists, suggest course of action, and conclude like "I would like to hear from you soon."
- **Don't give too many whys.** It's necessary to explain why you want something done, but don't overdo it.
- **Keep paragraphs short.** Limit each paragraph to five lines or less. Put each reason in a separate paragraph. Simplify your language, Instead of "at this point in time," write "now."
- **Close with a call to action.** Many memos miss this, leaving the reader hanging. Unless the purpose of the memo is just to inform, state who should do what, how long do they have to do it? If you want a response by Friday at 3 p.m. or People to attend a must meeting, say so.