

Memorandum*

To: Reader's name and title
From: Writer's name and title (initial before sending)
Date: Date memo is sent
Subject: Clear, concise point of the message
*Ref: Refers to a project, file, or previous correspondence
*Action
Required: Notifies the reader if a response will be necessary.
Could use "Action Requested" if writing to a superior

**Optional*

OPENING

The opening frames the message. It tells the reader who you are and why the reader is receiving the memo.

SUMMARY

Since memos serve as records of important communication, and since memo readers are busy people, the summary must be clear, comprehensive, and concise. *It may be the only part of the document that the reader reads in its entirety.* First, since recipients of your correspondence don't always recall the occasion or significance of your correspondence, "contextualize the memo" for your reader. (This is sometimes called "framing your message.") Second, summarize the main points of the memo, as you would for an abstract. In addition, identify any action you expect the reader to take. In essence, the summary should include the following:

- the subject and purpose of the memo
- the occasion for the memo (what prompted you to write it)
- any context details (dates, names, assignment numbers, etc.)
- the "news" or bottom line, including important findings, their implications, and your recommendations
- an overview of the contents (a "roadmap" of what follows)
- any action requested

DISCUSSION OR ANALYSIS

Body Sections

Introduction

Long memo reports, i.e., those having multiple parts to the discussion, should begin by summarizing what follows, i.e., stating the bottom line up front and outlining the main points that follow. Good introductions state a clear purpose and provide a "roadmap" for the reader, clearly connecting both to the overarching point of the memo report. Short memo reports need not have a separate introduction to the discussion. The body can begin with the first point.

Body

The body paragraphs provide analysis and discussion that support the main points your reader needs to know. They provide as much detail as needed for the reader to understand what you mean and, if appropriate, what you need him to do, why you need him to do it, and how you expect him to do it. You may use graphics (if necessary) and divide up the body into sections (and subsections, as this memo shows), depending on the complexity of the subject and the familiarity of the reader with the subject. Each section should begin with an “umbrella statement,” i.e., a topic sentence that introduces the purpose of that section or paragraph and outlines what follows, explicitly connecting the purpose and contents to the overall purpose of the memo report.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Short memo reports (2 pages or less) may combine these, while longer reports may provide a section for each. The conclusions and recommendations should logically follow from the analysis and discussion. Clearly written conclusions and recommendations are explicit and easy to see. Thus, they don't ask the reader to infer what you mean; instead, they explicitly state what should happen next (based on what your analysis supports). They are also easy on the eyes, setting off key findings and implications through informative headings and typography.

CLOSING

Some memos need no concluding comments (for example, memos that are very brief, ones that are a paragraph or less). Most, however, require some kind of response. In this case, conclude by providing a closing that “wraps up” your purpose for writing and provides an opportunity for response. (For example, “I will come by your office on Tuesday at 4:00 PM to hear your comments on my proposal. Please let me know if you prefer to meet at another time.”) Make your closing substantive and meaningful. No clichés, please.

Writing Style

Use a professional but conversational style. Slang would be inappropriate as would overly stiff, formal prose. Choose a courteous, accommodating tone, much as you would use in conversation with your boss or the client in his or her office. With other audiences, you need to make choices about style and tone based on your relationship with your audience and your perception of their needs and expectations.

Design

Use typographical devices to help the reader “see” the most important information. You may want to use headings (as is used in this memo) to alert the reader to the main ideas and other typographical devices such as lists, bolding, graphics, or white space to set off key details that otherwise might be lost in a paragraph.

Format Expectations

Spacing

Single-space within paragraphs but double-space between paragraphs and sections.

Signature

Initial the memo as your “signature.”

Continuation page format

Note the use of continued page format used here on p. 2. Place the three items of information along a single line, as done in this memo, or you can stack them at the left margin. Use the name of the recipient, the date and the page number, as shown in this memo.

Enclosure

Use if you are attaching material to your letter or memo.

Other choices

Some memos include decorative additions (such as a company logo), a watermark, a border, or the word MEMO or MEMORANDUM at the top. Follow the format guidelines given in the organizations where you work.

Differences between memos and e-mailed messages

E-mails are set up essentially like memos, with a typical memo style heading already included. Begin your email message with a greeting using the name of the recipient followed by your reason for writing and any action requested. In other respects (tone, style, use of visual cues like headings, sub-headings, bulleting, etc.), prepare your e-mailed messages as you would a memo. If your message is long, you may want to attach the longer document to the email; however, you should provide a clear and concise summary in the email, especially because your reader may not open or read through your entire attachment. Last, include a professional signature block, one that identifies your full name, title, place of work, and contact information.

CONCLUSION

Memos are used in the workplace to report information internally; i.e., they are not sent outside of the office. Best practices involve knowing your audience and context to determine the purpose, style, organization, and level of detail.

CLOSING

If you have questions regarding the scope, design, or other aspects of memo writing, please contact Cindy Raisor, Writing Program Director, at c-raisor@tamu.edu.

[SAMPLE MEMO \(Intelligence Report\)](#)