
Writing Memos**Definition of a Memo**

A memo is a document typically used for communication within a company. memos can be as formal as a business letter and used to present a report. However, the heading and overall tone make a memo different from a business letter. Because you generally send memos to co-workers and colleagues, it is not required to include a formal salutation or closing remark. It is important to have your audience and purpose clearly defined, because this will help you determine what information to include and how best to convey it.

Purpose of a Memo

Usually you write memos to inform readers of specific information. You might also write a memo to persuade others to take action, give feedback on an issue, or react to a situation. However, most memos communicate basic information, such as meeting times or due dates.

While memos are a convenient channel to communicate, it is always necessary to determine if a meeting is more appropriate. For example, pretend your team needs to make a very important financial decision. A memo can ask for that information from team members and request a response by a specific date.

By meeting with everyone, however, you not only get to hear final decisions but the rationale behind them. In fact, new ideas may stem from face-to-face discussions. By writing a memo in this scenario, you may never invent alternative ways of solving the problem.

Before writing a memo, outline what your purpose is for doing so, and decide if the memo is the best communication channel.

Audience Analysis

The typical audience for a memo is your co-workers and colleagues. However, in the age of downsizing, outsourcing, and teleconferencing, you might also write memos to employees from other companies working on the project, or other departments within your company.

This is why knowing your audience is very important when writing a memo. For example, if your audience is generally familiar with you professionally and/or your role in the project, it is not necessary to provide a detailed background about your purpose. If they are new to the project, provide detailed background information so that they understand the situation and can provide constructive feedback if desired.

It is helpful, however, to inform readers about the context. In other words, do not only write that a meeting will take place by listing the date and time. Inform why the meeting is occurring in the first place. Also, do not assume that your readers have contact information. Always include some way for them to get in touch with you and other members of the team working on the project.

When composing academic memos (i.e. for school), consider what this audience already knows about the subject. For example, if you are writing a memo for a paper, does your audience already know what the paper is about? What further information do they require to provide understanding?