

Writing Business Memos

A memorandum (memo) is used to make announcements, to confirm what transpired during conversations or meetings, and to request or exchange information. It can be directed to a few specific people but often addresses a group, entire team or department. It is often written in the first person (*I* or *we*) and ranges from very informal to extremely formal, depending on the writer and the intended recipients. Its topic is narrow and should be apparent immediately. Since it is a business document, it is important that the writing be up-front and concise. A good memo summarizes facts, analyzes pertinent issues, makes a recommendation, and supports it. It is easy to get overly technical and use unnecessary words to describe a situation; attention to clarity eliminates any need for the writer to go into lengthy explanations. Remember, too, that a memo becomes the property of its recipients and is not “private.” Don’t say anything in a memo that you wouldn’t say in person.

STANDARD MEMO HEADING

Though the format for a memo may vary from one organization to another, the standard heading consists of a series of clearly labeled lines that convey key information about the memo’s contents and its distribution. The following are standard elements of a memo header:

Date: The date on which the memo is distributed

To: The person(s) to whom it is primarily addressed (sometimes with job title)

cc: Name(s) of anyone else who receives a copy (sometimes with job title)

From: Name of the writer, usually followed by his/her handwritten initials (sometimes with job title)

Subject: or **Re:** Concise statement of the memo’s topic

THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN WRITING MEMOS:

- Identify your audience before you begin to write.
- Ask yourself, should this be persuasive, directive, or technical?
- Be concise and come straight to the point.
- Maintain a business-like tone.
- Use headings, bullets, and/or numbered lists so key points stand out and the document is easy to read.
- As when writing anything, each paragraph should contain one main idea. Also, try to keep each paragraph short.
- Always proofread very carefully. Check all of your facts.
- Don’t forget to identify any attachments. If not, a recipient would not realize anything was missing.
- Never include a closing. The “From” line eliminates the need.