

How to Write an Effective Memo

Memo (short for memorandum) is a business-oriented style that is best suited for interoffice or intercolleague correspondence. More informal in tone and organization than a letter, memos are generally used to provide or ask for information, announce a new policy, update on personnel transfers, or for any other internal issues.

Elements of an Effective Memo

An effective memo:

- grabs the reader's attention
- provides information, makes a recommendation, or asks for action
- supports your position or explains benefits to reader
- mentions next steps and deadlines

When composing a memo, always take the four-step approach to writing: plan what you want to say, write a draft, revise the draft, and edit.

Types of Memos

There are four types of memos you might have to write, each with its own organizational format: information, problem-solving, persuasion, and internal memo proposal.

Information Memo

- used to deliver or request information or assistance
- first paragraph provides main idea
- second paragraph expands on the details
- third paragraph outlines the action required

Problem-solving Memo

- suggests a specific action to improve a situation
- first paragraph states the problem
- second paragraph analyzes the problem
- third paragraph makes a recommendation
- when making a recommendation, include not only the positive details but also the drawbacks and diffuse them yourself

Persuasion Memo

- used to encourage the reader to undertake an action he or she doesn't have to take
- first paragraph begins with an agreeable point
- second paragraph introduces the idea
- third paragraph states benefits to the reader

- fourth paragraph outlines the action required
- fifth paragraph ends with a call to action

Internal Memo Proposal

- used to convey suggestions to senior management
- first paragraph states reason for writing
- second paragraph outlines present situation and states writer's proposal
- third paragraph describes advantage(s)
- fourth paragraph mentions and diffuses disadvantage(s)
- fifth paragraph ends with a call to action

Memo Parts

More informal in appearance and tone than a letter, a memo is set up in a special format. Headings, lists, tables or graphs are often used to make the information more readable.

All memos consist of two sections: the heading and the body. The heading indicates who is writing to whom, when, and why. The heading should include the following parts:

1. **To**

- lists the names of everyone who will receive the memo
- includes the first and last name and titles or departments of the recipients for formal memos, memos to superiors, or if everyone on the list does not know each other
- if all recipients know each other's names and positions, use just the first initial and last name of each recipient
- can be listed alphabetically or by rank
- if it is not possible to fit all the names in the *To:* area, use the phrase "See distribution list"
- at the end of the memo add the word "Distribution" and then list the names of the people who will receive a copy of the memo
- arrange the names by rank, department or alphabetically

2. **From**

- lists the name of the writer(s) in the same way as the name(s) of the recipient(s)
- there is no complimentary close or signature line, but authors initial their names on the *From:* line

3. **Date**

- lists the month, date, and year the memo was written
- do not use abbreviations
- avoid using numbers for months and days

4. **Re: or Subject**

- indicates the main subject of the letter
- should be as specific and concise as possible

5. **Cc or c**

- lists those readers who should have a copy of the memo for their information or reference but are not expected to carry out the same action as the recipients listed in the *To:* line
- "cc" can also be placed at the end of the memo below the distribution list (if used)

The body of the memo conveys the message and generally consists of 4 parts:

1. Introduction

- states the general problem or main idea

2. Statement of facts

- states the facts or discusses the problem or issue

3. Argument

- explains importance or relevance of facts

4. Conclusion

- summarizes the main idea, suggests or requests action
- memos do not have a complimentary close or signature line
- memos end with a call to action