

Writing Professional Memos

In this era of emails and electronic communication, learning to convey information quickly and professionally is a highly sought-after skill. In many business or academic settings, the best way to showcase this skill is by writing a memorandum—otherwise known as a memo.

What is a Memo?

A memo is a targeted message designed to draw attention to a specific problem and, if necessary, propose a solution and action steps. Normally, memos are used for communicating policies, procedures, updates, or important information to those within an organization. A memo is often written in the form of mass communication rather than one-on-one communication. It's different from a typical email in that it broadcasts a message to a large group or audience.

Audience Considerations and Purpose

Oftentimes, a memo's purpose is not only to inform, but to persuade an audience with a call to action. To do this successfully, it is important to be aware of your audience. Memos are often used in professional settings, such as a corporate office or a university campus; knowing who your readers are and understanding the professional setting will help you better organize your memo and write persuasively and effectively.

Tips to Consider

- Memos are often brief; it is important to keep your information concise and to the point.
- Memos should be fairly skimmable. Headings, lists, and a well-organized structure of topics will help ensure your memo is easy to read and understand.
- Memos should only be addressed to the individuals who need to read it. If you have an issue involving only one person, it would be unprofessional to send a memo out to everyone in a team or within a company.

What are the Parts of a Memo?

1. **Heading:** As demonstrated in the box below, the heading segment has a basic format.

Format of Memo Heading

TO: (readers' names and job titles)

FROM: (your name and job title)

DATE: (current date)

SUBJECT: (brief statement of what the memo is about)

2. **Introduction:** Similar to an introduction of an essay, an introduction in a memo states the purpose of a memo by providing the context of the issue/event and the proposed solution/call to action. In other words, it provides a short overview of what the rest of the memo will cover and gives your audience the incentive to keep reading.
3. **Context:** This section provides more in-depth context or background information about the issue/event. Remember to only provide information that is necessary for the reader to understand the overarching point.
4. **Call to Action:** This section provides the steps or actions that will be taken to solve the issue; if your memo is not addressing a problem but, rather, informing your audience of an event, this is where you would highlight what your readers need to do for the event.
5. **Discussion:** The discussion section is the longest portion of the memo. This is where you will identify your main arguments or key points in support of your proposed solution/call to action.
6. **Summary:** If your memo is longer than one page, you may want to include a summary section. This is where you write a brief statement of the key points you have covered. In addition, this is also where you would include any resources you refer to in your research.
7. **Closing Statements:** The closing statements provide a polite and courteous ending to the memo. They can also convey any benefits the audience will enjoy through the proposed solution or your sentiment of how you can make their actions easier.

Examples of Closing Statements

1. "I will be glad to discuss this recommendation with you during our Wednesday meeting. If you have any questions or need any assistance in this matter, please feel free to contact me."
2. "I look forward to our staff's cooperation in this endeavor. It will ultimately lead to company growth and potential pay increases in the long term."
3. "By increasing our efforts, we will avoid any potential pitfalls during the upcoming holiday season, and I am willing to offer any sort of guidance to those who are unsure how to implement these changes."

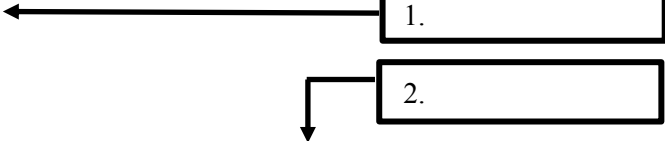
Activity 1: Closing Statement Practice

Imagine you are the CEO of a clothing line company. You have just asked your marketing staff to change the traditional advertising plan to a digital one. This will demand more hours out of your workers, but you have explained that it will increase profit in the long-term. Can you write a closing statement for this memo?

Activity 2: Label the Memo

Please identify all the parts of the sample memo in the boxes provided above; refer to the “parts of a memo” section if you are unsure.

TO: Advertising Staff
FROM: John Johnathan, Advertising VP
DATE: October 31, 20XX
SUBJECT: Halloween Costumes at Work



It has come to my attention that many of our staff have expressed the desire to wear costumes during Halloween this year, as many have done throughout the past few years. After discussing it with both HR and our CEO, we have made the decision to ban the practice during this time.

While we have had employees in the past dress up for the holiday, Halloween falls on Thursday, Oct. 31st this year. As you all are aware, this is when our meeting and facility tour will take place with Overseas Inc.: a well-established textile company and our biggest prospective client since Local Co.



Because of the delicate nature of this business endeavor, we have decided it would be more beneficial to have our staff dress professionally and to ban costume-wear at this time.



Overseas Inc. is known for its high-quality merchandise and professional presentation. To develop a stable business relationship with them, we need to put our best foot forward and give them a good impression. Our company will be able to do this, and more, by representing ourselves in a professional, attentive manner. According to TorbesFinancial.com, businesses that have professionally dressed staff:

- are 56% more likely to solidify a business deal;
- will have an overall 38% increase in employee confidence;
- have a 58% overall better impression when compared to a business with casually dressed staff.

While I understand that many will be disappointed in our decision, maintaining our professionalism during this time will benefit our company in the long run. In addition, if a business deal is reached with Overseas Inc., management will be throwing a company-wide party to celebrate, and costumes will be encouraged.



Thank you,
John Johnathan, Advertising VP

Answer Key

1. Heading 2. Introduction 3. Context 4. Call to Action 5. Closing Statements

References

Purdue Writing Lab. "Parts of a Memo." *Purdue Online Writing Lab*, N.d., <https://tinyurl.com/y8oe8uep>. Accessed 30 Oct. 2019.

"Writing a Sample Memo." *A Research Guide for Students*, N.d., <https://www.aresearchguide.com/sample-memo.html>. Accessed 30 Oct. 2019.