

Memo

To: 6th-12th grade faculty
From: Leah Zuidema
Date: November 14, 2003
Re: What a memo is and how to write one

This memo provides basic information about memos that you may wish to adapt and share with your students. Many teachers are so familiar with memos that we find it difficult to actually explain them to students; this document outlines some of the basics that students need to know. A memo is a short document that members within an organization use to exchange information. To write a memo, consider the needs of your audience, use the inverted pyramid for organization, and support your content with formatting that makes it easy to read.

What a memo is

Memos are considered to be official documents in most organizations. They are used to ask for information or to call for action, or they are written to report back in response to requests for information or action. Memos are often read by many people. Many memos are written to large groups of people within an organization. Some memos are written to only one person but are passed along (“forwarded”) to other people in the organization who need the information. Because memos are official organizational documents, they are sometimes read by people outside of the organization. Some memos are made public for legal reasons or during court cases. Other times, particularly “juicy” memos are leaked to the press.

How to write a memo

After you have analyzed your audience and settled on your purpose, you can write a memo by following these steps:

1. Open a new Microsoft Word document and select the memo template, or design a page of your own that looks similar to this one.
2. Before you begin the actual text of the memo, fill in the header. State whom the memo is to, who is writing it, the date that it was written, and a precise and informative subject (labeled “Re:” in this memo).
3. Begin the text of your memo by stating the precise purpose of the memo (why you are writing). Then write a brief but informative summary of your message. The purpose and summary are the most important information to your reader.
4. Write the discussion section of the memo by explaining details and examples that will be essential for your reader to know. It may be helpful to remember to answer the questions who, what, when, where, why, and how.
5. Finish the text of your memo with a call for action or a statement about action you will take. Politely state what you want your reader to do after reading the memo.

As you are writing your memo, remember to make use of formatting conventions that will help your readers. Use block-style paragraphs, headings, bullets or numbering, and even graphics where appropriate. When you finish the memo and are ready to make it official, hand write your initials next to your name in the “From” line.

If you are interested in additional tips on writing memos, please visit the University of Toronto’s website about memos at <http://www.ecf.utoronto.ca/~writing/handbook-memo.html>. The memo you are reading is based on advice from this website, and you will be able to discover more detailed advice to help you with writing memos.