

A memorandum (memo) is used to communicate something of immediate importance to people within a business or organization. A memo also can be sent to people or firms that have close or long-standing relationships, such as vendors or consultants. Like a business letter, a memo is a permanent record of your communication. It is used in both paper and electronic formats. Since you may know the people you are writing, a memo may appear less formal than a business letter, but it isn't. It is not a text message or blog posting, and it should not include emoticons, cartoons, or anything "cute." Be professional and polite.

When to Write a Business Memo

Businesses and organizations may ask their employees or members to follow certain protocols for when to send a memo and even how to send it. These guidelines may explain when a paper version is required or when email is appropriate. These are some common workplace purposes for a memo:

- Announce or confirm a meeting or event
- Provide instructions
- Provide a status report on a project
- Request feedback or recommendations
- Summarize action required after a meeting
- Clarify or change a policy or procedure
- Distribute minutes or handouts from a meeting or event
- Notify others of a problem or that a problem was resolved
- Provide a short report of an event or decision

If You Use a Memo Template

Be selective if you use a template to create your memo. Some templates display the word "Memo" in very large type, and the words in the memo are in a very small font size. The word "Memo" should not be the most noticeable part of the document, which is why that memo template may make a poor impression on others. Instead, select one that looks professional and is easy to read. The message—your words—are most important.

How to Format a Business Memo

In the workplace, you may be required to use company letterhead or memo stationery or follow a specific electronic format. Type the memo single-spaced using a readable font and font size. Begin with a heading similar to those used in email transmissions (See Capital Industries sample below). The memo itself follows an A-B-C format. Even if a memo is one paragraph, it needs all three elements.

A = Abstract, which is the main point of the memo and sets the tone. Don't be mysterious; explain why you are writing in the first sentence.

B = Body, which provides relevant details. One or two body paragraphs are most frequently used, which is why you must choose only the most important details to share. You may use numbered lists (for items in a sequence or to indicate importance) or bullet points. If you are writing a long memo, use a few brief headings to divide the memo into logical sections.

C = Closing, which confirms the purpose and/or request, provides contact information, or states the follow-up.

If you send a paper version, the memo should be initialed next to your name as the sender. A memo also can be sent as an attachment to an email or as the email itself. Email memos usually do not require an electronic signature.

CAPITAL INDUSTRIES

1492 Washington Street ⊕ St. Paul, Minnesota

To: Jane Addison
From: Mike Fitzgerald
Re: New Application Forms
Date: January 4, 2010

- Use full names; also use titles if you are writing to someone at a higher level.
- Re or Subject: Be specific, but brief; begin each word with a capital letter.

Two new application forms will be ready for your use next week. The Executive Committee approved them late yesterday. I thought you would appreciate a follow-up report.

The Committee was grateful for the changes that you made to improve both forms. We are printing 500 of each form and should have them by Friday. Someone from shipping will deliver 250 of them to the plant so that you have them Monday morning. We will keep the other half here for our use and as reserve.

Carrie Olson is updating the electronic versions. She will contact you yet this week so that you can test them online before they are uploaded on Monday.

Thanks again, Jane, for your suggestions. Contact me if you have any questions.

cc: Carrie Olson

- Name of the individual who was sent a copy. Be aware that any communication may be shared with others in the company.