

Memo Format

Letters and memos are two common formats for business communications. The general rule is to use letter format when your audience is outside of your organization, and use memo format when your audience is within your organization. However, often memos are used when communicating with clients and other external parties that you work with frequently.

Memos are formatted differently from letters:

- **Omit the complimentary opening** (Dear Dr. Bartlet:) **and complimentary close** (Sincerely, Mary Walker) that are included in a letter.
- **Omit the mailing and return address** (because memos are typically internal—sent between employees of the same company—no addresses are needed).
- **If sending a hard copy, initial or sign the memo** next to your name on the “From” line.
- **Label the memo “Memo,” “Memorandum,” etc.** at the top of the page, as in the examples below.

The examples below show possible ways to set up your memo. When you begin to work for a particular company, you will likely format your memos in a company-specific way. Many companies have memo templates pre-formatted with the company and/or department logo. However, any memo you write will include the date, recipient’s name, sender’s name, and a subject line.

Memorandum

Date: October 9, 2006
To: Bob Manager, Team Coordinator
From: Sam Steinberg, CPA
Subject: Treatment of the restructuring issues for NetWorth Corporation

Internal Memorandum

October 9, 2006

To: Bob Manager, Team Coordinator
Cc: Debbie Partner
From: Sam Steinberg, CPA
Re: Treatment of the restructuring issues for NetWorth Corporation

The subject line should be very specific to the topic or purpose of the memo. Subject lines are important to memos (as well as emails) because they have a large impact on whether or not the recipient actually reads the message. A vague subject line could cause the recipient to discard the memo (or delete the email) without reading it.

Begin the memo with an introductory paragraph. This paragraph should set the tone for the memo. The length of this paragraph depends on the readers' need for introduction and orientation. The introduction is also the place to build goodwill with the reader and **forecast** the contents of the rest of the memo by overviewing the contents of the memo (that is, provide an **abstract** of the memo). When writing a memo to someone who has requested information, refer to that person's request in the introductory paragraph.

In the **body** of the memo, **use clear topic sentences and smooth transitions** (e.g., In addition..., Next..., Secondly..., In conclusion...) to guide the reader through the document.

“Talking” headings can be very effective, even in short memos. Headings help readers know how you have organized your memo and also enable readers quickly skim the memo to know what key topics are addressed.

The body of memos should be single-spaced, with blank space between paragraphs and around headings. As with all business communications, apply visual design principles.

Don't end the memo too abruptly. If further action is required of the reader, **include a brief closing paragraph.** This paragraph is the place to bring a **conclusion** to the memo by reinforcing the main points of the memo, using “you-attitude” to end on a positive note, and letting the reader know what action should be taken in response to the memo.

You can easily create memo formats on your own. Microsoft Word has memo templates that you can also use, but you will need to modify and adapt them to suit your needs and those of your readers. Realize also, that the templates are set up using Styles in Word (Normal, Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.), so often the easiest way to modify the template is to modify the styles.

Memos can be sent in hard copy or electronically. Today, memos are often sent as attachments to emails or are posted on company intranets.

Memos can be formal or informal, lengthy or short – it depends on the audience and purpose!