

Writing a memo

What is a memo?

A memo is a common form of communication in the business world, in particular within an organisation, as it focuses on specific problems and suggested actions to address these problems. Memos are internal documents; letters are external documents. Memos are most effective when they have a clear purpose and are addressed to a targeted audience.

You may be asked to use this format in your Business and Accounting subjects, as memos help you to write in a concise, purposeful way and prepare you for the workplace.

Features of a memo

Format/appearance

The most notable feature of a memo is the **heading** at the top of the page. Make sure you use the person's formal name rather than an informal version you might use when you are speaking to the person.

Keep the subject line concise but meaningful, e.g. "Software" could mean anything but "Comparison of Accounting Software" gives the reader a clearer idea of the memo content.

The information is organised into paragraphs with the heading often acting as the topic sentence. It then follows an organisational pattern, from general to specific, with examples, statistics and other forms of evidence being the core of the memo. A bullet point list can be used to highlight important points.

No indentation is necessary. A memo uses 1–1.5 line spacing with double spaces between the heading and paragraph and also between paragraphs.

Language

The tone of the language is generally formal:

- Rather than using contractions, use the longer form, e.g. can't > cannot.
- Instead of phrasal verbs, use non-phrasal verbs with the same meaning, e.g. dig up > excavate; show up > appear.
- Use correct grammar, capitalisation and punctuation.
- Use the **referencing style** nominated by your lecturer for any cited information, with a Reference List as an attachment.
- Use the **active voice** rather than the passive voice as you may want to express who is responsible for different actions.
- You need to address the intended audience with a professional and respectful tone.

Organisation of writing

A standard memo organises the information to increase readability and achieve the writer's purpose. These paragraphs are clearly separated by headings and subheadings, starting with the main heading, followed by an introduction, then context, then discussion, and finishing with a brief concluding paragraph.

Heading

TO: (readers' names and job titles, but without honorific titles i.e. Mr, Mrs, Ms, Miss)

FROM: (your name and job title)

CC: (other staff who need to read the communication)

DATE: (full and current date)

SUBJECT (or RE): (the main topic of the memo)

Heading example

QUANTAS MEMORANDUM	
TO:	Olivia Worth, Executive of Government and Corporate Affairs, Qantas Airlines
FROM:	Michael Smith, Communications Strategist
DATE:	May 5, 2017
SUBJECT:	Business Case Analysis

Introduction

Business memos typically start with a purpose statement related to the subject line which clarifies the reason the target audience should read it. Depending on the length of the memo assessment, this may be brief. If an action was requested, your purpose statement will acknowledge it:

e.g. *Following your request to investigate ...*

This response will reflect the different topic divisions of the memo:

e.g. *To establish the most cost-effective method, I will firstly...*

The format of your memo's introduction may also be guided by the type of assessment. Check the Assessment Details to see which format your lecturer wants you to use.

Context

Depending on the length of the memo, an overview paragraph may be included which sets the context of the problem and gives more background information. Keep it clear and as succinct as possible.

Discussion

This will be the longest part of the memo where you persuade the reader with supporting statistics, research and details. This provides the evidence to back up your arguments for your recommendations. Follow an organisational pattern from general to specific, as previously stated, referencing in the appropriate style when necessary.

Conclusion

The conclusion is a concise summary of the main ideas of the memo with a final view that may include future recommendations. Check back to the assessment task and marking criteria for specific direction from your lecturer.

Visual aids

You may need to include tables, graphs and diagrams to illustrate your points. These should be referenced appropriately and presented professionally. Alternatively, if the document appears crowded, you can include them as attachments, after referring to the tables, graphs or diagrams in the body of the memo.