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**SUBJECT:** *SESSIONAL*

**SUBJECT:** *TECHNICAL REPORT WRITING*

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# What Is a Memorandum?

A memorandum, more commonly known as a *memo*, is a short message or record used for internal communication in a business. Once the primary form of internal written communication, memorandums have declined in use since the introduction of email and other forms of electronic messaging; however, being able to write clear memos certainly can serve you well in writing internal business emails, as they often serve the same purpose.

## Parts of a memo or memorandum:

A good memo organizes the information to be conveyed both for the reader's convenience and ease of understanding and to achieve the writer's purpose in the most effective way.

### Heading

The heading for every memo follows the same basic format:

TO: [Reader's name and job title]

cc: [List others who are receiving copies]

FROM: [Your name and job title]

DATE: [Day, month, and year, spelt out]

SUBJECT: [Topic of the memo]

Your subject line should be brief, no more than a few words, but explicit, so that there is no chance for misunderstanding. "Ordering Pizza" as a subject line, for example, might lead your readers to think that your memo will provide instructions on the correct procedure for ordering takeaway on late nights at the office when, in fact, you're passing on complaints from the cleaning staff about the tomato sauce on the carpet and the boxes strewn all over the floor. Something like "Clean up your mess before leaving" announces the main point of the memo.

## Opening

The opening sentences or paragraphs of a memo tell readers the context of the issue, the suggested assignment or task, and the purpose of the memo:

## Context

The context you describe is the event, situation, or background of the problem or issue you are addressing. Whether it takes a sentence or a paragraph will depend on the complexity of the situation. For example, the context may begin with:

The cleaning company has complained that it takes too long to clean our floors...

Be clear and direct, providing only as much information as your readers need.

## Task

Your task or assignment statement describes what you are doing to solve the problem, issue, or situation. If your reader asked that you act, you might say:

You asked me to look at...

If you want to present alternatives for employees to consider, you might say:

We need to consider alternatives that will satisfy the cleaning company without...

## Purpose

Your purpose statement explains why you are writing the memo and leads in to the remainder of it. You need to be direct, and avoid trying to downplay the information. Your statement might begin with:

This memo describes my understanding of the cleaning company's complaint, proposes several ways of accommodating these people, and my own recommendations for resolving the problem.

If the memo will be so long that adding section headings will make it easier to follow the organization of the information, by all means, do so.

When the purpose of a memo is to convince your readers that there is a real problem, avoid going into more detail than the situation requires. If you discover that you're having difficulty describing the task, you may need to do more thinking before you write the memo. If you decide to break your memo into segments, be sure that they the most important points.

## **Summary**

Wait until you've written the main body of your memo to write a summary section. If your memo is one page or less, a summary may not be necessary. If, however, you've covered several important issues or events, or your analysis is fairly detailed, a summary paragraph is appropriate.

If the memo is a short report on research you've done on an issue or for a project, this is a good place to sum up methods and sources you've used so far. Remember, though, that this is a summation. Keep it brief and don't needlessly repeat detailed information.

## **Discussion paragraph(s)**

After you've adequately covered the basic presentation of your topic, here is where you lay out all the details—facts, statistics, hypotheses—that support the ideas you've discussed. In this section you demonstrate your ability to think creatively and critically by presenting your ideas.

Begin with the most important or most telling information, proceeding from your strongest fact to the weakest (or, if you're providing historical background, from oldest to newest information).

These paragraphs are also the place where you make your recommendations, acknowledge others' recommendations, and describe future problems that might occur and how your suggestions will ensure that such problems simply don't happen.

It often helps to put important facts or details into numbered or bulleted lists, again going from strongest point to weakest.

## Your closing

Once you've given your readers all the information relevant to the subject of your memo, use a courteous closing that describes the actions you want them to take, and point out how those actions will benefit everyone. This one-paragraph closing might begin with:

We can discuss my recommendations in greater detail at our next meeting...

or

Should you need more information, I'll be glad to....

## Attachments

Provide whatever documentation or additional information your readers will need to come to their own understanding of the event, issue, or problem you've described, and list such attachments at the end.

For example, if there has been an exchange of letters regarding your subject, include copies of them (if doing so will not breach confidentiality or if they contain information that your readers need to know). If you've created graphs of facts or statistics or diagrams that illustrate physical relationships, attach those. You can also refer to such graphs, diagrams, or illustrations at appropriate points in your memo.

Do not attach materials that do not bear directly on the subject of the memo.