Memorandums and Their Uses

TO: All Readers

FROM: The Channing L. Bete Communication Center

DATE: 10.14.06

SUBJECT: Memorandums and Their Uses

Memos are used within a company or organization to report information, make a request, or recommend an action; although in some places, they have been replaced by emails.

Aspects of the Well-Formatted Memo

- Memos do not need either salutations or closings
- Memos never use indented paragraphs
- Subject lines are required as part of the header
- Headings and subheadings are optional; if using a heading ensure that it covers all information included until the next heading
- Align all headings with the left margin
- The first paragraph should not have a separate heading

Organizing Informative and Positive Memos

- Give good news and summarize main points
- Give details, explanations, and background information
- Present any negative elements as positively as possible
- Explain reader benefits
- Use a personalized ending that shifts emphasis from the focus of the message back to the reader in a positive manner

Organizing Negative Memos

When the memo is addressed to a superior use the following outline:

- Describe the problem clearly and unemotionally
- Explain how the problem occurred by providing background information and state underlying factors relating to the problem
- Describe the best options for fixing the problem; if more than one option exists, describe all options with their advantages and disadvantages
- Recommend a solution and ask for action or approval to make the necessary changes

When the negative memo is addressed to peers and subordinates the following outline is appropriate:
Describe the problem clearly and unemotionally
• Present an alternative or compromise, if one is available
• If possible, ask for input and/or action; if your subordinates or peers are part of the decision-making process they are more likely to accept the consequences

Organizing Persuasive Memos

• Use a positive subject line
• Start by establishing common ground between the writer and reader
• When giving reasons for why changes are needed, show an understanding of the reader’s problems
• Explain what needs to be done concisely and clearly and use formatting that emphasizes the point, such as bullets
• Address the reader as an equal who can help in solving the problem
• Link the action to the benefits and picture the problem being solved

The One Page Memo

Occasionally, you may be asked to write a memo that is only one page long, although your information requires more space. In such a case, careful revising and editing may help you fit all your data on one page. However, if condensing the information does not help, put all the key points on one well-designed page and attach appendices with extra information for those readers who are interested.

More Information

• Sample memo

Reference: