

# Successful Writing for Work

## Writing Memos, Faxes and E-Mail

# Memos, Faxes, and E-Mails

1. Each is streamlined for the busy world of work
2. They give busy readers information fast
3. Even though they are routine, they still demand a great deal of your thought and time

# Memos

- *Memorandum* is the Latin word for “something to be remembered”
- Memos are brief in-house correspondence sent up and down the corporate ladder
- They can be on paper or sent through e-mail

# Memo Protocol and Company Politics

- Regardless of where you work, your employer will expect your memos to be timely, professional, and tactful
- Most companies have their own memo protocol
  - Accepted ways in which in-house communications are formatted, organized, written, and routed

# Compose Clear, Focused Memos

- Traditional written form for internal communication
- Usually written to inform, in a direct manner
- Often short (three to four paragraphs maximum)

# Functions of Memos

- ✓ Announcing a company policy or plan
- ✓ Changing a policy or procedure
- ✓ Offering information (FYI)
- ✓ Setting an agenda
- ✓ Making a request
- ✓ Explaining a procedure or giving instructions
- ✓ Clarifying or summarizing an issue

# Functions of Memos

- ✓ Alerting readers to a problem or a deadline
- ✓ Confirming the outcome of a conversation
- ✓ Calling a meeting
- ✓ Reminding readers about a meeting, policy, or procedure
- ✓ Circulating minutes of a meeting

# Functions of Memos

- ✓ Providing documentation
- ✓ Providing suggestions or recommendations
- ✓ Documenting, for your own protection, what you did or did not do
- ✓ Summarizing a long report or proposal
- ✓ Congratulating a co-worker
- ✓ Resigning your post



# Memo Format

- Some companies use a standard form while others have their memo printed on their letterheads
- The memo may be on a half sheet or a full sheet
- Basically, the memo consists of two parts
  - The identifying information at the top
  - The message itself

# Memo Format

- The identifying information includes the following lines

<b>TO:</b>	If your memo is going to more than one reader, make sure you list them in the order of their status in your company
<b>FROM:</b>	Write your name (and job title, if necessary for the reader.) You should always write your initials after your typed name to verify the memo comes from you
<b>DATE:</b>	Give the full calendar date
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	This serves as the title line of your memo. Summarize your message/purpose precisely

# Memo Style and Tone

- The style and tone of your memo will be controlled by the audience within your company or agency
  - Casual tone
    - When writing to a co-worker whom you know well
  - Formal tone
    - When writing to a manager

**Remember that your employer and co-workers deserve the same clear and concise writing that your customers do**

# Strategies for Organizing a Memo

## 1. Introduction

- Tell readers clearly about what prompted you to write
- Explain briefly any background information needed
- Be specific

## 2. Discussion

- State what is important, who will be affected, what caused it
- Indicate why changes are necessary
- Give precise dates, times, locations, and costs

## 3. Conclusion

- Request a reply by a specific date
- Provide a list of recommendations
- Ask readers to call if they have questions

- Headings
  - Organize your work and make information easy for readers to follow
- Numbered or bulleted lists
  - Help readers see comparisons and contrasts readily and thereby comprehend your ideas more quickly
- Underlining or **boldfacing**
  - Emphasizes key points. Do not overuse this technique; draw attention only to main points and those that contain summaries or draw conclusions

# E-Mail

- Essentially an electronic memo
  - Messages are clear and concise
  - Typically address one subject only
  - Stored in writer's file indefinitely
- E-mail is easy and immediate
- Should not replace formal letters
- You can send a variety of documents via e-mail
  - Memos
  - Correspondence
  - pictures
  - Various tables, lists, and statistical files
  - Video clips
  - Soundbites

# Business E-Mail versus Personal E-Mail

- Employers own their internal e-mail systems and thus have the right to monitor what you write and to whom
- Any e-mail at work can be saved, stored, forwarded, and most significantly, intercepted

**Always remember that your e-mail could be forwarded to people you did not intend to send it to**

# Guidelines for Using E-Mail

- Make sure your e-mail is confidential and ethical
- Observe all the proprietary requirements when using e-mail
- Follow all the rules of “Netiquette” when answering e-mail
- Use an acceptable format
- Adopt a professional style
- Insure that your e-mail is secure



# E-mails—Some Positives

- **Faster than traditional correspondence**
- **Memo/letter writing steps compressed into one**
- **Allows for “rapid-fire” exchanges**
- **Can contain complete record of all information**

# E-mails—Some Negatives

- Ease encourages overuse
  - Needless correspondence may be produced
  - Many e-mails written regarding same subject
  - Dashed off “in the heat of battle”
- Errors can occur
  - Miscues, omissions, other blunders due to hasty composition
  - Require “e-mails about e-mails” to correct

# Possible Solutions

- **Avoid errors—Proofread carefully**
  - **Ensure information is necessary and correct and pertinent details are included**
- **Watch for:**
  - **Typos and misspellings**
  - **Faulty capitalization**
  - **Sloppy punctuation**
  - **Grammatical errors**
- **Use spell checkers and grammar checkers**

# Help Dos and Don'ts

- **Peer edit**
  - **Ask a colleague to read your document: fresh eyes can detect errors you might miss because material is familiar**
- **Avoid “text-speak”: shortened versions of words used in text messages**

# Dos and Don'ts, continued

- **Follow grammar rules:**
  - Use *capital letters* appropriately
  - Punctuation is important
- **Compose for your audience**
- **Do NOT take shortcuts**
  - May affect reader's understanding of the message

# Important Points

- Letter-style greetings make messages less abrupt and more personal—especially for external or upward communication
  - Salutation (“Dear Mr. Jones:”)
  - Complimentary close (“Yours truly,”)
  - Use e-mail system to create signature file
- E-mail *is not private*
  - Employers have the right to monitor/inspect e-mail
  - Don’t say it if it can’t appear on the front page of the company newsletter

# Be Professional

- **E-mail is no place for personal or conversational messages**
- **External e-mail:**
  - **Use a higher level of courteous formality**
  - **Include letter-style salutation and complimentary close**
- **Be cautious about forwarding another writer's e-mail to others**
- **Be judicious about using "Reply to All" or cc'ing other readers**

# Be Professional, Continued

- **When including an attachment, mention the attachment in the e-mail text**
- **Be judicious about sending large attachments (especially more than 1 MB). Consider sending a link instead to an online version of the attachment.**



# **Craft Clear, Concise Text Messages That Convey Information With Maximum Economy**

- **Cell phone-to-cell phone communication**
- **Often fastest and most practical communication method**

# Texts – Some positives

- Faster than traditional correspondence
- Well-suited for multitasking environment (but NOT when driving or operating potentially dangerous equipment)
- Allows communication while away from computer

# Texts—Some Negatives

- Compressed message format may cause miscommunication
- Important or sensitive message may not be secure
- May be difficult to reconstruct complete exchange in the future
- Must be limited to appropriate messages and situations (e.g., not during a meeting or conversation)