

# How to Write Memos that Generate Results

by Carol Dunitz, Ph.D.

You are disturbed by a situation and have a sense of urgency about it. You want action taken and you want a written record of your request. Using a memo addresses all your concerns and has the potential to get a speedy response.

**Clearly state the action you desire.** Use the rest of the memo for clarification with bullet points to stress key points. Memo length should be no more than one page. Shorter memos are more likely to get read and acted upon. Engage readers and ask for feedback.

**Maintain a conversational tone.** Use simple language and short, simple sentences for increased impact. Try to keep sentence length under 20 words. Express only one thought in each sentence and make sure it modifies your topic sentence. Try reading it to yourself after you've written it to see if it sounds good. If it sounds good, it is good. Proofread for grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

**Avoid criticizing other people or departments.** Memos are not the place to air dirty laundry. Broadcasting the problem through a memo can create serious fallout.

**Avoid the use of humor.** It may be misunderstood or experienced as criticism. Everyone has a different sense of humor. You may not get the intended response.

**Courtesy copy (CC).** Send copies to the people who are in charge. Be selective while being appropriately inclusive with your list of recipients. CC in alphabetical order, not pecking order.

**Create a paper trail.** Writing a memo is a good way to establish a written record of a request for action. It demonstrates a sense of urgency.

Memos are generally short and informal. They are a useful tool with the potential to get speedy action.

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