

15 Workplace Memos and Letters

MEMOS

Considering Audience and Purpose

Memo Parts and Format

Memo Tone

Common Types of Memos

Guidelines for Memos

Checklist: Memos

LETTERS

Considering Audience and Purpose

Letter Parts, Formats, and Design Elements

Letter Tone

Global and Ethical Considerations

Guidelines for Letters in General

Conveying Bad or Unwelcome News

Guidelines for Conveying Bad News

Common Types of Letters

Guidelines for Inquiry Letters

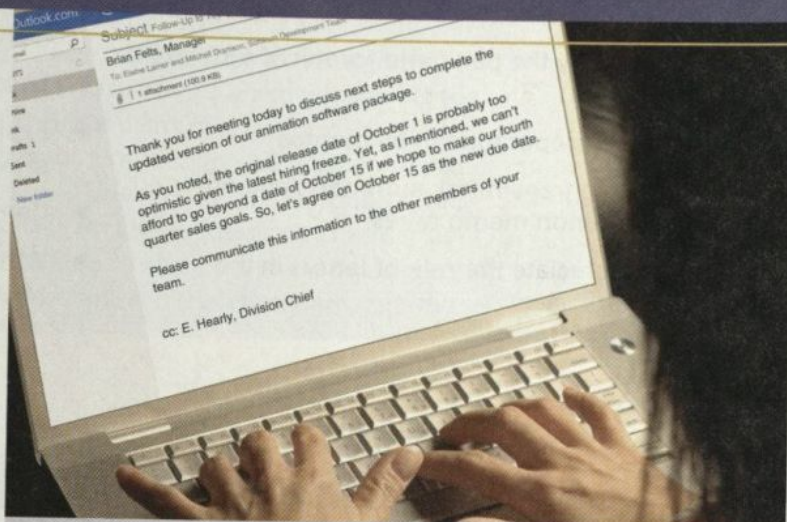
Guidelines for Claim Letters

Guidelines for Sales Letters

Guidelines for Adjustment Letters

Checklist: Letters

Projects



“One thing I’ve learned on the job is that email, memos, and letters circulate constantly. Everyone is busy, and you must be clear about why they need to read your message and, if appropriate, act on it. You are constantly competing to get the ‘mindshare’ of your readers. The constant stream of email we receive means that I need to find ways to be sure certain messages stand out. Memos signal an important announcement or decision and are less likely to be overlooked or deleted than, say, a routine email. Workplace letters convey an even more formal, official mode of communication. Even though all communication should be written carefully, effective memos and letters take more time to research, write, and proofread. The difference between everyday email and an official memo or letter is in the deliberate steps in writing and revising for content, format, and tone. Often, these official communications require a collaborative approach, involving several managers as well as the human resources or legal department. I like to print out the final version and proofread it carefully before sending.”

—Mary Hoffmann, Marketing Communication Manager for a major computer company

LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR THIS CHAPTER

- ▶ Appreciate the role of memos in the workplace
- ▶ Analyze your memo's audience and purpose
- ▶ Identify the parts and format of a standard memo
- ▶ Use proper tone in all memos
- ▶ Write transmittal, summary, and other common memo types
- ▶ Appreciate the role of letters in the workplace
- ▶ Analyze your letter's audience and purpose
- ▶ Identify the parts, formats, and design features of workplace letters
- ▶ Use proper tone in any letter
- ▶ Explain the global and ethical implications of workplace letters
- ▶ Convey bad or unwelcome news in a letter
- ▶ Write inquiry, claim, sales, and adjustment letters

MEMOS

- ▶ Appreciate the role of memos in the workplace

Definition of memos

"Memo" (short for "memorandum") is derived from the same Latin roots as the words "memorize," "remember," and "remind." Memos remind readers about important events, give directives, provide instructions and information, and make requests. Memos are important in workplace communication because unlike the daily, routine emails sent between individuals and teams, memos signal a more official communication, usually a message from the company, a manager or director, or another person or group acting in an official capacity.

Memos have ethical and legal implications

Memos provide formal, written documentation about an event or issue. Organizations rely on memos to trace decisions and responsibilities, track progress, and check agreements and commitments made. All memos should include the date and initials or a signature. Make sure the memo's content is specific, unambiguous, and accurate. Because memos are official documents, they can have far reaching ethical and legal implications. You should do as much research as needed to ensure that you have all your facts straight. This research might include consulting with other groups such as accounting, marketing, human resources, and legal.

CONSIDERING AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

- ▶ Analyze your memo's audience and purpose

Audience considerations

To determine your approach to any particular memo, identify the various audience members who will receive it. Some companies use standard memo distribution lists: a list for managers, a list for software developers, and so on.

The purpose of your memo should also be clear: Is it to inform your audience? To persuade people to support a new plan? To motivate them to take action? To announce bad news?

Memos are typically written either as the body of an email message or as a PDF attachment, usually on company letterhead. Shorter memos are well-suited to the body of an email message, while longer memos are better as PDF attachments. In some organizations, printed memos are still used, but increasingly, hard copy is giving way to digital. Digital delivery is easier to trace and not subject to getting lost in the company mailroom. Yet digital delivery is not perfect, either; although email leaves a digital trail, messages may be ignored when received among the stream of daily emails that make up a crowded in-box. For this reason, choose the subject line carefully and, especially for longer messages, consider using a PDF attachment (if appropriate, on letterhead), which will stand out among other routine emails. In cases where both print and digital delivery are required, PDF allows for both options.

Purpose considerations

Memos versus email

MEMO PARTS AND FORMAT

► Identify the parts and format of a standard memo

A standard memo has the word “Memo” or “Memorandum” centered at the top of the page and includes a heading (flush to the left margin) identifying the recipient(s), sender (and sender’s initials), date, and subject. At the bottom of the memo, include a distribution notation if copies are to be sent to anyone not listed in the “To” line (usually managers who simply need to know that the memo was sent). Because memos are often read rapidly by busy recipients, they must follow this consistent, predictable format. Figures 15.1 and 15.2 show these standard elements.

Standard parts of a memo

The body copy (main text portion) of a memo should focus on one topic. Content should be complete yet compact, providing all the information readers need but not going into unnecessary detail. Organize the body of your memo by starting with a short introduction, and then a paragraph or two to address the main issue. Conclude by suggesting a course of action or asking your readers to follow up. Figure 15.3 shows a typical memo with all parts labeled.

For memos sent as email messages, the “To,” “From,” “Subject,” and “Date” fields in the email header take the place of these lines on the PDF or print memo. But, if you want to emphasize that your email message is a memo, you can repeat the word “Memo” or “Memorandum” as well as these fields within the body of the email. Figure 15.4 shows a memo on letterhead; Figure 15.5 shows a memo sent as an email message.

NAME OF ORGANIZATION

MEMORANDUM Center this label on the page or set it flush left (as shown)

To: Name and title of recipient
From: Your name and title (and initials or signature), for verification
Date: (also serves as a chronological record for future reference)
Subject: Elements of a Usable Memo (or, replace Subject with Re for
in reference to)

Subject Line

Be sure that the subject line clearly announces your purpose: "Recommendations for Software Security Upgrades" instead of "Software Security Upgrades." Capitalize the first letter of all major words. (Some organizations also use boldface for the subject line. Follow the guidelines for your workplace.)

Memo Text

Unless you have reason for being indirect (see page 347), state your main point in the opening paragraph. Provide a context the recipient can recognize. (*As you requested in our January meeting, I am forwarding the results of our software security audit.*) For recipients unfamiliar with the topic, begin with a brief background paragraph.

Headings

When the memo covers multiple subtopics, include headings (as shown here). Headings (see page 297) help you organize, and they help readers locate information quickly.

Graphic Highlights

To improve readability you might organize facts and figures in a table (see page 243) or in bulleted or numbered lists (see page 291).

Paragraph and Line Spacing

Do not indent a paragraph's first line. Single-space within paragraphs and double-space between.

Subsequent Page Header

Be as brief as possible. If you must exceed one page, include a running head on each subsequent page, naming the recipient and date (*J. Baxter, 6/12/11, page 2*).

Distribution and Enclosure Notations

These items are illustrated under "Workplace Letters" (see page 343), and used in the same way with memos, as needed.

FIGURE 15.1 Standard Parts of a Memo These elements can differ across organizations and professions, but most memos, especially longer ones, contain most of these parts. Because memos are often read rapidly by busy people, formatting and page layout are key.

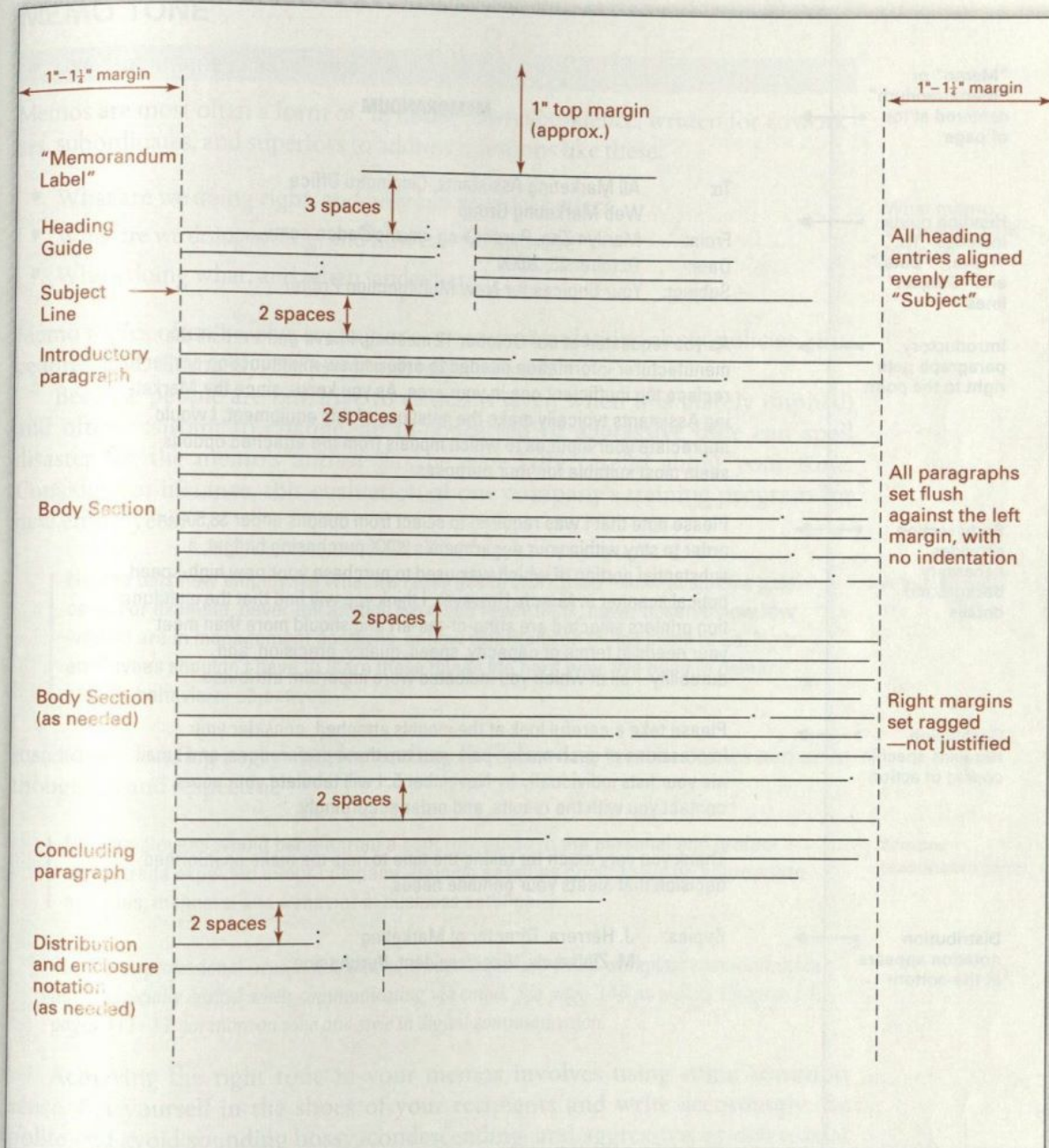


FIGURE 15.2 Standard Memo Format Any internal headings would be set two line spaces below the preceding paragraph and one line space above the following paragraph.

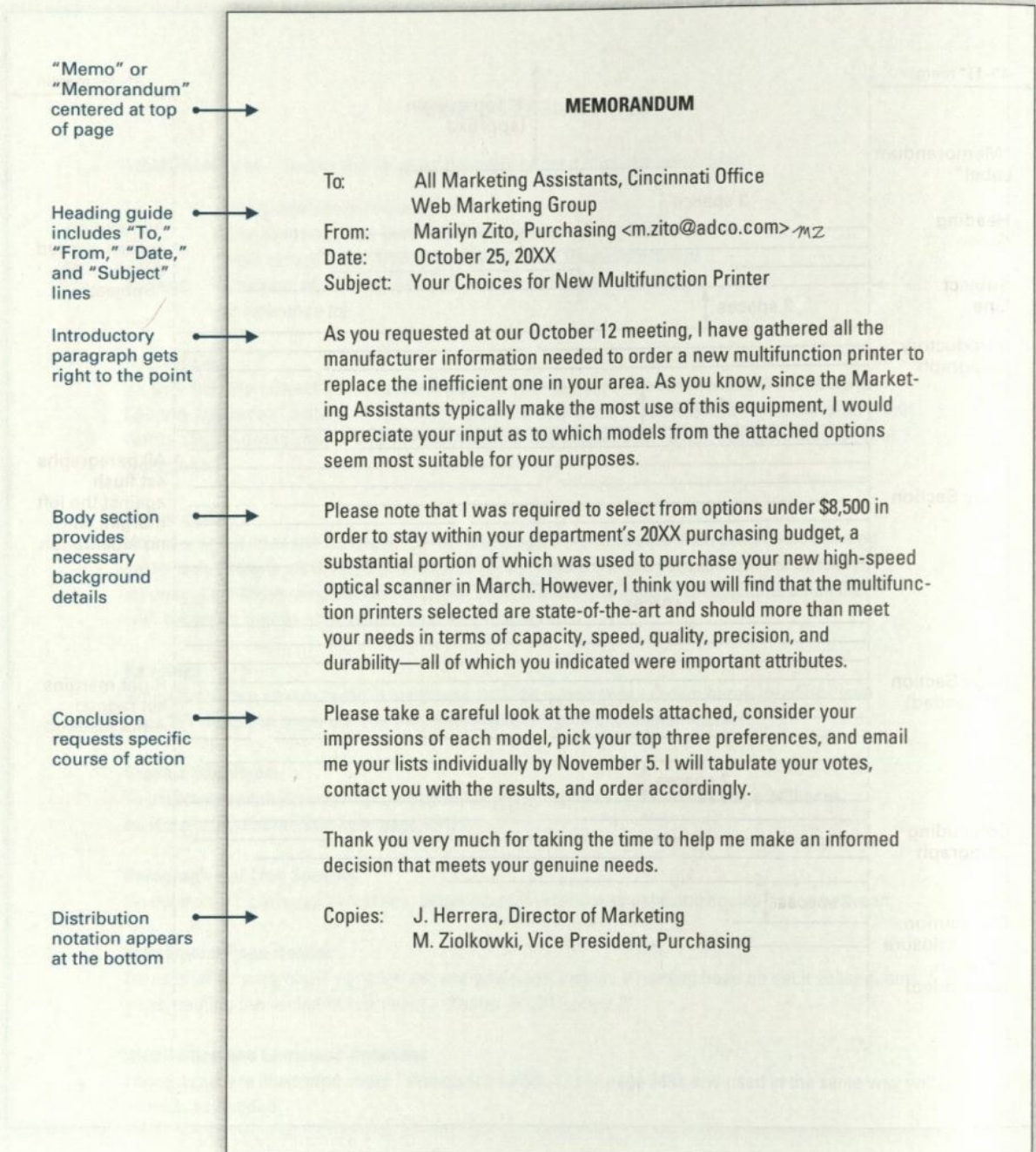


FIGURE 15.3 A Typical Memo Note that the writer has initialed her memo (in the "From" line). Also she has provided a copy to each appropriate recipient—no one appreciates being left "out of the loop." Because of this memo's length, it is more suitable as a PDF attachment than as the body of an email message.

MEMO TONE

► Use proper tone in all memos

Memos are most often a form of “in house” correspondence, written for coworkers, subordinates, and superiors to address questions like these:

- What are we doing right, and how can we do it better?
- What are we doing wrong, and how can we improve?
- Who’s doing what, and when, and where?

Memo topics often involve evaluations or recommendations about policies, procedures, and, ultimately, the *people with whom we work*.

Because people are sensitive to criticism (even when it is merely implied) and often resistant to change, an ill-conceived or aggressive tone can spell disaster for the memo’s author. So, be especially careful about your tone. Consider, for instance, this evaluation of one company’s training program for new employees:

No one tells new employees what it’s *really* like to work here—how to survive politically. For example, never tell anyone what you *really* think; never observe how few women are in management positions, or how disorganized things seem to be. New employees shouldn’t have to learn these things the hard way. We need to demand clearer behavioral objectives.

What memo recipients want to know

A hostile tone

Instead of sounding angry and demanding, the following version comes across as thoughtful and respectful:

New employees would benefit from a concrete guide to the personal and professional traits expected in our company. Training sessions could focus on appropriate attitudes, manners, and behavior in business settings.

A more reasonable tone

NOTE A professional, reasonable tone is always important in all workplace communication but is especially critical when communicating via email. See page 345 as well as Chapter 14, pages 311–13, for more on tone and style in digital communication.

Achieving the right tone in your memos involves using some common sense. Put yourself in the shoes of your recipients and write accordingly. Be polite and avoid sounding bossy, condescending, and aggressive, or deferential and passive. Don’t criticize, judge, or blame any individual or department. Don’t resort to griping, complaining, and other negative commentary. Try to emphasize the positive. Finally, approach difficult situations reasonably. Instead of taking an extreme stance, or suggesting ideas that will never work, be practical and realistic.

Being direct or indirect

The tone of a memo also comes across in the sequence in which you deliver the information. Depending on the sensitivity of your memo's subject matter, you may want to take a direct or an indirect approach. A direct approach (as in Figure 15.3), begins with the "bottom line" in the first sentence (as well as in the subject line) and then presents the details or analysis to support your case. An indirect approach lays out the details of the case over several sentences (and leaves the subject line vague) before delivering the bottom line later in the paragraph.

Readers generally prefer the direct approach because they want to know the bottom line without being told in advance how to feel about it. Assume, for example, that a company Payroll Manager has to announce to employees that their paychecks will be delayed by two days: This manager should take a direct approach, announcing the troubling news in both the subject line and the opening sentence and then explaining the causes of the problem:

Direct approach:
Subject line
announces main
point

Opening
paragraph starts
with bottom line

MEMO

To: All employees

From: Meredith Rocteau, Payroll Manager MR

Date: May 19, 20XX

Subject: Delay in Paychecks

I regret to inform you that those employees paid by direct deposit will experience a two-day delay in receiving their paychecks.

This delay is due to a virus that infiltrated the primary computer server for our payroll system. Although we hired virus consultants to identify the virus and clean out the server, the process took nearly 48 hours.

We apologize for the inconvenience.

However, when you need to convey exceedingly bad news or make an unpopular request or recommendation (as in announcing a strict new policy or employee layoffs), you might consider an indirect approach; this way you can present your case and encourage readers to understand your position before announcing the unpopular bottom line. The danger of the indirect approach, though, is that you may come across as evasive.

Indirect approach:
Subject line is not
specific about the
main point

MEMO

To: All employees

From: J. Travis Southfield, Director of Human Resources JTS

Date: September 19, 20XX

Subject: Difficult Economic Times

Each employee of the AutoWorld family is a valued member, and each of you has played an important role in our company's expansion over the past 10 years.

Yet as you all know, times are difficult right now for the automobile industry. Sales are down; financing is hard to obtain; and consumers are holding back on major purchases.

In order to keep the company solvent, we must consider all options. Therefore, I have been informed by our company president, John Creaswell, that we must downsize. We will begin with options for retirement packages, but please be prepared for the possibility that layoffs may follow.

We will have more information for you at an all-hands meeting tomorrow.

Offers an explanation before delivering the bottom line

The bottom line

(For more on direct versus indirect organizing patterns, see page 347.)

Finally, a memo's tone comes across not only in the words you choose but also in the way you handle its distribution. If your topic is very short, not overly formal, and needs to reach everyone quickly, consider sending the memo as an email. But if your topic is more formal and more detailed, send out a brief cover email ("Please see attached memo for information about this year's raises") with the memo as a PDF attachment. Also, be careful about who receives copies. Don't copy everyone at work when the content is only appropriate for a few, and don't leave vital people off your distribution list.

Consider whether to use email or a PDF attachment

COMMON TYPES OF MEMOS

► Write transmittal, summary, and other common memo types

Memo format can also be used for distributing short, informal reports, discussed in Chapter 21. However, for the purposes of this introductory chapter, consider the following common and more basic types of memos.

Transmittal Memo

A transmittal memo accompanies a package of materials, such as a long report, a manuscript, or a proposal. Its purpose is to signal that the information is being sent from one place to another (providing a paper trail), to introduce the material, and to describe what is enclosed. A transmittal memo may be as simple as a sentence or a paragraph with a bulleted list describing the contents of the package, as in Figure 15.4.



MEMORANDUM

To: D. Spring, Director of Human Resources
 From: M. Noll, Head, Biology Division, *M.N.*
 Date: January 16, 20XX
 Subject: Hiring of New Laboratory Manager

Introduction
conveys the
main point



As you know, each unit manager has been asked to prepare a hiring plan for the coming year. Attached to this memo please find a brief report justifying the biology division's need for a new laboratory manager.

Bullet list
highlights
major items



The attached report includes

- an overview of needs
- a job description
- a budget

Please let me know if you require any additional information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Enclosure
notation names
the document
being transmitted



Enclosure: Justification report

FIGURE 15.4 A Transmittal Memo A memo like this would be placed atop a longer document.

Summary or Follow-up Memo

A summary or follow-up memo provides a written record of a meeting or conversation, or just a recap of a topic discussed that was not resolved at the time. In addition to providing evidence that the meeting or conversation took place, summary and follow-up memos also insure that each recipient has the same understanding of what was decided. Figure 15.5 shows a memo sent as an email that performs both a summary and follow-up function.

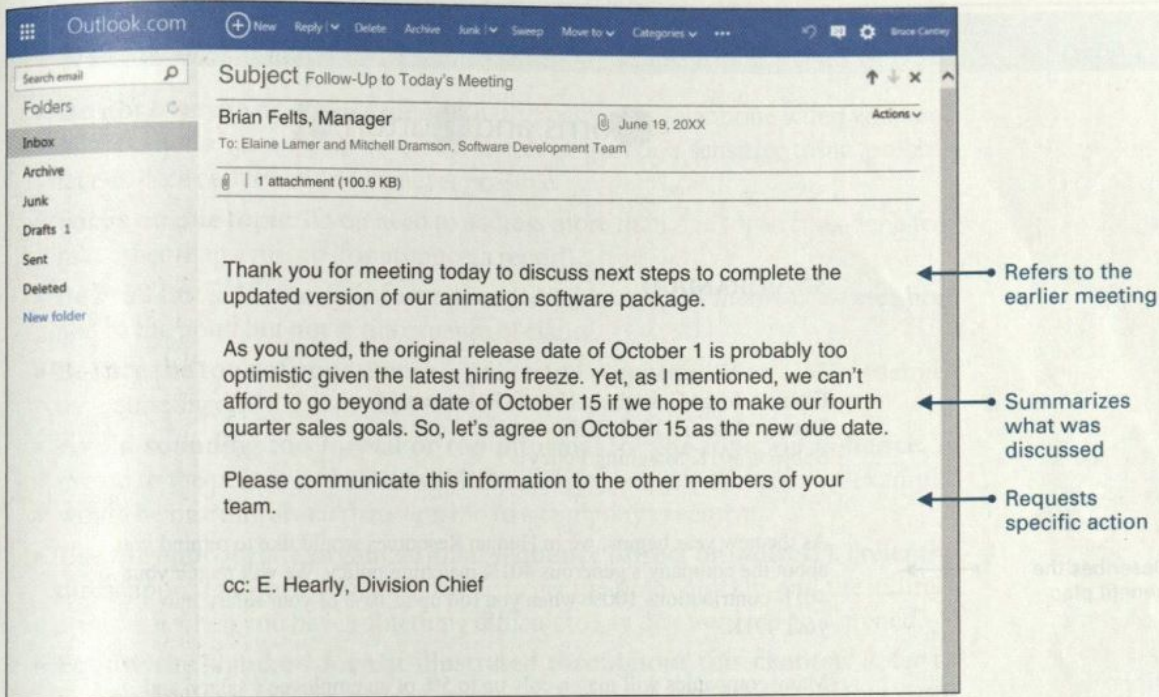


FIGURE 15.5 A Summary or Follow-Up Memo This type of memo provides a written record. Since it is short and not overly formal, it takes the form of an email message.

Source: Microsoft Outlook 2013.

Routine Miscellaneous Memo

Routine miscellaneous memos cover a virtually infinite variety of topics. Such a memo, for example, may contain some type of announcement or update, such as announcing the closure of a parking ramp over the holidays for repair, or an upcoming awards ceremony on Friday. Other such memos may request information or action, reply to an inquiry, or describe a procedure. Shorter, less formal memos of this type are generally sent as email. But if the memo has a formal purpose, especially if it comes from a group such as the Human Resources department to all employees, a more formal version may be preferable. Figure 15.6 shows one such example, formatted on company letterhead and sent as a PDF attachment. (See also Figure 14.4.)

Morris and **S**utton, **LLC**

MEMORANDUM

To: All employees
 From: Jorge Gonsalves, Human Resources JG
 Date: January 12, 20XX
 Subject: 401K Matching Policy

Describes the benefit plan



As the new year begins, we in Human Resources would like to remind you about the company's generous 401K matching policy. We will match your 401K contributions 100% when you roll up to 10% of your salary into your 401K.

Encourages participation



Many companies will match only up to 5% of an employee's salary, and usually not at a 100% rate, so please take advantage of this program by enrolling now. Enrollment is only open until March 1st and will not be open again until next January.

Describes the procedure



For more information, including frequently asked questions and a live chat feature, please visit our [Web site](#). You are also welcome to make a phone or in-person appointment with a Human Resources specialist by using our [online calendar](#) or stopping by our office on the 6th floor (Room 6044).

Thanks.

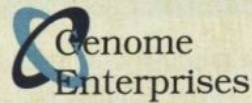
cc: Alison Sheffield, Manager, Human Resources

FIGURE 15.6 A Routine Miscellaneous Memo This type of memo can cover a wide variety of topics. The memo is sent as a PDF email attachment. Because this company's policy is to provide employees with all Human Resources notices in hard copy as well, print copies are also sent via regular mail.



GUIDELINES for Memos

- ▶ **Do not overuse or misuse memos.** Use email or the telephone when you need to ask a quick question or resolve a simple issue. For a sensitive topic, prefer a face-to-face conversation whenever possible.
- ▶ **Focus on one topic.** If you need to address more than one topic, consider a format other than a memo (for instance, a report).
- ▶ **Be brief but sufficiently informative.** Recipients expect memos that are short and to the point but not at the expense of clarity.
- ▶ **Be sure the tone of your memo is polite and respectful.** Don't make enemies by "sounding off."
- ▶ **Avoid sounding too formal or too informal for the topic or audience.** A memo to the person in the next cubicle to ask for help on a project, for example, would be more informal than a memo to a company executive.
- ▶ **Use the appropriate organizational sequence (direct or indirect).** Prefer the direct approach when you need people to get the point quickly, and the indirect approach when you have something difficult to say that needs to be softened.
- ▶ **Follow the standard format illustrated throughout this chapter.** Refer to Figures 15.1 and 15.2 for spacing, margins, alignment, and other elements. Keep in mind that some organizations may have their own formatting requirements for various documents.
- ▶ **Use white space, headings, and bullets, as needed.** These features provide visible structure to your memo, as well as "chunking" all elements into easily digestible parts.
- ▶ **Use tables, charts, and other visuals to display quantitative information and to achieve emphasis, as needed.** See, for example, Figure 15.7.
- ▶ **Check spelling, grammar, and style.** Run the spelling and grammar checkers, but also proofread or ask a colleague to proofread the memo.
- ▶ **For print copies, be sure to initial your memo.** Initials beside your typed name certify that you are the author.
- ▶ **Determine whether to send your memo as the body of an email message, as a PDF attachment, and/or in hard copy.** Use email for shorter memos, particularly ones that summarize a project status or the like (such as Figure 15.5). But use PDF attachments on letterhead if your message is an official announcement, such as Figure 15.6. In some organizations, and for some purposes (such as tax notices, human resources announcements, and other corporate or legally required situations), hard copy may be required as well.
- ▶ **Distribute to the right people.** Do not "spam" people with your memo. Be sure it reaches only those who need the information. At the same time, don't leave out anyone who needs to read your message.



MEMO

To: Steve Bates, Director of Sales
 From: Marcia Rogers, Sales Manager *M.R.*
 Date: Feb. 1, 20XX
 Subject: Yearly Sales Volumes in Regions 3, 5, 6

As I indicated at the meeting last week, Southwest sales continue to lag behind those in the Midwest and the Northwest. I still have no answer for the fourth quarter downturn. No doubt, the region's economic problems have caused everyone headaches, but we should be able to develop some new marketing strategies.

The Southwest region is diversifying quickly, and all economic indicators show slow but steady growth. A medical instrumentation industry such as ours should mirror that growth. But as the following chart illustrates, sales in the region have been erratic. We lost over \$150,000 in the last quarter alone.

Visual provides emphasis →

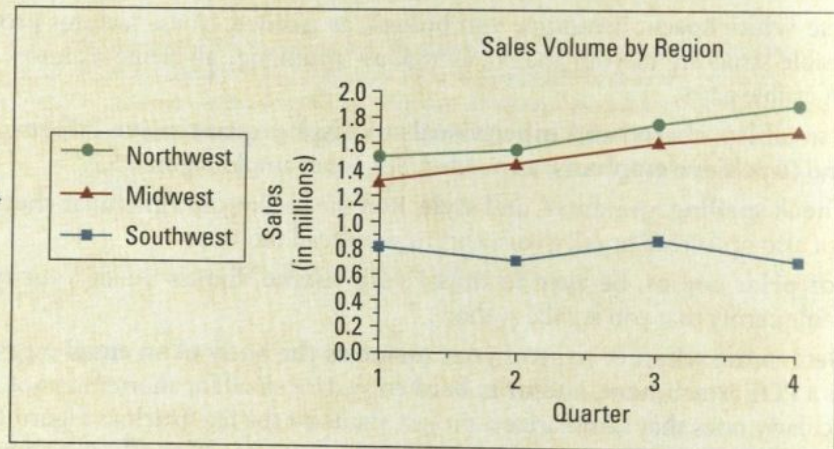


FIGURE 15.7 A Memo that Includes a Visual to Underscore a Point The line graph underscores and justifies the writer's concern about the company's unacceptable performance.



CHECKLIST: Memos

MyWritingLab™

(Numbers in parentheses refer to the first page of discussion.)

Content

- Is the information based on careful research? (121)
- Is the message brief and to the point? (325)
- Are tables, charts, and other graphics used as needed? (335)
- Are recipients given enough information to make an informed decision? (324)
- Are the conclusions and recommendations clear? (328)

Organization

- Is the important information in an area of emphasis? (325)
- Is the direct or indirect pattern used appropriately to present the memo's bottom line? (347)
- Is the material "chunked" into easily digestible parts? (197)

Style

- Is the writing clear, concise, fluent, and exact? (203)
- Is the tone appropriate? (329)
- Has the memo been carefully proofread? (114)

Format

- Does the memo have a complete heading? (325)
- Does the subject line announce the memo's content and purpose? (326)
- Are paragraphs single-spaced within and double-spaced between? (326)
- Do headings announce subtopics, as needed? (326)
- If more than one reader is receiving a copy, does the memo include a distribution notation (cc:) to identify other recipients? (326)
- Does the memo fit the mode of delivery (email, PDF, print copy)? (331)

Ethical, Legal, and Interpersonal Considerations

- Is the information specific, accurate, and unambiguous? (329)
- Is the message inoffensive to all parties? (329)
- Are all appropriate parties receiving a copy? (331)

LETTERS

► Appreciate the role of letters in the workplace

Writers often have good reason to correspond in a more formal and personal medium than a memo or email message. A well-crafted letter is appropriate in situations like these:

When to send a letter instead of a memo or email

- To personalize your correspondence, conveying the sense that this message is prepared exclusively for your recipient
- To convey a dignified, professional impression
- To represent your company or organization
- To present a reasoned, carefully constructed case
- To respond to clients, customers, and others outside your organization in a formal, businesslike manner
- To provide an official notice or record (letters are often the required format for legal notifications)

A letter often has a *persuasive* purpose (see Chapter 3); therefore, proper tone is essential for connecting with the recipient. Because your signature certifies your approval—and your responsibility—for the message (which may serve as a legal document, as in Figure 15.8), precision is crucial. Letters can be sent as PDF email attachments, in hard copy, or both. Some organizations require certain letters (such as changes to salaries or pension plans, or legal notifications) be sent in hard copy, sometimes by certified mail.

The rest of this chapter covers four common letter types: inquiry letters, claim letters, sales letters, and adjustment letters. (Job application letters and letters of transmittal are discussed in Chapters 16 and 21, respectively.)

CONSIDERING AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

► Analyze your letter's audience and purpose

Your overall approach to a workplace letter is determined by the letter's audience and purpose.

Audience considerations

Begin by focusing on your audience: Who will be the recipient of this letter? (When possible, write to a named person, not the title of a position.) What is your relationship to this person? Is this a potential employer, a client, an associate, a stranger? Exactly what information and level of formality does this person expect? How might this person react to the contents of your letter? Answering these questions in advance will help you craft a letter that connects with its recipient.

Purpose considerations

Next, focus on your purpose: What do you want the recipient to do after reading your letter—offer a job, provide advice, grant a favor, accept bad news? Do you have

multiple purposes in mind as in, say, obtaining a refund for a faulty product while also preserving your business relationship with that supplier? Answering these questions in advance will help you craft a letter that achieves the outcome you seek.

LETTER PARTS, FORMATS, AND DESIGN ELEMENTS

► Identify the parts, formats, and design features of workplace letters

Most workplace letters have the same basic components. This conventional and predictable arrangement enables recipients to locate what they need immediately, as in Figure 15.8.

Standard Parts

Many organizations have their own formats for letters. Depending on where you work, some of these parts may appear at different locations on the page. But in general a letter contains the elements listed here.

Heading and Date. If your stationery has a company letterhead, simply include the date a few lines below the letterhead, flush against the right or left margin. When you use your personal address, omit your name, because that will appear below your signature at the letter's end.

154 Sea Lane
Harwich, MA 02163

July 15, 20XX

Street address

City, state, zip

Month, day, year

Use the Postal Service's two-letter state abbreviations (e.g., MA for Massachusetts, WY for Wyoming) in your heading, in the inside address, and on the envelope.

Inside Address. Two to six line spaces below the heading, flush against the left margin, is the inside address (the address of the recipient).

Dr. Ann Mello, Dean of Students
Western University
30 Mogul Hill Road
Stowe, VT 51350

Name/position

Organization

Street address

City, state, zip

Whenever possible, address a specifically named recipient, and include the person's title. Using "Mr." or "Ms." before the name is optional. (See page 228 for avoiding sexist usage in titles and salutations.)

NOTE Depending on the letter's length, adjust the vertical placement of your return address and inside address to achieve a balanced page.

Heading (sender's address)	<p>LEVERETT LAND & TIMBER COMPANY, INC. 18 River Rock Road Leverett, MA 01054</p> <hr/>	<p>creative land use quality building materials architectural construction</p>
Date	<p>January 17, 20XX</p>	
Inside address (recipient)	<p>Mr. Thomas E. Muffin Clearwater Drive Amherst, MA 01022</p>	
Salutation	<p>Dear Mr. Muffin:</p>	
Body text	<p>I have examined the damage to your home caused by the ruptured water pipe and consider the following repairs to be necessary and of immediate concern:</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Exterior:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove plywood soffit panels beneath overhangs Replace damaged insulation and plumbing Remove all built-up ice within floor framing Replace plywood panels and finish as required <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Northeast Bedroom—Lower Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove and replace all sheetrock, including closet Remove and replace all door casings and baseboards Remove and repair windowsill extensions and moldings Remove and reinstall electric heaters Respray ceilings and repaint all surfaces <p>This appraisal of damage repair does not include repairs and/or replacements of carpets, tile work, or vinyl flooring. Also, this appraisal assumes that the plywood subflooring on the main level has not been severely damaged.</p> <p>Leverett Land & Timber Company, Inc. proposes to furnish the necessary materials and labor to perform the described damage repairs for the amount of sixteen thousand one hundred and eighty dollars (\$16,180).</p>	
Complimentary closing	<p>Sincerely,</p>	
Signature	<p><i>G.A. Jackson</i> Gerald A. Jackson, President</p>	
Typist's notation	<p>GAJ/ob</p>	
Enclosure notation	<p>Encl. Itemized estimate</p>	
	Phone: 410-555-9879	Fax: 410-555-6874
		Email: llt@yonet.com

FIGURE 15.8 Standard Parts of a Workplace Letter This writer is careful to stipulate not only the exact repairs and costs, but also those items excluded from his estimate. In the event of legal proceedings, a formal letter signifies a contractual obligation on the sender's part.

Salutation. The salutation, two line spaces below the inside address, begins with *Dear* and ends with a colon (*Dear Ms. Smith:*). If you don't know the recipient's name, use the position title (*Dear Manager*) or, preferably, an attention line (page 342). Only address the recipient by first name if that is the way you would address that individual in person.

- | Dear Ms. Smith:
- | Dear Managing Editor:
- | Dear Professor Trudeau:

Typical salutations

No satisfactory guidelines exist for addressing several people within an organization. *Gentlemen* or *Dear Sirs* implies bias. *Ladies and Gentlemen* sounds too much like the beginning of a speech. *Dear Sir or Madam* is old-fashioned. *To Whom It May Concern* is vague and impersonal. Your best bet is to eliminate the salutation by using an attention line.

Text. Begin your letter text two line spaces below the salutation or subject line. Workplace letters typically include (1) a brief introductory paragraph (five or fewer lines) that identifies your purpose and connects with the recipient's interest, (2) one or more discussion paragraphs that present details of your message, and (3) a concluding paragraph that sums up and encourages action.

The shape of workplace letters

Keep the paragraphs short, usually fewer than eight lines. If a paragraph goes beyond eight lines, or if the paragraph contains detailed supporting facts or examples, as in Figure 15.8, consider using a vertical list.

Complimentary Closing. The closing, two line spaces (returns) below the last line of text, should parallel the level of formality used in the salutation and should reflect your relationship to the recipient (polite but not overly intimate). *Yours truly* and *Sincerely* are the most common. Others, in order of decreasing formality, include

- | Respectfully,
- | Cordially,
- | Best wishes,
- | Regards,
- | Best,

Complimentary closings

Align the closing with the letter's heading.

Signature. Type your name and title on the fourth and fifth lines below and aligned with the closing. Sign in the space between the complimentary closing and typed name.

The signature
block

Sincerely yours,

Martha S. Jones

Martha S. Jones

Personnel Manager

If you are representing your company or a group that bears legal responsibility for the correspondence, type the company's name in full caps two line spaces below your complimentary closing; place your typed name and title four line spaces below the company name and sign in the triple space between.

Signature block
representing the
company

Yours truly,

HASBROUCK LABORATORIES

Lester Fong

L. H. Fong

Research Associate

For PDF, you can sign a hard copy and scan, or use one of the PDF tools (digital pencil or digital signature).

Optional Parts

Some letters have one or more of the following specialized parts. (Examples appear in the sample letters in this chapter.)

Attention Line. Use an attention line when you write to an organization and do not know your recipient's name but are directing the letter to a specific department or position.

An attention line
can replace your
salutation

Glaxol Industries, Inc.

232 Rogaline Circle

Missoula, MT 61347

Attention: Director of Research and Development

Drop two line spaces below the inside address and place the attention line either flush with the left margin or centered on the page.

Subject Line. Typically, subject lines are used with memos, but if the recipient is not expecting your letter, a subject line is a good way of catching a busy reader's attention.

A subject line can
attract attention

I Subject: *Placement of the Subject Line*

Place the subject line below the inside address or attention line with one line space before and after. You can italicize the subject to make it prominent.

Typist's Notation. If someone else types your letter for you (common in the days of typewriters but rare today), your initials (in CAPS), a slash, and your typist's initials (in lower case) appear below the typed signature, flush with the left margin.

| JJ/pl

Typist's notation

Enclosure Notation. If you enclose other documents in the same envelope, indicate this one line space below the typist's notation (or writer's name and position), flush against the left margin. State the number of enclosures.

| Enclosure

Enclosure noted

| Enclosures 2

| Encl. 3

If the enclosures are important documents such as legal certificates, checks, or specifications, name them in the notation.

| Enclosures: 2 certified checks, 1 set of KBX plans

Enclosure named

Copy (or Distribution) Notation. If you distribute copies of your letter to other recipients, indicate this by inserting the notation "Copy" or "cc," followed by a colon, one line below the previous line (such as an enclosure line). The "cc" notation once stood for "carbon copy," but no one uses carbon paper any more, so now it is said to stand for "courtesy copy."

| cc: office file

Copy notations

| Melvin Blount

| copy: S. Furlow

| B. Smith

Most copies are distributed on an *FYI* (*For Your Information*) basis, but writers sometimes use the copy notation to maintain a paper trail or to signal the primary recipient that this information is being shared with others (e.g., superiors, legal authorities).

Multiple notations would appear in this order: typist, enclosures, and then copy.

Postscript. A postscript (typed or handwritten) draws attention to a point you wish to emphasize or adds a personal note. Do not use a postscript if you forget to mention a point in the body of the letter. Rewrite the body section instead.

| P.S. Because of its terminal position in your letter, a postscript can draw attention to a point that needs reemphasizing.

A postscript

Place the postscript two line spaces below any other notation, and flush against the left margin. Because readers often regard postscripts as sales gimmicks, use them sparingly in professional correspondence.

Formats and Design Features

The following elements help make workplace letters look inviting, accessible, and professional.

Letter Format. Although several formats are acceptable, and your company may have its own, the most popular format for workplace letters is *block* (Figure 15.9).

Digital Templates. Most word-processing software allows you to select from templates, or predesigned letter formats. These templates provide fields for you to insert your name, your company name, and your message. Some templates provide background artwork or other decorative features. As tempting as it may be to simply choose a template, make sure the one you use is appropriate for your audience and purpose. Unless the situation specifically calls for a decorative format, strive for a tasteful, conservative look. When in doubt, ignore the templates and work from a blank document.

Quality Stationery. When printing hard copies for an official workplace letter, use the organization's formal letterhead. Otherwise, use high-quality, 20-pound bond, 8½-by-11-inch stationery with a minimum fiber content of 25 percent to convey a professional look.

Uniform Margins and Spacing. When using stationery without a letterhead, frame your letter with top and side margins between 1 inch and 1½ inches. Use single spacing within paragraphs and double-spacing between. Vary these guidelines based on the amount of space required by the letter's text, but strive for a balanced look.

Headers for Subsequent Pages. Head each additional page with a notation identifying the recipient, date, and page number.

Subsequent-page
header

I Adrianna Fonseca, June 25, 20XX, page 2

Align your header with the right-hand margin. See page 55 for an example.

NOTE Never use an additional page solely for the closing section. Instead, reformat the letter so that the closing appears on the first page, or so that at least two lines of text appear above the closing on the subsequent page.

The Envelope. For hard copy, use the organization's formal envelope. Otherwise, use a standard-size business envelope (usually #10) that matches your stationery. Place your own name and address in the upper-left corner. Single-space these elements. Most word-processing programs have envelope printing options that automatically place these elements.

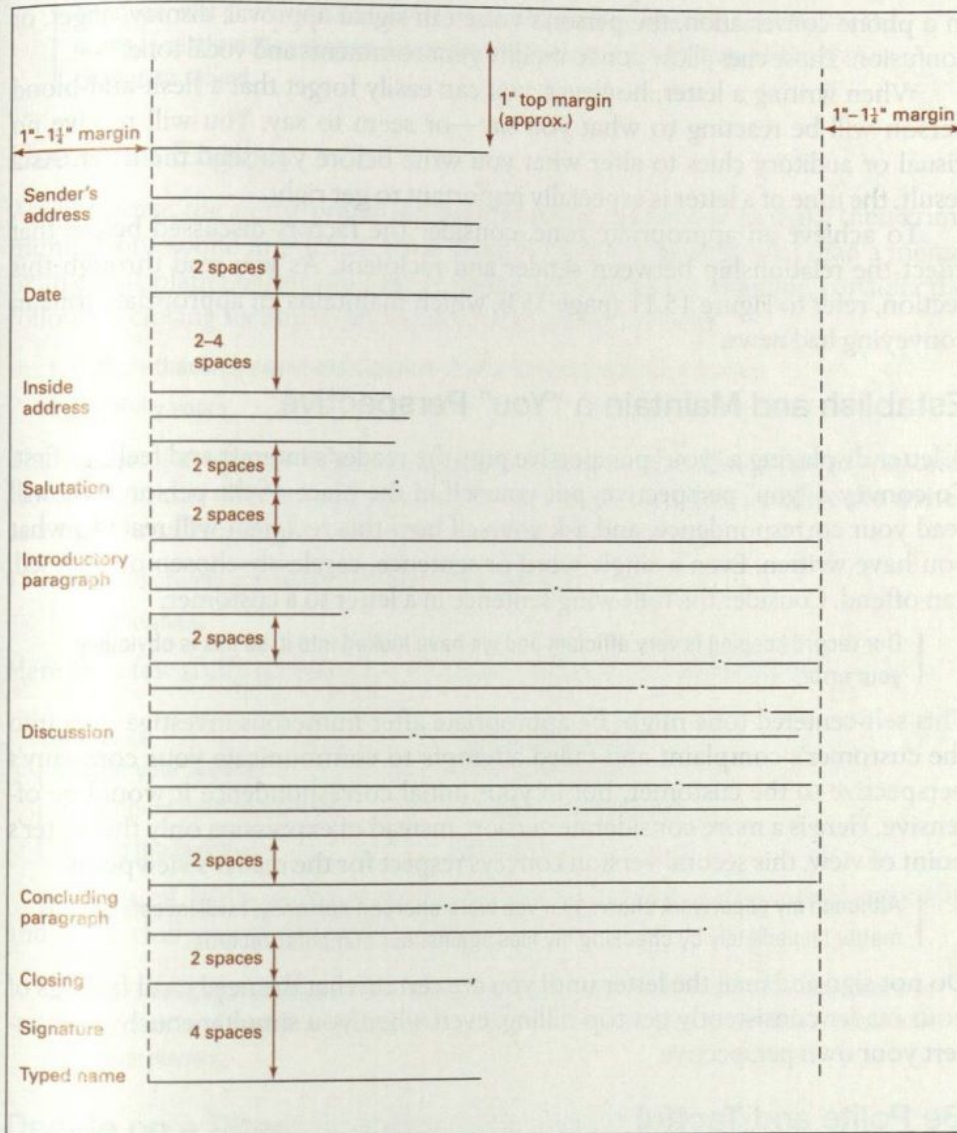


FIGURE 15.9 Block Format (without letterhead) In the block format, every line begins at the left margin. This format is popular because it looks businesslike and saves keying time by eliminating the need to tab and center.

LETTER TONE

► Use proper tone in any letter

When you speak with someone face-to-face, you unconsciously modify your statements and facial expressions as you read and listen to the listener's signals: a smile, a frown, a raised eyebrow, a nod, a short vocal expression of agreement or disagreement.

The importance of a letter's tone

In a phone conversation, the person's voice can signal approval, dismay, anger, or confusion. Those cues allow you to modify your comments and vocal tone.

When writing a letter, however, you can easily forget that a flesh-and-blood person will be reacting to what you say—or seem to say. You will receive no visual or auditory clues to alter what you write before you send the letter. As a result, the tone of a letter is especially important to get right.

To achieve an appropriate tone, consider the factors discussed below that affect the relationship between sender and recipient. As you read through this section, refer to Figure 15.11 (page 353), which maintains an appropriate tone in conveying bad news.

Establish and Maintain a “You” Perspective

Prioritize the reader's needs, wants, and feelings

A letter displaying a “you” perspective puts the reader's interest and feelings first. To convey a “you” perspective, put yourself in the place of the person who will read your correspondence, and ask yourself how this recipient will react to what you have written. Even a single word or sentence, carelessly chosen or phrased, can offend. Consider the following sentence in a letter to a customer:

Offensive

Our record keeping is very efficient and we have looked into it, so this is obviously your error.

This self-centered tone might be appropriate after numerous investigations into the customer's complaint and failed attempts to communicate your company's perspective to the customer, but in your initial correspondence it would be offensive. Here is a more considerate version. Instead of expressing only the writer's point of view, this second version conveys respect for the reader's viewpoint.

Considerate and respectful

Although my paperwork shows that you were charged correctly, I will investigate this matter immediately by checking my files against our computer records.

Do not sign and mail the letter until you are certain that the needs and feelings of your reader consistently get top billing, even when you simultaneously must assert your own perspective.

Be Polite and Tactful

If you must express criticism, do so in a way that conveys good will and trust in the recipient. Avoid the following type of expression:

Tactless

I am shocked that your company lacks the standards to design and manufacture an alarm clock that actually works.

Although a company representative would be required to write a polite and thoughtful response to the above complaint, he or she might be inclined to look closely at the clock's warranty and offer only the most basic reimbursement.

In contrast, a polite and thoughtful letter might yield a full refund or a brand new replacement:

Although your clock worked reliably for several months, one of the internal mechanisms recently malfunctioned. I would appreciate your contacting me about an exchange or refund.

Polite

Use Plain English

Avoid *letterese*, the stuffy, puffed-up phrases some writers use to make their communications sound important. Even though a letter is more formal than a memo or an email, plain English still can get your point across. For example, consider the following closing section to an inquiry letter asking for help:

Humbly thanking you in anticipation of your kind assistance, I remain
Faithfully yours,

Letterese

The reader of this letter might feel spoken down to, and decide not to respond. However, in this next revised version, the reader would likely perceive the writer as a straight-talking equal and be more inclined to follow up:

I would greatly appreciate any help you could offer.
Best wishes,

Clear and direct

Here are a few stuffy phrasings, with clearer, more direct translations:

Letterese

As per your request
Contingent upon receipt of
Due to the fact that

Clear and direct

As you requested
As soon as we receive
Because

Be natural. Write as you would speak in a classroom or office: professionally and respectfully but clearly and directly.

NOTE In the legal profession (and others), phrases such as those shown above are known as “terms of art” and connote a specific meaning. In these cases, you may not be able to avoid such elaborate phrases.

Decide on a Direct or Indirect Organizing Pattern

The reaction you anticipate should determine the organizational plan of your letter: either *direct* or *indirect*. (Figure 15.10 illustrates the choices.)

- Will the recipient feel pleased, angry, or neutral?
- Will the message cause resistance, resentment, or disappointment?

Questions for
organizing your
message

The direct pattern puts the main point in the first paragraph, followed by the explanation. Be direct when you expect the recipient to react with approval or when you want to convey immediately the point of your letter (e.g., in good news, inquiry, or application letters—or other routine correspondence).

When to be direct

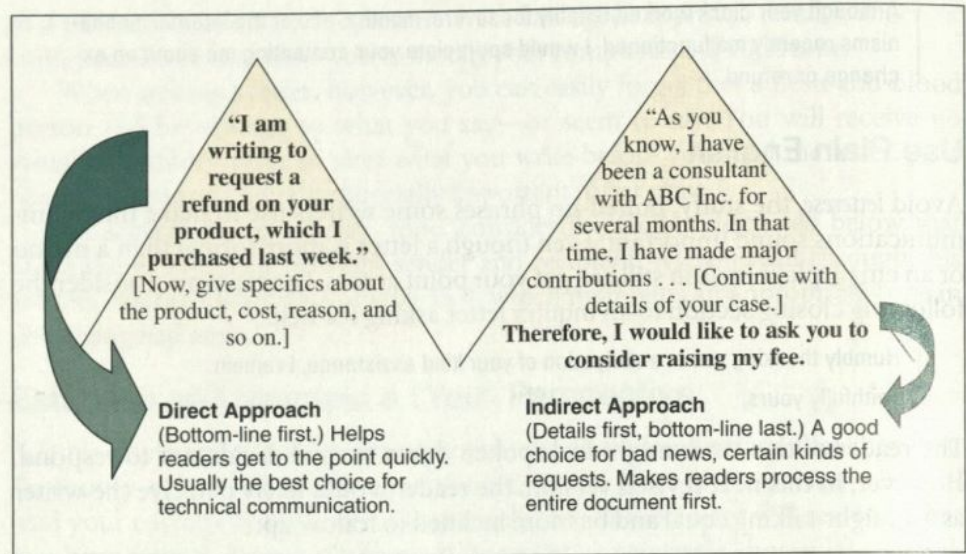


FIGURE 15.10 Deciding on Your Writing Approach Use a direct approach most of the time. But when you need to convey difficult or negative information, use an indirect approach. Be as brief as possible.

When to be indirect

If you expect the reader to resist or to need persuading, or if this person is from a different culture, consider an indirect plan. Give the explanation *before* the main point (as in requesting a pay raise or refusing a request).

Research indicates that “readers will always look for the bottom line” (*Writing User-Friendly Documents* 14). Therefore, a direct pattern, even for certain types of bad news, may be preferable—as in complaining about a faulty product. For more on conveying bad news, see the section later in this chapter.

NOTE Whenever you consider using an indirect pattern, think carefully about its ethical implications. Never try to deceive the recipient—and never create an impression that you have something to hide.

For more on direct versus indirect organizing patterns, see page 347.

GLOBAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

► Explain the global and ethical implications of workplace letters

Know your audience

In today’s international marketplace, you can expect to communicate with people from numerous different countries and cultures. Many such people are non-native speakers of English and/or have a cultural background other than Anglo American. In such cases, relationship building is essential—and often more important than the topic being discussed.

How relationships can be damaged

Learn all you can about the letter recipient’s culture and preferences before corresponding. Be aware that trouble can arise as early as the salutation:

International audiences often consider an inappropriate salutation highly offensive. In France or England, for example, a person's title should be used in the salutation, as in "Monsieur le Professeur Larousse" or "Lord High Commissioner Jones" (Sabath 164). In England, "Dear Madam" and "Dear Sir" continue to be acceptable for people not known well by the writer (Scott 55). Know the conventions preferred by your particular readers.

After a bad opening, the letter's contents can spell more trouble, especially when a North American writer "gets right down to business," without focusing first on the relationship. For example, international audiences often expect a personalized introduction that compliments the recipient, inquires about the family, and dwells on other personal details before discussing the topic at hand. Also, North American readers value correspondence that is sufficiently clear and direct to ensure one interpretation only. In contrast, readers from other cultures often prefer ambiguity in their correspondence, thereby allowing the recipient to infer his/her own meaning: In short, countless people across the globe are insulted by a message that seems to be telling them what to think.

Discussing any controversial topic with international readers can be especially hazardous. Consider, for example, the page 346 response to a customer's inquiry about a possible billing error: That example (repeated below) shows respect for the recipient's viewpoint.

Although my paperwork shows that you were charged correctly, I will investigate this matter immediately by checking my files against our computer records.

An acceptable version for an Anglo-American audience

However, while the previous version may be perfectly acceptable for a conventional North American audience, someone from a different culture might prefer a version like this one:

Thank you for bringing your question about the possible billing error to my attention. I personally will investigate this matter immediately and do everything possible to answer your question to your full satisfaction.

A preferable version for an international audience

Take special care in expressing disagreement. For example, instead of writing "I'm not so sure that's the best approach," prefer "Are there any other approaches?" or "Do you think that is the best approach?" Or, instead of writing "I disagree" or "We need to discuss this," prefer "That viewpoint is interesting" or "I had not thought of that."

Finally, the letter's closing can create additional problems. For example, informal complimentary closings such as "Cheers" or "Best" often are considered offensive; instead, prefer a formal closing, such as "Respectfully," which seems to be a universally acceptable choice. Avoid excessive informality throughout your letter.

Even the best intentions can violate ethical standards. For example, while trying to be polite and respectful, the writer might end up being evasive and mis-leading instead, thereby inadvertently deceiving the reader. In short, almost any type of international correspondence poses this dilemma: how to be clear and straightforward

How good intentions can go wrong

without appearing rude and insensitive. Do not allow your concern for diplomacy to overshadow the need for recipients to receive the information—as well as the understanding—they require in order to make sound decisions. Regardless of cultural differences, an ethical message ensures that the reader understands and interprets the information just as clearly and accurately as the writer does.

You can learn more about intercultural communication by reading credible Web pages and books. Also, workplace colleagues and faculty members may be good sources of advice. Never send off any global correspondence until you have done diligent homework. (For more on this topic, see Chapters 3 and 5.)



GUIDELINES for Letters in General

- ▶ **Determine whether the situation calls for a letter, memo, or email.** Use a letter to communicate formally with a client or customer or as required by company or legal policy.
- ▶ **Determine if the letter needs to be sent as an email attachment, in hard copy, or both.**
- ▶ **Use proper letter format and include all the required parts.** Unless your organization has its own guidelines, use block format and the parts discussed earlier.
- ▶ **Place the reader's needs first.** Always write from the “you” perspective, putting yourself in your reader's place.
- ▶ **Decide on the direct or indirect approach.** Generally speaking, take the direct approach for good news and the indirect approach for bad news.
- ▶ **Maintain a courteous, professional tone.** A professional tone creates goodwill and is more effective in the long run.
- ▶ **Avoid letterese.** Use plain English, no matter how formal or important the letter. Stuffy language only comes across as phony.
- ▶ **Keep international readers in mind.** Don't assume that every letter you write is directed at a recipient whose first language is English or whose cultural values match your own.

CONVEYING BAD OR UNWELCOME NEWS

- ▶ Convey bad or unwelcome news in a letter

Bad news is a fact of life in the workplace

During your career you may have to say no to customers, employees, and job applicants. You may have to make difficult requests, such as asking employees to accept higher medical insurance premiums or seeking an interview with a beleaguered official. You may have to notify consumers or shareholders about accidents

or product recalls. You may need to apologize for errors—the list of possibilities goes on. In conveying bad news, you face a *persuasive* challenge (see Chapter 3): You must convince people to accept your message. As the bearer of unwelcome news and requests, you will need to offer reasonable explanations, incentives, or justifications—and your tone will need to be diplomatic, as in Figure 15.11.

In each instance, you will have to decide whether to build your case first or get right to the main point. This will depend on the situation. If you are requesting a refund for a faulty printer, for example, you will probably want a direct approach, because the customer service person, who could easily receive hundreds of letters each day, will get to your point quickly. But if you are announcing a 15 percent increase in your client service fees, you might want readers to process your justification first.

The following general guidelines apply to many situations you will face; they also complement the guidelines for each specific type of letter covered in this chapter.

Decide if a direct or indirect approach is best



GUIDELINES for Conveying Bad News*

- ▶ **Don't procrastinate.** As much as people may dislike the news, they will feel doubly offended after being kept in the dark.
- ▶ **Never just blurt it out.** Set a considerate tone by prefacing your bad news with considerate terms such as *I regret*, *We're sorry*, or *Unfortunately*. Instead of flatly proclaiming *Your application has been denied*, give recipients information they can use: *Unfortunately, we are unable to offer you admission to this year's Program. This letter will explain why we made this decision and how you can reapply.* Provide a context that leads into your explanation.
- ▶ **Give a clear and honest explanation.** Don't make things worse by fogging or dodging the issue. (See the Guidelines for Persuasion, pages 51–52.)
- ▶ **When you need to apologize, do so immediately.** Place your apology right up front. Don't say *An error was made in calculating your construction bill.* Do say *We are sorry we made a mistake in calculating your construction bill.* Don't attempt to camouflage the error. Don't offer excuses or try to shift the blame.
- ▶ **Use the passive voice to avoid accusations but not to dodge responsibility.** Instead of *You used the wrong bolts*, say *The wrong bolts were used.*
- ▶ **Do not use "you" to blame the reader.** Instead of *You did not send a deposit*, say *We have not received your deposit.*

*Guidelines adapted from Dumont and Lannon 206–21; Timmerman and Harrison 382–87; U.S. Bureau of Land Management.



GUIDELINES *Continued*

- ▶ **Keep the tone friendly and personal.** Avoid patronizing or impersonal jargon such as *company policy* or *circumstances beyond our control*.
- ▶ **Consider the format.** Take plenty of time to write and revise the letter, even by hand, if a personal note is warranted. For exceedingly bad news—say, denial of a promotion—consider sending the letter and following up with a meeting. Never use form letters for important matters, and don't use a formal letter for a relatively minor issue; for example, to notify employees that a company softball game has been cancelled, an email would be sufficient.
- ▶ **Consider the medium.** Don't be like one major electronics retailer who used an email list to notify hundreds of workers that they were laid off, effective immediately.

COMMON TYPES OF LETTERS

- ▶ Write inquiry, claim, sales, and adjustment letters

Among the many types of business letters you may write on the job, the common types are inquiry letters, claim letters, sales letters, and adjustment letters.

Inquiry Letters

Solicited and
unsolicited inquiry
letters

Inquiry letters ask questions and request a reply. They may be solicited (in response to an advertisement or announcement) or unsolicited (spontaneously written to request some type of information you need). For example, a computer repair technician might write a solicited inquiry to a computer manufacturer that offers free troubleshooting guides for repair specialists. If there has been no such advertised offer, the technician might write an unsolicited inquiry to the same company to ask if any troubleshooting information is available.

In a solicited inquiry, be brief and to the point, and be sure to reference the advertisement or announcement that prompted you to write. In an unsolicited inquiry, you are asking a busy person to spend the time to read your letter, consider your request, collect the information, and write a response. Therefore, keep your request reasonable and state the purpose clearly and concisely. Apologize for any imposition and express your appreciation. Avoid long, involved inquiries that are unlikely to be answered.

Figure 15.12 illustrates an unsolicited letter requesting information. Research consultant Alan Greene is preparing a report on the feasibility of harnessing solar energy for home heating in Alaska. After learning that a nonprofit research group has been experimenting with solar applications, Alan decides to write for details. Notice how he tries to make the respondent's task as easy as possible.

LEVERETT LAND & TIMBER COMPANY, INC.
 18 River Rock Road
 Leverett, MA 01054

creative land use
 quality building materials
 architectural construction

January 17, 20XX

Mr. Thomas E. Shaler
 19 Clearwater Drive
 Amherst, MA 01022

Dear Mr. Shaler:

Thank you for bringing the matter of the ruptured water pipe to my attention. I was pleased to hear from you again these months after our firm completed construction of your living room addition, though I was of course sorry to hear about the water damage not only to the new construction but to the living room as a whole.

← Establishes "you" perspective immediately

Naturally, I understand your desire to receive compensation for your home's damage, especially taking into account how recently the extension was completed. In reviewing the blueprints for the extension, however, I find that the pipes were state-of-the-art and were fully insulated. In fact, it is the practice of Leverett Land & Timber not only to use the best materials available but also to exceed piping insulation requirements by as much as 50 percent. For this reason, we cannot fulfill your request to replace the piping at no cost and repair the water-damaged areas.

← Takes an indirect approach by easing into the bad news, and saving it until the end of second paragraph

Undoubtedly, your insurance will cover the damage. I suspect that the rupture was caused by insufficient heating of the living room area during this unusually cold winter, but homeowner's insurance will cover damages resulting from cold-ruptured pipes 95 percent of the time.

← Speaks clearly and honestly—without blaming the reader

Our policy is to make repairs at a 20 percent discount in situations like this. Though the pipe rupture was not our fault, we feel personally close to every project we do and to every client we serve. Please get in touch if you would like to discuss this matter further. I would also be happy to speak with your insurance company if you wish.

← Remains polite and tactful, despite refusing the request

Sincerely,

P.A. Jackson

Gerald A. Jackson

← Maintains the "you" perspective throughout

FIGURE 15.11 Bad News Letter Note the "reader-friendly" tone throughout.

Solar Solutions, Inc.
234 Western Road
Fargo, ND 27116

March 10, 20XX

Rachel Cowans
Director of Energy Systems
The Earth Research Institute
Pershram, ME 04619

Dear Ms. Cowans:

States the purpose → As a Research Consultant at Solar Solutions, I am preparing a report (April 15 deadline) on the feasibility of solar energy for home heating in Arctic regions.

Makes a reasonable and courteous request → In my research, I encountered references to your group's pioneering work in solar systems. Would you please allow me to benefit from your experience? Your answers to the following questions would be a great help.

Presents a list of specific questions →

1. At this stage of development, do you consider active or passive heating more practical? (Please explain briefly.)
2. Do you expect to surpass the 60 percent limit of heating needs supplied by the active system? If so, at what level of efficiency and how soon?
3. What is the cost of materials for building your active system, per cubic foot of living space?
4. What metal do you use in collectors, to obtain the highest thermal conductivity at the lowest maintenance costs?

Leaves space for response to each question →

Provides complete contact information → Please record your answers in the spaces provided and return in the enclosed envelope. If an alternative medium is suitable, here is my contact information: phone: 555-986-6578; email: agreene@solarsolutions.com

Offers to share findings → I would be glad to send you a copy of my final document. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,
Alan Greene
Alan Greene
Research Consultant

FIGURE 15.12 An Unsolicited Inquiry Letter This type of letter must be reader-friendly to increase the chance of getting a reply.

If your questions are too numerous or complex to be answered in print, you might alternately request an interview (assuming the respondent is nearby), as in Figure 15.13.

82 Mountain Street
New Bedford, MA 02720

March 8, 20XX

The Honorable Roger R. Grimes
Massachusetts House of Representatives
Boston, MA 02202

Dear Representative Grimes:

As a University of Massachusetts technical writing student, I am preparing a report evaluating the EPA's progress in removing PCB contaminants from New Bedford Harbor.

In my research, I encounter your name repeatedly. Your dedicated work has raised public awareness, and I am hoping to benefit from your knowledge.

← Gets right to the point of the letter

I was surprised to learn that, although this contamination is considered the most extensive anywhere, the EPA has not moved beyond conducting studies. My own study questions the need for such extensive data gathering. Your opinion, as I can ascertain from the news media, is that the EPA is definitely moving too slowly.

← Describes related research

The EPA refutes that argument by asserting they simply do not yet have the information necessary to begin a clean-up operation.

← Summarizes the ongoing controversy

As a New Bedford resident, I am very interested in your opinions on this issue. Could you possibly find time to grant me an interview? With your permission, I will phone your office in a few days to ask about arranging an appointment.

← Politely requests an interview

I would deeply appreciate your assistance and will gladly send you a copy of my completed report.

← Offers to share findings

Very truly yours,

Karen P. Granger

Karen P. Granger

FIGURE 15.13 Request for an Informative Interview Be as straightforward and polite as possible in order to get the reader interested in interviewing you.



GUIDELINES for Inquiry Letters

- ▶ **Don't wait until the last minute.** Provide ample time for a response.
- ▶ **Whenever possible, write to a specific person.** If you need the name, call the organization and ask to whom you should address your inquiry.
- ▶ **Do your homework to ask the right questions.** A vague request such as "Please send me your data on . . ." is likely to be ignored. Don't ask questions for which the answers are readily available elsewhere.
- ▶ **Explain who you are and how the information will be used.** If you appear to be from a competing company, your request will likely be ignored. But even in other situations, you will need to explain how you plan to use the requested data.
- ▶ **Write specific questions that are easy to understand and answer.** If you have multiple questions, put them in a numbered list to increase your chances of getting all the information you want. Consider leaving space for responses below each question.
- ▶ **Provide contact information.** If you can be reached via phone, email, and fax, provide all your numbers/addresses.
- ▶ **Include a stamped, self-addressed envelope.** This courteous gesture will increase the likelihood of a response.
- ▶ **Say thank you and offer to follow up.** Offer to send a copy of the document in which you plan to use the information, if appropriate.

Claim Letters

Routine and
arguable claim
letters

In the workplace, things do not always run smoothly. Sometimes people make mistakes, systems break down, or companies make promises that can't be kept. Claim (or complaint) letters request adjustments for defective goods or poor services, or they complain about unfair treatment or something similar. Such letters fall into two categories: *routine claims* and *arguable claims*. Each calls for a different approach. Routine claims typically take a direct approach because the customer's claim is not debatable. Arguable claims present more of a persuasive challenge because they convey unwelcome news and are open to interpretation; arguable claims, therefore, typically take an indirect approach.

Figure 15.14 shows a routine claim letter. Writer Jeffrey Ryder does not ask whether the firm will honor his claim; he assumes that it will, and asks directly how to return his defective skis for repair. Notice that, in place of a salutation, an attention line directs the claim to the appropriate department, while a subject line (and its reemphasis in the first sentence) makes clear the nature of the claim.

Ryder's Ski Shop
Box 2641-A
Pocatello, ID 83201

April 13, 20XX

Star Ski Manufacturing Company
P.O. Box 3049
St. Paul, MN 55165

Attention: Consumer Affairs Department
Subject: Delaminated Skis

This winter, four of the pairs of Tornado skis I purchased for rental at my ski shop began to delaminate. I want to take advantage of your lifetime guarantee to have them relaminated.

← States problem and action desired

I purchased the skis via your St. Paul Sales Representative in November 1989. Although I no longer have the sales slip, the registration numbers are P9906, P9961, P9965, and P9978.

← Provides details

I'm aware that you no longer make metal skis, but as I recall, your lifetime guarantee on the skis I bought was a major selling point. Only your company and one other were backing their skis so strongly.

← Explains basis for claim

Please let me know how to go about returning my delaminated skis for repair.

← Courteously states desired action

Yours truly,

Jeffrey Ryder

Jeffrey Ryder

FIGURE 15.14 A Routine Claim Letter This type of claim letter is not debatable, but it still maintains a courteous tone.

Figure 15.15 shows an arguable claim letter. Because the reply may not necessarily be in her favor, writer Sandra Alvarez uses a tactful and reasonable tone and an indirect approach to present her argument. Although she is courteous, she is also somewhat forceful, to reflect her insistence on an acceptable adjustment. For example, the attention line creates an immediate businesslike tone.

Office Systems, Inc.
657 High Street
Tulsa, OK 74120

Fax (302) 655-5551 Phone (302) 655-5550 Email osys@sys.com

January 23, 20XX

Consumer Affairs Department
Hightone Office Supplies
93 Cattle Drive
Houston, TX 77028

Attention: Ms. Dionne Dubree

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Establishes early agreement | → | <p>Your company has an established reputation as a reliable wholesaler of office supplies. For eight years we have counted on that reliability, but a recent episode has left us annoyed and disappointed.</p> <p>On January 29, we ordered 5 cartons of 700 MB "hp" CDs (#A74-866) and 13 cartons of Epson MX 70/80 black cartridges (#A19-556).</p> |
| Presents facts to support claim | → | <p>On February 5, the order arrived. But instead of the 700 MB "hp" CDs ordered, we received 650 MB Everlast CDs. And the Epson cartridges were blue, not the black we had ordered. We returned the order the same day.</p> |
| Offers more support | → | <p>Also on the 5th, we called John Fitzsimmons at your company to explain our problem. He promised delivery of a corrected order by the 12th. Finally, on the 22nd, we did receive an order—the original incorrect one—with a note claiming that the packages had been water damaged while in our possession.</p> |
| Includes all relevant information | → | <p>Our warehouse manager insists the packages were in perfect condition when he released them to the shipper. Because we had the packages only five hours and had no rain on the 5th, we are certain the damage did not occur here.</p> |
| Sticks to the facts | → | <p>Responsibility for damages therefore rests with either the shipper or your warehouse staff. What bothers us is our outstanding bill from Hightone (\$2,049.50) for the faulty shipment. We insist that the bill be canceled and that we receive a corrected statement. Until this misunderstanding, our transactions with your company were excellent. We hope they can be again.</p> |
| Requests a specific adjustment | → | <p>We would appreciate having this matter resolved before the end of this month.</p> |
| Stipulates a reasonable response time | → | <p>Yours truly,</p> <p><i>Sandra Alvarez</i></p> <p>Sandra Alvarez
Manager, Accounting</p> |

FIGURE 15.15 An Arguable Claim Letter This claim is debatable—be sure to state your claim thoroughly and professionally.



GUIDELINES for Claim Letters

Routine claim letters

- ▶ **Use a direct approach.** Describe the request or problem; explain the problem; close courteously, restating the action you request.
- ▶ **Be polite and reasonable.** Your goal is not to sound off but to achieve results: a refund, a replacement, or an apology. Press your claim objectively yet firmly by explaining it clearly and by stipulating the reasonable action that will satisfy you. Do not insult the reader or revile the company.
- ▶ **Provide enough detail to clarify the basis for your claim.** Explain the specific defect. Identify the faulty item precisely, giving serial and model numbers, and date and place of purchase.
- ▶ **Conclude by expressing goodwill and confidence in the company's integrity.** Do not make threats or create animosity.

Arguable claim letters

- ▶ **Use an indirect approach.** People are more likely to respond favorably *after* reading your explanation. Begin with a neutral statement both parties can agree to—but that also serves as the basis for your request.
- ▶ **Once you've established agreement, explain and support your claim.** Include enough information for a fair evaluation: date and place of purchase, order number, dates of previous letters or calls, and background.
- ▶ **Conclude by requesting a specific action.** Be polite but assertive in phrasing your request.

Sales Letters

Sales letters are written to persuade a current or potential customer to buy a company's product or try its services. Because people are bombarded by sales messages—in magazines, on billboards, on television, on the Internet—your letter must be genuinely persuasive and must get to the point quickly. Engage the reader immediately with an attention-grabbing statement or an intriguing question. Describe the product or service you offer, and explain its appeal. Conclude by requesting immediate action.

In the letter in Figure 15.16, restaurant owner Jimmy Lekkas opens with an attention-grabbing question that is hard to ignore and has universal appeal: good food, for free, right in the neighborhood. He then makes his case by explaining the history of his restaurant (which provides immediate credibility) and offering vivid descriptions of the food. He closes by asking readers to take action by a specific date.

Purpose and tone
of sales letters



Jimmy's Greek Kitchen

24-52 28th Street, Astoria, NY 11102

Phone: (555) 274-5672 Fax: (555) 274-5671

Email: Jimmysgreek@comcast.net

Web site: www.jimmysgreekkitchen.com

July 16, 20XX

Adriana Nikolaidis
26-22 30th Street #5
Astoria, NY 11102

Dear Ms. Nikolaidis:

Opens with an attention-grabbing question



Are you in the mood to sample the best Greek food in the neighborhood absolutely free of charge? We at the newly opened Jimmy's Greek Kitchen would like to say "Thank you for having us in your neighborhood" by inviting you to sample a variety of our authentic Greek specialties.

Describes the long history and appeal of the restaurant



If you've heard of or visited the famous Jimmy's in Chicago, you know that our fare has been pleasing Chicago diners for over 40 years. At long last, we have opened a companion restaurant in Astoria, and we are proud to offer you the same high-quality appetizers, entrees, and desserts, prepared to perfection. In fact, I trained our Astoria chef myself.

Maintains appeal by describing the menu



Ranging from charbroiled meats and grilled seafoods to vegetarian specialties and Greek favorites like tzatziki, pastitsio, and moussaka, Jimmy's is truly the best in town. Please have a look at the enclosed menu to see the full range of tasty foods we offer.

Ends by asking the reader to take action



Please take advantage of this special offer while it lasts. From now until August 31, just bring this letter to Jimmy's and lunch or dinner is on the house. You may choose any appetizer, entree, side order, beverage, and dessert on the menu—all free of charge. We hope that you will not only enjoy the dining experience but will tell others and come back to see us frequently.

Thank you,

Jimmy Lekkas

Jimmy Lekkas

FIGURE 15.16 A Sales Letter Sales letters must grab immediate attention, maintain interest, and evoke reader action.



GUIDELINES for Sales Letters

- ▶ **Begin with a question or other attention-grabbing statement.** Induce the recipient to take notice.
- ▶ **Get to the point.** People resist reading long opening passages, especially if the message is unsolicited.
- ▶ **Spell out the benefits for the recipients.** Answer this implied question from the reader: “What do I stand to gain from this?”
- ▶ **Persuade with facts and with appeals to the senses.** Facts (such as the history of your company) appeal to logic. Graphic descriptions (such as the colors of your new cars or the types of food you offer) appeal to a different part of the brain—the emotions. Use both.
- ▶ **Tell the truth.** Despite your desire to sell something, it is unethical to lie, distort, exaggerate, or underestimate to make the sale.
- ▶ **Close by asking readers to take action.** Either ask for some reasonable action (such as “go to our Web site”), or offer an incentive (such as a free sample) to encourage follow-up.

Adjustment Letters

Adjustment letters are written in response to a claim letter from a customer. Even though most people never make formal complaints or follow up on warranties or product guarantees, companies generally will make a requested adjustment that seems reasonable.

Rather than quibbling over questionable claims, companies usually honor the request and show how much they appreciate the customer, as in Figure 15.17. In that example, writer Jane Duval apologizes graciously for a mistake. She omits an explanation because the error is obvious: Someone sent the wrong software. Once the reader has the information and apology, Duval shifts attention to a positive feature: the gift certificate. Note the “you” perspective, the friendly tone, and the incentive for further business.

Of course, if a claim is unreasonable or unjustified, the recipient usually will refuse the request. In refusing to grant a refund for a ten-speed bicycle, Company representative Anna Jenkins needs to maintain a delicate balance (Figure 15.18). On the one hand, she must explain why she cannot grant the customer’s request; on the other hand, she must be diplomatic in how she asserts that the customer is mistaken. Although Mrs. Gower may not be pleased by the explanation, it is thorough, reasonable, and courteous.

Positive
adjustment letters

Negative
adjustment letters

 Software
Unlimited
421 Fairview Road
Tulsa, OK 74321

May 2, 20XX

Mr. James Morris
P.O. Box 176
Little Rock, AR 54701

Dear Mr. Morris:

Apologizes
immediately



Your software should arrive by May 15. Sorry for the mixup. We don't make a practice of sending Apple software to PC owners, but we do slip up once in a while.

Offers
compensation



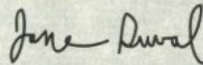
In appreciation for your patience and understanding, I've enclosed a \$50 gift certificate. You can give it to a friend or apply it toward your next order. If you order by phone, just give the certificate number, and the operator will credit your account.

Looks toward
the future



Keep your certificate handy because you will be getting our new catalog soon. It features 15 new business and utility programs that you might find useful.

Sincerely,



Jane Duval
Sales Manager

Encl. Gift Certificate

FIGURE 15.17 A Positive Adjustment Letter Positive responses to claims ensure customer loyalty.



People Power, Inc.

101 Salem Street, Springfield, Illinois 32456

March 8, 20XX
 Mrs. Alma Gower
 32 Wood Street
 Lewiston, IL 32432

Dear Mrs. Gower:

When we advertise the Windspirit as the toughest, most durable ten-speed, we stress it's a racing or cruising bike built to withstand the long, grueling miles of intense competition. The bike is built of the strongest, yet lightest alloys available, and each part is calibrated to within 1/1000 of an inch. That's why we guarantee the Windspirit against defects resulting from the strain of competitive racing.

The Windspirit, though, is not built to withstand the impact of ramp jumps such as those attempted by your son. The rims and front fork would have to be made from a much thicker gauge alloy, thereby increasing weight and decreasing speed. Since we build racing bikes, such a compromise is unacceptable.

To ensure that buyers are familiar with the Windspirit's limits, in the owner's manual we stress that the bike should be carried over curbs and similar drops because even an eight-inch drop could damage the front rim. Damage from such drops is not considered normal wear and so is not covered by our guarantee.

Since your son appears to be more interested in a bike capable of withstanding the impact of high jumps, you could recoup a large part of the Windspirit's price by advertising it in your local newspaper. Many novice racers would welcome the chance to buy one at a reduced price. Or, if you prefer having it repaired, you could take it to Jamie's Bike Shop, the dealer closest to you.

Yours truly,

Anna Jenkins

Anna Jenkins
 Manager, Customer Services

← Introduction starts off with the facts

← Writer doesn't accuse; she explains in a friendly tone

← Refusal is professional, direct, and reasonable

← Closing is helpful

FIGURE 15.18 A Negative Adjustment Letter Negative responses to claims say "no" diplomatically but emphatically.



GUIDELINES for Adjustment Letters

Granting Adjustments

- ▶ **Begin with the good news.** A sincere apology helps rebuild customers' confidence.
- ▶ **Explain what went wrong and how the problem will be corrected.** Without an honest explanation, you leave the impression that such problems are common or beyond your control.
- ▶ **Never blame employees as scapegoats.** To blame someone in the firm reflects poorly on the firm itself.
- ▶ **Do not promise that the problem never will recur.** Mishaps are inevitable.
- ▶ **End on a positive note.** Focus on the solution, not the problem.

Refusing Adjustments

- ▶ **Use an indirect organizational plan.** Explain diplomatically and clearly why you are refusing the request. Your goal is to convince the reader that your refusal results from a thorough analysis of the situation.
- ▶ **Be sure the refusal is unambiguous.** Don't create unrealistic expectations by using evasive language.
- ▶ **Avoid a patronizing or accusing tone.** Use the passive voice so as not to accuse the claimant, but do not hide behind the passive voice (see page 207).
- ▶ **Close courteously and positively.** Offer an alternative or compromise, when it is feasible to do so.



CHECKLIST: Letters

MyWritingLab

(Numbers in parentheses refer to the first page of discussion.)

Content

- Does the situation call for a formal letter rather than a memo or email? (324)
- Is the letter addressed to the correct and specifically named person? (324)
- Have you determined the position or title of your recipient? (324)
- Does the letter contain all the standard parts? (325)
- Does the letter have all needed specialized parts? (325)
- Is the letter's main point clearly stated? (330)
- Is all the necessary information included? (332)

Arrangement

- Does the introduction engage the reader and preview the body section? (332)
- Is the direct or indirect approach used appropriately? (335)
- Does the conclusion encourage the reader to act? (344)
- Is the format block? (344)

Style

- Does the letter convey a "you" perspective throughout? (346)
- Is the letter in plain English (free of letterese)? (347)
- Is the tone professional, polite, and appropriately formal? (350)
- Is the letter designed for a tasteful, conservative look? (344)
- Is the style clear, concise, fluent, exact, and likable? (203)
- Have you proofread with extreme care? (114)

**Projects**

MyWritingLab™

GENERAL

1. Think of an idea you would like to see implemented in your job (e.g., a way to increase productivity, improve service, increase business, or improve working conditions). Write a routine miscellaneous memo requesting action and persuading your audience that your idea is worthwhile.
2. Write and mail an unsolicited letter of inquiry about the topic you are investigating for an analytical report or research assignment. In your letter you might request brochures, pamphlets, or other informative literature, or you might ask specific questions. Submit a copy of your letter, and the response, to your instructor.
3. Politicians and other officials receive dozens if not hundreds of emails daily; research has shown that a hard-copy letter, sent in the mail, is a more effective approach. Write a claim letter to a politician about an issue affecting your school or community. Or, write a claim letter to an appropriate school official to recommend an action on a campus problem.
4. Write a claim letter about a problem you've had with goods or services. State your case clearly and objectively, and request a specific adjustment.
5. The following sentences need to be overhauled before being included in a memo or letter. Identify the weakness in each statement, and revise as needed. For example, you would revise the accusatory *You were not very clear* to *We did not understand your message*.
 - a. I need all the information you have about methane-powered engines.
 - b. You people have sent me the wrong software!
 - c. It is imperative that you let me know of your decision by January 15.
 - d. I have become cognizant of your experiments and wish to ask your advice about the following procedure.
 - e. You will find the following instructions easy enough for an ape to follow.
 - f. As per your request I am sending the country map.

- g. I am in hopes that you will call soon.
- h. We beg to differ with your interpretation of this leasing clause.

TEAM

1. Divide into teams and assume you own a company (create a name for it). Revise the following message so that it gets the intended results. Pay close attention to *tone*. Use a memo format. Make sure the subject line clearly forecasts your topic. Appoint one team member to present the revised memo in class.

Too many employees are parking in front of the store rather than behind it. As a result of this infraction, customers have been complaining that they cannot find parking spaces. If employees don't start parking where they're supposed to, we'll lose customers. Lost customers means lost jobs. Since I've worked hard to build this company, I don't want to lose it because employees are too lazy to walk from the back lot. Let's keep our customers by keeping them happy.

2. Working in groups, respond to the following scenario. Appoint one group member to present the letter in class.

As director of consumer affairs, you've received an adjustment request from Brian Maxwell. Two years ago, he bought a pair of top-of-the-line Gannon speakers. Both speakers, he claims, are badly distorting bass sounds, and he states that his local dealer refuses to honor the three-year warranty. After checking, you find that the dealer refused because someone had obviously tampered with the speakers. Two lead wires had been respliced; one of the booster magnets

was missing; and the top insulation also was missing from one of the speaker cabinets. Your warranty specifically states that if speakers are removed from the cabinet or subjected to tampering in any way, the warranty is void. You must refuse the adjustment; however, because Maxwell bought the speakers from a factory-authorized dealer, he is entitled to a 30 percent discount on repairs. Write the refusal, offering this alternative. His address: 691 Concord Street, Biloxi, MS 71690.

DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Word-processing programs such as *Microsoft Word* offer templates for writing letters. (Templates are preformatted layouts that can be used to create résumés, memos, letters, and other documents.) Templates can help you get started with the writing. Templates can also be a problem, however, because instead of thinking for yourself about the audience, purpose, and appropriate organizational pattern and language usage, you may end up letting the template do the thinking. Look at the various templates available in your word-processing program and on the Internet, and make a list of ways in which the template may or may not work for your purposes.

GLOBAL

Interview a person whose work takes him or her to one or more countries outside the United States. Ask that person to describe the way letters or memos are used for international communication, and whether any special issues involving grammar, forms of address, direct or indirect organizational patterns, or other features make letter writing different when addressing international audiences.

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Visit Chapter 15, *Workplace Memos and Letters*, in MyWritingLab to complete this chapter's applications, to explore this chapter's overview, checklist, and flashcards, and to test your understanding of the chapter objectives.