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Letterhead Here

Monday, September 2, 2002

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Jane/John Q. Public, Student

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Dear Ms/Mr. Public,

This letter is intended to discuss the characteristics of a business letter. I cover both formatting and content issues here. Use it as a model. Keep your letters shorter than this one.

It is appropriate to have all text in your business letter left justified. You should have a “ragged right” margin (do not justify both margins). You *may* hyphenate the document. You should also single space *everything* (except for documents you hand in to be critiqued, which should have the body-text double-spaced for editing purposes). You may use **bold**, *italic*, underline, and ^{superscript} if appropriate—but use non-roman formatting sparingly. Set all margins at one-inch.

Be sure to use the same font and the same font size throughout the letter. Do not use a font that is smaller than 11-point Helvetica, Garamond, or Times New Roman, or 10-point **Bookman**, Palatino, New York, or New Century Schoolbook. This letter is written in 10-point Bookman Old Style.

Use full-block or modified full-block format. Full-block format is like this letter: no tabs at the beginning of paragraphs and insert an extra space between paragraphs. Modified full block format is like what you were trained to use when writing class essays: insert a half-inch tab at the beginning of all paragraphs and do not insert extra spaces after paragraphs.

Keep all paragraphs short—a few sentences only, such as illustrated here. Limit each paragraph to discussion/elaboration of a single idea. By limiting each paragraph to single ideas, the letter is easier to “scan” for relevant content issues. Try to keep business letters to only a few (two to three) paragraphs. Do not write one-sentence paragraphs.

Keep the entire letter short—never more than 1.5 pages. Busy people do not have time to read a lot of unsolicited information. Also, organize information (such as three story ideas used in a pitch letter) according to order of importance. Very often a busy person will not read the whole letter when it arrives but save it for when it is more relevant. S/he will read the first paragraph (or first few paragraphs) for the general idea, and then scan the rest of the letter for content. They will then save the letter until it is relevant to them—i.e., before a meeting.

In a business letter it is okay to be “somewhat” conversational. However, avoid technojargon, colloquial language, purple prose, clichés, and sounding too academic.

Always proofread! Always spell check! Always fix errors—even minor errors. Never send a letter out with errors that you know about. And never send out a letter with editing marks on it where you corrected your mistakes.

Cordially, (Respectfully, Sincerely, etc. Not: Cheers, Your Humble Servant, etc.)

Michael Kent

Director, Educational Communication

Monday, September 17, 2001

Memo

To: Class Members
From: Michael L. Kent
Re: Memo Writing



Most students have never been asked to do any business writing. Indeed, most students never write any “professional” documents until they start writing their résumés and cover letters for jobs. This memo will briefly explain the structure, tone, and format of a typical memo. After reading this memo you should have a fairly good idea of both how a memo might look, and how to structure the content of a memo. The first issue to consider here is how a memo should look.

Memos look different than business letters, as this sample document illustrates. Although it is not necessary to put the big “Memo” at the top of a memo, that is often what is done. Also, since memos are “internal” documents, the formal addressing found on business letters is unnecessary. Usually memo headers include the “date,” “To:...” “From:...,” and “Re:...” (regarding) lines. Microsoft Word has an assortment of memo templates. Simply go to: “file,” “new,” and the “memo” tab and select a memo format (or go to “file” and “Project Gallery” depending upon the version of Word you are using). The next issue has to do with tone.

The differences between a memo and a business letter are few, but the tone of a memo may be slightly more conversational than a business letter—although both are written “professionally.” This means that you do not use slang, colloquial language, etc., nor do you use technojargon, contractions, or unnecessary abbreviations. Finally, memos are formatted differently.

Memos are formatted differently than business letters. Memos are single spaced documents and follow most of the rules for how to structure business letters—see the handout on writing business letters for more information. Major differences include:

- (1) Memos often include numbered or bulleted lists.
- (2) Memos are not signed; instead, initial a memo next to your name at the top.
- (3) Memos are often not edited by others. With many memos you often do not have the luxury of a proofread by a colleague, thus, you must proofread and edit them carefully yourself.

For class assignments, you should do the following:

- When you turn in your “memo,” include both a “final draft” that looks exactly like the real final draft should look (single spaced, no widows/orphans, etc.), and also include an “editable” draft that is double-spaced so that it can be edited/corrected.
- Have as many people as possible proofread your memo for you.
- Contact me at ex. 5130 with questions, or e-mail me at: KentM@Mail.Montclair.Edu.