**MGTC 30300**
**Managerial Competencies**

# Writing a Memo Exercise

For this exercise, you will write four memos. Actually, the memos are email messages. You'll read background material that describes an incident. You'll then read two emails from parties involved in the incident. Using the communication principles you have learned in class, you'll be ask to respond to each of the email messages. You'll then be asked to re-write the two email messages, again using the written communication principles you've learned.

Although you will submit all four memos together, they are wholly separate. Make sure they appear on separate pages and do not reference one in the other. In preparing your email messages, please follow the format below:

1. Include a cover page that contains the title of this assignment—"Writing a Memo Exercise"—as well as your name and the date.
2. Page 1 will contain your email message from Dr. Madison Bentley to Hunter J. Bramsen.
3. Page 2 will contain your email message from Dr. Bentley to Blaise I. Filson.
4. Page 3 will contain your re-write of Bramsen's email message to Dr. Bentley.
5. Page 4 will contain your re-write of Filson's email message to Dr. Bentley.

Your memos will be graded on the following criteria:

1. Degree to which memos follow the "Ten Tips for Writing Effective E-Mails".
2. The quality of the writing: (a) Grammar, spelling, punctuation (i.e., is your memo well-written and free from errors?), (b) Effectiveness in addressing the issue (i.e., how persuasive and effective is your writing?), and (c) Degree to which your communication reflects understanding of the core issue (the appropriate punishment for Hunter and Blaise) and to Hunter and Blaise's original emails.

*Note: The formatting of your four emails should look exactly like the format of the four templates to follow.*

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# Ten Tips for Writing Effective E-Mails

## 1. Write a meaningful subject line.

People who get a lot of email **scan the subject line** in order to decide whether to open, forward, file, or trash a message. If your subject line is vague — or even worse, if it's blank — you have missed your first opportunity to inform or persuade your reader. Remember — your message is not the only one in your recipient's mailbox. Before you hit "send," take a moment to write a subject line that accurately describes the content.

**Subject: [Blank]**
If you don't put a subject line on your e-mail, you are sending the message that your name in the "From" line is all your recipient should need in order to make it a top priority. That could come across as arrogant, or at the very least, thoughtless. Take advantage of the opportunity to get your recipient thinking about your message even before opening it.

**Subject: "Important! Read Immediately!!"**
What is important to you may not be important to your reader. Rather than brashly announcing that the secret contents of your message are important, write an informative headline that actually communicates at least the core of what you feel is so important: "Emergency: All Cars in the Lower Lot Will Be Towed in 1 Hour."

**Subject: "Quick question."**
If the question is quick, why not just ask it in the subject line? This subject line is hardly useful.

**Subject: "Follow-up about Friday"**
Fractionally better — provided that the recipient remembers why a follow-up was necessary.

**Subject: "That file you requested."**
If you're confident your recipient will recognize your e-mail address, and really is expecting a file from you, then this would be fine. But keep in mind that many e-mail providers get scads of virus-laden spam with vague titles like this. The more specific you are, the more likely your recipient's spam-blocker will let your message through.

**Subject: "10 confirmed for Friday… will we need a larger room?"**
Upon reading this revised, informative subject line, the recipient immediately starts thinking about the size of the room, not about whether it will be worth it to open the e-mail.

## 2. Keep the message focused.

Often recipients only read partway through a long message, hit "reply" as soon as they have something to contribute, and forget to keep reading. This is part of human nature.

If your e-mail contains **multiple messages that are only loosely related**, in order to avoid the risk that your reader will reply only to the first item that grabs his or her fancy, you could **number your points** to ensure they are all read (adding an introductory line that states how many parts there are to the message). If the points are substantial enough, **split them up into separate messages** so your recipient can delete, respond, file, or forward each item individually.

Keep your message readable.

- **Use standard spelling**, especially when your message asks your recipient to do work for you. ◦If you are a teenager, writing a quick gushing "thx 4 ur help 2day ur gr8″ may make a busy professional smile at your gratitude.
- But there comes a time when the sweetness of the gesture isn't enough. u want ur prof r ur boss 2 think u cant spl? LOL ;-)
- **Skip lines between paragraphs**.
- **Avoid fancy typefaces**. Don't depend upon bold font or large size to add nuances. Your recipient's email reader may not have all the features that yours does. In a pinch, use asterisks to show *emphasis*.
- **Use standard capitalization**. All-caps comes across as shouting, and no caps invokes the image of a lazy teenager. Regardless of your intention, people will respond accordingly.

## 3. Avoid attachments.

Rather than attaching a file that your reader will have to download and open in a separate program, you will probably get faster results if you just copy-paste the most important part of the document into the body of your message.

**To:** All 1000 Employees
**From:** Eager Edgar
**Subject:** A helpful book everyone should read

———

*Hello, everyone. I've attached a PDF that I think you'll all find very useful. This is the third time I sent it the file — the version I sent yesterday had a typo on page 207, so I've sent the whole thing again. Since some of you noted that the large file size makes it a bit awkward, I've also attached each chapter as a separate document. Let me know what you think!*

*Attachments:*

- *Big Honking File.pdf (356MB)*
- *BHF Cover.pdf (25MB)*
- *BHF Chapter 1.pdf (35MB)*
- *BHF Chapter 2.pdf (27MB)*
- *[… ]*

Okay, raise your hands… how many of us would delete the above message immediately, without looking at *any* of those attachments?

**To:** Bessie Professional
**From:** Morris Ponsybil ☑
**Subject:** E-mail tips — a subject for an office workshop?

*Bessie, I came across a book that has lots of tips on streamlining professional communications. Has anyone volunteered to present at the office workshop next month? Let me know if you'd like me to run a little seminar (2o minutes?) on using e-mail effectively.*

*Below, I'll paste the table of contents from the book. Let me know if you want me send you the whole thing as a PDF.*

*Table of Contents*
*1.Write a meaningful subject line.*
*2.Keep the message focused and readable.*
*3.Avoid attachments.*
*4.[...]*

E-mail works best when you just **copy and paste the most relevant text into the body of the e-mail**. Try to reduce the number of steps your recipient will need to take in order to act on your message.

If your recipient actually needs to view the full file in order to edit or archive it, then of course sending an attachment is appropriate.

If it's the message that matters, recognize that attachments

- consume bandwidth (do you want your recipient to ignore your request so as to avoid paying for a mobile download?)
- can carry viruses
- don't always translate correctly for people who read their e-mail on portable devices.

## 4. Identify yourself clearly.

**To:** Professor Blinderson
**From:** FuZzYkItTy2000@hotmail.com ☒
**Subject:** [Blank]

*Yo goin 2 miss class whats the homework*

*Professor Blinderson's response:*

*Please let me know your name and which class you're in, so that I can respond meaningfully. I don't recognize the address FuZzYkItTy2000@hotmail.com.*

**To:** Professor Blinderson
**From:** m.ponsybil@gmail.com
**Subject:** EL227 Absence, Oct 10

*Dear Prof. Blinderson:*

*This is Morris Ponsybil, from EL227 section 2.*

*This morning, I just found out that the curling team has advanced to the playoffs, so I'm going to be out of town on the 10th. According to the syllabus, it looks like I will miss a paper workshop and the discussion of Chapter 10. May I email you my Chapter 10 discussion questions before I leave town? And could I come to your office hour at 2pm on the 12th, in order to catch up on anything I missed? I've asked Cheryl Jones to take notes for me.*

*Thank you very much. I'll see you in class tomorrow.*

*Morris*

You'll get a faster, more useful response if you provide your recipient with the right information.

When contacting someone cold, always include your name, occupation, and any other important identification information in the first few sentences.

If you are following up on a face-to-face contact, you might appear too timid if you assume your recipient doesn't remember you; but you can drop casual hints to jog their memory: "I enjoyed talking with you about PDAs in the elevator the other day."

Every fall, I get e-mails from "bad_boy2315@yahoo.com" or "FuZzYkItTy2000@hotmail.com" who ask a question about "class" and don't sign their real names.

While formal phrases such as "Dear Professor Sneedlewood" and "Sincerely Yours," are unnecessary in e-mail, when contacting someone outside your own organization, you should write a signature line that includes your full name and at least a link to a blog or online profile page (something that does not require your recipient to log in first).

**5. Be kind. Don't flame.**

Think before you click "Send."

If you find yourself writing in anger, save a draft, go get a cup of coffee, and imagine that tomorrow morning someone has taped your e-mail outside your door. Would your associates and friends be shocked by your language or attitude?

Or would they be impressed by how you kept your cool, how you ignored the bait when your correspondent stooped to personal attacks, and how you carefully explained your position (or admitted your error, or asked for a reconsideration, etc.).

Don't pour gasoline on a fire without carefully weighing the consequences. Will you have to work with this person for the rest of the semester? Do you want a copy of your bitter screed to surface years from now, when you want a letter of recommendation or you're up for promotion?

@!$% &*@!! &(*! ☒

Go ahead… write it, revise it, liven it up with traditional Lebanese curses, print it out, throw darts on it, and scribble on it with crayon. Do whatever you need in order to get it out of your system. Just **don't hit "Send" while you're still angry**.

**From:** Clair Haddad
**To:** Ann O. Ying ☑
**Subject:** Re: Ongoing Problems with Project

*I'm not sure how to respond, since at the meeting last week you told Sue that you didn't need any extra training, so I cancelled Wednesday's workshop. I can CC Sue in on this thread if you like, since she's the one who will have to approve the budget if we reschedule it.*

*Meanwhile, I can loan you my copies of the manual, or we can look into shifting the work to someone else. Let me know what you'd like me to do next.*

*—Original Message –*

**From:** Ann O. Ying

*I tried all morning to get in touch with you. Couldn't you find a few minutes in between meetings to check your messages? I'm having a rough time on this project, and I'm sorry if this is last-minute, but I've never done this before and I think the least you could do is take some time to explain it again.*

If your recipient has just lambasted you with an angry message, rather than reply with a point-by-point rebuttal, you can always respond with a brief note like this, which

1. casually invokes the name of someone the angry correspondent is likely to respect (in order to diffuse any personal antagonism that may otherwise have developed) and
2. refocuses the conversation on solutions (in this conversation, Ann has already dug herself into a hole, and Clair has nothing to gain by joining her there)

## 6. Proofread.

If you are asking someone else to do work for you, take the time to **make your message look professional**.

While your spell checker won't catch every mistake, at the very least it will catch a few typos. If you are sending a message that will be read by someone higher up on the chain of command (a superior or professor, for instance), or if you're about to mass-mail dozens or thousands of people, take an extra minute or two before you hit "send". Show a draft to a close associate, in order to see whether it actually makes sense.

## 7. Don't assume privacy.

Unless you are Donald Trump, **praise in public, and criticize in private**. Don't send anything over e-mail that you wouldn't want posted — with your name attached — in the break room.

**E-mail is not secure**. Just as random pedestrians could easily reach into your mailbox and intercept the envelopes that you send and receive through the post office, a curious hacker, a malicious criminal, or the FBI can easily intercept your e-mail. In some companies, the e-mail administrator has the ability to read any and all e-mail messages (and may fire you if you write anything inappropriate).

## 8. Distinguish between formal and informal situations.

When you are writing to a friend or a close colleague, it is OK to use "smilies" :-) , abbreviations (IIRC for "if I recall correctly", LOL for "laughing out loud," etc.) and nonstandard punctuation and spelling (like that found in instant messaging or chat rooms). These linguistic shortcuts are generally signs of friendly intimacy, like sharing cold pizza with a family friend. If you tried to share that same cold pizza with a first date, or a visiting dignitary, you would give off the impression that you did not really care about the meeting. By the same token, don't use informal language when your reader expects a more formal approach. Always know the situation, and write accordingly.

## 9. Respond Promptly.

If you want to appear professional and courteous, make yourself available to your online correspondents. Even if your reply is, “Sorry, I’m too busy to help you now,” at least your correspondent won’t be waiting in vain for your reply.

## 10. Show Respect and Restraint

Many a flame war has been started by someone who hit “reply all” instead of “reply.”

While most people know that e-mail is not private, it is good form to ask the sender before forwarding a personal message. If someone e-mails you a request, it is perfectly acceptable to forward the request to a person who can help — but forwarding a message in order to ridicule the sender is tacky.

Use BCC instead of CC when sending sensitive information to large groups. (For example, a professor sending a bulk message to students who are in danger of failing, or an employer telling unsuccessful applicants that a position is no longer open.) The name of everyone in the CC list goes out with the message, but the names of people on the BCC list (“blind carbon copy”) are hidden. Put your own name in the “To” box if your mail editor doesn’t like the blank space.

Be tolerant of other people’s etiquette blunders. If you think you’ve been insulted, quote the line back to your sender and add a neutral comment such as, “I’m not sure how to interpret this… could you elaborate?”

**Sometimes E-Mail is Too Fast!**

A colleague once asked me for help, and then almost immediately sent a follow-up informing me she had solved the problem on her own.

But before reading her second message, I replied at length to the first. Once I learned that there was no need for any reply, I worried that my response would seem pompous, so I followed up with a quick apology:

“Should have paid closer attention to my e-mail.”

What I meant to say was “[I] should have looked more carefully at my [list of incoming] e-mail [before replying],” but I could tell from my colleague’s terse reply that she had interpreted it as if I was criticizing her.

If I hadn’t responded so quickly to the first message, I would have saved myself the time I spent writing a long answer to an obsolete question. If I hadn’t responded so quickly to the second message, I might not have alienated the person I had been so eager to help.

Based on: Jerz, D. G., & Bauer, J. (March 8, 2011). Writing Effective E-Mail: Top 10 Tips. *Jerz's Literacy Weblog*.