

10

Memos and Letters



LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR THIS CHAPTER

- ▶ Identify the parts and format of a workplace memo or letter
- ▶ Achieve the right tone in a memo or letter
- ▶ Determine when to take a direct or indirect approach in a memo or letter
- ▶ Write an effective memo
- ▶ Write an effective inquiry, claim, sales, or adjustment letter

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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LET'S GET STARTED

Memos

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You need to write a memo to your supervisor or professor requesting an extension for a project you are working on. You have decided to use a memo rather than email because a memo is more formal and indicates your professionalism and seriousness. Without reading this chapter, write such a memo. Or, if you have a different situation going on at work or school, write a memo for that situation.

Questions to ask about the memo you wrote as you review the material in this chapter:

- ▶ Does the memo contain all of the typical parts?
- ▶ Is the memo direct and to the point?
- ▶ In the memo professional and respectful in tone?
- ▶ Is the memo too long? Too short?

At the end of this chapter, review the memo you wrote for this Let's Get Started exercise. Compare what you wrote with what you learned from this chapter. Revise or modify your memo based on what you have learned from the chapter and what you learn from class. Bring your original and your revision for class, and discuss these with a small group of two to three students.



LET'S GET STARTED

Letters

MyWritingLab™

You have been asked to write a report for a science, history, English, or other class. You would like to request information from a local company, nonprofit, or other organization. Without reading this chapter, write a letter about the topic you are investigating for your report or research assignment. In your letter you might request brochures, pamphlets, or other informative literature, or you might ask specific questions.

Questions to ask about the letter you wrote as you review the material in this chapter:

- ▶ What type of letter are you writing?
- ▶ What kind of tone or style did you use (professional, formal, informal)?
- ▶ How is the content of your letter organized (did you make your request first or provide introductory information first)?
- ▶ How long is your letter?
- ▶ What format and layout did you use?
- ▶ What revisions would you make, based on the material in this chapter and your class discussions?

At the end of this chapter, review the letter you wrote for this Let's Get Started exercise. Compare what you wrote with what you learned from this chapter. In particular, pay attention to the style and tone of your request. Revise or modify your letter based on what you have learned from the chapter and what you learn in class. Bring your original and your revision for class, and discuss these with a small group of two to three students.

The most common forms of everyday workplace communication are memos, letters, and email. Today, memos and letters are often sent via email as attachments, or a short memo might be written directly in the body of an email message. You need to consider audience, purpose, formality, and workplace guidelines when choosing between these forms. This chapter considers memos and letters, discussing these as stand-alone documents that might be delivered in print as well as digital formats.

MEMO BASICS

“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 typically distributed to employees within an organization, not to people outside the company. Memos are important in the workplace because they are easy to distribute via email or inter-office mail (print copies) and because they provide written documentation about an event or issue.

Definition and
importance of
memos

Memos versus email

Informal memos and day-to-day exchanges are typically written as email messages. See Chapter 18 for more on using email for workplace communication. More formal memos should follow the strategies discussed in this chapter. These memos can then be delivered as print documents and/or as PDF attachments via email. (PDF is preferable to Word or other word processing formats because with PDF files the formatting and layout can't change.)

MEMO PARTS AND FORMAT

Standard parts of a memo

A standard memo has the word “Memo” or “Memorandum” centered at the top of the page and includes a heading guide (flush to the left margin) identifying the recipient(s), sender (and sender's initials), date, and subject. If anyone is copied on the memo, use the abbreviation “cc” followed by a colon and the name of each recipient. Because memos are often read rapidly by busy recipients, they should follow this consistent, predictable format. Figure 10.1 shows a standard memo with all parts labeled.

Memo format: introduction, body, conclusion

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, then writing a paragraph or two to address the main issue, and then concluding by suggesting a course of action or asking your readers to follow up.

MEMO TONE

The importance of memo tone

Memos are typically distributed in-house and circulated among colleagues, subordinates, and superiors. Memo topics often involve evaluations or recommendations about policies, procedures, and, ultimately, the people with whom you work. Because people are sensitive to criticism (even when it is merely implied) and often resistant to change, an ill-conceived memo tone can create problems. So, be particularly careful about your tone.

Achieving the right tone

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 indirect approach. A direct approach (as in Figure 10.1) begins with the “bottom line” in the first sentence (as well as

MEMORANDUM

To: All Marketing Assistants, Cincinnati Office Web Marketing Group
From: Marilyn Zito, Purchasing <m.zito@adco.com>*MZ*
Date: October 25, 20XX
Subject: *Your choices for new high-capacity copier*

As you requested at our October 12 meeting, I have gathered all the manufacturer information needed to order a new high-capacity photocopier to replace the inefficient one in your area. As you know, since the MAs typically make the most use of the copy machines, I would appreciate your input as to which copiers from the attached options seem most suitable for your purposes.

Please note that I was required to select from options under \$8,500 in order to stay within your department's 20XX purchasing budget, a substantial portion of which was used to purchase your new high-speed fax machine in March. However, I think you will find that the copiers selected are state-of-the art and should more than meet your needs in terms of capacity, speed, quality, precision, and durability—all of which you indicated were important attributes.

Please take a careful look at the models attached, consider your impressions of each model, pick your top three preferences, and email me your lists individually by November 5. I will tabulate your votes, contact you with the results, and order accordingly.

Thank you very much for taking the time to help me make an informed decision that meets your genuine needs.

cc: J. Herrera, Director of Marketing
M. Ziolkowski, Vice President, Purchasing

Annotations:

- “Memo” or “Memorandum” is centered at the top of the page
- Heading guide includes “To” “From” “Date” and “Subject” lines
- Opening paragraph gets right to the point
- Provides necessary background details
- Outlines specific course of action in the conclusion
- Copy notation appears at the bottom

FIGURE 10.1 A properly formatted memo

in the subject line) and then presents the details or analysis that 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 unpopular news in the subject line and in the opening sentence and then explaining the causes of the problem:

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 consultants to identify the virus and clean out the server, the process took nearly 48 hours.

We apologize for the inconvenience.

Direct approach:
Subject line gets
right to the main
point
Opening paragraph
starts with the
bottom line

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.

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.

Indirect approach:
Subject line is
not specific about
bottom line

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.

Opening paragraph starts with an explanation before delivering the bottom line

The bottom line

Finally, a memo's tone comes across in the way you handle its distribution. Use the appropriate delivery medium. If your topic is very short, timely, not overly formal and the message needs to reach everyone quickly, consider sending the memo as an email or email attachment. But if your topic is more formal and more detailed, send out a traditional paper memo. Also, be careful about who receives your memo. Don't send a memo to everyone at work when the content is only appropriate for a few, and don't leave vital people off your distribution list.

Delivering memos in the right medium to the right people

TYPES OF MEMOS

Memo format can also be used for distributing short reports, discussed in Chapter 15. However, for the purposes of this 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 explain what is enclosed. A transmittal memo may be as simple as a sentence or a paragraph with a bulleted list describing the package, as in Figure 10.2.

Summary or Follow-up Memo

A summary or follow-up memo provides a written record of a meeting or conversation or just a topic during the meeting or conversation that was not resolved at the time. In addition to providing documentation that the meeting or conversation took place, summary and follow-up memos also ensure that each recipient



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*

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 outlining the biology division's need for a new laboratory manager.

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.

FIGURE 10.2 A transmittal memo

has the same understanding of what was decided. Figure 10.3 shows a memo that performs both a summary and follow-up function.

Informational Memo

Informational memos typically contain some type of announcement or update. For instance, you may receive a memo announcing the closure of a parking ramp over the holidays for repair or an upcoming awards ceremony on Friday. Such memos are increasingly sent via email, since email is quick and inexpensive and has wide reach. But if the memo has a more formal purpose, a traditional paper version may be preferable, as in Figure 10.4, which reiterates an important company policy.

**MEMO**

To: Elaine Lamer and Mitchell Dramson, Software Development Team
From: Christopher Felts, Manager *C.F.*
Date: June 19, 20XX
Subject: *Follow-up to today's meeting*

Thank you for meeting today to discuss next steps to complete the next version of our animation software package.

As you noted, the original release date of October 1 is probably too optimistic given the latest hiring freeze. Yet, as I mentioned, we can't afford to go beyond a date of October 15 if we are to make our fourth-quarter sales goals. So, let's agree on October 15 as the new due date.

Please communicate this information to the other members of your team.

cc: E. Hearly, Division Chief

FIGURE 10.3 A summary or follow-up memo

 Morris and Sutton, **MEMORANDUM**

To: All employees
From: Jorge Gonsalves, Human Resources *J.G.*
Date: January 12, 20XX
Subject: *401K matching policy*

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.

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 1 and will not be open again until next January.

Please drop by the Human Resources office on the 6th floor to get a handout that provides more detailed information or to speak with an HR representative in person.

Thanks.

cc: Alison Sheffield, Manager, Human Resources

FIGURE 10.4 An informational memo



STRATEGIES for Memos

- ▶ **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.** People expect memos that are short and to the point.
- ▶ **Use the appropriate organizational format (direct or indirect).** Prefer the direct format when you need people to get the point quickly and the indirect format when you have something hard to say that needs to be softened.
- ▶ **Use white space, headings, and bullets.** These features provide visual structure to your memo.
- ▶ **Distribute to the right people.** Whether you are sending the memo via email or on paper, 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.
- ▶ **Use PDF for digital delivery.** If your memo will be sent via email or posted to a company internal Web site (intranet), use PDF rather than a word processing format for your attachment.

LETTER BASICS

A well-crafted workplace letter conveys a formal, professional impression. It presents a reasoned, carefully constructed case and represents not only you but also your company or organization. Letters also serve as an official notice or record. Your signature on a letter certifies your approval of the message. Letters often serve as legal documents, and so precision is crucial.

Importance of letters

LETTER PARTS AND FORMATS

All letters contain various parts (date line, return address, signature line), which are formatted in a standard way.

Parts of a Letter

The parts of a letter include the sender's address/heading, date, inside address, salutation, body text, complimentary closing, and signature. In addition, a letter may include such optional parts as a company logo, typist's initials, enclosure notation, and/or copy notation. Figure 10.5 shows a workplace letter with the standard parts (as well as optional typist's initials and enclosure notation) labeled.

Standard and optional parts of a letter

Heading (sender's address)	→	LEVERETT LAND & TIMBER COMPANY, INC. 18 River Rock Road Leverett, MA 01054	creative land use quality building materials architectural construction
Date	→	January 17, 20XX	
Inside address	→	Mr. Thomas E. Muffin Clearwater Drive Amherst, MA 01022	
Salutation	→	Dear Mr. Muffin:	
Body text	→	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: Exterior: - 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 Northeast Bedroom—Lower Level: - 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 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. Leverett Land & Timber Company, Inc., proposes to furnish the necessary materials and labor to perform the described damage repairs for the amount of six thousand one hundred and eighty dollars (\$6,180).	
Complimentary closing	→	Sincerely,	
Signature	→	<i>G.A. Jackson</i> Gerald A. Jackson, President	
Typist's initials	→	GAJ/ob	
Enclosure notation	→	Encl. Itemized estimate	
		Phone: 410-555-9879	Fax: 410-555-6874 Email: llt@yonet.com

FIGURE 10.5 A workplace letter

Sender's Address. The sender's address appears at the top of the letter in the form of either a company letterhead or the sender's mailing address. When you use your personal address, omit your name because that will appear below your signature at letter's end. On the first line, include the full street address, and on the next line, include the city, state (abbreviated), country (if applicable), and postal code (ZIP code or other postal code).

Date. The date appears two spaces below the sender's address. Spell out the month completely.

Inside Address. Use between two and four spaces between the date and the inside address (the address of the recipient). Include the courtesy title ("Mr.," "Ms.," "Dr.") and the full name of the recipient on the first line; the person's job title (if applicable) on the second line; the name of the company (if applicable) on the next line; the full street address on the next line; and the city, state, country (if applicable), and postal code on the last line.

Salutation. Double space between the inside address and the salutation. The salutation includes a greeting (usually "Dear"), followed by a courtesy title and the recipient's last name. If you don't know the person's gender, use the full name ("Dear Sandy Martin:"). In a business letter, always use a colon at the end of the salutation, not a comma.

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. Place the attention line flush with the left margin two line spaces (returns) below the inside address ("Attention: Director of Research and Development").

Typically, *subject lines* are used with memos, but if the recipient is not expecting your letter, a subject line can be a good way of catching a busy reader's attention ("Subject: *New patent for hybrid wheat crop*"). Place the subject line below the inside address or attention line. You can italicize the subject to make it more prominent.

Body Text. Double space between the salutation and the body text. The introductory paragraph should get right to the point. The middle paragraph(s) should support the introduction without straying off topic. The concluding paragraph should summarize and call for further action.

Complimentary Closing. Double space between the body text and the complimentary closing. Use a standard, businesslike closing such as "Sincerely," "Respectfully," or "Best regards."

Signature. Type your name four lines beneath the complimentary closing and sign in the space between the complimentary closing and typed name.

Optional Parts. Most company letters will feature a preprinted logo at the very top of the page, providing the name and address of the company along with contact information. You may also need a *typist notation*: If not typed by the author, place the author's capitalized initials first, followed by a slash and the typist's lowercase initials. If anything was sent in the same envelope provide an *enclosure notation*: Use the abbreviation "Encl." and briefly describe the contents. If anyone is copied on the letter, provide a *copy notation*. Use the abbreviation "cc" followed by a colon and the name of each recipient. Multiple notations would appear in this order: typist, enclosures, and then copy.

Formats for Letters

Block format

Although several formats are acceptable and your company may have its own, the most popular format for workplace letters is *block format* (Figure 10.6).

LETTER TONE

The importance of a letter's tone

Letters are typically written from one individual to another. But unlike a face-to-face conversation, video chat, or phone call between two people, letters lack important nonverbal cues (smiles, frowns, vocal expressions of agreement or disagreement) that help clarify what's being said. These nonverbal cues allow you to modify your comments and your 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, like that of a memo, 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 10.7, which maintains an appropriate tone in conveying bad news.

Establishing and Maintaining a "You" Perspective

Prioritize the readers' 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.

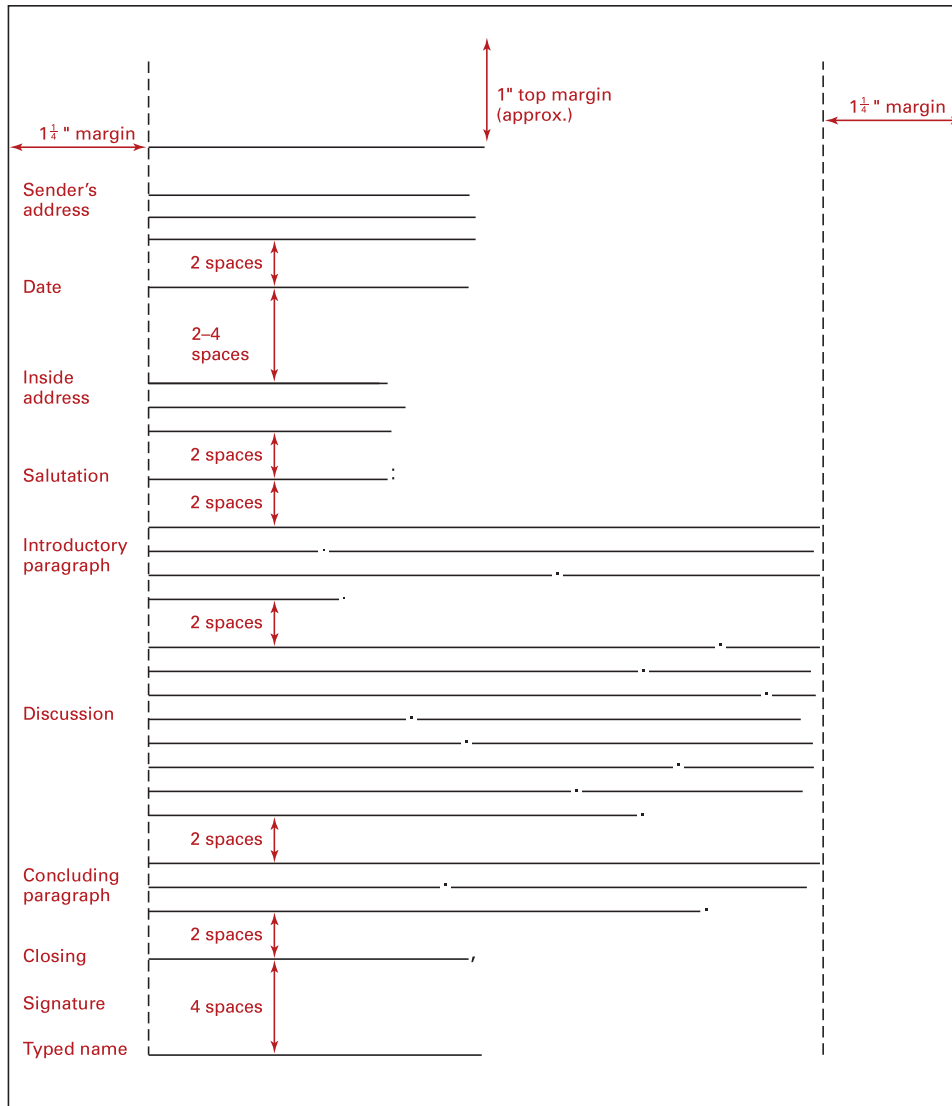


FIGURE 10.6 Block format (without letterhead)

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. The example below shows a more considerate version. Instead of expressing only the writer's point of view, this second version conveys respect for the reader'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.

Considerate and respectful

	LEVERETT LAND & TIMBER COMPANY, INC. 18 River Rock Road Leverett, MA01054 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. 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. 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. 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. Sincerely, <i>P.A. Jackson</i> Gerald A. Jackson	creative land use quality building materials architectural construction
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Establishes "you" perspective immediately

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

Speaks clearly and directly to the reader

Remains polite and tactful, despite delivery of bad news

Maintains the "you" perspective through to the end

FIGURE 10.7 Appropriate tone in conveying bad news

The “you” perspective is appropriate not only at the beginning of a letter but also throughout. Do not sign and mail the letter until you are certain that the needs, wants, and feelings of your reader consistently get top billing, even when you simultaneously must assert your own perspective.

Being 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:

Be courteous and emphasize good will

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

Tactless

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, offer only the most basic reimbursement, and not seek the customer’s future business via an incentive.

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

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

Using Plain English

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

Be professional without being stuffy

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

Stuffy

The reader of this letter might feel spoken down to and decide not to respond. However, in this 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 me.
Best wishes,

Clear and direct

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

Stuffy, unclear

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.

Considering the Needs of International Readers

Any letter might be read by international readers

In the increasingly global marketplace, you will often find that you need to communicate with readers outside the United States, many of whom do not speak English as a first language. To ensure that your letter is appropriate for an international reader, avoid being overly informal, use plain English, and avoid idiomatic expressions such as “in the ball park” or “under the weather.”

Being Direct or Indirect

Determine if the direct or indirect approach is preferable

During your career you will have to write letters that convey bad or unwelcome news. For example, 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 have to apologize for errors—and so on. In each instance, you will have to decide whether to build your case first (indirect approach) or get right to the point (direct approach).

When to be direct or indirect

Try to anticipate your readers' reaction. Generally speaking, when you have good news use the direct approach; readers will appreciate your getting right to the point. When presenting bad news you may prefer the indirect approach; by presenting your rationale beforehand you give readers the chance to adjust to the bad news.



STRATEGIES 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 (someone not in your organization).
- ▶ **Use proper letter format and include all the required parts.** Unless your organization has its own guidelines, use block or modified block format and the parts discussed earlier.



STRATEGIES *continued*

- ▶ **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 stuffy language.** 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.
- ▶ **Use PDF for digital delivery.** If your letter will be sent via email, use PDF rather than a word processing format for your attachment.

TYPES OF LETTERS

There are many types of business letters. Among the most common types you can expect to write on the job are inquiry letters, claim letters, sales letters, and adjustment letters.

Inquiry Letters

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

Solicited and
unsolicited inquiry
letters

In a solicited inquiry, be brief 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 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. Express your appreciation. Avoid long, involved inquiries that are unlikely to be answered.

Figure 10.8 is an example of 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 Greene tries to make the respondent's task as easy as possible.

		Solar Solutions, Inc. 234 Western Road Fargo, ND 27116 March 10, 20XX Rachel Cowans Director of Energy Systems The Earth Research Institute Persham, ME 04619 Dear Ms. Cowans:
States the purpose	→	As a Research Consultant at Solar Solutions, Inc., 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	→	While gathering data on home solar heating, I encountered references (in <i>Scientific American</i> and elsewhere) to your group's pioneering work in solar energy 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?
Provides complete contact information	→	Please write your answers on the back of this page and return in the enclosed envelope. If email or phone are more convenient, feel free to contact me at agreene@solarsolutionsND.com or 555-986-6578.
Offers to share findings	→	I would be glad to send you a copy of the final document. Thank you in advance.
		Sincerely, <i>Alan Greene</i> Alan Greene Research Consultant

FIGURE 10.8 An unsolicited inquiry letter



STRATEGIES 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 in other situations, you still need to explain what you plan to do with 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.
- ▶ **Provide alternate contact information.** If you can also be reached by email or phone, provide that information as well.
- ▶ **Include a stamped, self-addressed envelope.** This courteous gesture will increase the likelihood of a response.
- ▶ **Say thank you and offer to follow up.** Even if you said it at the beginning, say thank you again at the end. Offer to send a copy of the document in which you plan to use the information, if appropriate.

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 the like. 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 10.9 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.

Routine and arguable
claim letters

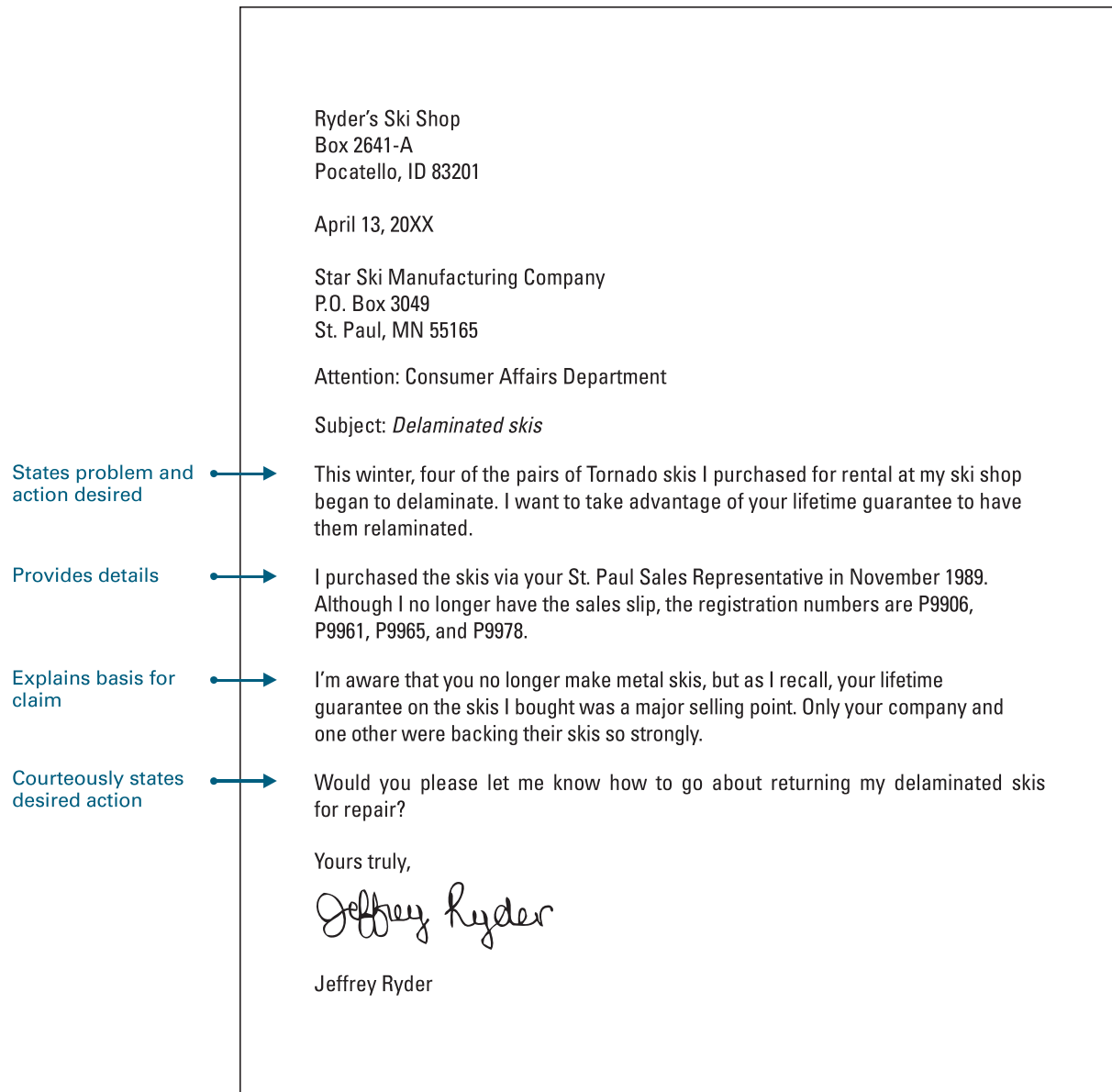


FIGURE 10.9 A routine claim letter

Figure 10.10 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, Texas 77028

Attention: Ms. Dionne Dubree

Dear Ms. Dubree:

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.

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).

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.

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.

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.

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.

We would appreciate having this matter resolved before the end of this month.

Yours truly,
Sandra Alvarez
Sandra Alvarez
Manager, Accounting

- ← Establishes early agreement
- ← Presents facts to support claim
- ← Offers more support
- ← Includes all relevant information
- ← Sticks to the facts
- ← Requests a specific adjustment
- ← Stipulates a reasonable response time

FIGURE 10.10 An arguable claim letter



STRATEGIES for Claim Letters

► Routine claim letters

- **Use a direct approach.** Describe the request or problem; explain the problem clearly; 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 clearly, 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 how you make your request.

Sales Letters

Purpose and format of 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, online—your letter must be genuinely persuasive and must get to the point quickly. First, engage the reader immediately with an attention-grabbing statement or an intriguing question. Next, describe clearly and concisely the product or service you offer and explain its appeal. Finally, conclude by requesting immediate action.

In the letter in Figure 10.11, 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.



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:

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.

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.

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.

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

- ← Opens with an attention-grabbing question
- ← Describes the long history and appeal of the restaurant
- ← Further maintains appeal by describing the menu
- ← Ends by asking the reader to take action

FIGURE 10.11 A sales letter



STRATEGIES for Sales Letters

- ▶ **Begin with a question or other attention-grabbing statement.**
- ▶ **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: “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

Positive and negative
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 10.12. In this 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 and friendly tone.

Of course, if a claim is unreasonable or unjustified, the recipient usually will refuse the request. In refusing to grant a refund for a 10-speed bicycle, company representative Anna Jenkins faces a delicate balance (Figure 10.13). 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 and reasonable.

FIGURE 10.12
A positive adjustment letter

Software Unlimited
421 Fairview Road
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74321

May 2, 20XX

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

Dear Mr. Morris:

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.

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.

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

Jane Duval
Sales Manager

Encl. Gift Certificate

← Apologizes immediately

← Offers compensation

← Looks toward the future



STRATEGIES for Adjustment Letters

- ▶ **If you need to apologize, do so immediately and in active voice.** Don't say "An error was made..."; instead, say "We are sorry we made an error..."
- ▶ **Be polite and professional.** Even if you must say no to a request, you can do so respectfully.
- ▶ **Use passive voice if you want to avoid sounding accusatory.** If your customer made a mistake in assembling the device, you could say "The wrong bolts were used" rather than "You used the wrong bolts."
- ▶ **If appropriate, offer an incentive.** You can create a lot of goodwill if you reach out with even a small gift certificate or in-store credit.
- ▶ **Close on a positive note.** Thank the person for writing and for being a customer.

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



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

FIGURE 10.13 A negative adjustment letter



CHECKLIST for Memos and Letters

MyWritingLab™

MEMO

- ☐ Does my memo contain all the necessary parts (To, From, Date, Subject, body copy)?
- ☐ Is the text of my memo clear and direct?
- ☐ Does my memo follow a standard format, beginning with an introductory paragraph, explaining my points in the body of the memo, then ending with a short conclusion?
- ☐ Is the tone of my memo professional and polite?
- ☐ Have I considered whether to take a direct or an indirect approach?
- ☐ Does my memo focus on one topic?
- ☐ Is my memo directed at the right people?

LETTER

- ☐ Does my letter contain all the necessary parts (sender's address, date, inside address, salutation/attention line, body text, closing signature)?
- ☐ Is the tone of my letter professional, polite, and appropriately formal?
- ☐ Have I considered whether to take a direct or an indirect approach?
- ☐ Have I put my reader's interests first (the "you" perspective)?
- ☐ If making a difficult request, am I being tactful yet clear about what I want?
- ☐ Am I writing in clear language?



APPLICATIONS

GENERAL APPLICATION

MyWritingLab™

Write a memo as the sales director of a company to in-house sales department employees and to sales representatives. Announce and outline a new dress code policy and diplomatically explain why the policy is more strict for the sales reps. Remember to keep an informal but professional tone, format the memo properly, and keep it brief but complete.

TEAM APPLICATIONS

1. In groups of two to three, assume that you are co-owners of a condominium complex that has been invaded by carpenter ants. Have a meeting to discuss your plans to find a way that the ants can be eliminated, using an insecticide that is proven to be nontoxic to humans. Ask each team member to write a follow-up memo that summarizes the meeting and recommends next steps for each team member to take. Compare memos and discuss the decisions each person made for how to organize and structure the memo.
2. Working in groups, respond to the following scenario. Appoint one group member to present the letter in class.

Luke Harrington wants a \$1200 refund for four Douglas fir trees that have died since your workers planted them in his yard two years ago. Because you guarantee your transplants for three years, he wants his money returned. After checking Harrington's contract, you recall his problem: You wouldn't guarantee the five Douglas firs he ordered because he wanted them planted in a wet, marshy area, and Douglas firs need well-drained soil. A check of Harrington's lot confirms that four trees planted in the wet area have died of root rot. Write to him, reminding him of the contract and refusing the adjustment. As you did two years ago, suggest that he plant balsam firs in the wet area. Although balsam needles are slightly darker than the Douglas firs', both trees have the shape he wants. The balsams would retain the symmetry of his tree line. Harrington's address: 921 Daisy Lane, Churchill, MO 61516.

GLOBAL APPLICATION

MyWritingLab™

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 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.

DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATION

MyWritingLab™

Word processing programs such as Microsoft Word or Apple Pages offer a variety of templates for writing letters. 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 make a list of ways in which the template may or may not work for your purposes.

MyWritingLab™

Visit Chapter 10, *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.