

Letters, Memos, and E-mail

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Letters, Memos, Emails

- Three genres you will encounter most often in the workplace
 - Reflects image of you and your company
- Often act as the “wrapper” to larger technical documents
 - Résumés
 - Proposals
 - Reports



When you encounter a new genre,
remember the two most important
elements to technical communication:

1. Audience

2. Purpose



Letter Conventions

- Oldest, most formal of the three genres
- Addressed to someone in another organization
- Always concluded with a signature in ink



Ars dictaminis

- The rhetorical art of letter writing
- Intended to incite action:

“It could be said that the *ars dictaminis* emphasized the practical application of rhetoric over theoretical considerations and that this practical orientation became increasingly dominant”



Memo Conventions

- Less formal and shorter than letters
- Used most often for communication within one organization



E-mail Conventions

- Least formal of the three genres
- Replacing memos because of its technological advantages
- Always professional and free of errors



Mail From 1302-006



Follow up
Completed on Monday, June 19, 2006 9:50 PM.
You forwarded this message on 6/19/2006 9:50 PM.
This message was sent with Low importance.

To: [REDACTED]

From:

Password: [REDACTED]

I was late on one of my critiques by about 2 days but i had sent a it thru so i wouldnt get anymore late penalties because the paper yall gave me to critique didnt have anything on it. Now that it is open again. Am i still going to be penalize all 7 days for the critique



Types of Letters and Memos

- Inquiry
- Response
- Transmittal
- Claim
- Adjustment
- Refusal





9 writing strategies



1: Pay Attention to Tone

- Always consider audience and purpose
 - E-mail to an expert = respectful, friendly and professional
 - Complaint letter = firm, formal, demanding, but *not threatening*



The word “YOU” really effects your tone.

- Congratulate and thank with “you”
 - “Your company always provides the best service.”
- Do NOT use “you” when giving bad or negative information
 - “Your shoddy work produced a bad toaster.”

Vs.

- “My toaster no longer works.”



Not Good.

You must
have dropped
the engine.
The housing
is badly
cracked.





Better

The badly cracked housing suggests that your engine must have fallen onto a hard surface from some height.



2: Brief, purposeful Introduction

- The first line should clarify topic & purpose
- No more than four or five lines

Avoid diving into details too early or before the purpose of the communication is mentioned.



3: Review the context

- We're forgetful and busy people
- Your reader may not be familiar with the situation





4: Follow a good-news first strategy





5. Use a reader-centered strategy





6: Organize your paragraphs logically

- State the subject and purpose.
- Explain the problem in detail.
- Describe how the problem inconvenienced you.
- State what you would like the reader to do.
- Thank the reader for his or her response.
- Provide contact information.



7: Keep your paragraphs short!

No more information than necessary!



8: Use headings, lists, and tables

Lorem Ipsum

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Donec vel arcu. Sed urna. Nam ut leo at lorem sagittis porta. Quisque leo nisl, porttitor et, vulputate et, sodales a, risus. Vestibulum non sapien sodales nulla scelerisque suscipit.

Aenean vel turpis.

Etiam ultrices mollis eros.

Aliquam congue, metus ut semper faucibus

Curabitur accumsan elit sit amet magna. Class aptent taciti sociosqu ad litora torquent per conubia nostra, per inceptos hymenaeos. Pellentesque nibh. Curabitur dapibus bibendum orci. Fusce lacinia, massa eu volutpat feugiat, arcu purus semper diam, id rutrum urna ante id quam.



9: Have an active conclusion

- Tell your reader what you want
- Give your contact information

A photograph of a handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "John Hancock", written in dark ink on aged, light brown paper. The signature is elegant and fluid, with a large, sweeping initial 'J' and a decorative flourish at the end.





Overview part I

- Pay attention to tone
- Have a brief “state-your-purpose” introduction
- Review the context
 - If writing a response to some other communication, repeat the details of the context
- Follow a good-news-first, bad-news-last strategy
- Use a reader-centered strategy
 - Reader and writer usually have a mutual goal – they both want something!! Both parties needs to feel they have gained something.
- Organize paragraphs logically
 - Intro, Narration, Petition and Justification



Overview part II

- Keep your paragraphs short
 - Fewer than 8 lines, and use 11-point, readable font
- Use headings, lists, and tables where appropriate
 - Headings indicate sections, bulleted lists for key points, numbered lists of sequential items, and tables to enable comparison information
- Have an active conclusion
 - Make clear what you expect the recipient to do, avoid weak endings like “hoping to hear from you soon,” and give your contact information!