

Authentic Assessment

Memorandum



DEFINITION

A memorandum, or memo in short, is a concise written message of one page or less. It is typically used for internal communication in an organization. When used as an assessment, students are usually given a scenario that requires them to prepare a memo. It can be as simple as a meeting schedule or a reminder, but can also be more complicated, requiring the identification of a problem and its corresponding solution(s). Depending on the discipline, memos can serve different purposes.

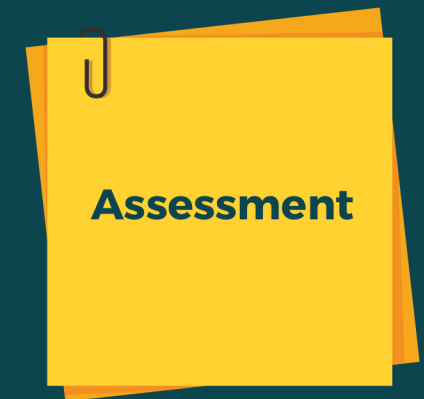
For example, a legal memorandum can be in the form of an internal document to one's work supervisor on the assessment of a client's situation based on the current law, while a policy memorandum can be a piece written to a political authority to propose policy changes. In business, a memo can be a response to customers' enquiries or complaints.

In general, a memo consists of the following components: (1) the memo title, (2) name of the memo recipient, (3) name of the memo sender, (4) subject heading, and (5) the memo message.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

To design a memo assessment, teachers should follow the procedures below:

1. Define the objectives of the memo assessment task.
2. Introduce to students the structure of memos and offer them a memo template and examples as reference.
3. Specify the content requirement of the memo assessment.
4. Build and introduce to students the assessment criteria of the memo assessment task.
5. Provide timely feedback to students for their memo.



BENEFITS & CHALLENGES

Benefits

- A memo is simple to understand and prepare, even for students who are unfamiliar with memo assessments.
- Memos are written in brief. Therefore, it will not be a time-consuming assessment for both students and teachers.

Challenges

- Memo writing becomes challenging if students do not have the ability to write concisely. Students need to embrace brevity in order to write effective memos.
- Students may be too used to academic writing and not familiar with the writing style of memos. Thus, there is a need to provide training and exemplars to help students produce a memo with the specified recipient in mind. For example, students can be reminded to avoid technical terms and legal jargon when writing for laypeople.

CASE SAMPLE

Memorandum assessment at Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business in the United States

Design of the assessment:

Memorandums were used as an assessment tool by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) at a state university.

Participants enrolled in sections of a fundamental quantitative business course in operations management. The course included three memo assessments. Students were given a memorandum template each time and were instructed to complete the salutation, as well as the body writing (problem stating and action-oriented request recommendation). In all three memo assessments, students were required to play the role of the Operations Manager (OM) and respond to specific customer complaints. The first memo required students to respond to customer feedback regarding broken packaging for a company which produced Mighty Muffins. The second memo required students to respond to a complaint about a smartphone case in the wrong size, while the third memo required students to respond to customer feedback regarding burnt pumpkin pies.

How are students assessed?

Students were assessed with a rubric of six criteria, including (1) audience; (2) problem statement; (3) request; (4) grammar; (5) punctuation and (6) spelling, rated on a 2-point scale. The rating scale ranged from 0 ("Does not meet expectations") to 1 ("Meets or exceeds expectations"). This rubric was applied to all of the three assessments.

Reference

Williams, J. A. S., Schutts, J., Gallamore, K., & Amaral, N. (2019). Assessment of memorandum writing in a quantitative business context. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 82(1), 38-52.

TIPS FOR DESIGNING

- A good memo assessment should allow students to practice specific skills (e.g. research skills, analytical skills).
- Before deciding on the problem for the memo assessment, it is recommended that the teacher has a go at the assessment task themselves. Doing so would give them a better understanding of their own expectations of students, such as to clarify the key issues that students are expected to conduct research on, what resources are students expected to find, and what students are expected to learn.