

Take Note

THERE'S AN ART TO DASHING OFF MEMOS. SO IF YOU WANT TO PEN POWERFUL AND PERSUASIVE MESSAGES, READ THIS HANDY HANDBOOK.

BY MARK LUCE

Course improvements are looming, you need new mowers, and your computer is dying. But to get the funding to correct these problems, you have to do something you enjoy as much as a trip to the dentist — write a memo.

Penning a memo might be your vision of Dante's 12th level of hell. But without that written request, your course might burn brown in the summer sun. Learning to write powerful, convincing and effective memos will not happen overnight, but L. Sue Baugh's, "How to Write First Class Memos: The Handbook for Practical Memo Writing" (NTC, \$12.95), will get you on the way.

From the most common mistakes to rough drafts, from how to get a reader's attention to proof-reading, Baugh's book is a boon for even the most reluctant and hesitant writers.

While it's impossible to cover everything that's in Baugh's book here, you can learn the memo-writing basics.

Write or talk

Getting the right message to the right people can sometimes work through simple conversation. But people have a tendency to forget. How many times have you left a conversation saying, "Oh, I wished I would've said ..."

Memos give you the chance to think of what you want to say, allow the receiver to consider the question and let you save the information for future reference.

Ramblin' man

The biggest problems with memos are poor organization and a lot of bureaucratic babble. To solve the first problem, make sure that your most important information comes first and least important information last. This style is called an inverted pyramid. Baugh writes: "Once you have stated the main idea, subsequent information should support, explain, elaborate or qualify the idea and its meaning to the reader. The information should be given in a logical progression without skipping steps or jumping from one fact to another."

Clarifying unclear writing takes time and effort. Remember that big words do not impress, so keep it simple. And if you're unsure whether your memo is ready to send, have someone who is unfamiliar with what you're writing read it over. If they are confused, you have more work to do.

Get it right

What makes Baugh's book helpful is that she outlines the process — not just the thinking and planning but the writing. She breaks the writing of a memo down into three simple steps:

- **Preparation:** In this stage, you figure out the purpose, topics and needs the memo will fulfill. Ask yourself who you are writing for, what they need to know and how you want them to respond.

- **Writing:** The organization and writing. Don't, Baugh warns, fall into the perfection trap. "In many instances, people suffer from the paralyzing expectation that their memos must be perfect, or more important or official sounding than their other communications. As a result, they lose their own 'voice' and adopt a stiff, unnatural style that confuses rather than communicates." Be yourself.

- **Review:** Double and triple-check the facts, dates, names, prices, spelling and grammar. And always keep in mind your purpose — effective, persuasive communication.

This small primer should get you on the road to better writing, but the book is certainly more helpful. It includes a laundry list of commonly misspelled words (do not rely on spell-check because it will burn you), explanations of common grammatical errors (which/that, who/whom, council/counsel) and more than 60 pages of model memos.

You'll probably never be Hemingway. But you will gain respect and trust by learning to write effectively. And everyone will be on the same page.

Mark Luce, a freelance writer who lives in Lawrence, Kan., now communicates exclusively by memo. This column appears occasionally in Golfdom.