

Date: 10/6/10

To: Mike

From: Jack

Subject: Summary of "Memo Punctilio," by Walter Kiechel III

As you requested, I've summarized the useful information in the *Fortune* magazine article that you gave me. First, it discusses when or when not to write a memo. Second, it suggests some pointers on how to write a memo when the occasion calls for it.

When to Write a Memo

When Not to Write. The article points out that few managers like to read or write memos. Know when not to write one.

- When personal communication and immediate feedback are more effective for reaching your management goals
- When the company might be put in legal jeopardy by having a written record that makes it vulnerable
- When having a written record puts you in jeopardy with superiors if your message is controversial
- When dismissing someone from employment

When to Write. On the other hand, managers use memos effectively in the following situations:

- When conveying large chunks of complex information, especially when it involves numbers
- When you want to communicate with more people than can be done conveniently in person
- When you want to distance yourself from someone you ordinarily communicate with orally
- When you need information or ideas recorded, especially when you want to take responsibility for them.

How To Write a Good Memo

First, take the time to analyze the situation. Define your purpose and know your audience and its needs. Here's quick summary of some of his other pointers:

Format: The memos should start with a brief paragraph stating your main point. Paragraphs that provide a background summary, supporting information, and a concluding summary or request for action should follow.

Conciseness: Keep your sentences short. They should average around twenty words. Keep the memo itself short and limit your main points.

Tone: Write the way you talk. Be natural and friendly in tone. Use the active voice to give your writing vigor, but it's OK to use the passive voice when you want to be indirect. For instance, it might be better to say "Time is being wasted" rather than "You waste my time."

Response Mechanism: Tack on a sentence in your close that asks for a response or which authorizes you to act. For instance: "If I don't hear from you, I will assume that you approve."

Critical Distance: Hold on to the memo before sending it, especially if your message has an emotional charge. Sleeping on it might give you perspective.

That wraps it up. If I can help in any other way, let me know. If you find this summary, others might as well. Just give me the word, and I'll photocopy it and distribute it to others in the department. I'm attaching a copy of the article for your reference.