



Wise Old Owl Consulting

Specialists in TQM (Total Quality Memos)

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TO: Colleagues and Friends
FROM: Bob Behn
RE: The Art of the Memo
DATE: Thursday, December 2, 1993

A memo communicates ideas. But it does this not only through its words and sentences. A memo also communicates ideas through its headings and layout. A reader should understand the message of a one-page (or ten-page) memo not only after a thorough reading, but also at a glance.

I. Headings Can Convey A Lot of Information

Headings accomplish three important purposes:

- (1) Headings force you to organize your memo. You can't produce intelligent and useful headings unless you have thought through both your message and **how** you will communicate it.
- (2) Headings convey your organization to the reader. Like the chapter titles in a book, the headings in a memo tell the reader what information to expect when.
- (3) Headings can also convey your message themselves. Well organized and well designed headings can quickly give your reader the basics of your message.

II. The Layout Can Make the Message Easy to Understand

The esthetics of a memo contribute to its message. Indeed, a memo's layout can make people want to read it. So, design a layout to convince potential readers that you have an important message that they can easily understand by quickly reading your memo.

Consequently, don't make your readers go searching through your trees to find your forest. Don't clutter up your memo with *italics*, **boldface**, underlining, double underlining, or CAPITAL LETTERS. Use such devices sparingly to highlight the core of your message, not to obscure it.

III. "Message: I Care!"

If you have an important message -- if you have a message that warrants spending the time to write it out carefully and clearly -- then you also ought to spend enough time to ensure that the page on which that message appears contribute to the communication of the message. A well-written, well-organized, well-laid-out memo tells the reader that you have a message that is so important that it was worth your valuable time to present it clearly.