

1 Formal or informal?

A First, read the information about email writing styles.

It is helpful to think about three writing styles, although in real life the differences are not so clear.

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| Formal | This is the style of an old-fashioned letter. Ideas are presented politely and carefully, and there is much use of fixed expressions and long words. Grammar and punctuation are important. This style is not so common, but you can find it if the subject matter is serious (for example a complaint), in emails to customers where you want to make a good impression, or in some cultures where a more formal style is expected. |
| Neutral | This is the most common style in professional/work emails. The writer and reader are both busy, so the language is simple, clear and direct. There is often a friendly opening line. Sentences are short and there is use of contractions (<i>I've</i> for <i>I have</i> etc.). |
| Informal | This is the style for emails between friends. The email might include personal news, funny comments etc. This style is close to speech, and has informal words and conversational expressions. Many people now choose social media rather than email to communicate with friends: with social media the style is even more informal. |

Most real emails are basically neutral, but with some elements of formality or informality depending on the context. Mixing styles is okay to some extent, but don't mix styles at the two extremes.

Now match the more informal phrases (1–16) with the more formal phrases (a–p).

Informal	Formal
1 What do you need? <i>...</i>	a) Unfortunately I will not be able to attend the meeting.
2 Thanks for your email. <i>.....</i>	b) I can assure you that ...
3 Sorry, I can't make it. <i>.....</i>	c) I will take the necessary action to solve this issue.
4 Could you ...? <i>.....</i>	d) Please let us know your requirements.
5 I promise ... <i>.....</i>	e) I was wondering if you could ...?
6 You haven't ... <i>.....</i>	f) We regret to advise you that ...
7 I'm sorry to tell you that ... <i>.....</i>	g) Thank you for your email of 12 February.
8 I'll deal with this. <i>.....</i>	h) We note from our records that you have not ...
9 Don't forget that ... <i>.....</i>	i) I look forward to meeting you next week.
10 I need to ... <i>.....</i>	j) With reference to ... (or Regarding ...)
11 Shall I ...? <i>.....</i>	k) Would you like me to ...?
12 But ... / Also ... / So ... <i>.....</i>	l) I would be grateful if you could ...
13 Please ... <i>.....</i>	m) Please accept my apologies for ...
14 I'm really sorry about ... <i>.....</i>	n) It is necessary for me to ...
15 Re ... <i>.....</i>	o) We would like to remind you that ...
16 See you next week. <i>.....</i>	p) However ... / In addition ... / Therefore ...



Basics

B Match the more formal words in box A with the more informal words in box B.

A

1 assistance	5 inform	9 possess
2 due to	6 information	10 provide
3 in the near future	7 receive	11 request
4 further	8 occupation	12 requirements

B

a) soon	e) job	i) give
b) facts	f) because of	j) needs
c) help	g) get	k) have
d) ask for	h) more	l) tell

1 c 2 h 3 g 4 d 5 e 6 f 7 a 8 b 9 i 10 j 11 k 12 l

Note there are often two words in English with a similar meaning: a longer one of Latin or Old French origin that is more *formal*, and a shorter one of Old English origin that is more *informal*.

C Rewrite the formal emails below by replacing the phrases in *italics* with more informal phrases. Sections A and B will help you. Use contractions (eg *I'll* for *I will*) where appropriate.

Email 1

Unfortunately *I will not be able to attend the meeting on Friday. As I will miss the meeting, I was wondering if you could send me a copy of the minutes? I will write to Rina as well, to inform her that I will not be there. Once again, please accept my apologies for this.*

Sorry I can't make it on Friday. As I'll miss the meeting,

Email 2

Thank you for your email of 25 January where you requested assistance on how to receive an online discount. *It is necessary for me to know your a/c number before I can take action to solve this issue. I would be grateful if you could also let me know which browser you are using.*

Email 3

I am writing with reference to your order number 8916. We received the order this morning via our website, but you *have not* filled in the section about size. *Please let us know your requirements.* These products are selling very well, and we *regret to advise you that* the medium size is temporarily out of stock. *However, we are expecting more to arrive in the near future. Would you like me to email you when they are back in stock?*



2 Key phrases

A Write a subject line from the box for each email. One is not used.

Action re contract	Your order #8694: out of stock items	Meeting 14/5
Re your advertisement	Shipping confirmation	Special deals for January!

Email 1

Subject:

Re your last email, we are in the process of arranging the meeting scheduled for 14 May, but there are still a few details I need from you. Do you want me to book hotel accommodation for you — or will you sort it out at your end? Also, can you send us something about the Barcelona project you were involved in last year? It would be helpful to have something to circulate before the meeting. Please send a copy of any relevant reports. Regards, Monica.

Email 2

Subject:

Sorry for the delay in replying — I've been out of the country on business. Unfortunately, the items you ordered are not in stock, but we're expecting delivery by the end of the week. I'll get back to you as soon as they arrive. If you need any more information, please feel free to contact me.

Email 3

Subject:

Luisa, I've emailed Michelle and Roberto about the changes to the contract. If you like, I can have a word with Michelle to make sure she understands what's going on. And, as you work with Roberto, can you talk to him? Thanks for your help.

Email 4

Subject:

Good news! Subscribers to this email newsletter can take advantage of fantastic price savings in our January sale. I've attached a pdf file that gives full details, or alternatively just click on the link below. You can order online or by phone — our customer service staff are always available to answer questions. Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Email 5

Subject:

Just a short note to let you know that we received your order. I can confirm that the items were sent by courier today. To track your order, click on the link below. If there's anything else, just let me know. Best wishes, Pierre.



Basics

B Complete the table by matching an underlined phrase in section A with a similar phrase below. Look carefully at the headings in bold.

Previous contact

With reference to your email sent (date), ... 1 Re your last email

Reason for email

We are writing to inform you that ... 2

Good news

You will be pleased to hear that ... 3

We are able to confirm that ... 4

Bad news/Apoloizing

I apologize for ... 5

We regret to inform you that ... 6

Requests

I'd be grateful if you could ... 7

I would appreciate it if you could ... 8 Can you

Offering help

Would you like me to ...? 9

If you wish, I would be happy to ... 10

Promising action

I will contact you again. 11

Attachments

Please find attached ... 12

Final comments

Thank you for your assistance. 13

Do not hesitate to contact us again 14

if you need any further information.

osing

We are looking forward to ... 15

Yours/Sincerely 16 /

C In general, do you think the phrases on the left above are more *informal* or more *formal* than those on the right?

Underline all the phrases above you already use in your emails.



3 Opening and closing

A Match the email beginnings (1–8) with the endings (a–h).

Beginnings Endings
1 I am writing with regard to your recent email. We regret to inform you that there are no double rooms available for the nights you require. ...	a) Anyway, really looking forward to it. Do u want me to bring anything?
2 Thank you so much for the wonderful present. It's exactly the book that I wanted – how did you know? I'm really looking forward to reading it.	b) You know you can count on me if you need any support. I'll call you at the weekend to see how things are.
3 Patricia, I've just read your email. I'm so sorry to hear about what happened.	c) Should you need any further information about room availability, we will be happy to assist you.
4 Aarrghh! Can't make it. Really sorry. But I'm sure you'll all have a great time.	d) I look forward to receiving this information as soon as possible.
5 I am mailing this via the 'Contact Us' link on your website. I'd like to know a few more details about the anti-virus software that's listed on the site.	e) It really is great news, and I'm sure that it's only the beginning of our work in the French market.
6 I am writing with reference to our order number GH674. The goods arrived this morning, but you only sent 200 pieces instead of the 300 that we ordered.	f) Please deal with this matter urgently. I expect a reply from you by 5 pm tomorrow at the latest.
7 Wow! Great! I'd love to come!	g) Thanks again for the gift, and give my very best wishes to your family.
8 I've just heard from Antonio about the Paris contract. It's fantastic news – you worked really hard on this and you deserve the success.	h) Sorry again I can't come. ☹ But let's meet up soon anyway. What about going to see that new Ang Lee movie?



Basics

B Match the beginning and ending pairs in section A with the descriptions (1–8) below.

- 1 An email asking for information. Neutral style. ...5d...
- 2 An email giving information. Formal style.
- 3 An email saying 'yes' to an invitation. Informal style.
- 4 An email saying 'no' to an invitation. Informal style.
- 5 An email of congratulations. Neutral style.
- 6 An email of complaint. Neutral style.
- 7 An email of thanks. Neutral style.
- 8 An email of sympathy. Informal style.

C Read the following sentences. Decide whether they are *beginnings* or *endings*. Then decide whether they are more *formal* or more *informal*.

- | | | |
|---|---------|----------|
| 1 I hope that everything is clear now, but do not hesitate to contact me if you need any clarification. | beg/end | form/inf |
| 2 Btw, I'll be back late. Can you do the shopping and buy something nice for dinner? Thx. Cu later. | beg/end | form/inf |
| 3 This email is to inform all staff that the computer network will be shut down for maintenance over the weekend. | beg/end | form/inf |
| 4 Meg! What a surprise! How nice to hear from you! How are things? | beg/end | form/inf |
| 5 I look forward to receiving your comments on this matter. | beg/end | form/inf |
| 6 I think that's all for now. Will keep you updated. Am on ext 391 if you have any Qs. Cheers, Lukas. | beg/end | form/inf |
| 7 Dear colleagues – I thought it was a very useful meeting on Friday. Please find attached my report, as promised. | beg/end | form/inf |
| 8 Anyway, I'm so happy for you! You really deserve this. Write again soon and tell me how it's going. | beg/end | form/inf |
| 9 Hey Lara. Been talking about hols with S. Looks like we won't b able to join u. Really sorry. | beg/end | form/inf |
| 10 We are writing to advise you of some changes in our price list. | beg/end | form/inf |
| 11 If you would like any more details, please let me know. I am away next week but Andrea is dealing with this in my absence. | beg/end | form/inf |
| 12 Just a quick note to say I really enjoyed last night. | beg/end | form/inf |

D Look back at the examples in section C. Find:

- a) two written to a long list of people who are unknown or little known. ...3.../.....
- b) five written to known colleagues at work. ...1.../...../...../...../.....
- c) four written to friends. /..... /..... /.....
- d) one written to a very close family member.

