95 Formal and informal English

A Formal English

Formal English is more common in writing, but you will also hear examples in more formal spoken English, e.g. announcements, speeches, television news, or discussions.

NOTICE IN A CAFE: Only food **purchased** [bought] here may be eaten **on the premises** [here].

POLICE STATEMENT: The man is being questioned **regarding** [about] the robbery last night.

BUSINESS LETTER: I **regret to inform you** [I am sorry to say] that we are unable to …

THEATRE ANNOUNCEMENT: The play will **commence** [start] in two minutes.

INFORMATION NOTICE: If you **require** [need] **further assistance** [more help], please contact the above address.

STATION ANNOUNCEMENT: The next train to **depart** [leave] from platform 7 will be the 7:22 to Reading.

FORMAL LETTER: We are not in a position to **grant** [give or allow] you a visa to this country.

AIRPORT ANNOUNCEMENT: Will passengers for Miami please **proceed to** [go to] gate 36.

B Informal English

Informal language is more common in spoken English, and also in most emails or letters to friends. The words and phrases in **bold** in these dialogues are all informal.

A: Who's Callum?
B: A **mate** [a friend] of mine.
A: Really?
B: Yeah, I see him **quite a bit** [often]; he's a nice **bloke** [man].

A: Toby, I'm afraid I can't **make it** [come] this evening.
B: Oh, that's a shame.
A: Yeah, I'm sorry, but **the thing is** [the problem is], Ella's not well, so I'll have to look after the **kids** [children].
B: OK, don't worry. There will still be twelve **or so** [about twelve] at the meeting, and I'll ring you later and let you know what happens.
A: **Cheers** [thanks]. That would be great.

A: **I bet** [I'm sure] you're hungry.
B: Yes, **I'm dying for** something to eat. [want to eat something very much]
A: Well, I think you'll find some **stuff** in the fridge.

A: What **are** you **up to** this evening? [What are you doing?]
B: Nothing much. Why?
A: Well, would you like to see the new Coen Brothers film? I've heard it's **great** [very good; *syn* **terrific**].
B: Really? My brother saw it and said it was **a load of rubbish** [terrible].

Language help

We often use the uncountable noun **stuff**, especially in spoken English, to refer to an uncountable noun or a group of things. We do this when others know what we are talking about, or if we don't need to be exact.
Put this **stuff** in the cupboard. [e.g. plates, food, toys]
We carried our camping **stuff** [equipment].
What's this **stuff** in the fridge in the blue bottle? [liquid]

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Exercises

95.1 **Put the words into the correct column on the right.**

~~depart~~	mate
cheers	commence
regarding	terrific
purchase	bloke
proceed to	kids

formal	informal
depart	

95.2 **Now write a synonym for each of the words in 95.1.**

depart	*leave*	mate	
cheers		commence	
regarding		terrific	
purchase		bloke	
proceed to		kids	

95.3 **Replace the underlined words and phrases with more informal words or phrases.**

1 I'm sure your parents are pleased? *I bet*
2 I'd love to come, but the problem is, my mother wants us to go and see her. .....
3 I watched that new series on TV last night. It was absolutely terrible. .....
4 What are you doing this weekend? .....
5 I really want something to drink. .....
6 None of them can come on Monday. .....
7 Jamie is a friend of mine. .....
8 We go there often. .....
9 You can leave all those books, files and papers on the desk. .....
10 We should be able to get approximately 40 on the coach. .....

95.4 **Rewrite the underlined parts of this letter in more suitable formal English.**

1 *regarding*.....
2 .....
.....
3 .....
4 .....
.....

Reply Forward

To M. Collins x 7:03 AM (3 hours ago)

Dear Mr Collins

We are writing about[1] your application to the council for a disabled parking space outside your home. We're sorry to say[2] that we are unable to allow[3] this request as parking is the sole responsibility of the Highways Agency.

We suggest that if you need more help[4], you should contact them on 01727 717 317.

95.5 **Dictionaries will tell you if a word is *formal* or *informal/spoken*. Use your dictionary to find out if the underlined words here are *formal* or *informal/spoken*. What do they mean?**

1 I thought the film was a drag.
2 Smoking isn't permitted.
3 It's a scary film.
4 This watch cost fifty quid.

LIVEWORKSHEETS