

Contents

To the student		4
To the teacher		5
Basics		
	1 Formal or informal?	6
	2 Key phrases	8
	3 Opening and closing	10
	4 Giving news	12
	5 Advice and suggestions	14
	6 Invitations and directions	16
	7 Checking understanding	18
Language focus		
	8 Verb forms	20
	9 Sentence building	22
	10 Missing out words; abbreviations	24
	11 Common mistakes 1	26
	12 Common mistakes 2	28
	13 Punctuation and spelling	30
Style		
	14 Being brief and businesslike	32
	15 Being informal and friendly	34
	16 Being polite and diplomatic	36
Professional		
	17 Information	38
	18 Action	40
	19 Memos and short messages	42
	20 Arranging a meeting	44
	21 Negotiating with external partners	46
	22 Commercial: customer/supplier sequence	48
	23 Commercial: inquiries and orders	50
	24 Commercial: discussing terms	52
	25 Commercial: asking for payment	54
	26 Job application	56
Problems		
	27 Complaints	58
	28 Apologies	60
Reports and analysis		
	29 Reports: structure and key phrases	62
	30 Linking words and relative clauses	64
	31 Describing trends	66
	32 Explaining trends	68
Social media supplement		71
Phrase bank		87
Answer key		100

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.

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



22 Commercial: customer/supplier sequence

A Match words (1–6) with definitions (a–f).

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 a complaint | a) a request by a customer for a company to supply products |
| 2 an invoice | b) a document you get from someone showing you have given them money |
| 3 a quotation/quote | c) a question you ask in order to get information |
| 4 an inquiry | d) a document showing products you bought and must pay for (= a bill) |
| 5 a receipt | e) something you say or write when you are not satisfied or not happy |
| 6 an order | f) the price someone says they will charge you for doing a piece of work |

From the list above (1–6) find:

- i) three documents sent by the customer to the supplier/...../.....
 ii) three documents sent by the supplier to the customer/...../.....

B Complete this typical customer/supplier sequence with words from the box.

a complaint	information	an inquiry	an invoice (with the goods)
the issue	an order	a payment	a quotation
		the quotation	a receipt

The customer ...

The supplier ...

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| 1 makes <i>an inquiry</i> | → | 2 sends |
| 3 requests | ↙ | 4 gives |
| 5 makes | ↘ | 6 sends |
| 7 makes | ↙ | 8 sends |
| 9 makes | ↘ | 10 solves |

C Below you will see eight emails between a supplier of ornamental plants and a hotel manager. Put them into the correct order. Section B will help you.

a)

Thank you for your email received today. We supply and maintain large, ornamental plants for hotel lobbies and company reception areas. We have been in business for more than ten years and have some of the city's biggest hotels among our clients. Please see the attached document for more details of our products and prices. If you need any more information, please let me know.

b)

I saw your advertisement in a recent copy of Hotel and Catering Monthly. I am interested in your Plant Solutions service for hotel lobbies. Please send more details.

c)

Your visit to our hotel last Tuesday was very useful, and I now have the agreement of my line manager to go ahead with the contract. I am attaching our order as a pdf. Please acknowledge receipt of this email and give us a delivery date.

Arrangements

Meetings

	Neutral	Informal
Reason for writing	I'm writing to arrange a time for our meeting. What time would be convenient for you?	Just a quick note to arrange a time to meet. When would suit you?
Suggesting time/place	Could we meet on [day] at [time]?	How about [day] at [time]? Are you free sometime next week?
Saying when you are (are not) free	I would be able to attend the meeting on Thursday morning. I'm out of the office until 2pm. Any time after that would be fine. Unfortunately I can't manage next Monday.	I'm free Thursday am. I won't be around until after lunch. Any time after that is okay. Sorry, can't make it next Monday.
Confirming	I'd like to confirm ... That's fine. I will call/email you tomorrow to confirm the details.	Thursday is good for me. That should be okay. I'll get back to you if there's a problem.
Changing arrangements	This is to let you know that I will not be able to attend the meeting next Thursday. I wonder if we could move it to ...? I apologize for any inconvenience caused.	Re our meeting next week, sorry but I can't make Thursday. How about ... instead? Sorry for the inconvenience.
Close	I look forward to meeting you in Brussels. Let me know if you need to change the arrangements.	See you in Brussels. Give me a call if anything changes.

Invitations

Inviting	I would like to invite you to attend ... Your presence at ... will be very useful. Please let me know if you are able to attend.	I'm writing to invite you to ... It would be great to see you there. Please let me know if you can make it.
Preparations	Before the meeting it would be useful if ... It would be helpful if you could bring ...	Please ... before the meeting. Please bring to the meeting ...
Accepting	Thank you for your kind invitation. The date you suggest is fine. I would be delighted to attend the meeting.	Thanks a lot for the invitation. The date's fine for me. I'd love to come to the meeting.
Refusing	Thank you for your kind invitation. Unfortunately, I have another appointment in my schedule on that day. I hope we will have the opportunity to meet on another occasion in the near future. I am sure the meeting will be a great success.	Thanks a lot for your kind invitation. Unfortunately, I have something else on that day. Please accept my apologies. I hope we can meet up soon. Good luck with the meeting.

d)

Further to your last email, I am happy to provide you with the information you need:

- On an order for just 12 plants we could not give any discount. We believe our prices are very competitive and offer excellent value for money.
- Our terms of payment are 30 days from date of invoice.
- Yes, it would be useful to come to the site. Is next Tuesday morning at 10am convenient for you? I can use the opportunity to clarify any other questions that you might have.

e)

I am writing about a visit by one of your maintenance staff earlier today. He left a lot of water on the carpets where he had watered the plants. This was not the high standard of service that we have come to expect from you in the past.

f)

Thanks for your prompt reply. I am interested in obtaining four large plants for our lobby (variety 'Grandifolia') and a further eight for the restaurant area (variety 'Graciosa'). Would you give a discount on an order of this size? Also, can you state your terms of payment as I could not find these on the document you attached? One final thing – do you need to come to the site to see if there is sufficient light? Our address is below.

g)

We are very sorry to hear that the service you received from our company was not up to the usual standard. Unfortunately, a lot of our regular maintenance staff have been ill recently and we had to employ temporary workers. We appreciate the time you have taken to bring this matter to our attention, and as we value our good customer relations we are happy to give you one week's free maintenance. We will also pay any carpet cleaning bill relating specifically to this issue (please forward the bill to me). I apologize again for any inconvenience caused.

h)

We attach an invoice for the supply of 12 ornamental plants to your hotel last week. We would like to remind you that our terms are 30 days. Thank you.

Email order: 1 b 2 3 4 5 6 (later ...) 7 8

D Find a word (or phrase) from the emails above which mean:

- 1 (email a) to provide people with something that they need.*supply*.....
- 2 (email b) words or pictures that try to persuade people to buy a product.
- 3 (email c) to tell someone in writing that you have received something.
- 4 (email d) a good relationship between quality (or quantity) and price.
- 5 (email e) a level of quality, especially one that people consider acceptable.
- 6 (email f) the conditions of a business or legal agreement.
- 7 (email g) to tell someone you are sorry for doing something wrong.
- 8 (email h) to make someone remember something that they must do.



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 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

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?

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