

Formal vs. Informal

Business correspondence can range from the very formal to the very informal. This depends, of course, on who you are writing to. This can be:

- a company rather than a specific person
- a person that you do not know
- a person with whom you have had some work contact
- a person you know quite well through work
- a good friend with whom you also have work contact.

The relationship with your reader(s) is more important than whether the document is a fax, e-mail or letter. For example, you would never write to an official as informally as you would to a good friend.

Here are some general guidelines on what type of vocabulary, punctuation and grammar to use in formal and informal letters.

Formal	Informal
Latin based words	Anglo Saxon words (phrasal verbs)
Uncommon words	Common words Slang Colloquialisms Acronyms
Full words	Contractions Abbreviations
Passive constructions	Active constructions
Noun phrases	Verb phrases
Complex sentences	Simple sentences
We (when writing on behalf of a company)	I
Do not start sentences with 'and' or 'but'	May start sentences with 'and' or 'but'
Always include relative pronoun	May omit relative pronoun
Full form of dates	Short form of dates

Useful phrases

Some useful phrases are shown below. There is no absolute right and wrong, and often the difference between the two is quite minor.

Please remember to avoid very formal, old-fashioned phrases:

e.g. *"I enclose herewith"* (use *"please find enclosed"* instead)
"pursuant to your enquiry" (use *"in answer to your enquiry"* instead)
"at your earliest convenience" (use *"as soon as possible"* instead).

More formal	Less formal
<i>Thank you</i> for your letter of ...	<i>Thanks</i> for your letter of ...
I am writing <i>with regard/reference to</i> ...	I am writing <i>about</i> ...
We <i>regret to inform</i> you that ...	We <i>are sorry to tell</i> you that ...
We <i>require</i> five further rooms.	We <i>need</i> five more rooms.
We were surprised to <i>learn</i> that ...	We were surprised to <i>hear</i> that ...
We would like to <i>purchase</i> ...	We would like to <i>buy</i> ...
We would like to <i>request</i> ...	We would like to <i>ask for</i> ...
As you will <i>appreciate</i> , ...	As you will <i>understand</i> , ...
We <i>trust</i> this is satisfactory.	We <i>hope</i> this is satisfactory.
We hope this <i>is convenient for</i> you.	We hope this <i>suits</i> you.
If you need any <i>further assistance</i> , ...	If you need any more <i>help</i> , ...
<i>Should</i> you have any <i>further queries</i> , ...	<i>If</i> you have any <i>other questions</i> , ...
We <i>look forward</i> to seeing you.	We <i>are looking forward</i> to seeing you.