

1 Formal or informal?

▲ First, read the information about writing emails then match the informal phrases (1–15) with the neutral/formal phrases (a–o).

Three different writing styles are often identified, 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. The language is impersonal. Grammar and punctuation are important. This style is not common in emails, but you can find it if the subject matter is serious (for example a complaint).

Neutral/Standard 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. Sentences are short and there is use of contractions (*I've* for *I have* etc.). The language is more personal. However, the style is not similar to speech – it is too direct.

Informal This is the most common style for emails between friends. Sometimes the email can be very short or it could include personal news, funny comments etc. This is the style that is closest to speech, so there are everyday words and conversational expressions. The reader will also be more tolerant of bad grammar etc.

Informal

- 1 What do you need? *d*
- 2 Thanks for the email of 12 Feb.
- 3 Sorry, I can't make it.
- 4 I'm sorry to tell you that
- 5 I promise
- 6 Could you ...?
- 7 You haven't
- 8 Don't forget
- 9 I need to
- 10 Shall I ...?
- 11 But ... / Also ... / So
- 12 Please could you
- 13 I'm sorry for
- 14 Re
- 15 See you next week.

Neutral/Formal

- a) With regard to ... (or With reference to)
- b) I can assure you that ...
- c) We note from our records that you have not ...
- d) Please let us know your requirements.
- e) I was wondering if you could ...
- f) We would like to remind you that ...
- g) I look forward to meeting you next week.
- h) Thank you for your email received 12 February.
- i) I am afraid I will not be able to attend.
- j) Would you like me to ...?
- k) I would be grateful if you could ...
- l) Please accept our apologies for ...
- m) It is necessary for me to ...
- n) We regret to advise you that ...
- o) However ... / In addition ... / Therefore ...

Note: with business emails you can mix styles to some extent, but don't mix styles at the two extremes. If in doubt, follow the style of the other person.

B Rewrite the emails below by substituting the phrases in *italics* with more informal phrases. Section A will help you. Use contractions (e.g. *I'll*) where appropriate.

Email 1

I am afraid 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 Anita as well, to inform her that I will not be there. Once again, please accept my apologies for this, and I can assure you that I will be at the next meeting.

Sorry I can't make it on Friday.

Email 2

Thank you for your email of 25 January where you requested assistance on how to order on-line. It is necessary for me to know your a/c number before I can deal with this. I would be grateful if you could also provide details of which version of Windows you are using.

Email 3

With reference to your order number J891 – we received it this morning, but you have not filled in the sections on size and colour. Please let us know your exact requirements. These products are selling very well at the moment, and we regret to advise you that the medium size is temporarily out of stock. However, we are expecting more supplies in the near future. Would you like me to email you when they arrive?

C Match the words of Latin origin in box A with the shorter words in box B.

Box A

1 assistance	6 information	11 repair
2 due to	7 obtain/receive	12 request
3 enquire	8 occupation	13 requirements
4 further	9 possess	14 reserve
5 inform	10 provide	15 verify

Box B

a) ask	f) facts	k) help (n)
b) ask for	g) fix (v)	l) job
c) because of	h) get	m) more
d) book (v)	i) give	n) needs (n)
e) check/prove	j) have	o) tell

1 *k* 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... 5 ... 6 ... 7 ... 8 ... 9 ... 10 ... 11 ... 12 ... 13 ... 14 ... 15

Note: longer words of Latin origin sound more *formal*, and shorter words sound more *informal*.