

Degrees of Formality

An important part of business correspondence is its degree of formality. The degree of formality depends on the purpose of the message and the relationship you have with the reader. For example, a memo reporting the results of a meeting will be more formal than an email inviting someone for a cup of coffee. Similarly, an email to your friend will be less formal than an email to your employer. A note is often written in a very informal style.

Formal language conveys respect, politeness and distance. On the other hand, informal language can convey familiarity and friendliness.

There are a number of ways to convey degrees of formality in writing, including:

- the choice of words, phrases and expressions
- the use of specific grammar structures e.g., the passive voice
- the use of contractions for informal messages

1 | Read the sentences below and discuss what makes them formal or informal.

- a) Should you require additional information regarding this project, please do not hesitate to contact me at 555-123-4567.
 - b) If you need to know more about this project, please give me a call at 555-123-4567.
- a) I was not informed about the change in the schedule.
 - b) Nobody told me about the change in the schedule.
- a) I am not satisfied with the work that was done by your company.
 - b) I'm not happy with the work your company did.

2 | Write more formal synonyms for the words below. Use a dictionary or thesaurus if needed.

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. phone _____ | 6. awesome _____ |
| 2. job _____ | 7. home _____ |
| 3. kids _____ | 8. t.v. _____ |
| 4. ad _____ | 9. fridge _____ |
| 5. mom _____ | 10. smart _____ |

3 Rewrite the sentences below, replacing the words in *italics* with their formal equivalents from the box. Make sure you use the correct form of the verb.

| | | | | |
|----------|-----------|--------|---------|------------|
| review | concerned | angry | ensure | receive |
| purchase | complete | assure | request | would like |

1. I can promise you this will never happen again.
2. We will *make sure* the computer is repaired by one of our technicians.
3. The book I *bought* online was damaged.
4. I *want* you to give me my money back.
5. I hope you *got* the package I sent last week.
6. He’s really *mad* about the service he received at our store.
7. The work will be *finished* by the end of the month.
8. The manager is *worried* that they won’t meet their deadline.
9. Please *go over* the proposal and make any necessary changes.
10. She *asked for* the information a long time ago.

4 Complete the table below using formal or informal words. Write your own sentences using formal words.

| | FORMAL | INFORMAL | YOUR SENTENCE |
|-----|------------|----------|---------------|
| 1. | request | _____ | _____ |
| 2. | ensure | _____ | _____ |
| 3. | _____ | help | _____ |
| 4. | _____ | tell | _____ |
| 5. | concerned | _____ | _____ |
| 6. | prior to | _____ | _____ |
| 7. | fail to do | _____ | _____ |
| 8. | assure | _____ | _____ |
| 9. | _____ | get | _____ |
| 10. | complete | _____ | _____ |

5

Read the sentences below and decide whether or not they use the degree of formality appropriate for the given situation. Revise the sentences if necessary.

1. **a note to a co-worker:** The meeting is at 10 sharp. Don't be late.

2. **a letter to a Member of Parliament:** Thank you for your help in this matter.

3. **an email message to a friend:** I am looking forward to seeing you there :)

4. **a note to a child's teacher:** I would greatly appreciate it if you could inform me when I could meet with you.

5. **an email message to a superior:** I'll let you know about the time of the meeting ASAP.

6. **a manager to her subordinates:** Thanks for your hard work, guys!

7. **a letter accompanying your résumé:** Here is my résumé.

8. **a note to the office cleaner:** I would appreciate it if you could kindly clean under my desk in a timely fashion.
