

Formal and informal writing

A letter means a written communication addressed to a person or an organization. A letter starts with a salutation and ends with the signature of the sender.

There are two types of letters according to the relationship between the sender and the responder – a formal letter and an informal letter.

A typical feature of an informal letter is a close relationship between the sender and the addressee. It can be a letter to a friend, a member of a family or other relatives.

A typical example of a formal letter can be a letter of complaint, a letter of application, enquiry letter or apology letter.

Formal letter

A formal letter is written in a formal and standard language and follows a certain format. Such letters are written for official purposes to authorities, colleagues, seniors, etc and not to personal contacts, friends or family. A number of rules must be followed when writing such letters.

- **Sender's Address:** The sender's address is usually put on the top right-hand corner of the page. The address should be complete and accurate especially in case when the sender wants a further communication
- **Date:** The sender's address is followed by the date just below it, that means on the right side of the page. This is the date on which the letter is written. It is important in formal letters because they are usually placed in files and kept on record. The British way of writing the date is day/ month/ year. The American way of writing the date is month/ day/ year.
- **Receiver's Address:** We leave some space and then we print the receiver's address on the left side of the page. You must write the official title/name/position of the receiver on the first line of the address.
- **Greeting:** This is where you greet the person you are writing the letter to. As it is a formal letter, the greeting must be respectful and not too personal. If you know the name of the receiver, you should use "Dear Mr/ Mrs/ Ms + last name" of the receiver. If you don't know the receiver's name, but you at least know that it is a man, you can use the greeting "Dear Sir". In case of a woman receiver, you can use the greeting "Dear Madam". If you don't know who the receiver is, you should use the greeting "Dear Sir or Madam". It's important not to address the receiver only by their first name.
- **Subject:** After the salutation/greeting you can write the subject of the letter. In the centre of the line write the word 'Subject' and then sum up the purpose of writing the letter in one line. This helps the receiver get familiar with the topic of the letter immediately.

- Body of the letter: This is the main content of the letter. It is divided into paragraphs. The purpose of the letter should be made clear in the first paragraph itself. The tone of the content should be formal. Do not use any flowery language. The letter should be brief but to the point. You must be always respectful no matter the subject of your letter is.
- If you want to get a reply to your formal letter, the best way how to do it is to write the phrase “I am looking forward to hearing from you soon” or “I am looking forward to your reply”.
- Closing the letter: At the end of your letter you must write the closing words. In case you started the letter with the greeting “Dear Mr/ Mrs/ Mr + last name”, you should finish the letter with “Yours sincerely”. In case you started the letter with the greeting “Dear Sir/ Madam”, you should finish it with the closing phrase “Yours faithfully”.
- Signature: Leave some space for your signature and then write your full name in capital letters below your signature so that the recipient would know who is sending the letter.

Types of formal letters:

There are various types of formal letters according to different purposes. The most common ones are:

1. Enquiry letter: You write an enquiry letter when you want to learn more about a product, service or event.
2. Letter of motivation: You usually write such a letter to accompany your CV when you are applying for a job. It states your qualifications and reasons why you are applying for the job position.
3. Order letter: You write such a letter for ordering new goods or services from a company.
4. Acceptance letter: You write acceptance letters to confirm that you accept a job, a resignation or an honour.
5. Letter of complaint: You write a letter of complaint to express your dissatisfaction with goods or services.
6. Apology letter: You write an apology letter to apologise for making a mistake.
7. Letter of approval: You write a letter of approval to express your agreement or consent with something
8. Letter of thanks: You write such a letter to express your thanks
9. Making a claim letter: If you are unhappy with a product or service, you can send a letter to the manufacturer to request a refund.

Rules for writing formal letters:

- We must use formal standard language
- We mustn't use informal or vulgar words
- We try to avoid imperative, phrasal verbs
- We don't use contractions (aren't, don't, I'm, can't...), abbreviations (ASAP, BBQ...)
- We should use the Passive, modal verbs, complex sentences, indirect questions, more formal linking words (however, nevertheless, although, in order that...)
- Don't thank the receiver for his time and for reading your letter

Informal letter

Informal letters are written to close friends, family, relatives, etc. As they are written to close relations the letters have an informal and personal tone. When writing an informal letter, casual and colloquial language is used. Such letters can also have an emotional undertone.

Informal letters are mainly used for personal communication and that's why they don't have to follow any specific rules. They can be written according to the writer's wish and depending on the situation.

Format of Informal Letter: There is no set format when writing an informal letter. But there is a general pattern that people usually follow.

- Address: We usually write the address of the writer on the left-hand side of the page at the very top. The address should be accurate and complete. If the recipient of the letter is in another country, we must write the country in the address as well.
- Date: Right below the address we write the date.
- Greeting: The greeting can be informal because we know the recipient well. If it is a friend or someone close to our age, we can greet them by their first name "Dear + first name". If we are writing to our relative like our mother/father/aunt/uncle and so on, we can greet them for example, "Dear Mom".
- Introduction Paragraph: The introductory paragraph sets the tone for the whole letter. We can start by asking the recipient about their well being (How are you?, How's it going?). Or we can say that we hope they are fine, we can apologize for not writing for a long time or we can thank them for their letter.
- Body of the Letter: The letter should have a friendly tone but we have to adjust the words and language to the person we are writing to. When writing to a friend, we can afford to be very casual, but when writing to an elder relative we should be respectful and considerate. Even when writing an informal letter, we still need to divide the text into paragraphs.
- Conclusion: Here we should sum up the reason for writing the letter. We shouldn't forget to invite the recipient to write back or answer to the letter because it shows our intention to keep the conversation going on.
- Signature: There are no strict rules how to sign an informal letter, but the most common phrases used in informal letters are:
 - Love
 - Lots of love
 - Bye
 - See you soon
 - Best wishes
 - Best regards
 - Kind regards

After one of these phrases we just sign our name below.

Rules for writing informal letter:

- We use personal tone of communication
- We use informal language, colloquial language, phrasal verbs, modal verbs, imperative
- We use contractions (aren't, isn't, don't...) and abbreviations (ASAP, BBQ...) if the recipient is familiar with them
- We don't use the Passive so much
- We use shorter sentences than in formal letters, direct and indirect questions

Other types of texts

- An Article:
- A Descriptive Essay, Characteristics
- A Narrative

- **An Article**

We write an article to interact with our readers so it must be written with respect to the target audience. Articles are published in newspapers, magazines, journals, etc. They should attract and keep the reader's attention.

Articles can be formal or informal, it depends on the audience. An article usually contains the opinions and thoughts of the writer, they should be supported by facts and evidence. An article can describe events, people, places, experiences...

Articles contain an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Articles should have a title that attracts their readers. In the introduction there should be explained why the author decided to choose this particular topic, there should be at least a short introduction to the topic. But it is important not to write a lengthy and boring introduction because the article could lose its readers.

The main body should contain 2 to 5 paragraphs, which further discuss the topic and explain the idea. Articles must be written with respect to the audience, it means that there would be certain differences between an article for younger kids and an article meant for doctors or scientists. The ending is also very important. There we should summarize all the ideas presented in the article and also leave some space for readers' thinking. An article can end with a question that can provoke readers' reactions.

- **A descriptive Essay, Characteristics**

An essay where we try to describe a person, place, event or a thing should be really vivid. This means that when a reader reads such an essay, they should have a feeling that they know the described person, they can imagine how the person feels, they can identify with the described person or they can imagine being at the described place. It is really important to use a lot of descriptive adjectives and comparison.

A descriptive essay or characteristics should have an attractive headline to get a reader's attention. The introduction of a descriptive essay should be interesting and should be about creating a background for the person, place or thing we are planning to describe in the essay. The main body should contain several paragraphs. The paragraphs should be logically planned without jumping from one topic to another. The conclusion should summarize the whole essay.

- **A Narrative**

A narrative must have a suitable heading to attract the reader. The text itself must be divided into paragraphs. In the introduction there we should set the scene. In the next paragraph there must be a plot, which should be interesting for readers. A good narrative should contain a plot twist or several plot twists, gradation, culmination and a conclusion. In a narrative there we should use direct speech, descriptive adjectives, we can address the reader by asking questions (for example “You won’t believe it!”, “You can’t imagine it...”).

Emails and printed letters

Writing letters is not as frequent as it used to be because it takes much time to write them (when you write them by hand) and you need to buy an envelope and a stamp to send them. Sometimes you need to send them special delivery, airmail or as a registered letter and it costs quite a lot of money. Sometimes your letter can be lost or delivered to a wrong address. These might be the reasons why people like writing emails more because it’s faster and you don’t need to go to the post office or look for a postbox to send them. On the other hand formal letters are still quite frequent as they are used for formal communication between the sender and an organization, institution or a manager. Emails are also used for formal purposes but usually within the organization or institution. It will be nonsense to send printed letters to own employees when the manager wants to inform them about something or when he or she wants the employees to do something.

Writing letters is more personal than writing a message or an email. On the other hand writing messages and emails is better if you want to share or arrange something immediately and you don’t have time to wait for the reply for a long time.