

Writing a formal E-mail

In the information age, email has become the necessary form of communication. Being able to write a polished and professional email is now an important skill both in college and in workplace. Below are some of the key features of formal and informal email writing, as well as some guidelines to follow when drafting a formal email to a superior (professor, current or prospective employer, etc.) or someone who does not have an idea about you.

Informal vs. Formal

Informal:

- Written to friends and family
- Accuracy and grammar (spelling and punctuation) are not important
- You can make up your own rules

Example:

Hi,

I miss you so much! Can't wait to see you on Friday!! We haven't hung out in so long! I miss my bestie! Maybe we can go to the movies or dinner or just chill and watch TV and catch up...idc, whichever you want.

Love ya,

Sweetie.

Formal:

- Written to a professor, colleague, Manager, boss, etc.
- Must always be professional
- Accurate grammar, punctuation, and spelling necessary

Example:

Dear Professor John,

I was unable to attend class today due to a doctor's appointment. When you have a moment, could please let me know what I missed and what homework I need to have completed for Friday?

Thank you,

Julia Smith

Email Format:

Salutation:

The salutation of a formal email is similar to that of a salutation in a letter. When writing to someone you do not know by name, you put “To Whom it May Concern.” When applying for a job, you would address the person by, “Dear Hiring Manager.” If you do know the recipient’s name, you put “Dear Mr./Ms. Smith.” For a formal salutation, you should not use the recipient’s first name or the informal greetings “Hello” or “Hey.”

Body Paragraphs:

It is important to remember that an email needs to be concise. The first sentence, known as the opening sentence, can be a greeting if the situation allows it.

- I hope all is well with you.
- Thank you for your prompt response.

However, for most formal emails it is best to get straight to the point. Depending on the subject, you should have a maximum of four paragraphs and each paragraph should contain a single point. It is also important to provide questions in order to prompt a response. At the end of your last paragraph you should provide a “thank you” or “call to action” depending on the subject of your email.

- Thank you for your assistance with...
- Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing back from you.
- Please feel free to call or email me if you have any questions.
- I would appreciate it if this could be taken care of promptly.

Closing:

Like the salutation, the closing of a formal email can be the same as the closing to a letter.

However, unlike the salutation, there are more options for a closing.

- Thank you
- Best regards
- Sincerely
- Yours

The closing is then followed by your full name. It is also beneficial to add your job position (if applicable) and phone number under your name in the 4th paragraph.

Example:

Sincerely,
Agarwal
Student Body President
R.C.Shukla College

Tips:

- Do NOT use contractions.
 - For example: don’t, haven’t, I’m, isn’t.

- Do NOT write in all capital letters.
- Use formal vocabulary and sentence structure. Do NOT use slang.
 - For more help on this topic please refer to the module Diction & Style: <http://www.menlo.edu/uploads/academics/DICTIONSTYLE.pdf>
- Proofread the email at least twice and get a second opinion if possible.

Exercises:

Formal vs. Informal

State whether the sentence would be classified as either formal or informal. If informal, change it to formal.

Example:

Hi y'all!

informal; To Whom it May Concern:

1.) I am pleased to inform you that you have won our grand prize.

2.) I hope all is well with your new career choice.

3.) I shouldn't have gone and missed with it!!

4.) I can't help you with that cuz it's too hard.

5.) Hi, how are you?

Putting It All Together: Find and correct the errors in the following emails:

Hello Professor Bhagwan,

I'm sorry to tell you but im sick and will not be able to come to class. See ya Wednesday.

Harinder

Dear Shanta Sinha,

I read online that you're selling business cards. I was wondering how much if i only wanted 500? Is color and a logo extra? Can I see an example before all are shipped or will that cost extra? You seem to have a great business so I hope you can help.

Thanks,

Roop Sim