

APSS – Online classes

Activity 5

Description

Materials	Workbook. Module 3. 3.1 Levels of formality
Learning objectives	Becoming aware of the importance of levels of formality
Method and objectives	Answer Key / self- correcting + submission
Assessment	Self- assessment and teacher's assessment

To-do

- Read the notes in the workbook.
- Do Exercise 1, Exercise 2, Exercise 3 and Exercise 4 about levels of formality (p. 49-50).
 - You'll find the audio files for this in the materials attached to a previous post.
 - The talk is in OralEnglishTechnical2A (minute 22:28)
 - and the conversation is in OralEnglishTechnical2B (minute 00:01).
 - These exercises are self-correcting (I'll post the key).
- Complete the table on p 51.
 - The key is in the PowerPoint file attached to this post (Levels of formality2).
- Submit the work for the Practice task (p.51). What would you say in these situations?

Information - levels of formality

[to-do item] Read the notes in the workbook

In English, as well as in many other languages, there are some expressions, within one function, that you can use at any time. It doesn't matter who you are talking to, or when, or where. These are called *neutral* expressions. 'Thank you', for instance, is one of many neutral expressions in English. It can be used whenever you want to thank anyone. But there are some expressions especially suitable at certain times, and rather unsuitable at others. For example, you probably don't greet your employer in the same way as you greet your best friend. You are most likely to use *formal language* to greet someone in authority, and *informal language* to greet someone you know well.

In order to communicate efficiently, you need to decide whether to use formal or informal language according to what situation you are in. That determines what kind of language you use. Remember that most technical communication (academic, professional) is likely to require neutral or formal registers.

Situation	Language
Formal	Formal
Informal	Informal
Neither very informal nor very formal	Neutral

When deciding how formal or informal a situation is, you must consider the following factors:

- A. **the setting** (where you are and when)
- B. **the topic** (what you are talking about)
- C. **your social relationship** (who you are talking to: e.g. a friend, a stranger, an employer, etc.).
- D. **your psychological attitude** (what you feel about the topic or the other person).

Remember that it is not right to take just one factor into account. The level of formality depends on all four factors.

Exercises

[to-do item] Do Exercise 1, Exercise 2, Exercise 3 and Exercise 4 about levels of formality (p. 49-50).

Exercise 1

Listen to a lecturer describing to new students the ways in which computers can be useful to them. Fill in the table below, which shows how different people need different software.

	Social science	History	Engineering	Computer science	Languages	Business Studies	General Sciences
Programming				x			x
Word processing				x	x		
Database		x				x	
Spreadsheet		x		x		x	
DTP	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Statistics	x			x			
Financial software				x		x	
CAD			x	x			
Simulations				x		x	
Operating systems				x			

Exercise 2

Although very friendly, the tutor's spoken English is quite formal because of the academic content of his talk and his intention to be clear and unambiguous. Can you list some of the features of this formal style?

- It usually is formal in tone and impersonal in style.
- It avoids contractions or shortened forms of verbs, such as won't, doesn't or it's.
- It avoids using a linking word such as 'and' or 'but' at the beginning of a sentence
- It uses the passive form of verbs often.
- It tends to employ a cautious way of explaining findings, using expressions such as 'may', 'it is possible that...', 'could'.
- It may use specialised vocabulary.

Exercise 3

Now you are going to listen to two conversations between two students.

- At the library: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABEcliFXkp8>
- Freshman and senior students
 - In what ways do you think the spoken English you are about to hear might differ from that of the previous listening exercise?
 - Now listen and list some of the features of the style used in this conversation.

This English will be less formal than the former exercise. Specially case (a, since they don't need to use any formalism to each other as in case b. They use contractions.

They may say things that can be confusing or ambiguous to someone who is not in the same line of thought they are. For example, in the first audio the girl used GM to refer to genetic modification, but the guy thought she was referring to General Motors.

Their speech is more personal and direct.

Exercise 4

Can you provide some examples?

- a different form of 'yes' and "no"
 - informal: Yeah, sure, no problem, okay.
 - formal: Yes, of course, I would be glad/happy to, absolutely, certainly.
- bad grammar
 - sentence fragment: Because I ate dinner.
 - confusing words: Since your going out, you should check the weather on you're phone.
 - contractions: Rock n' roll
- a way of asking for information when you have absolutely no idea?
 - formal: May I ask for your guidance in this regard?
 - informal: Could you help me, please? I don't think I can make it alone.
- other elements of informal style
 - slang: Bae, lit, busted, low key, savage.

Table

[to-do item] Complete the table on p 51.

	Informal	Neutral	Formal
Asking for permission	Can I...?	Do you mind if...?	With your permission I'd like to...
Requesting	You haven't got ... have you?	Could I borrow...?	It would be a pleasure if you could lend me...
Complaining	I don't like...	I have a complaint about...	May you help me with this?
Introducing someone	He's/She's...	His/Her name is...	Let me introduce...
Asking for someone's opinion	What about...?	What is your opinion regarding... ?	May I know your opinion about....?
Saying you are not sure	I don't know.	I'm not sure.	As far as I know...

Submission

[to-do item] Submit the work for the Practice task (p.51). What would you say in these situations?

What would you say in these situations?

a) At a managerial meeting, it is suggested that Mr French, who works under you, should be promoted to chief sales executive. You approve.

What do you say? I would choose option 2 or 3. I think they are both valid in this situation.

1. Great!
2. That suggestion has my full support.
3. I can thoroughly recommend Mr French for the position.

What else could you say? I think it would be a very good idea to go ahead with this suggestion.

b) At a meeting of an international association, the member organizations are asked to increase their financial support in order to solve the association's financial problems. One of the delegates does not approve:

Delegate: I'm dead against that idea. There must be other ways of working this thing out.

Is this appropriate? I think that, given the situation, it is not the correct way to be expressed. The delegate speaks neutrally, I would even say informal. In the given context a formal language has to be used.

If not, what is appropriate? My opinion is that this is not the most optimal idea to solve this problem. I propose to look for other more effective ways to make it work correctly.

c) You are a junior executive in a large company which has announced pay increases for its employees. You ask various people for their opinion on the increases.

What do you ask each one?

- a friend who shares your office
 - What about the increases?
- a colleague you don't know very well
 - What is your opinion regarding the increases?
- the head of another department of the company
 - May I know your opinion about the increases?
- your secretary
 - Tell me your opinion about the increases.

d) You are attending a scientific conference on energy, and talking to another delegate.

What would you say? I would choose option 1, since it is clear and unambiguous.

1. I'm convinced that solar power will eventually solve many of our present energy problems.
2. I'm of the opinion that solar power will eventually solve many of our present energy problems.
3. If you ask me, solar power will eventually solve many of our present energy problems.

What else could you say? I truly believe that solar energy will eventually solve many of our current energy problems.

e) At an executive meeting someone has a proposal to make. What would s/he say?

With the recent increase in staff, we should do something about improving recreating facilities. ...

1. *Would you agree with that suggestion?*
2. *OK by you?*
3. *I wonder if you would agree with that suggestion.*

I think the best option to choose here is the third, since the degree of formality required in an executive meeting is high. On the other hand, it would still be acceptable to use the first option, even if it is not as formal, as the context may change greatly depending on the company.

f) You are in a seminar with a number of people whom you have not met before. One of them states that the standard of living has risen considerable in the past forty years. Is anyone saying anything inappropriate?

Participant A: *That may be so, but is the distribution of wealth as it should be?*

Participant B: *OK, but it's risen a lot more for some than for others.*

Participant C: *Could be, but I still think there's too much profit in too few hands.*

Although the people who attend the seminar do not know each other, the level of formality is not so low as to be inappropriate in the context. Still, if we had to choose one of the participants' responses as inappropriate, we would say it is the Participant B's.

g) Your board is considering the installation of automated processes for some of the production lines in your factory. Not everyone is in favour:

A: *Well, personally, I think that these processes have yet to prove themselves.*

You disagree.

What would you say? *Clearly, we would say the third options.*

1. *I don't see why. ...*
2. *You can't mean that!...*
3. *I see things rather differently myself. ...It's quite clear that they are efficient and highly cost-effective in the long run.*

What else could you say?

I am afraid I cannot agree with you. It is quite clear that they are efficient and highly profitable in the long term.