

Writing a Formal Email

In the information age, email has become the dominant form of communication. Being able to write a polished, professional email is now a critical skill both in college and the workplace. Below are some key distinctions between formal and informal writing, as well as some guidelines to follow when composing a formal email to a superior (professor, current or prospective employer, etc.) or someone who does not know 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 Anne,

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,

Jules

Formal:

- Written to a professor, colleague, boss, etc.
- Must always be professional

- Accurate grammar, punctuation, and spelling necessary

Example:

Dear Professor Johnson,

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 the salutation of 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,
Julia Smith
Student Body President
Menlo College
(555) 555-5555

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/DICTION__STYLE.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:

1.)

Hello Professor Smith,

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

Jason

2.)

Dear Sally Blue,

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,

Jess Higgins

3.)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a graduate from menlo college. I got a degree in business and would now like to use it. Your company looks interesting. Can I come in for an interview? I have alot of experience from my schooling and extra cirriculers. I think I can help the company alot. Please respond to my email to let me know.

Thanks,
Max Oates

Answers:

Formal vs. Informal

- 1.) Formal
- 2.) Formal
- 3.) Informal; I should not have changed it.
- 4.) Informal; I apologize but I am unable to help you with your problem because it is extremely difficult.
- 5.) Informal; Dear Mr. Smith, How are you?

Putting It All Together (*answers may vary*)

1.)

Dear Professor Smith,

I am sorry to inform you, but I will not be able to attend class today because I am ill. Would it be possible for you to let me know what I have missed? Thank you for your help and I will see you in class on Wednesday.

Sincerely,
Jason Jones

This is just one of the many ways to write about this particular topic. However, make sure to use formal language, no “see ya.” Also, eliminate all contractions. If possible, try to ask a question. For this particular topic it is good to show your professor that you are truly sorry for missing class and want to know what you are missing.

2.)

Dear Ms. Blue,

I was searching online for a company that makes business cards. I came across your website and am extremely impressed. However, I do have a few questions. If I were to order only 500 instead of the advertised 1000 business cards, how much would that cost? Furthermore, I would like my business card to be colored and also include the logo of my company. Are those requests possible, and if so, how much extra will they be? Due to my request for color and a logo I would like to preview the card before receiving all 500. Is that feasible? I appreciate your assistance and look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Jessica Higgins

Managing Partner of First Financial Assistance

(555) 555-5555

This example was not as poorly written as number 1. However, it can still be written better. For the salutation you do not want to use the person's first-name unless you are friends. Attempt to use more formal language and sentence structure. For this specific topic, praise and understanding is important. Since this topic revolved around a person working for a specific company, they needed to expand on their signature.

3.)

Dear Hiring Manager,

My name is Max Oates. I recently graduated in May from Menlo College with a Bachelor of Science in Business Management and a concentration in Marketing. I was recommended to contact you concerning job opportunities from my advisor Dr. Nancy Drew. I believe that I would be an excellent candidate for a job.

I have taken many courses to prepare me for a job in marketing. These courses include Principles of Marketing, Marketing Research, Strategic Marketing Management, Consumer Behavior, and Internet Marketing. I have also recently interned at Google as an Internet Marketing Researcher. Through my many marketing classes and internship, I have learned to be a strong team member that values time management and communication.

I believe that I can be a valued asset to your company. My phone number and alternative email are listed below. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Max Oates

maxoates@gmail.com

555-555-5555

When it comes to emailing a hiring manager for a job, there is a specific outline that you should follow. Make sure to include your name and any experiences that relate to the job you are applying for. Also add any special skills you may have. Remember that you are trying to promote yourself as a good candidate for the job. You should be polite and use formal language and sentence structure. Do not forget to add additional contact information.

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