

Formal vs Informal English

Collected and annotated by Sara Meitner

Formal English: Used in business and scientific circles when conducting official meetings, giving formal presentations, writing essays, summaries, covering letters for job applications, letters and official e-mails. Please take special note of the fact that abbreviations (can't for cannot, won't for will not) are NOT to be used in formal letters. All words should be written in their complete forms.

Informal English: Used in business and scientific circles as agreed with co-workers at specified levels; commonly used with peers, friends, relatives and children.

Following are terms saying the same thing using formal and informal English.

Please note: In some cases there are spelling differences for the same word according to whether the typical use is of British (seen on the left) or American (seen on the right) use. The "American" use is also the worldwide use of a word, because of American hardware and software companies (Apple, Microsoft, IBM, etc.) dominating the scene at the beginning – or "dawn" of personal computers.

In the EU, British forms are usually used, as British English is the standard form of English in the EU (although the AE or "world" spelling is okay as an alternative). If there are any specific uses of words that are more British or American, I use (BE) for British and (AE) from American. In English-speaking Commonwealth countries (the countries united under the King – or Queen – of England), such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, a mixture of both BE and AE styles are used, although the spelling is usually BE. AND they say "zed" for the letter "Z", while the Americans say "zee" (pronounced like the German "Sie"). ***In class, British English and styles/forms for letters, dates and such are used and as such, they and FORMAL language are THE required usage for marks/grades.***

Additional note: I have also included a separate list of "informal to formal" words. Now, there's a good chance you will notice there are discrepancies in the two lists (they are NOT exactly the same).

I have used this list to show you a representation of what the two forms look like. Eventually, I might have the time to make sure they are an exact duplication of each other...but for now, these two lists are what we've got.

Verbs

Formal

accumulate
allow, permit
annoy, bother, irritate

apologise, apologize
appear
arrive
ascertain, discover
authorise, authorize

bother, irritate, annoy

call, telephone with
cause
commence
consider
contact
decrease
delay, postpone
demonstrate, illustrate
discover, ascertain
establish

Informal

rack up
let
get on someone's nerves
say sorry
seem
show up
find out
give the go ahead, greenlight
get on someone's nerves
ring up
bring about
start, begin
think about
get in touch with
go down
put off
show
find out
set up

Formal

examine
explode
fabricate
give someone a call
handle
illustrate, demonstrate
increase
indicate
inform, substitute
irritate, annoy, bother

It concerns/regards

It is in regard to

obtain
omit
oppose
permit, allow
portray
postpone, delay
purchase
release
represent
required
retain

Informal

look at
blow up
make up
ring up
deal with
show
go up
point out
fill in
get on someone's nerves
It's about
It's about
get
leave out
go against
let
show
put off
buy
free
stand for
need to
keep

Formal vs Informal English

substitute, inform	fill in
Formal	Informal
tolerate	put up with
undermine	block

Formal	Informal
many (for countable)	lots / a lot of
much (for non-countable)	lots / a lot of

TRANSITIONS

Formal	Informal
acceptable	All right
acceptable	Okay, OK
as soon as possible	ASAP
at your earliest convenience	ASAP
Finally,	In the end,
Furthermore/Moreover	Plus/Also
However	But
In addition/Additionally	Also
In conclusion,	To sum up
In my opinion	I think
In order to	So that
In the interim	In the meantime
Moreover/Furthermore	Plus/Also
Nevertheless	Anyways
Notwithstanding	Anyway,
Therefore/Thus	So
To summarize,	In a nutshell / Basically

Emphasis Words

Formal	Informal
completely, strongly	totally
definitely	really, very
large quantities of, a number of	tons of / heaps of

ABBREVIATIONS

Note from Sara: There are MANY e-mail and text abbreviations in general use these days. Just remember that in formal language, complete words are used. The abbreviations are used in informal situations. I have only included a few examples.

Formal	Informal
as soon as possible	ASAP
cell phone (AE)	cell (AE)
for your information	FYI
Internet	net
mobile phone	mobile
photograph	photo
television	TV

SLANG

Formal	Informal
children	kids
considerable	really big
correct	right
incorrect	wrong
inexpensive	cheap
intelligent	smart
loaded	rich
negative	bad
positive	good

Letter Expressions

Formal	Informal
Dear Sir or Madam (BE)	Dear (title of a position): Dear Sales Manager
	OR to the company: Dear Dräger AG
I am writing to inform you...	Just wanted to let you know...
Yours sincerely, Yours faithfully	Yours,
I look forward to hearing from you.	Hope to hear from you soon.
Please do not hesitate to contact me.	You can call me if you need anything.