

Writing skills: informal vs. Formal writing – some tips

When it comes to writing in English, there are two main styles of writing – formal and informal. Consider these two examples:

Example 1: Formal This is to inform you that your book has been rejected by our publishing company as it was not up to the required standard. In case you would like us to reconsider it, we would suggest that you go over it and make some necessary changes.	Example 2: Informal You know that book I wrote? Well, the publishing company rejected it. They thought it was awful. But hey, I did the best I could, and I think it was great. I'm not gonna redo it the way they said I should.
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The difference between the two is obvious. The first one is formal, and the second is informal. But what is it that makes them formal and informal?

It is the style of writing, or the way we use words to say what we want to say. Different situations call for different ways of putting words together. The way we write in academic and scientific settings differs greatly from the way we write to a friend or close one. The tone, vocabulary, and syntax, all change as the occasion changes. This difference in the styles of writing is the difference between formality and informality, or the difference between formal and informal writing.

Here's a list of some of the main differences between informal and formal writing:

Style: Informal	Style: Formal
May use colloquial words/expressions (<i>kids, guy, awesome, a lot</i> , etc.).	Avoid using colloquial words/expressions (substitute with <i>children, man/boy, wonderful, many</i> , etc.)
May use contractions (<i>can't, won't, shouldn't</i> , etc.).	Avoid contractions (write out full words – <i>cannot, will not, should not</i> , etc.).
May use first, second, or third person.	Write in third person (except in business letters where first person may be used).
May use clichés (<i>loads of, conspicuous by absence</i> , etc.)	Avoid clichés (use <i>many, was absent</i> , etc.)
May address readers using second person pronouns (<i>you, your</i> , etc)	Avoid addressing readers using second person pronouns (use <i>one, one's, the reader, the reader's</i> , etc.)
May use abbreviated words (<i>photo, TV</i> , etc)	Avoid using abbreviated words (use full versions – like <i>photograph, television</i> , etc.)
May use imperative voice (e.g. <i>Remember....</i>)	Avoid imperative voice (use <i>Please refer to....</i>)
May use active voice (e.g. <i>We have noticed that....</i>)	Use passive voice (e.g. <i>It has been noticed that....</i>)
May use short and simple sentences.	Longer and more complex sentences are preferred (short simple sentences reflects poorly on the writer)
Difficulty of subject may be acknowledged and empathy shown to the reader.	State your points confidently and offer your argument firm support.

These are just some of the differences between formal and informal writing. The main thing to remember is that both are correct, it is just a matter of tone and setting. Formal English is used mainly in academic writing and business communications, whereas Informal English is casual and is appropriate when communicating with friends and other close ones. Choose the style of writing keeping in mind what you are writing and to whom. But whichever style you write in – formal or informal – be sure to keep it consistent, do not mix the two.

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