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What is formal writing style

See also: Writing in Plain English Writing style is how a writer expresses themselves. It includes spelling, grammar and punctuation, as well as aspects like sentence length and word choice. Style may vary with the type or purpose of writing. For example, you may come across academic writing, journalistic writing and business writing, all of which have different purposes and characteristics. Style may also vary with period (age) and nationality. However, all styles of writing can be described as either formal or informal. This page covers the key aspects of formal and informal writing styles, to enable you to distinguish between the two, and use them appropriately. Understanding Formal and Informal Styles What do we mean by 'formal' and 'informal'? Some definitions (formal, adj. stiffly polite rather than relaxed and friendly; said of language: strictly correct with regard to grammar, style and choice of words, as distinct from conversational informal, adj. without ceremony or formality; relaxed and friendly; said of language, clothes, etc: suitable for and used in relaxed, everyday situations. Source: Chambers 21st Century Dictionary, online edition. Informal language and writing, then, is suitable for use every day. It is, effectively, how we speak and write to our friends and families. It will include slang and colloquialisms (defined as phrases that are used in informal but not formal language). The recipient may tolerate some spelling and grammar mistakes. We are therefore likely to use an informal writing style when composing emails and letters to friends and family. Blogs and other online copy are also often written in a more informal, conversational style. Formal writing needs much more care. It is the style of writing used for business and other official purposes. It needs to be correct in terms of grammar, spelling, punctuation and usage. A more formal style may also be appropriate for some letters, for example, if you are making a complaint to an organisation. You may find our page on Writing Styles helpful. This is part of our study skills section, and summarises the main styles of writing that a student may encounter during their studies. When you look at a piece of writing, it is possible to distinguish whether it is written in a formal or informal style from several different aspects. The main characteristics of an informal writing style are: Colloquial language and terms. Informal writing is similar to a spoken conversation. It may therefore include slang, figures of speech, broken syntax, or asides. A personal tone as if you were speaking directly to your audience (readers). Informal writing is often very conversational in style. The writer often uses the first person (I and we), and will also address the reader directly using the second person (you and your). A simple structure and approach. As in conversation, both sentences and paragraphs tend to be shorter in informal writing. This is especially true in writing for the internet. Writers may also use incomplete sentences or ellipses (...) to make points. Contractions and abbreviations within the text. Just as in speech, words may be shortened or abbreviated in informal writing. You will therefore see contractions (for example, I'm, doesn't, couldn't, it's) and abbreviations (e.g. TV, photos) used much more in this form of writing. Empathy and emotion. In informal writing, a writer will often show more empathy towards the reader. They may, for example, explain a more complex thought more clearly. This is linked to the more personal style in informal writing, which is more suited to conveying emotions. The main characteristics of a formal writing style are: A more complex structure. Formal writing often uses longer sentences. However, this is changing slightly with a growing understanding that clarity is important. In formal writing, you will also see a more structured approach generally, with points clearly introduced, explained and concluded. Formal pieces of writing are often carefully planned, revised and reviewed several times to ensure that they are as clear as possible, and make all the necessary points. Complex should not mean incomprehensible Some people equate formal writing with the use of longer words and complex sentence structures. It is true that formal writing can be like that. However, this is neither essential nor desirable. Any writing needs to convey your point to the reader as clearly as possible. Using simpler language and sentence structures is usually a better way to do this. Long words do not make you sound cleverer, especially if you use them incorrectly. See our page on Using Plain English for more about this. An objective approach. In formal writing, the writer uses a more objective approach. Main points are usually stated and then supported with arguments. Formal writing is less likely to be emotional in style. It therefore avoids emotive punctuation such as exclamation points or ellipsis, unless they are being cited from another source. Use of full words rather than contractions. As a general rule, no contractions should be used to simplify words in formal writing. Abbreviations should generally be spelled out in full when first used. There are a few exceptions to this rule, for example, when the acronym is better known than the full name (BBC, ITV or NATO for example) or where it has become part of the language (for example, AIDS). Writing in the third person. Formal writing is not a personal writing style. The writer often aims to sound dispassionate about the topic. It is usually not appropriate to use the first person (I or we) or second person (you). However, there are some exceptions to this (see box). First or third person in academic writing? In academic writing, it was traditional to use the third person and the passive voice. For example: "The authors are not aware of any other studies that have used this approach." "The reagents were added together carefully to avoid any cross-contamination." However, this type of language is quite hard to read. Many academic journals therefore now encourage the use of the active voice, and the first person, but within a style that is considered formal. Examples of this use of language are: "As far as we are aware, no other studies have used this method." "In total, we enrolled 65 people onto the study over a period of six months. They completed the initial questionnaire during April 2021." When to Use Formal and Informal Writing A formal writing style is not necessarily "better" or "worse" than an informal approach. There is a time and a place for both. They have very different purposes. You should therefore take care to choose the most appropriate style to use. There are several factors that may affect your choice. Two of the key factors dictating the choice of a formal or informal writing style are your audience and your medium. You may therefore find it helpful to read our pages Know your Audience and Know Your Medium. In general, writing for professional or work purposes is likely to require a formal style. However, you may be able to use a more informal style if you are writing to someone you know in person. Emails also tend to use a less formal style than paper-based communications. However, this is changing slightly as more organisations use emails for all communications. You should therefore avoid the use of "text talk" or too much informality. There is more about this in our page on Good Email Etiquette. Remember... If in doubt as to how formal your writing should be, it is usually better to err on the side of caution. Almost nobody is offended by too much formality. However, it is certainly possible to offend by being too informal in your approach. Score: 0% Rank: Correct Answer: A key part of clear communication is considering your audience. How well you know them, and how casual it's appropriate to be with them, will affect every word from your salutation to your sign-off, so let's unpack the difference between formal and informal language. Deciding how formal your writing needs to be is a bit like choosing an outfit. You need to know whether you're headed to a backyard barbecue or a red carpet gala. A poor choice will make you stick out, and not in a pleasing way. We'll start with some definitions and examples of formal vs. informal writing style, then elaborate on where each can serve you best. Hey, so what's informal language? Informal language is how you communicate with people you know well and can relax around. It tends to resemble the way people converse out loud more than formal writing does, and it may feature more contractions ("they're" instead of "they are") as well as slang, abbreviations, and expressions of emotion—even exclamations! As an example, you might use informal language when sending a quick invitation to some friends: Hey fam, we're hosting a brunch thing at our place this Sunday morning say 10:30-ish. Hope you can make it! xo That said, just because they're your friends doesn't mean you'll never write to them formally. For instance, if you're working on an invitation fancy enough to consider employing a calligrapher and the word "fête," chances are you'll want a more formal greeting than "hey y'all." Very well. In contrast, please define formal language. You might think of formal language as the snappy blazer to informal writing's t-shirt. It's more serious, and features more buttoned-up construction, longer words, and little to no slang. A professional might use it to write a cover letter, business proposal, white paper, or legal brief. Formal writing tends to use abbreviations only after first spelling out what they stand for. And where exclamations are fine in informal settings, they're frowned upon for formal writing. The same goes for the first and second person—notably, pronouns like "I" and "you." Here's an example in which the formal version writes around the word "I" by using the passive voice: Informal: I asked the mayor about earthquake preparedness, and he said we haven't done enough to be ready. Formal: When asked about earthquake preparedness, Mayor Kim said the city has more work to do. Formal language sometimes gets panned for being full of stilted, winding sentences, but there's no rule saying it always has to be mind-meltingly bland or as opaque as a Terms of Service agreement. Examples abound of it being memorable and funny. That's true even on the level of Supreme Court opinions, like this one by Ruth Bader Ginsburg: Notwithstanding nightmarish images of out-of-control flatware, livestock run amok, and colliding tubas disturbing the peace and quiet of Tecumseh, the great majority of students the School District seeks to test in truth are engaged in activities that are not safety sensitive to an unusual degree. Formal, yes, but a snoozer, that sentence ain't. So how do I tell which style is appropriate? Deciding when to use formal language and when it's better to write informally goes back to the question of who your audience is. For example, if you're writing to a prospective client, you want to seem professional, so your writing might err on the side of formality. You don't want your casual manner to give the impression that you wouldn't take the work seriously, after all. Similarly, where in professional settings you're generally expected to keep your emotions in check, formal writing usually favors objectivity, keeping the writer's feelings at a remove. If you're reaching out to someone you don't know well and aren't sure what level of formality to aim for, it's often easier to start out formal. As the correspondence progresses, you might reassess and ease your style accordingly. By contrast, if you start out too casually, only to realize you're giving the wrong impression and have to correct course, things could feel mighty awkward. Then again, being overly formal in a context clearly better suited to informal writing can look ridiculous. Imagine organizing a weekend float trip and flexing your formidable formal stylings this way: Dear friends, As a longtime aficionado of float trips, it pleases me to suggest this upcoming Saturday, the 18th, for a worry-free afternoon on the storied Inconsiderate Goose River. Please advise me as to your availability and inclination to carpool. Yours faithfully, Todd Dang, Todd, did you also attach a SWOT analysis of potential snacks? Dial it back, my guy. It's okay to relax sometimes. Need more guidance on the difference between formal and informal writing? Use Grammarly's tone detector when you write your next email.

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