

Formal letters and emails

Although less common than before electronic communication became available, letters are still important for formal matters, or when an email address is unknown. They are also considered to be more reliable than emails.

However, due to its convenience email is increasingly used for semi-formal as well as informal communication. It is widely seen as a way of having a permanent record of an arrangement or discussion.

1 Letters

You have applied for a place on an MSc course at a British university. Read the letter on p. 250 you have received in reply.

■ **Label the following features of formal letters with the letters (a-l) from the left margin.**

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (d) Date | <input type="checkbox"/> Address of recipient |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ending | <input type="checkbox"/> Address of sender |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Request for response | <input type="checkbox"/> Reason for writing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greeting | <input type="checkbox"/> Sender's reference |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Further details | <input type="checkbox"/> Signature |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Subject headline | <input type="checkbox"/> Writer's name and job title |

- (a) Central Admissions Office
Wye House
Park Campus
University of Mercia
Borchester BR3 5HT
United Kingdom
- (b) Ms P Tan
54 Sydney Road
Rowborough RB1 6FD
- (c) Ref: MB/373
- (d) 3 May 2010
- (e) Dear Ms Tan,
- (f) **Application for MSc Sustainable Building Technology**
- (g) Further to your recent application, I would like to invite you to the university for an informal interview on Tuesday 21st May at 11 am. You will be able to meet the course supervisor, Dr Schmidt, and look round the School of the Built Environment.
- (h) A map of the campus and instructions for finding the university are enclosed.
- (i) Please let me know if you will be able to attend on the date given.
- (j) Yours sincerely,
- (k) *M. Bramble*
- (l) Mick Bramble
Administrative Assistant
Central Admissions Office

Enc.

Note the following points:



- (a) The example above is addressed to a known individual and the ending is 'Yours sincerely'. However, when writing to somebody whose name you do not know, e.g. The Manager, use *Dear Sir* and *Yours faithfully*.
- (b) A formal letter generally uses the family name in the greeting (*Dear Ms Tan*). Certain organisations may, however, use a first name with a family name or even a first name alone (*Dear Jane Tan*, *Dear Jane*).
- (c) If the sender includes a reference it is helpful to quote it in your reply.

2 Practice A

■ Write a reply to Mr Bramble making the following points:

- (a) You will attend the interview on the date given.
- (b) You would like to have the interview one hour later, due to train times.

54 Sydney Road
Rowborough RB1 6FD

3 Emails

Starting and finishing

The following forms are acceptable ways to begin an email if you know the recipient:

Hi Sophie, Dear Sophie, Hello Sophie

If you have not met the recipient it may be safer to use:

Dear Sophie Gratton, Dear Ms Gratton, Dear Dr Gratton

If you need to send an email to a large group (e.g. colleagues) you may use:

Hi everyone, Hello all

In all cases to close the message you can use:

Regards, Best wishes, Best regards

You may also add a standard formula before this:

Look forward to meeting next week/ Let me know if you need further information.

The main text

Here you can use common contractions (I've, don't) and idiomatic language, but the normal rules for punctuation should be followed to avoid confusion. Spelling mistakes are just as likely to cause misunderstanding in emails as elsewhere. Always check for spelling and grammar problems before pressing the 'send' key. Note that emails tend to be short, although longer documents may be added as attachments.

4 Practice B

- Read the following and decide who the sender and recipient might be. Would Rachel expect a reply?

Hello Dr Hoffman,

I'm afraid I can't attend your Accounting Methods class this week, as I have to go for a job interview then. However, I will be there next Tuesday, when I am giving my paper (attached, as requested).

See you then,

Rachel

5 Practice C

- Write suitable emails for the following situations:

- You are writing to Mark, a colleague at work, to ask him to suggest a time to meet you tomorrow.
- Write to your teacher, Tricia James, to ask her to recommend another book for your current essay.
- Write to a group of classmates asking them how they want to celebrate the end of the course.
- Write an email in response to the one below. You have never had this book.

According to our records, the copy of *Special Needs in Education* you borrowed from the library on 12 October is now overdue. Your fine is currently £2.15. Please arrange to return this book as soon as possible.

Best wishes,

Tim Carey
Library services