



Seven Differences between Formal and Informal English

September 2023 OPEN Intermediate Workshop



Why learn the difference?

Formal English

Formal English is used for **professional or academic purposes**, so it is less personal. It is more common in writing, but it is spoken in formal situations, such as when addressing superiors or people you don't know. It is used in academic or business writing, interviews, and presentations.

Informal English

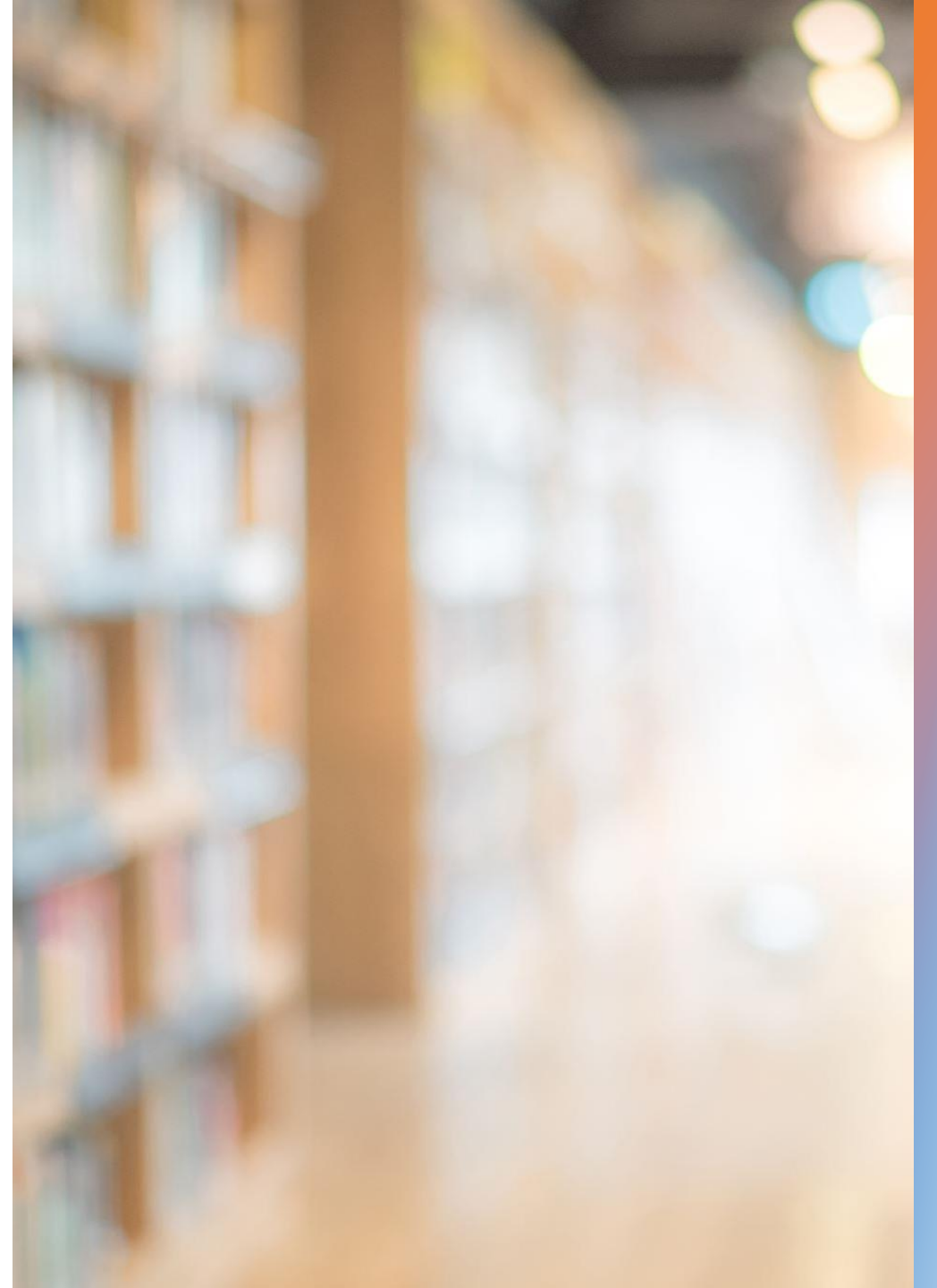
Informal English is used when communicating with **friends, family, or peers**, and is more common in casual conversation. In informal writing, it is used in personal emails, text messages, social media posts, and in some business correspondence.

This workshop

Some learners of English may be unaware whether language is formal or informal. In this workshop, we will look at **seven key differences** between formal and informal English with some examples. Then, you will determine the level of formality of some sentences in a quiz.

Differences between Formal and Informal English

- Sentences & Grammar
- Vocabulary
- Pronouns
- Phrasal verbs
- Idioms
- Slang & Colloquialisms
- Contractions



Sentences and Grammar

In formal English, grammar is **more complex**, and sentences are generally **longer**. In formal writing, the sentences are **complete** with **complex clauses** and **abbreviations** are spelled out in full when first used. **Modal verbs** and the **passive voice** are common, and the **tone** is professional and official.

In informal English, grammar is **simpler**, and sentences are **shorter**. In informal writing, some sentences may be **incomplete**, and words might be **simplified** and **contracted**. The language is **direct**, an **active voice** is used, and the **tone** is personal and friendly.

- Could you please tell me how to get to the restroom? (formal)
- Where's the toilet? (informal)
- The report must be finished by Friday night. (formal)
- I need to finish this report by Friday night. (informal)



Vocabulary

Formal	Informal
assistance	help
commence	start
observe	see
purchase	buy
require	need/want
select	choose

Some words are more formal than others. Formal words are usually longer, have a higher English level, and are often used in academic writing.

Informal words are shorter, easier to understand, and are more common in conversation.

- The meeting will **commence** this afternoon at 2:00 pm. (formal)
- Let's **start** the meeting at 2:00. (informal)
- If you **require** further **assistance**, please **contact** us by email. (formal)
- If you **need** more **help**, please **send** us an email. (informal)

Pronouns

- **First person pronouns** (“I” and “we”) and **second person pronouns** (“you”) are preferred in informal English. Most sentences are expressed in active voice and are more direct with a personal tone.
- **Third person pronouns** (“he”, “she”, and “they”) are preferred in formal English as the style is less personal with a professional tone. Sometimes “we” is used to give a less personal tone in conversation.
 - We regret the unavailability of fresh coffee. (formal)
 - I’m sorry we don’t have any fresh coffee. (informal)
 - The data was analyzed, and the results were significant. (formal)
 - I analyzed the data and got some good results. (informal)





Phrasal Verbs

- A **phrasal verb** is an idiomatic phrase that consists of a verb and an adverb or preposition. Phrasal verbs are more common in informal English.
- I couldn't hear what the new team member said, so I asked him to **speak up**. (speak more loudly)
- I can't **turn down** a task that my boss asked me to do. (refuse)
- I didn't expect to **run into** my friend from college at the job interview. (meet unexpectedly)
- The meeting was **put off** until next Monday. (postpone)

Idioms

An **idiom** is an expression in which you can't easily guess the actual meaning from the words used. Idioms are commonly found in informal conversations.

- Sorry, I'll have to **take a rain check** regarding today's meeting. (politely refuse an offer)
- I want to make sure we're all **on the same page** regarding this project. (have the same understanding)
- It's better to **cut to the chase** and discuss the issue now. (get to the point)
- Sorry I can't come to the party tonight. I'm feeling **under the weather**. (sick)



Slang & Colloquialisms

Colloquialisms and **slang** are words and phrases regarded as **very informal** and rarely used in written speech. They typically vary between groups of people, regions, professions, or age groups.

- **No biggie** if you can't come tomorrow. I'm also free next week. (no big deal)
- I'm absolutely **knackered** after working that long shift yesterday. (exhausted)
- I need to **bail**; the bus is leaving in five minutes. (leave quickly)
- Do you fancy a **cuppa**? (Would you like a cup of tea?)





Contractions

Contractions are common in **informal language**. Usually, they are two words merged together and are characterized by an apostrophe (').

- We **can't** meet the deadline.
- **They're** visiting the site next week.
- We **couldn't** confirm the new process from the results of that experiment.
- **It'll** take a while for team members to adapt to the new system.

Workshop Quiz

Read the two sentences. Decide which sentence is the most formal or informal and explain why.

1. a) Sorry, but the delivery will be late because of bad weather.
 b) We regret to inform you that the delivery will be delayed due to adverse weather conditions.

2. a) We must contact the vendor soon.
 b) We must get in touch with the vendor soon.

3. a) Shall we go and get some grub?
 b) Shall we go and have lunch?

4. a) They're going to do overtime this weekend.
 b) They are going to do overtime this weekend.

Workshop Quiz

5.
 - a) He doesn't always agree with his colleague about the new design.
 - b) He doesn't always see eye to eye with his colleague about the new design.

6.
 - a) A new product will be launched within the next six months.
 - b) We will launch a new product within the next six months.

7.
 - a) They will not tolerate the current situation anymore.
 - b) They won't put up with this situation any longer.

8.
 - a) How's the newbie doing?
 - b) How is the new employee doing?

Workshop Quiz

9. a) I'm sorry for what happened.
 b) I apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused you.
10. a) We need to start preparing our presentation for the seminar.
 b) We need to get the ball rolling on the preparation for our presentation.
11. a) I considered various research methods for the study.
 b) Various research methods were considered for the study.
12. a) Unfortunately, I cannot join you later as I am short of funds.
 b) Sorry, I can't make it tonight as I'm broke.

Workshop Quiz

13. a) I look forward to meeting you next week.
 b) See you next week.

14. a) Let's call it a day and talk more about this in the next meeting.
 b) Let's close the meeting and continue this discussion next week.

15. a) Please dispose of leftover food in the garbage.
 b) Please throw away leftover food in the trash.

16. a) I can help you solve this problem. Please call me.
 b) We can assist in the resolution of this matter. Contact us on our office number.



Thank you!

The English Helpdesk is here to support you!

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- Questions