

Formal and Informal Language

Formal Language

Formal writing is used when we want to be taken seriously or when we want to impress or show respect. It is often used when we are writing to someone important or to someone we don't know.

When writing formally, we need to think about the following:

- Avoid using 'I' or 'you'. This means that it has an impersonal tone.
- Distance is created between the writer and the reader which makes the writing appear more factual.
- Spelling, punctuation and grammar should follow standard English rules and conventions.
- Contractions are not used e.g. use 'should not' rather than 'shouldn't'.
- Vocabulary is often more technical, complex and specialist.
- More complex sentences are used.

Formal writing can be used in the following texts and genres: formal letters, newspapers, instructional texts, textbooks.

Informal Language

Informal writing is used when we want to write to someone we know well and want more of our speaking voice and personality to come through in our writing. It gives our writing more of a chatty feel.

When writing informally, we need to think about the following:

- Contractions can be used (won't, can't)
- Slang words or dialect words can be used – be careful not to overuse these as it is better to use them for effect.
- More informal punctuation marks such as dashes can be used.
- Short, snappy sentences can be used.

Informal writing can be used in the following texts and genres: postcards, text messages, informal letters and emails, comic books, diaries.

Sometimes there can be a little crossover between the level of formality you choose. For example, you know your grandparents and best friend very well but would you use the same level of informality with both?