



## Writing formal letters

You may need to write formal letters (or formal emails) for many different reasons. Think about the types of formal letters you need to write. Your list may include **application letters**, **complaint letters**, **letters to ask for information**, and **letters to place or follow up an order or booking**. You may also need to write letters to **apologise**, to **ask for permission** or to give **advice or instructions**. Are there any other kinds of formal letters you may have to write?

### When writing a formal letter, first ask yourself:

- Who am I writing to?
- Why am I writing?
- What do I need to tell them?
- What do I want them to do?



### Where do I start?

1. Make a list of all the points you need to include in your letter. Always give precise **details**, such as exact names, addresses and dates (for example, the date you bought something, or when and where you saw an advertisement). If you've already been in touch with the individual or organisation, give the dates of any previous letters, phone calls or emails. If you have a reference or account number, always include it in your letter.
2. Put your points in order. Decide on the opening sentence: this should state clearly why you are writing. You should also plan how your letter will end. Do you want to emphasise what you want to happen as a result of your letter?
3. Make a draft of your letter. Decide on the paragraphs you want to use. The first paragraph should probably include your reason for writing. The second or other paragraphs may include a summary of details, or an explanation of your situation. The last paragraph is often used to state what you want or what you would like to happen next.
4. Read through the draft and edit your writing. Do you want to change the order of your points? Is anything missing?
5. Now proofread for grammar, spelling and punctuation.

### What is important?

When writing formal letters, we need to make sure our writing is **relevant**. Formal letters are generally precise and to-the-point, without any unnecessary detail. When writing a formal letter, such as a letter of complaint, it can sometimes be difficult to adopt the right **tone**. The tone of a letter means how it sounds. It's important to be objective and to sound business-like, rather than let our feelings get in the way. A good way to check the tone of a letter is to ask a friend to read it for you and say how they would feel if they received it.

In order to have a **formal style**, you need to think about the **layout** of your letter and the **language** you use. It is very helpful to look at the layout of different kinds of formal letters. You can also build your vocabulary by using a dictionary or thesaurus to make a list of useful words, phrases and sentences you can use in formal letters.