

Formal or informal in e-mails?

First read the information about writing e-mails and then match the informal phrases (1-15) with the neutral formal phrases (a-o).

Three different writing styles are often identified, although in real life the differences are not so clear.

Formal This is the style of an old-fashioned letter. Ideas are presented politely and carefully, and there is extensive use of fixed expressions and long words. The language is impersonal. Grammar and punctuation are important. This style is not common in e-mails, but you can find it if the subject matter is serious (for example a complaint, an apology).

Neutral/ Standard This is the most common style in professional/work e-mails. The writer and reader are both busy, so the language is simple, clear and direct. Sentences are short and there is use of contractions (I've, you'll etc.). The language is more personal. However, the style is not similar to speech - it is too direct.

Informal This is the most common style of e-mails between friends. Sometimes the e-mail can be very short or it could include funny comments, personal news etc. This is the style that is closest to speech, so there are everyday words and conversational expressions. The reader will also be more tolerant of bad grammar etc.

Informal

1. What do you need?
2. Thanks for the email of 12 Feb...
3. Sorry, I can't make it
4. I'm sorry to tell you that
5. I promise
6. Could you?
7. You haven't
8. Don't forget
9. I need to.....
10. Should I?
11. But.../ also.../ so....
12. Please could you
13. I'm sorry for
14. Re.
15. See you next week.

Formal

- d) Please let us know your requirements.
- h) Thank you for your email received 12 February.
- i) I am afraid I will not be able to attend.
- n) We regret to advise you that
- b) I can assure you that
- e) I was wondering if you could
- c) We note from our records that you have not...
- f) We would like to remind you that
- l) It is necessary for me to
- j) Would you like me to?
- o) However... / In addition... / Therefore...
- k) I would be grateful if you could
- m) Please accept our apologies for
- a) With regard to.....
- g) I look forward to meeting you next week...

N.B. with business e-mails you can mix your styles to some extent, but don't mix styles at two extremes. If in doubt, imitate the style of the other person.