

B Formal and informal

One of the most important areas to master in terms of register is the difference between formal and informal English. Of course, there are many degrees of formality, and most written English (including newspapers, magazines and novels) is situated somewhere between the two extremes.

Here is a list of some of the most characteristic features that differentiate formal and informal English, followed by some preliminary exercises. Many further exercises to practise the use of different registers, and particularly to distinguish between formal and informal usage, occur throughout the rest of the book.

Formal	Informal
Words of Latin / French origin Single-word verbs	Words of Anglo-Saxon origin Phrasal verbs, idioms with <i>get</i>
Formal connecting words	Informal connecting words
Impersonal constructions <i>it is said that</i> <i>the price has been increased</i> <i>one never knows</i>	Active constructions <i>they say that</i> <i>they've put the price up</i> <i>you never know</i>
Abstract nouns <i>Is happiness possible during unemployment?</i> <i>After clarification of the problem areas . . .</i>	Modal verbs, adjectives, clauses, etc. <i>Can people be happy when they haven't got a job?</i> <i>When the bits everyone was getting wrong had been explained . . .</i>
Not ending with preposition; use of <i>whom</i> <i>To whom were you speaking?</i>	Ending with preposition <i>Who were you speaking to?</i>
Complex sentences Use of inversion for conditionals and emphasis <i>Should you require further information, please contact . . .</i>	Simple sentences Inversion sometimes used for emphasis <i>Only then did I realize . . .</i>
No contractions in writing <i>I will, we would</i>	Contractions in writing <i>I'll, we'd</i>

1.0 Vocabulary

A Origin

Why are some English words considered to be more polite or refined, whereas others which mean the same thing are thought rude or vulgar?

English vocabulary comprises words taken from many languages, particularly Anglo-Saxon, French and Latin. In 1066 the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of Britain were conquered by the French-speaking Normans. As French was the language of the ruling classes (and Latin the language of education), words derived from French or Latin have been considered more formal than those derived from the language of the Anglo-Saxons.

The table below compares relatively formal words of Latin / French origin with their less formal alternatives, many of Anglo-Saxon origin. It is an illustration of a general tendency, not a conversion table: the choice of vocabulary always depends on the context. Supply the missing words.

Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal
<i>Verbs</i>		<i>Nouns</i>	
to depart	to go	carnivore	meat-eater
to retain	_____	putrefaction	_____
to cease	_____	deficiency	_____
to function	_____	vision	_____
to masticate*	_____	residence	_____
to demonstrate	_____	respiration	_____
to reside	_____	somnambulist	_____
_____	to seem	comprehension	_____
_____	to shorten	perspiration	_____
_____	to end	<i>Adjectives</i>	
_____	to help	incorrect	wrong
_____	to begin	amiable	_____
_____	to want	vacant	_____
_____	to get	insane	_____
_____	to free	inexpensive	_____
_____	to eat	_____	lively
<i>Adverbials</i>		_____	better
subsequently	next / later	_____	childish
principally	_____	_____	enough
_____	so	_____	whole
_____	at first	_____	older
_____	in the end		

*Bodily functions are an area where the difference of formality is particularly marked.

B Phrasal verbs and single-word verbs

Killing a parrot (a true story)

a Mr Lamprey and Mr Pear are neighbours. Mr Pear and his wife keep parrots. The noise made by the parrots has finally made Mr Lamprey so angry that he has broken down the fence between their two gardens and strangled one of the parrots. You are the lawyer defending Mr Lamprey, who is being sued by Mr Pear for the damage done to his property. The following is how your client describes the events to you.

This has been going on for three years, ever since the Pears *came along* and brought their infernal parrots into the neighbourhood. The noise of the birds *got on my nerves* from the very start **so** I did use to complain a bit. I **finally** *gave up hope of getting* used to it when in the middle of the night, I heard someone calling out my name. It was a trick he'd put one of his parrots up to, just to *wind me up!* In the morning I had it out with him, **but** he had the cheek to say that the bird wasn't saying my name at all, **and** it wasn't his fault if the bird's love call sounded a bit like "Herbert".

'I didn't know what to do. I *talked it over* with my mates at work, who suggested I *get in touch with* the City Council **and** maybe *put in* a formal complaint. **So** I rang them up **and** they *put me through* to the Social Services. The woman there said she'd come and *check out* the parrots the next week, **but** she never *turned up*. **So** we *fixed up* another time, **and** she stood me up again. They kept on *putting it off* till one day, out of the blue, a bloke *showed up*. He left after five minutes, saying he'd *pass the matter on* to the Environmental Health Department.'

Now you are speaking in court, before a judge and jury. Note that your account appears more concise and less emotive than your client's. Fill the blanks by replacing the phrasal verbs and phrases with *get* in the original (*in italics*) with a single-word verb selected from the list below. Put the verb into the appropriate tense.

- | | | | |
|---------|----------|----------|-------------|
| lodge | irritate | despair | arrive |
| contact | refer | postpone | visit |
| become | discuss | provoke | investigate |
| connect | arrange | come | |

'Ever since the Pears (1) _____ in the neighbourhood three years ago my client, Mr Lamprey, has been (2) _____ by the birds. He finally (3) _____ of (4) _____ accustomed to the noise the night that one of the birds started to call out his name. Mr Pear would appear to have taught the bird to say the name "Herbert" with the sole intention of (5) _____ my client.

'Having (6) _____ the problem with his colleagues, my client (7) _____ the City Council with a view to

(8) _____ a complaint. The switchboard (9) _____ him to the Social Services Department, where a woman promised to (10) _____ the matter the following week. The woman never (11) _____. Another time was (12) _____, but again the woman failed to appear. In fact, this initial visit was continually (13) _____ until six months later, when a council officer finally (14) _____. After a brief inspection, the officer said he would (15) _____ the case to the Environmental Health Department.'

b Now, reverse the process. The rest of the story is in your words. Read it, then complete Mr Lamprey's more informal version by filling each gap with a phrasal verb selected from the list below, or with a phrase with *get*.

'The prospect of another six months waiting *angered* my client. He told the council officer he was no longer prepared to *tolerate* the situation; **moreover**, he felt it was the Council's job to *restore* peace and quiet to the neighbourhood. **Nevertheless**, in the twelve months that have *elapsed* since the officer came, the Council has *taken no further action*.

'Matters *deteriorated* **recently** when Mr Pear's wife Dolores *entered the quarrel*. My client had previously *enjoyed good relations* with Mrs Pear, **but** *all good will ended* when it *transpired* that Mrs Pear had been phoning the police, *claiming* that the Lampreys had threatened to kill the birds.'

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|----------|
| make out | turn out | fall out |
| go by | bring back | join in |
| get on with | put up with | |

'Well I don't mind telling you that I (1) _____ pretty angry. I told him that if he thought I was going to (2) _____ another six months of being messed about by the City Council and taunted by screaming parrots he had another think coming. I told him it was his job to (3) _____ peace and quiet to the neighbourhood. Well, 12 months have (4) _____ now and the council hasn't (5) _____ anything done about it.

'Recently, things (6) _____ worse when Mrs Pear (7) _____. We used to (8) _____ her OK, but then we (9) _____ when it (10) _____ she was the one that kept phoning the police about us, (11) _____ we had threatened to kill the birds . . .'

c Look back at the connecting words in **bold** in the boxed parts of the story (beginning with 'so I did use to complain'). What is the difference between the connecting words in the formal speech and those in the informal spoken English?

1.1 Grammar

Impersonal constructions

One of the most common register mistakes made by inexperienced writers involves using too personal a manner in a piece of formal writing. A chatty style, characterized by the use of the words *I* and *you*, could be inappropriate and even offensive in a formal letter or a magazine article.

1 Me, myself, I

Everybody likes to talk about themselves, but when (for example) you're reviewing a film, you should be talking about the film and not about yourself.

Rewrite these three passages so that the writers are no longer talking about themselves.

Example

In my opinion, this is a highly amusing film.
This is a highly amusing film.

- I would say that the best place to spend an autumn afternoon in Paris is probably the Jardins de Luxembourg.
- The actress playing his lover is Juliette Binoche, and although I personally don't like her very much I must admit that her performance is very good.
- From my point of view, this guidebook is very helpful. It tells me about many little-known places and, as I'm not the kind of person who likes to be part of a crowd of tourists, I think this is the right guidebook for me.

2 The informal you

The way the word *you* is used in informal speech ('You should have seen it!' 'if you know what I mean') is not appropriate in formal writing. At best it sounds chatty and informal; at worst, disrespectful or even offensive.

The word *you* points a finger at the reader. But the readers are not friends of yours, and you have no right to make assumptions about them. Consider the following sentence from a film review written by a student.

The film is about what happens when you become middle-aged: you comb your hair over the bald patch; . . .

A man reading this will be offended because you accuse him personally. A woman might say you are talking nonsense. What the student meant was:

The film is about what happens to a man when he becomes middle aged: he combs . . .

Who exactly are you referring to?
To yourself?

This book convinces you of the advantages of vegetarianism, and after reading it you never want to eat a dead animal again.

This book convinced me of the advantages of vegetarianism, and after reading it I never wanted to eat a dead animal again.

To a specific person or group of people?

If your house is burgled, you can feel violated.

Victims of a burglary can often feel violated.

Or to people in general?

This film makes you meditate on the meaning of life and reconsider your attitude to religion.

This film makes one meditate on the meaning of life and reconsider one's attitude to religion.

(Use *one* only in formal written English, and don't use it to refer just to yourself.)

Compare Rewrite the following sentences without using the word *you*, (as if you were writing a fairly formal article or review in a newspaper or magazine.) *the ones in the key*

- If you marry now, in the '90s, you only stand half a chance of staying married for a lifetime.
- You easily forget how different life was 50 years ago.
- It's incredible when you hear about how much they spend on the army, especially when you think of all the poor and homeless people.
- The Happy Kitten Beginners Picture Dictionary* is a good way of improving your vocabulary.
- As you read this book, you gradually become less ignorant about what it is like to belong to an ethnic minority that suffers from racial discrimination and abuse.
- The open fire and the dogs roaming around the restaurant will remind you of home.
- This book tells you everything you need to know about banking.
- Focusing on the problems faced by working class people in the States today, this is a film that really makes you think.
- In my home town, you're always seeing violence in the streets, but you soon learn to turn a blind eye.
- In my country there are few jobs for school leavers, but when you're desperate you'll do anything to get ahead.

3 The aggressive you

When the word *you* would sound unnecessarily direct and even aggressive, it can often be avoided by use of the passive.

You didn't send us the cassettes we ordered, and we've paid you for them.

We have not yet received the cassettes, which were ordered and paid for.

Compare Rewrite the following sentences, (replacing the personal construction with a passive) *with the ones in H*

- What I don't like about your club is that you don't offer enough activities for young people.
- You must do something about these problems.
- If you want to keep your customers happy, you shouldn't break the promises you make in your brochure.

1.2 Register transfer

Read the following piece of informal, spoken English in which someone describes a job advertisement to a friend, then use the information in it to complete the numbered gaps in the job advertisement itself. **Use not more than two words for each gap.** The answer to (0) has been given as an example. The words you need **do not** occur in the informal, spoken English. See page 10 for information and advice about this exam task type.

Informal spoken English

'There's an advert here in the paper for a job that might interest you, Maria. A young airline executive wants a Personal Assistant. The money's not bad – £1,300 a month – but the job's only temporary. The person who normally does the job is off for six months, having a baby.

'Actually, the job sounds right up your street. You've only got to know how to use a word processor and be a bit of a linguist: they're asking for good English and at least one other European language. And you mustn't mind working overtime.

The other thing they say is that they want to give the job to somebody who's got "good interpersonal skills". I'm afraid that means being charming, sociable and articulate. (Never mind, I'm sure they'll accept a rude, sulky delinquent if she's good enough at bluffing her way through interviews!) Oh yes, and you've got to be good on the telephone.

If you're interested in the job, you've got to phone to get an application form. The woman you speak to will also be able to tell you more about it. Then you've got to fill out the form and send it off by the end of February, otherwise you'll be too late. Doesn't give us much time to work on your "interpersonal skills", does it?'

Job advertisement in a newspaper

RICHTHOFEN AIR

Personal assistant (based in Manchester)

Fixed term contract

Salary £1,300 per month plus paid overtime.

A young airline executive (0) **requires** a Personal Assistant for six months while the present postholder is on (1) _____.

The successful (2) _____ should have word processing (3) _____, a good (4) _____ of the English language and a keen interest in air travel. Fluency in one or more European languages is highly (5) _____, as is a willingness to work overtime.

The person (6) _____ would also be expected to (7) _____ good interpersonal skills and an excellent telephone (8) _____.

Application forms and (9) _____ information concerning the post are (10) _____ from Sue Murphy (phone 0171 606 9999).

(11) _____ application forms must be returned by February 28th. No applications will be (12) _____ after that date.

B Formal and Informal

1.0 page 14

A

VERBS		NOUNS	
to depart	to go	carnivore	meat-eater
to retain	to keep	putrefaction	rot
to cease	to stop	deficiency	lack
to function	to work	vision	sight
to masticate	to chew	residence	home
to demonstrate	to show	respiration	breathing
to reside	to live	somnambulist	sleep-walker
to appear	to seem	comprehension	understanding
to abbreviate	to shorten	perspiration	sweat
to terminate	to end		
to assist/aid	to help	ADJECTIVES	
commence/initiate	to begin	incorrect	wrong
to desire/require	to want	amiable	friendly
to obtain	to get	vacant	empty
to liberate/release	to free	insane	mad
to consume	to eat	inexpensive	cheap
		vivacious/animated	lively
ADVERBIALS		superior/improved	better
subsequently	next/later	infantile/ juvenile	childish
principally	mostly/mainly	immature/puerile	
consequently/therefore	so	sufficient	enough
initially	at first	entire/complete	whole
ultimately/finally	in the end	senior	older

- B**
- a 1 arrived 2 irritated 3 despaired
 4 becoming 5 provoking 6 discussed
 7 contacted 8 lodging 9 connected
 10 investigate 11 came 12 arranged
 13 postponed 14 visited 15 refer
- b 1 got 2 put up with 3 bring back
 4 gone by 5 got 6 got 7 joined in
 8 get on with 9 fell out 10 turned out
 11 making out
- c Connecting words in informal spoken English are usually one-syllable words such as *and, but, so*, which are used repetitiously. In formal speech the connecting words are more complex.

1.1 page 16

- 1 a The best place to spend an autumn afternoon in Paris is probably the Jardins de Luxembourg.
- b The actress playing his lover is Juliette Binoche, and her (*or whose*) performance is very good.
- c This guidebook is very helpful. It tells about many little-known places, and is the right guidebook for tourists who don't like to be part of the crowd.

A Introduction

At the Advanced level, you should of course aim to write grammatically correct English. But is that enough? For example, it is grammatically correct to write 'Give me a job!', but that is not the way to write a successful job application. In fact, the employer is more likely to forgive a number of grammar or spelling mistakes than to employ an applicant whose letter was too rude or too informal. In the CAE exam, writing is assessed with this in mind: what effect would the piece of writing have on the person who is going to read it?

The ability to use the right *style*, whether you are writing a business letter or a holiday postcard, is one of the skills assessed in Paper 2; it is also examined throughout Paper 3.

But perhaps *style* is not the best word: you do not necessarily have to write stylishly. We could instead speak of *register*: the style appropriate to a particular kind of writing.

- 2 a Those marrying now, in the '90s, only stand half a chance ...
- b One easily forgets ... (or, It is easy to forget ...)
- c It's incredible how much they spend (better, "is spent") on the army, especially in view of all the poor and homeless people.
- d ... is a good way for beginners to improve their vocabulary.
- e As one reads this book, one gradually becomes less ignorant about what it is like to belong to an ethnic minority that suffers from racial discrimination and abuse.
- f ... create a homely atmosphere.
- g This book tells the layman (the ordinary person) everything he needs ...
- h ... made me think / makes one think.
- i In my home town, we're always seeing violence in the streets, but we ... / one is always ... but one learns ...
- j ... when people are desperate, they ... / when one is desperate, one ...
- 3 a ... not enough activities for young people are offered.
- b Something must be done about these problems.
- c Greater customer satisfaction could be achieved if the promises made in the brochure were respected.

1.2 page 17

Job advertisement in a newspaper

- 1 maternity leave 2 candidate / applicant
 3 skills 4 command 5 desirable
 6 appointed 7 have 8 manner 9 further
 10 available 11 Completed
 12 considered / accepted

Style and register

1.3 Writing practice

Nicole Renault works in Public Relations in Lille, where she shares a flat with Jane, an English secretary. Unfortunately, Nicole doesn't seem to understand the difference between a formal letter and a personal note: the result of her confusion may amuse her flatmate, but is likely to offend the important Japanese client.

Rewrite the letter as a note and the note as a letter. When rewriting each, borrow useful phrases from the other.

37 Rue du Vieux Faubourg
59002
Lille
April 4th

Dear Jane,

I write with reference to your phone call of April 1st.

I sincerely regret that I shall be unable to be present at our shared residence at the moment of your return from your vacation: unfortunately, I have previous commitments, namely a luncheon engagement and a dental appointment.

Nevertheless, please allow me to assure you that not only myself but also a number of my colleagues are very much looking forward to obtaining more information concerning your recent travels and, in particular, concerning Adonis. In view of this, might I suggest a meeting at your earliest convenience? We could perhaps meet at 6pm for an apéritif in the Café des Sports, followed by dinner at one of the more inexpensive restaurants in town? I should be very grateful if you would phone to confirm.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Nicole

Mon. 10am

Miss Akiko Kurosawa –

Thanks for the letter. Actually, I've already got something on for Thursday – there's a business lunch, and then I've got to go to the dentist's – so I won't be able to meet you at the airport. But me and the others are dying to get to know you, so perhaps we could get together as soon as possible after you get here? Why don't we come over to your hotel at eight, and take you out for a bite to eat? Give us a ring and say if that's OK.

Nicole Renault

p.p. Jean Émar, Export Manager.