

# Writing a Formal Letter or Email

IGCSE English ■ Topic 4

IGCSE English



## What we will cover

- 1 Spotting a formal task
- 2 A polite tone
- 3 Letter structure
- 4 Sincerely vs faithfully
- 5 Formal language





## Spot the task, keep it polite

- a **formal** task – to someone you do not know
- a **polite** tone – no slang; full forms (“I am”)

Manager, head teacher, organiser –  
write as if they will print it.



*Formal letter: polite structure and clear purpose*

## Letter structure

**Dear Sir/Madam,**

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**Yours faithfully,**

- open: *Dear Sir/Madam,*
- first para: **why** you write
- middle paras: your points
- last para: what you want to **happen next**
- close: *Yours faithfully,*

## Building a formal letter or email

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to ask about ...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I would be grateful if you could ...

Yours faithfully,

B. Chen

first paragraph: say  
**why** you are writing

middle paragraphs:  
**one point** in each

end: what you would  
like to **happen next**

**match the pair:**

Dear Sir or Madam, → Yours **faithfully**,

Dear Mr Lee, → Yours **sincerely**,

The shape of a formal letter - and the greeting decides the sign-off

## Opening and closing

- Open with *Dear Sir/Madam*, or *Dear Mr Lee*,
- If you start with a name, close with *Yours sincerely*,. If you start with *Sir/Madam*, close with *Yours faithfully*,.

## Clear paragraphs

- First paragraph: say why you are writing.
- Middle paragraphs: give your points, one idea in each.
- Last paragraph: say what you would like to happen next.

## Sincerely vs faithfully

**you know the name**

*Dear Mr Lee, → Yours **sincerely**,*

**you do not**

*Dear Sir/Madam,  
→ Yours **faithfully**,*

## Formal language

*I am writing to...*

*I would like to...*

*I would be **grateful** if...*

Keep sentences clear & complete, and check grammar & spelling.

## Keep a polite tone

**informal** - to a friend

**formal** - to someone you do not know

I'm writing ...

I am writing to ...

Guess what!

I would like to tell you ...

Thanks a lot!

I would be grateful if ...

full forms, no  
short forms

no chat, no slang,  
no jokes

polite, respectful  
requests

Turning friendly phrases into formal ones

## Exam tips

- Match the greeting to the ending: Dear Mr Lee → Yours sincerely; Dear Sir or Madam → Yours faithfully.
- Say why you are writing in the first line: “I am writing to apply for...” saves words and sounds formal.
- Do not use short forms: write “I am” and “do not”, never “I’m” or “don’t”.
- One paragraph per point, and end by naming the action you hope for: “I would be grateful if...”.
- Stay polite even in a complaint: “I was disappointed to find...” wins marks; “This is terrible!” loses the tone.

## When to write formally

The second writing task sometimes asks for a **formal** or **semi-formal** letter or email.

## A model formal letter

**Same task, opposite register. Notice what changes.**

*Dear Sir or Madam,*

*I am writing to suggest an improvement to the town library. At present it closes at five o'clock, which is too early for students who finish school at four.*

*If the library opened until seven on two evenings a week, many more students would be able to use it.*

*I would be grateful if you would consider this suggestion.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*Li Wei*

The task names the **format**, the **purpose** and the **reader**: *use all three*. *Yours faithfully* follows *Dear Sir or Madam*; *Yours sincerely* follows a name.



## Worked example – formal phrasing

**Rewrite for a formal complaint: “Your delivery guy was super late and I’m really mad about it.”**

- “guy”, “super”, “really mad” are **informal and emotional**.
- Stay **polite**: anger weakens a complaint, **facts** strengthen it.
- “The delivery arrived over three hours late, causing considerable inconvenience.”
- Then **say what you want**: “I would be grateful if you could refund the charge.”

Formal complaint = **what happened** + **what it cost you** + **what you want done**. Be specific (“three hours”), never emotional – calm is more persuasive.

## Topic 4 – key takeaways

1

### Tone

polite & formal; no slang or short forms

2

### Structure

open, reason, points, request, close

3

### Sign-off

name → sincerely; Sir/Madam → faithfully

4

### Language

formal phrases; clear, checked sentences

## Check yourself

- 1 Should a formal letter use “I’m”?
- 2 How do you close after “Dear Mr Lee,”?
- 3 How do you close after “Dear Sir/Madam,”?
- 4 What goes in the first paragraph?



**Answers** 1. no – use “I am” 2. Yours sincerely 3. Yours faithfully 4. why you are writing