

Exercise walk-through

Formal purpose and audience ■ 4.1

eXercise

You must be able to

- decide when a task requires formal writing
- state your purpose clearly in the opening sentence
- keep a polite, businesslike tone even when complaining

Method — When a task is formal

The reader is acting in a **role**, not as a friend: a manager, a head teacher, a company, a newspaper editor, an official you have never met.

Typical formal purposes:

- **Applying** for a job, a place or a position
- **Complaining** about a product or a service
- **Requesting** information, permission or action
- **Suggesting** a change to someone with the power to make it

Method — Say why you are writing in sentence one

I am writing to apply for the position of volunteer guide advertised in the June newsletter.

I am writing to complain about a jacket purchased from your Riverside branch on 3 May.

A reader who has to reach paragraph three to discover the purpose is already less likely to help you.

Method — Complaining without losing the reader

- State the facts first: what, when, where, and any order or reference number.
- Describe the problem plainly, without exaggeration.
- Say what you want: a refund, a replacement, an apology, an explanation.
- Stay polite. *I would be grateful if* achieves more than *I demand*, and it is what the register requires.

Method — Greeting and sign-off must match

Greeting	Sign-off
Dear Mr Osei / Dear Ms Chen	Yours sincerely
Dear Sir or Madam	Yours faithfully

Practice 2.1 ■ 3 marks

For each task, state whether formal or informal writing is required, and give the reason.

- (a) An email to the local library asking whether they lend musical instruments.
- (b) A message to your cousin about a birthday present.
- (c) A letter to a newspaper about traffic near your school.

Solution 2.1

Method: When a task is formal

Worked steps

(a) Formal — the reader is an organisation acting in an official role **B1**. (b) Informal — the reader is a family member **B1**. (c) Formal — the letter is for publication and addresses an editor and a general readership **B1**.

Practice 2.2 ■ 2 marks

Write an opening sentence for each formal task.

- (a) Requesting permission to use the school hall for a concert.
- (b) Complaining that a delivery arrived two weeks late and damaged.

Solution 2.2

Method: When a task is formal

Worked steps

(a) “I am writing to request permission to use the school hall on the evening of 14 June for a student concert.” **B1** (b) “I am writing to complain about order number 4471, which arrived two weeks after the promised date and in damaged condition.”

B1

Practice 2.3 ■ 2 marks

Rewrite this complaint politely, keeping the same request: "Your delivery service is a joke and I want my money back now."

Solution 2.3

Worked steps

Any polite version keeping the request **B2**, e.g. “I am disappointed with the standard of the delivery service on this occasion, and I would be grateful if you could arrange a full refund.”

Exam-style 3.1 ■ 8 marks

You bought a bicycle online. It arrived with a bent wheel, three weeks after the promised date. Write a letter of complaint to the company. Include what you bought and when, what is wrong, and what you want them to do. Write about 150 words.

Solution 3.1

Worked steps

Content (4): what was bought and when, the delay, the damage, and a clear statement of the remedy sought. Language (4): consistently formal register with no contractions or exclamation marks, matching greeting and sign-off, accurate sentences, clear paragraphing, roughly within the limit.

Exam-style 3.2 ■ 1 mark

Explain why a formal letter that ends “Dear Sir or Madam ... Yours sincerely” would lose a mark.

Solution 3.2

Method: Greeting and sign-off must match

Worked steps

“Yours sincerely” is used only when the recipient is named; “Dear Sir or Madam” requires “Yours faithfully” **B1**.