

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



1

Approach

Spot the task, keep it polite

- a **formal** 正式 task – to someone you do not know
- a **polite** 礼貌 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,

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** 感激 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** 正式 or **semi-formal** 半正式 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** 格式, the **purpose** 目的 and the **reader**: **use all three**. *Yours faithfully* follows *Dear Sir or Madam*; *Yours sincerely* follows a name.

2

Recap

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