

4 Giving news

A Decide whether the following would be used in a more *formal* or more *informal* email.

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| 1 Further to our phone call, I now have the information you requested. | form/inf |
| 2 Thx for your email – great to hear from you again. | form/inf |
| 3 Sorry I haven't been in touch. Really busy with all kinds of stuff. | form/inf |
| 4 With reference to your last email, I am writing to let you know ... | form/inf |

B Rewrite the sentences below with the correct word order, beginning as shown.

- I'm writing our appointment 6 June on Tuesday to confirm.
I'm
- Hey Max. You'll guess never happened what's!
Hey Max. You'll
- You will pleased be to hear that has been successful your application.
You
- Unfortunately, I will make the meeting not be able to on 6 June Tuesday.
Unfortunately,
- We inform you regret to that your application has been not successful.
We
- Just a quick note everything's good for our trip to say that at the weekend.
Just
- Here's the project on an update.
Here's

C Look back at the sentences in section B. Find:

- two written by a friend to another friend. /
- two written by a professional to a client, about a meeting. /
- two written by a human resources manager to a candidate for a job. /
- one written by a professional to a colleague, introducing work information.

D Complete the emails by writing *one* word in each gap. Several answers may be possible.

(1) *Further* to our phone call earlier today, I'm writing to (2) that I am able to
(3) the meeting next Monday as discussed. Looking (4) to seeing you then.

With (5) to your last email, I am writing to (6) you know what's happening
with the project. Everything is fine, but (7) we are a little behind schedule. You can get the
whole story from my report, which I've (8) as a pdf.



E Match the situations (1–6) with the verb forms in *italics* (a–f) below.

- 1 giving news: describing a habit or routine *b*
- 2 giving news: present result of a past action *.....*
- 3 giving news: action in progress at the moment (temporary) *.....*
- 4 giving news: action in progress from the past up to the present *.....*
- 5 background to a story: action in progress in the past *.....*
- 6 event in a story: completed action in the past *.....*

- a) Hi Anna. I'm in Switzerland! *I'm working* as an au pair over the summer.
- b) I have a new job! The hours aren't too bad – I *start* at 9 and *finish* around 5.
- c) Things are going well for me. *I've found* somewhere to live and *I've bought* a car.
- d) You won't believe it! *I was shopping* in the city centre the other day and I saw Helga! She ...
- e) You won't believe it! I was shopping in the city centre the other day and I *saw* Helga! She ...
- f) Do you fancy going out on Friday? *I've been working* real hard all week and I need to relax.

F Read the email. Then choose the best word to fill each gap from a, b, c or d below.

Hi Angela, thanks for your email. I ⁽¹⁾ *d* from you for ages! Was it really a year ago that we ⁽²⁾ *.....* at the English Centre? Do you know, I've already ⁽³⁾ *.....* the name of our teacher! Anyway, I'm pleased to hear that you're still enjoying your job, and that your relationship with Carlos ⁽⁴⁾ *.....* well.

I've been really busy. For the last few months ⁽⁵⁾ *.....* at a wine bar. I start work at six every evening, and ⁽⁶⁾ *.....* until midnight. I'm trying to save some money to go to Thailand, but I haven't got enough ⁽⁷⁾ *.....*.

I'm really enjoying it now, although at first it ⁽⁸⁾ *.....* difficult. It's real crazy – so many people ordering things at the same time.

By the way, I ⁽⁹⁾ *.....* to Manuela on the phone the other day and she ⁽¹⁰⁾ *.....* you might come over here for a visit. Please do come – you know you're always welcome to stay at our house.

Anyway, that's all for now. Are you on Skype? Let's fix a time to chat.

- | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 a) have heard | b) don't hear | c) did hear | d) haven't heard |
| 2 a) have been | b) did be | c) were | d) are |
| 3 a) forget | b) forgot | c) forgotten | d) been forgetting |
| 4 a) is going | b) goes | c) went | d) go |
| 5 a) I work | b) I had worked | c) I worked | d) I've been working |
| 6 a) I don't leave | b) I'm not leaving | c) I haven't left | d) I'm not going to leave |
| 7 a) already | b) still | c) yet | d) soon |
| 8 a) has been | b) had been | c) was | d) is |
| 9 a) talk | b) have talked | c) have been talking | d) was talking |
| 10 a) mentions | b) mentioned | c) has mentioned | d) has been mentioning |



Writing for social media

Formality, tone and politeness

Look at these examples from emails:

1 Can you pick me up from the airport? My stuff weighs a ton. But if you're busy, don't worry – I'll take a taxi. See you Tuesday. Should be fun!

(informal, friendly)

2 Pick me up from the airport please. I have two heavy bags. We will meet on Tuesday as planned. I look forward to it.

(informal, but a little unfriendly)

3 Would it be possible for you to pick me up from the airport? I would really appreciate it. If it's not convenient, don't worry because I can easily take a taxi. I look forward to seeing you on Tuesday.

(formal, friendly, polite)

There are three issues here. One is formality (informal vs formal), another is tone (friendly vs unfriendly) and another is politeness (polite vs rude). These issues are closely connected but not the same. And there are strong cultural factors at play: example 3 above is friendly and polite in some cultures, but too indirect and insincere in others.

How do I write in an appropriate style?

There is no magic answer because it all depends on the speakers and the situation. However we can make some general comments:

Informal, friendly language. This style appears in social media and in emails between friends. It has informal words like *stuff*. It has lots of little words like *actually*, *anyway*, *just* and *really*. It has vague language such as *things like that* or *a couple of* (notice how the precise 'two bags' in #2 above seems

unfriendly). It uses exaggeration: things are *amazing* rather than *good*. It often misses out small words (see page 80). And it typically uses more words than necessary in order to express feelings and build the relationship.

Informal, unfriendly language. This style appears when the writer tries to be simple and direct, but in doing so is emotionally cold. It has commands rather than requests. It is too factual and precise. It lacks extra words that show feelings and enthusiasm. It fails to give choices.

Polite language. Look at example #3 above: *Would it be possible for you to pick me up ...?* instead of *Can you pick me up ...?* The formula at work is:

indirect language + more words = polite

Some people believe that this formula allows you to show respect, for example it allows the reader to save face (it is easier to say 'no'). But politeness is cultural, and other people find that indirect language is confusing and insincere – they think it is better to be simple, clear and direct. It is often said that indirect language is associated with the UK, Southern Europe and Asia, while direct language is associated with the USA and Northern Europe.

Another way to think of polite language is that it is like a letter rather than an email. In other words, it is a little more formal, has more fixed expressions, and shows a generally more careful use of language.

Business emails: situation and content

Many business emails are simple and direct. But the style may change because of the situation. Consider three emails describing a new product: one to your boss, one to a colleague, and one to a client. The relationships are different and so the emails will be

different. Style also depends on the content: an email on a serious matter is likely to be more formal, no matter who the reader is.

Short forms (text message language)

A text message can also be called a 'text' or an SMS. Text message language uses short forms mixed with slang. It is also found in online chat and on some social media platforms. It developed because of the difficulty of typing full words on small mobile phone keyboards.

SMS language can be broken down into these areas:

Words or sounds → letters or numbers

are → r	see you → cu
before → b4	thanks → thx
for → 4	tomorrow → 2moro
great → gr8	you → u
later → l8r	your/you're → ur

Common words → shortened

message → msg	very → v
please → pls	would → wd
regarding → re	your → yr

Expressions → first letters of words

ASAP → as soon as possible
BTW → by the way
FYI → for your information
OTOH → on the other hand
TIA → thanks in advance
BW → best wishes

Other ways to shorten words

There are other ways to shorten words:

- A slash (/) can replace missing letters, so *w/* means *with* and *w/e* means *weekend*
- & means *and*; @ means *at*

In fact, more or less any word or phrase can be

shortened in social media writing if the context makes it clear:

No problem, I'll see you in 30 minutes.

→ No probs, c u 30 mins.

I'll meet Dan at the station on Wednesday.

→ I'll meet D at stn Weds.

I'm going to go back home now – I've got all the information I need.

→ Gonna go bk home. Got all info.

Short forms in context

Short forms like those above are found in text messages, online chat and social media. However they are not very common in emails.

Factors that affect the use of short forms include:

Age. The use of text message language is strongly age-related, with people born after about 1980 using it freely.

Situation. In a business context, use text message language with care. For example, BTW or BW are fine, but LOL ('laughing out loud') would never be used in a business context, despite being very common in social media.

Platform. On Facebook short forms are quite common as the medium is very informal. On LinkedIn very few short forms are found (professional people have to present an 'educated' image to the outside world). On Twitter the messages have a limit of 140 characters, and so you would expect to find many short forms here. However, the great majority of words in Twitter are written in full, and sentences are generally well-formed. It seems that Twitter users prefer the ease of reading a 'proper' full sentence.

Access to a full-sized keyboard. Given a full-sized keyboard, most people reduce their use of short forms. And even in text messages, short forms are becoming rarer due to new text input methods.

