



Writing formal and informal letters

Informal letters

How do you keep in touch with family and friends? Do you write letters, emails, speak on the telephone, send cards, text using a mobile phone, or use a social networking site such as Facebook?

Sometimes we need to communicate a lot of information and a letter or email may be the easiest way to do this. We may write a letter to mark a special occasion or to communicate something that's difficult to say face-to-face: for example, a letter expressing our sympathy when somebody has died, or a letter sending our congratulations on the birth of a new baby. These are personal letters. Personal letters may be short or long but they are usually **chatty and informal**.

Formal letters

Formal letters are letters to people who we don't know on a personal level. We may need to write formal letters or emails for many different reasons. For example, we may write **to find out information**, to **apply for a job** or a course, to **make a complaint**, to **give information** or to **send an apology**.

It can be helpful to look at examples of different kinds of letters that other people have written to get an idea about how to lay out your letter and the kind of language to use.

If you're writing a formal letter, ask yourself:

- Who am I writing to?
- Why am I writing?
- What do I need to tell them?
- What do I want them to do?

When you write a formal letter, it's important to have all the information you need with you, such as **dates, names and addresses**. If you've been given a contact name or a reference number, make sure you use it as this will help the person dealing with your letter. **Keep copies** of formal letters so you have a record of what you've sent, and so you can follow up any letters at a later date.

