

No	Informal/Friendly	Formal
1	want	would like
2	ask	enquire
3	questions	queries
4	buy	purchase
5	give	furnish__with/provide
6	help	assistance
7	start/begin	commence
8	things	items
9	about	regarding
10	going on at the same time	concurrently
11	I'm sorry	I apologize
12	tell	inform
13	can	able to
14	cannot	unable to
15	go for	attend

### Contracted Forms

Formal – Don't use contracted forms, use the entire auxiliary verb: They have lived in New York for many years.

Informal – Use contracted forms: They've lived in New York for many years.

## Relative Structures

Formal – Use relative structures: The woman thought that it was important to be on time.

Informal – Drop certain relative structures: The woman thought it was important to be on time.

## The Use of 'Whom'

Formal – Use 'whom' as an object: Whom have they chosen for the position?

Informal – Use 'who' as an object: Who have they chosen for the position?

## Auxiliary Verb Usage

Formal – Always use the full form of an auxiliary: Have you finished your work?

Informal – Sometimes the auxiliary verb is dropped in informal speech. Note: This is often grammatically incorrect, but is certainly common in everyday usage: Finished your work?

## Word Choice

Formal – Many words tend to be used in more formal situations. For example, certain verbs tend to be used in formal situations, but have other synonyms (often phrasal verbs) that are used in informal situations. Also, it uses more vocabulary derived from French and Latin (bigger words) It uses more synonyms and doesn't repeat the same words as much. The police investigated the situation.

Informal synonym: We looked into the situation.

## Passive structures

Formal – It uses more indirect language, making it less personal. The student was given a book.

Informal synonym: We gave the student a book.

**Anybody, anyone** – "Anyone" and its variants are more formal than "anybody" and its variants.

I didn't see anybody.

I saw no one.

**As** – "As" is often utilized in formal writing to mean "because." Placing a comma before "as" can help prevent ambiguity when it could also be understood to mean "when" or "where."

**Big, large, great** – All three of these words are acceptable in formal English, but "large" is more formal than "big," and "great" is more formal than "large."

**Fellow** – Avoid using "fellow" when you mean "a person." Calling someone a fellow is more formal than calling him or her a dude, but "fellow" is still a colloquialism.

**For sure** – Replace "for sure" with "with certainty" in formal writing, as in "I know with certainty." You might also write, "I am positive" or "I am sure."

**Get** – Avoid all forms of this verb in formal writing.

I got an A in the course.

I received an A in the course.

She didn't get the joke.

She did not understand the joke.

The machine never gets used.

The machine is never used.

**Got** – "Got" is a colloquialism. Replace it with "have," as in "Do you have [not "got"] an extra pen?"

**Introduce, present** – "Present" is more formal than "introduce." It is also more respectful to the person presented.

The queen was introduced. . . .

The queen was presented. . . .

**Kind of, sort of** – "Kind of" and "sort of" are unacceptable in formal writing when used for "somewhat" and "rather." When used to categorize something, "kind of" and "sort of" are acceptable, but "type of" is more formal: "The parakeet is a type of bird." Note that it is informal to include an article after "of": "The parakeet is a type of a bird."

**Let** – When used in place of "allow" or "permit," "let" is a colloquialism.

**Madam, ma'am** – Both "madam" and "ma'am" are very polite forms of address . . . but "ma'am" is unacceptable in formal English. In fact, "ma'am" is much more informal than other contractions such as "I'm" and "I'll," which go unmarked in dictionaries.

**Most** – In formal English, do not use "most" for "almost." You should write, "Almost everyone likes pizza," not "Most everyone likes pizza."

**On the other hand** – "On the other hand" is a very common phrase, but can be considered a cliché and should, therefore, be avoided in extremely formal English. Instead, use "conversely" or "by contrast." "On the other hand" is particularly useful in everyday writing and can eliminate the temptation to start with "but."

**So** – Avoid using "so" as a synonym for "very" in extremely formal writing. In perfectly formal writing, you also should avoid using "so" as a coordinating conjunction. You can eliminate this

colloquialism by deleting "so" and beginning the sentence with "because." Compare "The song may bother me, so I'll cover my ears" and "Because the song may bother me, I shall cover my ears." Sometimes, you need the conjunction "that" after "so," as in "I wrote this how-to so that you could improve your grammar and style."

**Thus, thusly** – Usually, the words ending "-ly" are more formal. For example, "firstly" is more formal than "first." In particular, formal English uses "firstly," "secondly," et cetera to discuss arguments, one by one. This is not the case for "thus," though; in formal writing, use "thus," not "thusly."

**Yours truly** – Ironically, signing a letter "Yours truly" is formal, but referring to yourself as "yours truly" is informal. Still, "Sincerely" is a more formal signature than "Yours truly" because it avoids the second person. "Yours truly" can be very useful in informal English because the proper pronouns sometimes sound wrong. You can say, "It's yours truly!" instead of "It's me!" because "yours truly" can be used for "I" and "me."

### **Examples**

*An informal letter:*

John,

I'm looking for a job, and I've heard through the grapevine that you need a workhorse for your shop. Well, I'm the man of the hour, as I've got a lot to offer. I'm pretty hard-working, and I'm really good about being on time. I'm also used to working by myself. Anyway, tell me whether you want to get together for an interview, okay?

-Informal Joe

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*A formal, professional letter:*

Dear John:

I understand that you are looking for a strong worker to assist you in your shop. I would appreciate consideration because I am diligent, punctual, and accustomed to working with minimal supervision. Please contact me if you are interested in arranging an interview. I thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Professional Joe