

**Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia**  
**Corso di Laurea in Lingue e Culture Moderne**  
**AA 2004-2005**

**“Formal Letter Writing Module**



This handout forms part of the module for English 1 “Formal Letter Writing”.  
Before starting on the tasks and exercises below consider the following:

- the purpose of writing letters
- the organisation of the information contained in the letter
- grammatical accuracy and proper lexis
- register i.e. formal/informal

### **Language Analysis**

Read text A and decide:

1. who it is written by
2. why it was written
3. the register (remember that lexis is very important in register)

### **Text A**

Dear Ms Roberts,

I am writing in reference to your advertisement for summer language courses abroad. I would like to receive more detailed information about the courses you offer. I would be able to attend a course for two or three weeks in June. Could you please send me more information and details of prices?

I would particularly like to know how many students attend the school, and the maximum number of students per class. I would also like to know the resources the school has. Your article mentioned a language library and fully equipped computer rooms. Would it be possible to use these facilities also in the evenings? Could you inform me of the staff? Are they all qualified teachers?

I would be grateful if you could send me more details regarding the social and sports programmes offered. Are the activities included in the price of the course?

Furthermore, I would appreciate your informing me on the amenities near the school.

I look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Black

Now read text B and decide:

1. Who it is written by
2. If the writer makes his point clear
3. The register and type of language used
4. If the writer is rude
5. How the chocolate manufacturers will react to the letter

**Text B**

Dear Madam,

I bought a bar of your “Dark Fantasy Delight” chocolate at my neighbourhood store and it was all mouldy with little white specks in it. Of course the chocolate was on the shelf for too long and it went bad. Anyway, I unwrapped the wrapper and ate a piece, it was absolutely disgusting and made me sick to my stomach and so now I want my money back!

If you don’t give me my money back I think that I’ll go to my lawyer and have him start legal proceedings against you and your chocolate company. Sometimes you manufacturers of chocolate bars think that you can get away with murder!

You’d better send me the money or better yet, you could even send me a year’s supply of decent chocolate.

I want an answer and I want it fast.

Yours,  
Robert Black

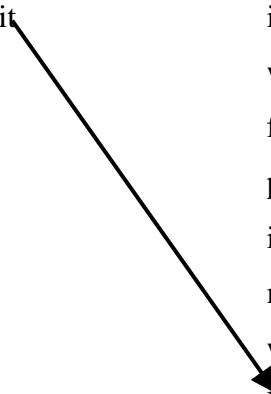
Now you are going to transform text A into an informal piece of writing that says exactly the same but looks quite different. Before attempting the transformation of the text look at the 2 columns below and match each word in column A to its equivalent in column B, then write 1 phrase or sentence for each. There might be more than 1 equivalent. An example has been given.

**A (informal)**

- can’t wait
- about
- tell
- can
- say
- answer
- also
- want

**B (formal)**

- in reference to (st)
- would be able to
- furthermore
- please / would you
- inform (sb)
- mention
- would like
- look forward to
- reply



1. Informal **I can't wait** to receive your answer.  
Formal **I look forward to** receiving your reply.
2. Informal  
Formal
3. Informal  
Formal
4. Informal  
Formal
5. Informal  
Formal
6. Informal  
Formal
7. Informal  
Formal
8. Informal  
Formal

Now re-write text A using informal language. Pay close attention to the areas highlighted in grey.

Formal letters are written for different purposes such as to complain, to request information, to give information, in response to a letter or a fax, to confirm details, to apply for a position, etc. They are letters that are written to people you do not know well or might not know at all so you should use a more formal, polite tone.

Below are some phrases and types of language that you could find in letters. Decide whether the phrase or type of language would be found in a formal or informal letter and put a tick in the proper column.

Phrase or Type of Language	Formal	Informal
"I am sorry to inform you that..."		
phrasal verbs; idioms and slang		
"I am very grateful for..."		
"Why don't we..."		
contracted verb forms		
"Yours faithfully", "Yours sincerely", "Yours", "Best wishes", "Write soon"		
polite phrases		
refers to reason for writing		
"I look forward to receiving your reply".		
"nevertheless," "therefore"		
"but"		
P.S.		
"Everything is OK."		
simple linkers, e.g. then, later, so		
"Get in touch with..."		

### Sentence Stems by Function

Look at the jumbled words below and put them in a logical order so as to make a full sentence. All the phrases deal with formal expressions.

1. as as could goods please possible replace soon the you damaged ?
2. am delighted examination have I inform passed that to you you your
3. about am at college courses enquire I to writing your
4. forward I look receiving reply to your
5. allow apologise for had have me please problems the to you
6. , be complain done forced is director the this to to unless we will
7. a cannot I offer refund regret inform that to we you you
8. a addressed enclosed envelop find please stamped self
9. 16th about enquiring for June letter of thank vacancies you your
10. 16th April letter of reference to with your
11. advertisement in reference the Times to with your
12. about be college could grateful I if information me send would you your
13. complain am to writing I

Indicate the function of each of the above phrases. One has been done as an example.

<b>Opening a letter:</b> -phrase 3: I am writing to enquire about your college
<b>Giving good news:</b>
<b>Giving bad news:</b>
<b>Complaining:</b>
<b>Explaining that something is included in the letter:</b>
<b>Requesting and/or demanding action:</b>
<b>Warning or threatening:</b>
<b>Requesting information:</b>
<b>Requiring a reply:</b>
<b>Apologising:</b>

## Layout of formal letters

Letters are made up of different parts:

### 1. The Greeting

If you know the name of the person you are writing to, begin:

- Dear Mr Jones, (to a man)
- Dear Mrs Jones, (to a married woman)
- Dear Ms Jones, (to a woman)
- Dear Miss Jones (not used much these days)

If you don't know the name of the person you are writing to, begin:

- Dear Sir, (to a man)
- Dear Madam, (to a woman)
- Dear Sir or Madam, (when you don't know which)

### 2. The opening paragraph

This paragraph (1 or 2 sentences) contains a clear statement of your reason for writing. Some typical openings are:

- I am writing in/with reference to.....
- I am writing in response to....
- I am writing to complain about...

### 3. The body of the letter

The body can contain 1-3 paragraphs, very rarely would it contain 4 or more paragraphs. The body contains all relevant information.

### 4. Signalling the end

The final sentence or paragraph often indicates that the letter is going to finish. Some typical sentences are:

- I look forward to receiving your reply
- Thanking you in advance for your consideration
- I look forward to hearing from you
- Please find enclosed a copy of my CV for your perusal

### 5. The closing

This phrase puts an end to the letter. If you know the name of the person you are writing to, end with

- Yours sincerely,

if you don't know the name of the person you are writing to, end with

- Yours faithfully,

### 6. The signature

In a formal letter it is common to print your name under your signature.

## Letters Requesting Information

Letters written to request information must do just that. You write the letter because you want to receive additional detailed information on a certain matter. These letters are always formal. As in all formal letters these should be organised in paragraphs:

- opening para: state why you are writing;
- body (usually not more than 3-4 paragraphs: include all relevant information);
- the last paragraph: signal the end of the letter; this consists in a short sentence;
- closing para: conclude using an appropriate sentence.

You are interested in an adventurous holiday this summer but need more information before deciding. Read this advertisement and the notes you've made.

**Explore Alaska's wildlife for an exciting adventure**

An exciting 15-day wildlife guided hiking and rafting expedition for a small group of people who are

- ▶ interested in what nature has to offer
- ▶ experienced hikers and rafters
- ▶ expert swimmers
- ▶ willing to rough it outdoors
- ▶ fit and in good health

We will be hiking and rafting every day discovering Alaska's splendour and wildlife.

We like our participants to be able to offer a useful skill to the group: know a little about the Inuit language, have first aid knowledge, be acquainted with the wildlife in Alaska, etc.

If there is a place in your mind's eye that can clearly picture the perfect Alaska- and you yearn for it- then come with us to Alaska.

If you think you can be a group member and want more information write to:  
Alaska's Adventures Ltd.  
45 Kenwood road  
Alaska

When? →

Cost? →

How many? →

How Experienced? →

Sleeping in a tent? Eating canned foods? →



Which of the following would you include in your letter? Tick the proper box.

Question	Yes	No	maybe
-dates?			
-medical knowledge necessary?			
-age of members in a group?			
-your experience of long distance hiking and of rafting?			
-the fact that you are a smoker?			
-n° of people in a group?			
-cost?			
- what equipment and clothing to take?			
-personal information (age, sex, etc)			
-the fact that you once went on a wildlife tour in Africa?			
-sleeping and eating arrangements?			
-that you are a language student in Pavia?			
-your weight?			

Now read the 2 sample letters below and decide which is the best letter and say why.

#### Text A

Dear Sir or Madam,

I saw your ad in the newspaper last week while I was at the dentist's. I want to get more information about the guided hiking and rafting tour because I want to see Alaska.

First of all, I want to say that I love nature (I plant and eat my own vegetables) and I learnt to swim when I was 3. I don't mind sleeping outdoors as long as I can sleep on an inflatable mattress. I'm fit and healthy, I work out at the gym twice a week and I weigh 62Kgs and I'm 1M68cm tall. But I do smoke, is that OK?

I'm writing because I really need to know how much the tour costs because I'm a student at university and I don't work so my mother will pay for me. I've done this sort of thing before but I'm not really experienced at rafting. Is that OK? I also want to know how many people are in a group and their age and sex. I'll be 22 next month.

Sorry for all the questions but I need to know these things before I can make up my mind.

Yours faithfully,

Mark Ferguson

#### Text B

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing with reference to the advertisement I saw in "Freedom" recently and would like to receive more detailed information.

I believe I meet all the requirements mentioned in your advertisement; however, I do not have any medical knowledge that goes beyond first aid. I can swim but I'm not very confident swimming in rivers. I am very keen on nature and often go on walking and rafting expeditions both in Italy and abroad.

If I am eligible to be a group member I would appreciate receiving more information about the cost of the wildlife tour and the number of people in a group. Moreover, I would like to know exactly what is meant by "willing to rough it outdoors". Apart from sleeping in tents and eating mostly canned foods, is something else intended? Lastly, I would like to know the exact dates of the tour.

I look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours faithfully,

Mark Ferguson

## Instructions

You are keen to study English in Canada. Read the advertisement on the Rockland School Of English and the notes that you've written. Then write a letter to Ms Peabody at the Rockland School asking for details about the school. The letter should be between 150 and 180 words. Do not write any addresses.



- how many students /class  
-are teachers qualified  
-what resources the school has  
-what's included in the price  
-what amenities the city has

### **Summer language courses in Ottawa at the Rockland School of English**

Our well-equipped school offers English language courses in this beautiful city. The school offers a full day study programme and organises a full range of sporting and social activities as well as excursions.

The Rockland School is conveniently situated for the amenities in Ottawa. Accommodation can be arranged with families carefully selected by the school or directly on campus.

**Contact Ms Peabody for further details**

## Writing plan

- ❖ Mention that you saw the advertisement and that you want to attend a course.
- ❖ Ask for more information and prices
- ❖ Questions:
  - students: how many?
  - staff: qualified teachers (native tongue / bilingual / etc)
  - resources at school: (self access computer rooms / libraries / language laboratory /etc)
  - sports and social programmes (what is offered) + accommodation included in price?
  - amenities in the city (discothèques / cinemas / internet cafés / theatres / etc)
- ❖ End the letter in an appropriate manner

## Layout

- ❖ Start the letter by using an appropriate greeting. Do you know the name of the person you are writing to?
- ❖ Opening paragraph: should give a clear statement of your reason for writing. (you want more details and information regarding the language course)
- ❖ Body of the letter: can contain 1-3 paragraphs. Here you state everything you have to say and ask all questions
- ❖ Signalling the end: use an appropriate phrase. Do you want that person to contact you, to write to you, etc.
- ❖ The closing: use an appropriate ending
- ❖ The signature: write your signature

## Language Notes

Some expressions that can be used when asking for information:

- I would particularly like to know...
- I would be interested in having more details about...
- Could you tell me something about...?
- Does the school organise...?
- I would be (most) grateful if....
- Use formal conjunctions: furthermore / moreover / in order to / therefore / nevertheless

**N.B.** Do not use object pronouns in place of noun phrases

Example of an answer

Dear Ms Peabody,

I am writing in reference to the advertisement I saw about the language courses you offer abroad. I would like to attend a course for the first two weeks in July and need more detailed information.

I would particularly like to know how many students attend the school, and how many students there are in a class. I would also like to know something more specific about the resources the school has. Is there a language laboratory and a library where I could study in the evenings? Do students have free access to internet? Are students permitted to use all the learning facilities available even on weekends?

Moreover, are all the teachers on staff qualified native tongue speakers?

Furthermore, I would like to receive more details of the social and sports programmes you offer. I am keen on football and tennis. Are these activities part of your sports programme? If so, are they included in the price of the course? Could you tell me about the cost of accommodation and what it includes?

Finally, could you tell me what amenities there are near the school? For instance, is there an Internet café and a theatre within walking distance of the school?

I look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely,  
Robert Black

## **Letters Giving Information**

Letters written to give information must do just that. You write the letter because you want to give information for a certain purpose. These letters are always formal.

As in all formal letters these should be organised in paragraphs with the opening one stating why you are writing; the body of the letter includes all the relevant information organised in paragraphs; the last paragraph, which consists in a short sentence, signals the end of the letter. The closing should be an appropriate one.

## **Instructions**

You want to learn how to use the computer and you come across the following article in a magazine:

### **Computer technology at your finger tips**

If you would like to study computer science on a course that has been specially designed to meet your personal needs and interests, then contact the Mr Adams of the Active Learning Computer School giving the following details

- ✿ motivation for studying Computer Science
- ✿ strengths and weaknesses in the field
- ✿ Preferred start date and length of course
- ✿ Hobbies and interests

We will contact you once we have received your details in order to arrange a study programme for you.

Finally a course designed to meet your real needs

Now write a letter to the Active Learning School giving your details.

## **Ideas for writing**

Think about the following to help you get started:

- The specific reason(s) you have for learning computer science (for fun, for an international certification, to improve your job prospects, etc)
- Your strong and weak points –you have to give some detail here so that Mr Adams can create a specific programme for your needs
- When you want to take the course (precise month and day)
- The length of the course (a two week intensive course, a 3 week semi-intensive course, a 1 month summer course, etc)
- The activities you would like to do in your spare time (playing sports, going to concerts, attending language conferences, etc).

- Any other information that might be useful for Mr Adams to know in order to make your programme (e.g. you prefer learning on a one-to-one basis, you prefer small classes, etc).

### **Language Notes**

Some expressions that can be used when giving information:

- I would like to mention...
- I am not interested in...(however)...
- I prefer (learning in)
- I am very keen on....

**Letters of Complaint**

The main purpose of a letter may be to ask for information or to give information; however, another important purpose of a letter may be to complain. Complaining is always a difficult thing to do, even in your own language.

When you write a letter of complaint you also express an attitude or emotion on the subject to the person in question. You must never be rude nor offensive when writing these letters, yet you must clearly state your purpose ( I am writing to complain about...)

**Language Analysis**

Put the phrases below into categories, depending on what emotion or attitude they convey. One has been done for you.

Dissatisfaction	Satisfaction	Annoyance	Desires
		-even though you mentioned	

**I am particularly unhappy about.....**

**I'm sorry (to have) to say....**

**I'm very keen to....**

**Unfortunately...**

**I was delighted to see/hear that...**

**...which was very disappointing.**

**Happily,...**

**Despite my request for...**

**...I should receive some compensation.**

**...is not what I expected.**

**What would suit me best is...**

**... was most impressive.**

**Even though you mentioned...**

Complete the possible sentences below from different letters by adding a phrase from above. More than one combination may work.

1. The way she remembered all our names\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ starting university.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ my accommodation was not at all as mentioned in your brochure.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ we arrived in time to catch the last train.
5. The course \_\_\_\_\_.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ that my timetable was absolutely fantastic.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ accommodation with a host family, I had to sleep on campus.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ a self-access computer room open 24hrs a day.
9. For these reasons I do not feel I received value for money and believe  
\_\_\_\_\_

Last month you went on a language study tour to Canada but you are dissatisfied with your experience. Look at the **STF Study Tour brochure** with your handwritten notes on it. Then write a letter of complaint to the company asking for compensation.

<h1>STF Study Tours</h1>	<p><b>Learn to speak English fluently in four weeks with our carefully designed study tours.</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>regular flights to Montreal</b></li> <li>➤ <b>transport to and from study location</b></li> <li>➤ <b>accommodation with carefully selected families</b></li> <li>➤ <b>full day study programme</b></li> <li>➤ <b>fast learning and effective teaching methodology</b></li> <li>➤ <b>multilingual classes</b></li> <li>➤ <b>weekend excursions</b></li> <li>➤ <b>sports programme</b></li> </ul>	<p>true</p> <p>true</p> <p>stayed with 15 foreign students in cheap guesthouse</p> <p>10 to 2pm!!!</p> <p></p> <p>most students were from my country</p> <p>3 were cancelled</p> <p>football and tennis matches and nothing else!</p>

### Layout

- ❖ Start the letter by using an appropriate greeting.
- ❖ Opening paragraph should give a clear statement of your reason for writing (I am writing to complain about...)
- ❖ Body of the letter: can contain 1-3 paragraphs. Here you describe your complaint item by item in detail. Arrange the information logically. Some useful phrases are:
  - First of all....Secondly.....Thirdly....Finally... (Finally, and worst of all...)
  - In addition ...
  - Apart from the above...
  - Furthermore, I would also like to draw your attention to...
- ❖ Signalling the end: say what action you want to be taken (refund / compensation / etc.)

When you complain, you are probably saying that a product or service does not match up to its description. See the chart below for some words to compare **the claims with the reality**:

description	linker	reality
You mentioned that the course would be intensive	<b>but in fact</b>	it was only 3 hours a day.
I was supposed to stay on campus	<b>whereas</b>	I <b>actually</b> stayed with a British family.



### **Letter of Application**

A letter of application is written to accompany a CV when applying for a job or sent on its own to request an application form for a job. As in all formal letters, a letter of application must follow certain rules if you want to give a good impression.

Study the letter of application below. Why would this letter be unacceptable as a letter of application for a job?

#### **Text A**

Dear Sir,

I saw your ad for a part-time English Teacher which was in a daily newspaper sometime last week and I would like you to give me this job.

I know I can do this job because I speak English very well and I'm attending 1st year university language courses. I taught my friend to speak English, too. This friend of mine is Italian and can now talk English. I think being an English teacher would be great because I like talking to people from other countries, and I like going to the pub down the road with the students to help them improve their English and to get a bit of English culture.

I can come for an interview if you want. I can come any day except Fridays because I always go out to lunch with my football mates on Friday. My CV is in this letter so have a look at it and phone me if you want, anytime after 11pm when I get back home from the pub.

Hope to hear from you soon,  
Mark

P.S. I'm 27.

The letter can be improved upon in many ways:

- By using formal lexis and expressions
- By using proper grammatical constructions and structures
- by giving only pertinent facts
- by organising the information in a coherent manner

Now, rewrite the letter by filling-in the gaps below. You might have to make up some details and you might have to leave some out.

Sir or Madam,

I am writing with reference to the advertisement for the position of \_\_\_\_\_ in a newspaper recently.

I am 27 years of age and have previously worked as a \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ months. I consider myself a very \_\_\_\_\_ person who enjoys \_\_\_\_\_.

In addition I \_\_\_\_\_

I would be able to attend an interview \_\_\_\_\_

Thanking you in advance for your consideration.

Yours \_\_\_\_\_

Mark Ferguson

Look at the letter below and identify the six sections (not including the greeting) that make up this letter of application

Introduction: line(s)  
Personal details: line(s)  
Reason: line(s)  
Extra point: line(s)  
Arrangements: line(s)  
Conclusion: line(s)

Dear Mr Jones,

1 I am writing in response to your advertisement in “The Guardian” of 4th  
2 September for the position of Travel Agent.

3 I am 27 years of age and have recently graduated from The University of Pavia  
4 where I studied languages. Although I have never worked as a travel agent I have  
5 3 years experience as a tour guide and speak English and French fluently. In  
6 addition I have travelled extensively throughout Europe and have lived in the USA  
7 for ten months.

8 I would enjoy the opportunity to work in the tourist industry. I feel that the work  
9 would be both rewarding and challenging. Moreover, I feel that my knowledge of  
10 geography would be useful in this line of work.

11 I would be able to attend an interview at any time that is convenient for you.  
12 Please find enclosed a copy of my CV for your perusal.

Yours sincerely  
Mark Ferguson

The table below shows the most common structures for this type of letter. They have been separated into the six “sections” mentioned previously.

**1. Introduction**  
I am writing in response to...  
I am writing with/in reference to...  
I am writing in reply to...  
e.g. *I am writing with reference to your advertisement in (newspaper) for the position of...*

I would like to apply for the position of...advertised in...  
I am interested in the position of...  
e.g. *I was interested in your advertisement in The Times of 8<sup>th</sup> October and would like to apply for the position of waiter.*

<p><b>2. Personal Details</b>  I am 25 years of age and...  I am a 25-year-old graduate of (subject)  I have been working as a (occupation) for (company / length of time).  I have (x) years experience in .....  In the future I hope to be able to (plans)</p>
<p><b>3. Reason</b>  I would enjoy / appreciate the opportunity to...  I feel that the work would be ...</p>
<p><b>4. Extra Points</b>  I have also...  Furthermore / In addition / Moreover...</p>
<p><b>5. Arrangements</b>  I would be able to attend an interview at any time that is convenient for you.  I would be able to attend an interview at any time except...</p>
<p><b>6. Conclusion</b>  Thank you in advance for your consideration.  I look forward to hearing from you.  Please find enclosed a copy of my CV.  Please find enclosed a copy of my CV for your perusal.</p>

When writing you must be careful about the preposition that follows certain nouns. Fill in the table below with the proper prepositions and continue the sentence. The first one has been done as an example

information +	I would like further information
interested + ( )	I am interested.....
( ) + response + ( )	I am writing..... response.....
( ) + reference + ( )	I am writing..... reference.....
apply + ( ) the position + ( )	I am applying ..... the position.....
years + ( ) age	I am 22 years.....age
work + ( )	I have worked ..... a teacher for 2 years
details + ( )	Please send me further details .....
graduate + ( )	I graduated ..... Economics
graduate + ( )	I graduated ..... The University of Pavia
According + ( )	According..... your advertisement.....

You want to find a temporary job for the summer, and you have seen this advertisement in a newspaper for personal guides.



**Friendly Personal Guides Services**

Are you looking for a summer job right in your own city?

Why not try being a personal guide.

We are looking for young people who:

- are dynamic and have an attractive appearance
- have a good knowledge of the city and of the best places to visit
- can help with transportation, shopping, etc.
- have a good command of the English language

If you feel you have the right qualifications write to Mr Jennings of the Temps Jobs Company (England)

Write a letter of application in response to the advertisement. The letter should be between 120-180 words. Do not put any addresses.