

Positive and negative replies game - Email formal and informal functional language review

Choose one of the functions below and dictate a (whole) email doing that thing, e.g. "Dear Sir or Madam, I'm writing to enquire about..." until "I look forward to hearing from you soon. Yours, (name)" for asking for information. Your partner will flip a coin. If they get heads, they must provide a positive answer, but if they get tails they must give a negative answer and the communication must continue until they get a positive answer (because of flipping heads), flipping the coin to decide the answer each time. Use any level of formality that is suitable, but be consistent with formality, making sure responses are the same level of formality as the original emails. Give specific reasons if you have to say no.

Making arrangements (= suggesting a time and place to meet)

Inviting someone to socialise together

Request

Making enquiries (= Asking for information)

Complaint (demanding some action)

Asking for permission

Asking for feedback on something

Suggesting a change to something

Offering help

Offering a product or service (= sales email)

Checking the progress of something (e.g. if a project is finished)

Giving instructions/ orders/ commands (e.g. a new office rule)

Asking for advice/ recommendations

Do some others, but leaving telephone messages for each other (until the final getting heads and so saying yes stage, at which point you should speak to each on the phone directly).

Do the same as face to face conversations, flipping a coin during the conversation each time you need to answer someone.

What language can you use for the functions above? What about in very formal and informal emails for each function?

Match these sections to seven of the functions on the last page (without looking at the list above if possible).

- Do you mind if I...?/ Do I have your permission to...?/ Might it be possible for me to...?/ Would it be acceptable for me to...?
- Would you be available...?/ ... if that is convenient with you./ I'm afraid I will be meeting my boss at that time.
- Why don't you ... (with me/ us)?/ How about... (with me/ us)?/ Fancy coming to...?/ Writing to see if you wanna come to...
- Please contact me if I can be of any assistance (with...)/ It is our great pleasure to offer you...
- I need some info about.../ Do you know...?/ I'm writing to ask about.../ Can you tell me if...?
- ... wasn't good enough./ ... was terrible./ I want to complain about.../ I am very angry about...
- Would you....?/ I'm afraid I have to ask you to.../ Please ensure that you.../ I'd like to ask you to.../ / Thank you for your cooperation.

To expand on and check your answers, match the seven sections below to the ones above by function.

- Are you free...?/ ... is best for me./ Sorry, gotta meet my boss then.
- Could you possibly inform me whether...?/ I am writing to enquire about.../ I was wondering if you have any information on...
- I need you to.../ Make sure.../ Don't forget to...
- I was not completely satisfied with.../ Unfortunately, ... did not meet the high standards that I expected.
- Is it alright (for me) to...?/ Can I...?/ Am I allowed to...?
- Drop me a line if you want me to lend you a hand (with...)/ Give me a call if you want any help (with...).
- We would like to invite you to.../ Please find enclosed an invitation to.../ It would be our great pleasure if you could attend.../ I am writing in order to invite you to attend...

To further expand on and check your answers, label one of each pair I for informal and the other F for formal. If you can't find one of each in each pair, you've probably matched up the wrong ones.

Check your answers on the next page and ask about you aren't sure of.

Test each other in pairs:

- Read out both formal and informal phrases and see if your partner can identify the function
- Read out either formal or informal phrases from one section and see if your partner can identify the function and level of formality
- Read out either formal or informal phrases from one section and help your partner come up with some phrases with the opposite level of formality
- Read out the name of one function and help your partner come up with both formal and informal phrases

Answer key

1 Asking for permission

Formal: Do you mind if I...?/ Do I have your permission to...?/ Might it be possible for me to...?/ Would it be acceptable for me to...?

Informal: Is it alright (for me) to...?/ Can I...?/ Am I allowed to...?

2 Making arrangements (= suggesting a time and place to meet)

Formal: Would you be available...?/ ... if that is convenient with you./ I'm afraid I will be meeting my boss at that time.

Informal: Are you free...?/ ... is best for me./ Sorry, gotta meet my boss then.

3 Inviting someone to socialise together

Formal: We would like to invite you to.../ Please find enclosed an invitation to.../ It would be our great pleasure if you could attend.../ I am writing in order to invite you to attend...

Informal: Why don't you ... (with me/ us)?/ How about... (with me/ us)?/ Fancy coming to...?/ Writing to see if you wanna come to...

4 Offering help

Formal: Please contact me if I can be of any assistance (with...)/ It is our great pleasure to offer you...

Informal: Drop me a line if you want me to lend you a hand (with...)/ Give me a call if you want any help (with...).

5 Making enquiries/ Asking for information

Formal: Could you possibly inform me whether...?/ I am writing to enquire about.../ I was wondering if you have any information on...

Informal: I need some info about.../ Do you know...?/ I'm writing to ask about.../ Can you tell me if...?

6 Making complaints

Formal: I was not completely satisfied with.../ Unfortunately, ... did not meet the high standards that I expected.

Informal: ... wasn't good enough./ ... was terrible./ I want to complain about.../ I am very angry about...

7 Giving instructions/ orders/ commands (e.g. a new office rule)

Formal: Would you...?/ I'm afraid I have to ask you to.../ Please ensure that you.../ I'd like to ask you to.../ Thank you for your cooperation.

Informal: I need you to.../ Make sure.../ Don't forget to...

Identify the phrases as formal or informal below and try to write a (very) similar one with a different level of formality. They don't have to be exactly the same as those above.

Do I have your permission to...?

Is it alright for me to...?

Can I...?

Are you free...?

I'm afraid I will be meeting my boss at that time.

We would like to invite you to...

I am writing in order to invite you to attend...

Drop me a line if you want me to lend you a hand/ Give me a call if you want any help(...)

Can you tell me if...?

I'm writing to ask about...

Do you know...?

I was not completely satisfied with...

... wasn't good enough./ ... was terrible.

I'm afraid I have to ask you to...

Please ensure that you...

Suggested answers

Do I have your permission to...? – Am I allowed to...?

Would it be acceptable for me to...? – Is it alright for me to...?

Might it be possible for me to...? – Can I...?

Would you be available...? – Are you free...?

I'm afraid I will be meeting my boss at that time. – Sorry, gotta meet my boss then.

We would like to invite you to... - Fancy coming to...?

I am writing in order to invite you to attend... - Writing to see if you wanna come to...

Please contact me if I can be of any assistance (with...). – Drop me a line if you want me to lend you a hand (with...)/ Give me a call if you want any help (with...).

Could you possibly inform me whether...? - Can you tell me if...?

I am writing to enquire about... - I'm writing to ask about...

I was wondering if you have any information on... - Do you know...?

I was not completely satisfied with... - I am very angry about...

Unfortunately, ... did not meet the high standards that I expected. – ... wasn't good enough./ ... was terrible.

I'm afraid I have to ask you to... - I need you to...

Please ensure that you... - Make sure.../ Don't forget to...