

# How to write an informal Letter & Email ? | B2 First (FCE)

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**Informal letters** are sent to people you know well (for example, friends, relatives, etc.) about your recent news, personal problems, the information you need, etc. They are written in an **informal style** with a **personal tone**.

## Informal style

When writing friendly letters, you normally use an **informal style**. Informal writing is characterized by the use of:

- Direct and personal tone **'I think', 'You should'** and direct sentences **'I think it's a good idea'** instead of **'It would be a good idea'**
- Informal vocabulary, **'totally, lots of stuff'** including phrasal verbs (**'go on'** instead of **'continue'**)
- Contractions/short forms **I've** just heard **you've** been to...
- Informal linking words **'Plus, Also, Well, Anyway, To sum up, In a nutshell'**
- Idioms **'Call it a day', 'break the leg', 'It's not rocket science'**
- Colloquial expressions **'I'm most interested'** instead of **'I am really interested'**
- Slang **'loaded, lit, gutted, cheeky, dude, go bananas'**
- Abbreviations **'ASAP, TV, photo, cell, net'**
- Punctuation using **exclamation marks** (don't overuse it)

## Structure

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|                      |
|----------------------|
| <b>1. Salutation</b> |
|----------------------|

Dear...

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>2. The first paragraph (opening)</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Begin by asking some personal questions or making some personal comments</p>                                                                                                                            |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>3. The next paragraphs (main content)</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Say why you are writing. If you need to change agreements or turn someone down, give reasons. Give the reasons that you have been told to give. Add some more details of your own if you like.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>4. Closing and signing off</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Give a reason why you're ending the letter.<br/>Send greetings and/or make references for future contact. Sign off with your name.</p>                                                                        |

## Writing Guide

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### 1. Salutation

Start with **Dear** followed by the first name of the person to whom you are writing. In emails, you can also start with **Hi** (and the person's name). **Dear Ben**, or **Hi Ben**, (Don't forget to use only the first name of the person you are writing to and not Dear Mr John, which is never used, or Dear Mr John Brown, which sounds too formal.)

### 2. The first paragraph (opening)

When writing an informal letter, you are usually replying to another letter. You would normally **start with a greeting, then acknowledge the letter to which you are replying**. It is often a good idea to acknowledge some key information given in the original letter too.

#### Example opening phrases

- *How are you? / How have the family been? / I hope you are well.*
- *Thank you / Many thanks for your (recent/last) letter/postcard.*
- *It was good /nice/great to hear from you again.*

#### Other useful phrases

- *I'm really sorry that I forgot to send you a birthday card but I was busy with my new job*
- *Thank you for asking/inviting me to ... but I'm afraid I won't be able to...*
- *I'm writing to ask for your help / you (if you could do me) a favour.*
- *I hope you don't mind me asking but could you (possibly)...*

### 3. The next paragraphs (main content)

Say why you are writing. If you need to change agreements or turn someone down, give reasons. Give the information that you have been told to give. Add some more details of your own if you like.

#### 4. Closing and signing off

The end of your letter is as important as the beginning. There are some standard ways of finishing an informal letter or email.

- **Give a reason why you're ending the letter:**  
*Anyway, I must go and get on with my work. / I guess it's time I got on with that studying I've been avoiding.*
- **Send greetings and/or make reference for future contact:**  
*Give my love / regards to... / Say hello to... / Anyway, don't forget to let me know the dates of the party. / I'll try and phone you at the wee"end to check the times. / We must try and meet up soon.*
- **Closing statement**  
such as *Love, Lots of love, All the best, Take care, Bestwishes*, should be written **on a new line**. If you used a comma after the opening greeting, use a comma here too.
- **Signing off**  
Your first name then follows **on another new line**

**TIP:** Remember about “linking” in the letter!



**Between paragraphs:**

*Let me start by telling you a [...]*

*By the way, do you have a [...]*

*Anyway, I must go and get on, [...]*

**Within a paragraph:**

It was nominated to become [...] **Also**, don't forget to [...]

## Model Answers

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## FCE Sample Informal Letter/Email

### Topic

Your Italian pen friend, Antonia, wrote and asked about your lifestyle in England. Read part of Antonia's letter and reply:

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I think I have a very healthy lifestyle. I eat a lot of fruit and I get a lot of fresh air. My family lives near the mountains, so we often go walking. Last weekend, we went rock climbing. I saw a lot of wildlife and I took a lot of photos. What kind of lifestyle do you have?

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### Model answer

Dear Antonia,

Thanks for your letter. Your lifestyle sounds really interesting! We don't live near the mountains so I've never been rock climbing, but I'd love to try it.

You asked me about my lifestyle. I think I'm quite healthy too. I sleep for about eight hours every night and I eat a lot of fruit and vegetables. I like doing exercise. I'm quite good at tennis and I often go swimming with my friends. Last month, I decided to do something different. I did a snorkelling course at our local swimming pool. While I was doing the course, I met some really great people! The course was hard, but we were all in the same boat!

I'd love to visit you one day. I think we'd get on really well!

Please write soon!

Love  
Kate

## FCE Sample Informal Letter/Email

### Topic:

You have received this email from an English speaking boy called Simon.

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*Hello, I would like to get to know someone from your country and a friend has told me that you would like to practise your English perhaps we could email*

*each other. Could you tell me a bit about yourself and your family. Could you suggest how we might meet sometime in the future.*

*Thanks,  
Simon*

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## **Model answer**

Hello Simon,

I'm glad you're interested in my country. As your friend said, I'd like us to email each other to help me improve your English.

Let me start by telling you a bit about myself and my family. My name's Ivo and I live in Kutna Hora, which is about 45 minutes from Prague by car. I used to work for a medical company but now I'm learning to be a salesperson. In the future, I want a job where I can travel for my work. I've already been to a few places in Europe but I've never been to an English-speaking country.

I live at home with my parents, which is convenient, as I don't have to do much housework and my meals are cooked for me. My younger brother is studying at university. Although he is four years younger than me, we get on quite well. We both enjoy snowboarding and music.

What about you? Have you ever been to the Czech Republic? It would be great if you could come over one day and we could fix up a meeting. Why don't you let me know your plans?

Anyway, I must go and get on with my work! Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Best wishes,  
Ivo

## **FCE Sample Informal Letter/Email**

### **Topic:**

An English friend of yours is visiting your city next summer. Write to him and tell him about the places he should visit and the clothes he should wear. You must also offer him to stay with you during his stay

## **Model answer**

Dear Jack,

It's great to hear from you after so long! How are you doing? I'm so excited about your visit next summer. Let me give you some tips so you can get ready.

First of all, there are some places which you can't miss! For example, here in Granada, you should totally visit the Alhambra, an ancient Muslim palace. It was nominated to become one of the new seven wonders of the world. Also, don't forget to check out St Nicholas viewpoint – you'll have the best views of the Alhambra and the whole city.

As for clothes, remember that it can get super hot in Granada, especially for foreigners! So forget about long sleeves or trousers and just pack some shorts, T-shirts and sandals. Oh, and remember to bring a cap, too!

By the way, do you have a place to stay? If you want, I could put you up in my place. I have a spare room and it would be great to have you here.

Anyway, I must dash now. Drop me a line soon and let me know what you think.

Best wishes,  
Carlos

## Example topics

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### FCE Informal Letter & Email Topic 1

Your Scottish friend, Maggie, has sent you an email asking you to help her organise a special surprise birthday party for her brother Rupert. Read Maggie's email and the notes you have made. Then write an email to Maggie using all your notes.

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*We must make sure that Rupert doesn't know we are planning this surprise. I'm not sure how many people to invite but our house is definitely too small.*

*Do you think we should book the Royal hotel for the evening and have the party there? You know that Rupert is very keen on music so we could hire a live band. I've also been wondering what we could buy as a present. What do you think?*

*Could you come the day before the party to help with preparations? There's a lot to plan so I'd really like your help. Can you suggest something else that will really make the party special?*

*All for now, best wishes,*

*Anne*

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**Your notes:**

- Paragraph 1 – Royal Hotel sounds OK but very expensive.
- Paragraph 2 – Rupert really enjoys fishing.
- Paragraph 3 – Sorry, busy that day.
- Paragraph 3 – Something else – Yes, how about ....

## FCE Informal Letter & Email Topic 2

You are studying in Britain and you've recently received a letter from a friend, Susan, who is interested in arranging a day trip for a group of students. Read Susan's letter, the advertisement and the notes you have made. Then write a letter to Susan, using all your notes.

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*..... and the students in my class are really interested in going on a day trip. I know you went on a boat trip with your class recently. Could you tell me what it was like and whether you'd recommend it?*

*Susan*

### Castle and Lake Boat Trips

Departures 9 a.m. or 11 a.m. daily  
Lunch at restaurant  
Afternoon at the lake with a choice of watersports  
Reasonable prices with reductions for groups

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**Your notes:**

- Earlier boat less crowded
- Take a packed lunch because ...
- You must try .....(watersport)
- Group minimum is 15

## FCE Informal Letter & Email Topic 3

Your friend, Jim, has written you an email, part of which says:

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*My parents have given me some money for passing my exams. I don't know whether to spend it on going to watch United in Madrid, or whether I should save up a bit more and buy some clothes. What do you think?*

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# Writing Checklist

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After writing your text, you can check it yourself using the **writing checklist** below.

**How to do that?** Simply check your text/email by **answering the questions one by one**:

## Content

- Have I covered all the key information required by the task?
- Have I written only information which is relevant to the task?
- Have I developed the basic points in the task with my own ideas?

## Communicative Achievement

- Have I achieved the main purpose(s) of the text (for example, explaining, persuading, suggesting, apologising, comparing, etc.)?
- Have I communicated a balance of straightforward and more complex ideas?
- Have I used a suitable style and register (formal or informal) for the task?

## Organisation

- Have I used paragraphs appropriately to organise my ideas?
- Have I used other organisational features appropriately for the genre of the text (for example, titles, headings, openings, closings, etc.)?
- Is the connection between my ideas clear and easy for the reader to follow? (For example, have I used appropriate linking words, pronouns, etc. to refer to different things within the text?)
- Are the ideas balanced appropriately, with suitable attention and space given to each one?

## Language

- Have I used a wide range of vocabulary?
- Have I avoided repeating the same words and phrases?
- Have I used a range of simple and more complex grammatical structures?
- Have I correctly used any common phrases which are relevant to the specific task or topic?
- Is my use of grammar accurate?
- Is my spelling accurate?

## Tips

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- Begin your letter by saying why you are writing.
- Say where you saw the advertisement (if there is any)
- Remember, the letter uses informal language.
- Try to avoid using exactly the same words that appear in the notes.
- Make sure you have included all the points from the notes.
- Use an appropriate closing formula.
- Decide what each paragraph will say before you start writing; each paragraph should have a specific purpose.
- Imagine you are really writing the letter and put yourself into the writer's position.
- Check your work for accuracy, punctuation and spelling.

## Useful phrases

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We will finish it with some useful vocabulary mostly used to organize information. Although it is **taking a shortcut**, if you learn several expressions for each paragraph in each type of text that could be on your exam, you will certainly be able to create a very consistent and well-organized text.

### Greetings

*Dear Jim*

*Hello Jim*

*Hi Jim*

### Introductory paragraph

*Sorry I haven't written for ages.*

*Sorry it's taken me so long to write.*

*How's it going?*

*How are you?*

*How are things with you?*

*How are things?*

### Referring to good news:

*Glad to hear about.*  
*I'm really glad to hear about*  
*I'm very happy to hear about*  
*I was very happy to read about*

### Referring to bad news:

*I'm extremely sorry to hear about.*  
*I'm very sorry to hear about.*  
*Sorry to read about.*  
*Its very sad to hear about you.*  
*I can't tell you how sad I am that.*

### Introducing points:

*By the way*  
*Did you hear about*  
*Did you see*  
*Have you seen*  
*Tell me about*  
*Oh, another thing*

### Ending:

*Well, time to go.*  
*Well, it's time to go.*  
*Well, got to go.*  
*Well, time to close.*  
*I've got to leave off now.*  
*Write soon.*  
*Make sure you write soon.*  
*Love*

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### What is the purpose of the informal letter?

To respond to a request for action from somebody else, such as to give information or make suggestions. Alternatively, it could be to initiate action, for example, to request information or invite somebody to do something. The task will tell you exactly what you have to do.

### Who will read it?

The person or people you have been asked to write to.

### **What style should I use?**

An informal style. Slang and colloquial expressions are sometimes appropriate, for example, if you are writing to a friend, but not if you don't know the person. Contractions are always appropriate.

### **What information should I include?**

In a transactional letter, you will need to read the information that is included in a variety of texts, for example, letters, memos, adverts, and your hand-written notes. You must answer all the questions in the texts or notes and make references to any other comments.