

Lesson Plan: Formal email writing

Level	Intermediate / Advanced (B1–C1)
Time	60–90 minutes
Skills	Writing, vocabulary
Focus	Structure; opening/closing formulas; sincerely vs. faithfully; requests, complaints, apologies

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Structure a formal email correctly with the right opening and closing formula
- Adjust tone and vocabulary for different email purposes
- Write a clear and polite request, complaint, or apology
- Apply the Yours sincerely / Yours faithfully rule correctly

TARGET LANGUAGE & EXAMPLES

Opening formulas

- Dear Mr/Ms [surname]: — formal, known recipient
- Dear Sir/Madam: — formal, unknown recipient
- To Whom It May Concern: — very formal, references/official letters
- Hi [first name], — informal (not for formal email)

Opening sentences by purpose

- Request: I am writing to enquire about... / I would like to request...
- Complaint: I am writing to express my concern about... / I wish to bring to your attention...
- Application: I am writing with reference to the position of... advertised on...
- Follow-up: Further to my email of [date], I would like to...

Useful formal phrases

- I would be grateful if you could... / Could you please...
- Please find attached... / Please do not hesitate to contact me.
- I look forward to hearing from you. / Thank you for your prompt attention.

Closing formulas — the sincerely/faithfully rule

- Yours sincerely — when you KNOW the name (Dear Mr Smith → Yours sincerely)
- Yours faithfully — when you DON'T know the name (Dear Sir/Madam → Yours faithfully)
- Best regards / Kind regards — semi-formal
- Memory aid: if you know the name → sincerely. If not → faithfully.

Meaning & Nuance

Phrase	Purpose	Register
I am writing to enquire about...	opening a request/inquiry	formal

I would be grateful if you could...	making a polite request	formal
I wish to bring to your attention...	raising a complaint	very formal
Please find attached...	referring to an attachment	formal
Further to my previous email...	following up	formal
I look forward to hearing from you.	standard closing sentence	formal
Yours sincerely / faithfully	closing when you know / don't know name	formal

LESSON PROCEDURE

1. Warm-up: Rate the emails (10 min)

Task: Show 3 versions of the same email: too informal, too stiff, just right.

- Students rank them and identify what makes each inappropriate.

→ Builds register awareness before teaching formulas.

2. Presentation (15 min)

Task: Structure: opening formula → purpose statement → body → closing → sign-off.

- The sincerely/faithfully rule — it is strict and frequently tested.
- Phrases for different purposes: request, complaint, follow-up.

3. Guided writing: Request email (20 min)

Task: Students write a formal request email from a given scenario.

- Scenario: write to a hotel asking to change a booking and request an upgrade.
- Swap and provide peer feedback on structure, tone, and formulas.

4. Complaint email (20 min)

Task: Write a formal complaint email.

- Scenario: you received a damaged item. You want a refund or replacement.
- Focus: polite but firm. State the problem clearly. State what you want.
- Peer review: is it too aggressive? Too weak?

TEACHER NOTES

- The sincerely/faithfully distinction is a genuine professional skill gap for many adult learners.
- Email writing is one of the highest-utility real-world English skills — worth investing time.

EXTENSION / HOMEWORK

Choose one or more:

1. Write a formal email to a potential employer asking about an internship opportunity.
2. Write a complaint email about a product or service you were unhappy with.
3. Rewrite an informal email in a formal style, changing vocabulary, tone, and structure.