

Phrase It Right Business Guide!

100 Formal and Informal Expressions for the Workplace



Introduction

Business communication is typically more formal than everyday language. However, the level of formality can vary depending on the situation, client, or industry. For example, people working in the IT sector often use a more casual tone, while industries such as banking and law maintain a more formal style. Formality also depends on whether you're communicating within your team (internal communication) or with clients (external communication), the seniority of the person you're speaking to, plus differing cultural expectations. E.g. Brits tend to communicate more formally than Americans.

Below are some examples of messages delivered in both a formal and informal style.

- **Formal:** Unfortunately, I am unable to attend the meeting today.
- **Informal:** I can't make it to the meeting today.

- **Formal:** I regret to inform you that we were unable to secure the funding we were hoping for.
- **Informal:** Bad news — we didn't get the funding we were hoping for.

If you're reading this guide, you're probably a non-native English speaker who is either working with or preparing to work with international clients or colleagues. Understanding how to differentiate between formal and informal communication will help you:

a) demonstrate professionalism

b) use language that fits the situation and sounds natural

For instance, sending an overly formal email to a colleague you've been working with for years might seem awkward and unnatural. On the other hand, using a very casual tone in an email to a senior executive could be seen as disrespectful or unprofessional.

If you're not sure which tone to use, a good rule is to **start with a more formal approach** to show respect and professionalism. If the other person responds with a more relaxed tone, you can adjust your language to match their style.

It's not possible to cover every situation in this short guide, but I give practical tips and phrases on some key aspects of business communication. Be sure to check out the bonus table at the end with useful expressions for different situations. Throughout the guide, you'll find online quizzes to test your understanding and help you recall new phrases you can use straight away in your professional life.

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5. Verb and phrasal verb synonyms
6. Bonus table: context-specific expressions

Greetings and sign-offs

The way people communicate in business has changed significantly in the last 30 years because of the growth of many different communication tools.

We've moved from letters to emails to messaging platforms. Each step has made communication less formal and changed how people greet and end their messages.

As a result, a mix of traditional and conversational terms are in use in the business world, depending on the context.

Greetings	
Informal	Formal
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hello! 2. Hi there! 3. Hi! 4. Hey! 5. Morning! 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dear Mr/Mrs X, 2. Good morning / afternoon (Name), 3. Dear Sir/Madam, 4. To Whom it May Concern, 5. Dear Sales Team / Recruitment Manager,
<p>Note: The exclamation mark (!) is optional.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with ! = extra warmth and cheeriness • without ! = more neutral tone 	<p>Note: Greetings 3-5 are used when you <u>don't know the name</u> of the person you are writing to. In many Western countries, especially those that are English-speaking, there has been a move towards gender-neutral language. As a result, some prefer to avoid using 'Dear Sir/Madam.' In the past, 'To Whom it May Concern' was widely used in formal business letters, but today, the most common greeting when writing to unknown recipients is 'Dear [team name/job title]'.</p>

In traditional formal correspondence in the past, the guidelines for sign-offs were :

- Use 'Yours faithfully' when you didn't know the recipient's name.
- Use 'Yours sincerely' when you knew the recipient's name.

📌 Dear Sir/Madam, Yours faithfully

📌 Dear Ms Lee, Yours Sincerely,

44 Ascot Street
Oxford
OX4 1EP


Sweet Hotel Group
54 Pembroke Road
London
W8 6NX

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to express my dissatisfaction with my stay at the Victoria Arms Hotel on 12th April. I made a reservation through another website which was offering one night for two people with an evening meal and breakfast for £110. However, when we arrived at 5.30 p.m. we were informed that there was no table available in the restaurant and that we could either dine at 6.00 p.m. or find another restaurant in the town.

We had the strong impression that, because it was a discounted offer, we did not receive the same level of hospitality as regular, full-paying guests. The situation was embarrassing and inconvenient. After some discussion with the staff, we opted to dine in the restaurant, but much later than we wished – at 9.30 p.m. No one apologized for this.

Compensation is not actually my principal concern. I would just like you to investigate the matter and ensure that this situation does not arise in future with other guests.

Yours faithfully

Ann Dunhill

 To: pennylee99@chinacentre.org
Subject: Courses at the China Centre

Dear Ms Lee,

I am writing to **enquire** about the Mandarin courses **currently** offered by the China Centre.

I am planning to take a Mandarin Chinese course at elementary level sometime early next year, preferably for a period of between three and five weeks. I have studied Mandarin before, but only at beginner level, and would be looking to review much of what I **previously** studied.

As such, **I would be most grateful** if you could send me information about what courses you will be offering between January and June next year, and also let me know the prices of these courses. **Furthermore**, I would appreciate it if you could let me know what kind of **excursions** and cultural activities your centre offers. I would also like to know whether or not it is possible to invite friends along on the excursions.

Finally, **I wonder if it would be possible for you to forward me** any information you might have about accommodation in the Manchester area, as I would like to stay locally while studying.

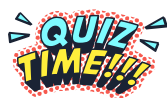
I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,
Kathrin Jacobson

You may still see these sign-offs occasionally in formal documents like job applications. However, they are less commonly used today, particularly 'Yours faithfully'. On the next page are a range of options.

Sign-offs		
Informal	Semi-formal	Formal
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cheers, 2. Speak soon, 3. Take care, 4. Have a good one, 5. Have a good day, 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Best wishes, 2. Best 3. All the best, 4. Warm regards, 5. Many thanks, 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yours sincerely, 2. Sincerely, 3. Regards, 4. Kind regards, 5. Best regards,

Note: this is not an exhaustive list and you may know other examples. As mentioned before, it's a good idea to notice the sign-off used by the person you are communicating with and use the same term to match their tone.

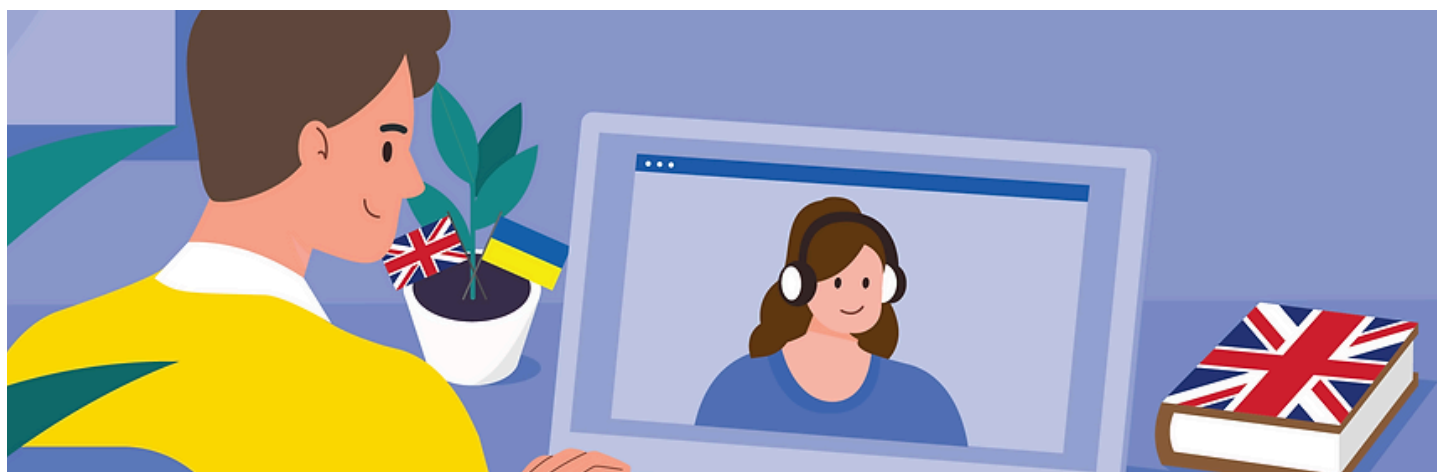


Test your knowledge! Click on the links below to take my online quizzes on greetings and sign-offs.

[Greetings Quiz](#)

[Sign-offs Quiz](#)

[English for Ukrainians with Anna](#)



Referencing

You may want to explain why you are writing, reference a past discussion or refer to something in the future. The following phrases can help you do that.

Referencing	
Informal	Formal
I'm writing about ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm writing about the new annual leave policy. 	I'm writing with regard to ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm writing with regard to the new annual leave policy.
Following on from X, ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following on from our chat yesterday, here's the updated plan. 	In reference to X, ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In reference to our earlier conversation, I am providing the updated plan.
As I mentioned earlier, ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As I mentioned earlier, the report is due on Friday. 	As previously discussed, ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As previously discussed, the report is due on Friday.
FYI (For Your Information) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> FYI, the deadline has been moved to next week. 	Please be advised (that)... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please be advised that the deadline has been moved to next week.
Just a heads-up about ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just a heads-up about the changes in the project timeline. 	I would like to bring your attention to ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I would like to bring your attention to the changes in the project timeline.

Test your knowledge! Click on the link to take my online quiz on referencing: [Referencing Quiz](#)

Making a request

There are many different situations when you may need to ask for something politely. Pay attention to the grammar tips about which types of words follow each structure.

Making a request	
Informal	Formal
Can you + <u>base verb</u> ...? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Can you confirm my appointment next week?	Could you kindly + <u>base verb</u> ...? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Could you kindly confirm my appointment next week?
Can you do me a favour and + <u>base verb</u> ...? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Can you do me a favour and <u>check</u> the data for accuracy?	Would you please be able to + <u>base verb</u> ...? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Would you please be able to <u>check</u> the data for accuracy?
Any chance you could + <u>base verb</u> ...? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Any chance you could <u>review</u> this document before the meeting?	Would it be possible for you to + <u>base verb</u> ...? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Would it be possible for you to <u>review</u> this document before the meeting?
Could you give me a hand with + <u>noun</u> or -ing <u>verb</u> ...? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Could you give me a hand with <u>the presentation</u>? (noun)	I was wondering if you could help me with + <u>noun</u> or <u>ing verb</u> ... <ul style="list-style-type: none">I was wondering if you could help me with <u>preparing</u> the presentation. (-ing verb) <p>Note: This structure does not use a question mark.</p>
Could you get that over to me? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Could you get that over to me by the end of the day?	Would you mind sending that to me? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Would you mind sending that to me by the end of the day? <p>Note: 'Would you mind' is always followed by an -ing verb.</p>

Test your knowledge! Click on the link to take my online quiz on [Making requests](#)

Linking words

Linking words help connect ideas. They can show contrast, indicate the order of events, or explain reasons, purposes, or results. Here are a few that might be useful.

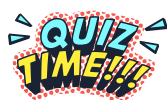
Linking words synonyms	
Informal	Formal
but <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal was approved, but we need to make a few revisions. 	however <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal was approved. However, we need to make a few revisions.
so <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sales targets were met, so we will receive a bonus. 	therefore <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sales targets were met. Therefore, we will receive a bonus.
also <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report is thorough, and it's also very well-organised. 	additionally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report is thorough. Additionally, it is very well-organised.
because of this <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We missed the deadline. Because of this, we had to reschedule the product launch. 	consequently <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We missed the deadline. Consequently, we had to reschedule the product launch.
then <ul style="list-style-type: none"> He completed the training session, then started applying the new skills to his daily tasks. 	subsequently <ul style="list-style-type: none"> He completed the training session. Subsequently, he began applying the new skills to his daily tasks.

Test your knowledge! Click on the link to take my online quiz on [linking words](#).

Verb synonyms: formal and informal

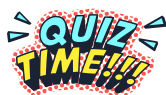
As with any language, there are various words that can express the same meaning, but with different tones and degrees of formality. Below, we explore synonyms for verbs and phrasal verbs. Phrasal verbs are generally more informal, though many are commonly used in business settings, especially in spoken communication.

Verb synonyms	
Informal	Formal
I am writing to ask about ...	I am writing to enquire about ...
The project needs additional resources.	The project requires additional resources.
Could you say more about that idea?	Could you elaborate on that idea?
Please make sure you arrive on time.	Please ensure you arrive on time.
What problems did you experience ?	What problems did you encounter ?



Test your knowledge! Click on the link below to take my online quiz on [Verb synonyms](#).

Phrasal verb synonyms	
Informal	Formal
put off <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The event was put off because of unexpected weather conditions. 	postpone <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The event was postponed due to unexpected weather conditions.
go over <ul style="list-style-type: none"> He went over the report to ensure accuracy. 	review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> He reviewed the report to ensure accuracy.
put together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'll put together the agenda for the upcoming meeting. 	compile / prepare <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'll compile the agenda for the upcoming meeting.
show up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure you show up on time for the conference call. 	arrive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure you arrive on time for the conference call.
turn down <ul style="list-style-type: none"> She decided to turn down the job offer because it didn't meet her career goals. 	reject <ul style="list-style-type: none"> She decided to reject the job offer because it didn't meet her career goals.



Test your knowledge! Click on the links below to take my online quizzes:

[Phrasal verb synonyms](#)

[Verb and phrasal verb synonyms](#)

A final refresher! Complete the sentences so that they are true for you. You can refer to the tables if you need to review the meanings of any words.

Informal:

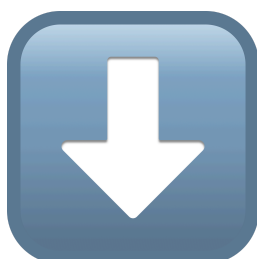
1. About _____
2. Following on from _____
3. Any chance you could _____?
4. Could you give me a hand with _____?
5. It's important not to put off too many tasks because _____
6. When people don't show up on time to meetings _____

Formal:

1. I am writing with regard to _____
2. Please be advised _____
3. Would it be possible for you to _____?
4. Would you mind _____?
5. I like/don't like my job. However, _____
6. I've completed this free download. Consequently, _____

You're almost done!

Check out the bonus business expressions on the next page.



More useful business phrases

Context	Informal	Formal
Gratitude	Thanks a lot!	I sincerely appreciate your assistance.
Understanding	I see where you're coming from.	I acknowledge the concern you've raised.
Permission	Can I get your OK on this?	May I request your approval on this?
Agreement	That works for us.	We are in agreement with this approach.
Disagreement	That wouldn't work for us.	I'm afraid that would not be suitable for us.
Suggesting an alternative	Maybe we should look at other options.	It might be worth considering another approach.
Disappointment	This didn't go as planned.	Unfortunately, this is not what we anticipated.
Surprise	I didn't see that coming!	This is an unexpected development.
Apologies	Sorry if this caused any problems.	I sincerely apologise for any inconvenience caused.
Urgency	This needs to be handled right away.	Please address this as a matter of priority.
Feedback	Let me know what you think.	I would appreciate any feedback you can provide.
Offering help	Let me know if you need help.	Please let me know if I can be of assistance.

Well done, you've completed this booklet! So, what's next?



Do you want to learn more useful expressions to **boost your language skills at work** and **reach your career goals**?

Then why not book a [free consultation](#) with me to discuss my **12-week Business Communication Accelerator**?

Say hello!



Hi there! I'm Anna - an **English native speaker from London**. Previously living in Lviv for 4 years, I have worked exclusively with **Ukrainian adult learners since 2019**. I've worked for large global companies, and also ran my own business for 15 years. I've helped hundreds of Ukrainian business professionals feel more confident communicating at work and advance in their careers. I'd love to help you too!

My **12-week Business Communication Accelerator** is for you:



If your English level is:

- limiting your job opportunities
- causing you anxiety in meetings
 - slowing down your work
- affecting relationships with colleagues



If you want to:

- boost your professional vocabulary
- increase your confidence at work
- fast-track your English progress
 - accelerate your career

Book a free consultation or email me to discuss how I can help you achieve your goals. I'm looking forward to hearing from you!

email ✉: anna@englishforukrainianswithanna.co.uk

free consultation 💬: <https://calendly.com/english4ukrainians/30mins>

profile 👤: www.linkedin.com/in/anna-abrahams

website 🌐: www.englishforukrainianswithanna.co.uk

“The business course will help people to work in an international company. It helped me to move to the next level and the most valuable thing for me was the course was built around my level and my requirements. I have never met this approach before. I feel the course was created for me! And from Anna, I felt that personalisation, impact and desire to improve my English.”



Oleksandr, Technical Director

“She expertly guided me through the nuances of British etiquette and polite expressions, ensuring I understood the cultural context behind it ... the interview training lessons have helped me feel more confident during job interviews in English.”



Maks, QA Engineer

“Her exceptional understanding of the Ukrainian context allows her to effectively identify and correct the most common mistakes of Ukrainian learners... an outstanding choice for anyone looking to improve their English skills in the business field.”



Lilia, Project Manager

“Anna’s business course was a fantastic experience! Her teaching style is engaging and clear, making complex topics easy to understand. I found it incredibly valuable and would definitely recommend Anna’s classes to anyone looking to improve their business skills.”



Denys, CEO