

Lesson Objective: Tutees will learn how to avoid making common errors when writing in formal tone. It is important to note that when we discuss formal tone in writing, it refers to academic English and the errors mentioned today do not necessarily apply to non-academic English. This lesson emphasizes the importance of maintaining a formal tone when writing for academic settings.

Handouts:

- a. Common Errors in Formal Tone: This worksheet discusses the errors that writers often make when they begin writing in a formal tone.

- b. Formal Tone vs. Informal Tone: The tutee will be asked to identify informal vs. formal sentences and then formulate their own sentences in formal or informal tones based on the intended audience.

- c. Formal Tone Worksheet: The tutee will be given two paragraphs that they will read over, identify errors related to formal tone, and suggest possible corrections.

Do Not Use....

- **Contractions**
 - *Don't* should be *do not*, and *what's* should be *what is*
- **Personal Pronouns** (“I, we, our, you”)
 - Personal pronouns should normally not be used in your paper; third person puts distance between the audience and yourself, creating a more formal tone for the paper. However, this is discipline specific. For example, in sociology first-person is a common tense.
- **Language that is Biased or Racially or Sexually Offensive**
 - Avoid the generic “he” by using “he or she”; if this becomes a burden, utilize the plural “they” instead.
 - Avoid labels that (intentionally or not) disparage the person or group you refer to.
 - Use names for racial, ethnic, and other groups that reflect the preferences of each group’s members.
- **Slang, Jargon, Clichés, and Conversational Language**
 - These are often too imprecise and informal for communicating effectively to the audience; write exactly what you mean. *Stuff* and *things* are common examples of vague language to revise.
- **Inappropriate emphasis**
 - One should emphasize with word meaning, not CAPITALIZATION, and definitely not *italics*!! Also, exclamation points should not be overused.
- **Informal Language**
 - Be careful with word choice, and avoid words like “really”, “a lot”, “super”, and “guys”. Without using the synonym button, try to think of a clearer word, and remove words that don’t add meaning to the sentence.
- **Numbers**
 - Write out numbers that can be easily written.
 - If a number starts a sentence, it must be written out.
- **Fragments**
 - Make sure every sentence has a subject, a verb, and a complete thought.

Formal Tone vs. Informal Tone
Practice

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Part 1: Identify each sentence as either a formal or informal sentence:

1. We're taking the kids to get some ice cream today.
2. He became a Christian and confessed his sins before God.
3. He was eyeing the chocolate brownies in the window.
4. The movie was awesome.
6. I am applying for the receptionist position advertised in the newspaper.
7. All you guys are going to the zoo today.

Part 2: Think of a time you really excelled at something. (Example: Aced a math test, went skydiving)

Write out how you would tell each person below, keeping in mind whether you should use formal or informal tone:

Situation: _____

Best Friend:

Professor:

Potential
Employer
in a Job
Interview:

Formal Tone vs. Informal Tone

Answer Key

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Part 1: Identify each sentence as either a formal or informal sentence:

1. We're taking the kids to get some ice cream today. Informal- Contraction and Informal Language
2. He became a Christian and confessed his sins before God. Formal
3. He was eyeing the chocolate brownies in the window. Informal- Informal Language/Slang
4. The movie was awesome. Informal- Conversational Language
6. I am applying for the receptionist position advertised in the newspaper. Formal
7. All you guys are going to the zoo today. Informal- Conversational Language

Part 2: Think of a time you really excelled at something. (Example: Aced a math test, went skydiving)

Write out how you would tell each person below, keeping in mind whether you should use formal or informal tone:

Situation: 100% on a math test

Best Friend:

Hey. You know that math test I was studying super hard for? Yeah, I freaking aced it, man! Informal

Professor:

I studied for your test and was happy to learn that I got a perfect score. Formal

Potential
Employer
in a Job
Interview:

I diligently studied for a math test in college, and my hard work was rewarded when I received my test back and discovered I had earned a perfect score. Formal

Instructions:

1. **Identify places where the writer uses an informal tone in the following sample.**
2. **Suggest possible corrections (there are multiple ways to correct the errors).**

Elizabeth was super surprised by the stuff Darcy had said. She just stared like a deer in the headlights. I believe that Darcy considered this sufficient encouragement; and the avowal of all that he felt, and had long felt for her, immediately followed. He spoke fine and all, but there were feelings besides the *mushy stuff* to be detailed. He was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride, which, you know, isn't the best way to handle a proposal. His sense of her inferiority—of her family practically living in the ghetto compared to his—was dwelt on with warmth to his credit, but it deeply wounded Elizabeth.

In spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she couldn't be insensible to the compliment of such a man's affection, and she was at first sorry for the pain he was to receive. That is, until, roused to resentment by his subsequent language, she went off her rocker. She tried really hard to be patient and nice, but he kept on being rude to her. He concluded with representing to her the strength of that attachment which, IN SPITE his best efforts, he'd found impossible to conquer. He expressed his hope that it would now be rewarded by her acceptance of his hand in marriage!! You've gotta admit, that's pretty crazy. As Darcy said this, Elizabeth could easily see that he didn't think she'd say no in a billion years. What an arrogant guy, thinking she would say yes after he was so rude.

Formal Tone Worksheet

Answer Key

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Instructions:

1. Identify places where the writer uses an informal tone in the following sample.
2. Suggest possible corrections (there are multiple ways to correct the errors).

Elizabeth was **super surprised** (informal language) by the **stuff** (conversational language) Darcy had said. She **just** (conversational language) stared **like a deer in the headlights** (cliché). **I** (use of the first person) believe that Darcy considered this sufficient encouragement; and the avowal of all that he felt, and had long felt for her, immediately followed. He spoke good and all, but there were feelings besides the *mushy stuff* (conversational language) to be detailed. He was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride, which, **you know**, (use of second person, conversational language) **isn't** (contraction) the best way to handle a proposal. His sense of her inferiority—of her family practically living in the **ghetto** (slang) compared to his—was dwelt on with warmth to his credit, but it deeply wounded Elizabeth.

In spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she **couldn't** (contraction) be insensible to the compliment of such a man's affection, and she was at first sorry for the pain he was to receive. That is, until, roused to resentment by his subsequent language, she **went off her rocker** (slang). She tried **really hard** (informal language) to be patient and nice, but he kept on being rude to her. He concluded with representing to her the strength of that attachment which, **IN SPITE** (inappropriate emphasis) his best efforts, **he'd** (contraction) found impossible to conquer. He expressed his hope that it would now be rewarded by her acceptance of his hand in marriage!! (inappropriate emphasis) **You've gotta admit, that's pretty crazy.** (contractions, slang, conversational language) As Darcy said this, Elizabeth could easily see that he **didn't** (contractions) think **she'd** (contractions) say no **in a billion years** (conversational language). **What an arrogant guy, thinking she would say yes after he was so rude.** (bias)