

A Lesson on Register

Level: Upper Intermediate / Advanced

Aim: To enable students to break down the different features of formal and informal English by working through a step-by-step text transformation at their own pace.

Materials: One copy for each student of...

- 1) "A lesson on Register" (Answer key in the Teacher's notes)
- 2) "Step by step worksheet" (Answer key in "Informal text")
- 3) "Text to work on"
- 4) (to be given after the lesson) "Informal text"

Explanation: This material is particularly relevant for the formal requirements of Business English and discursive essay writing (some Exams). After the lesson students can extract a list of rules for both vocabulary and grammatical differences between formal and informal English, which they can take away with them and apply elsewhere. The teacher could encourage them to do this as homework and start the next lesson in groups, drawing up what is remembered onto (A3?) paper. A possible list could be as follows:

Formal features	Informal features
<p>Vocabulary items</p> <p>Latin based words Uncommon words</p>	<p>Anglo Saxon words (phrasal verbs) Common words</p>
<p>Punctuation</p> <p>Full words</p>	<p>Abbreviations Contractions</p>
<p>Grammar</p> <p>Passive constructions Noun phrases Complex sentences</p>	<p>Active constructions Verb phrases Simple sentences</p>

Alternatively, after the lesson, give out a list like the one above and get students to find examples from the text for homework.

Teacher's notes:

Some discussion on "register" is needed at the start in order to place the lesson in real life and let students see the reason for going through such a picky process. Be aware that the students' first languages might not have the extent of differences between formal and informal language that English does. Discuss written and oral situations where formal register might be appropriate eg. business, administration, public notices, academia, discursive essays (such as CPE, IELTS and other exams require). To bring the topic to life why not make a brief reference to the Norman Conquest, when Latin based French was introduced into English along with the aristocracy. Use the links below to research this period or send your students to find out more.

<http://members.tripod.com/~GeoffBoxell/words.htm>

http://www.internationalfreeway.com/history_of_england.htm

<http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/history/A0835889.html>

Steps:

- 1) Orient students to the topic (see teacher's notes)
- 2) Hand out sheet "A lesson on register" and allow time to answer individually before checking in pairs or open class. **Answers are:**
 - i) It's a letter from a bank official, maybe the Manager, or a Head of Lending Department
 - ii) It's to a customer
 - iii) It answers a letter from the customer in which he/she asked to borrow some (more) money
 - iv) It's written in a formal register. Don't waste time trying to explain this in any way as the lesson answers the question.
- 3) Explain that you are all going to transform the text completely into an informal piece of writing, which says exactly the same thing, but looks very different.
- 4) Hand out "Text to work on" and "Step by step worksheet" (fold over the worksheet so they can only see vocabulary items first). Point out

- 5) that **scheduled** has already been changed to **set** as an example. Allow about 20 minutes for students to work through **ONLY** the vocabulary items on their own, whilst the teacher monitors and answers questions.
- 6) Check through so far and then work through the rest of the worksheet (individually or in pairs), explaining each step as necessary (judge the timing of this to leave room if possible for step 6 and 7).
- 7) When the students have their own written copy of the, now, informal text give them the handout called "Informal text" and let them check their own work. There should be a more lighthearted air of relief at this point, so, if there is time, it's fun to finish the lesson by..
- 8) In pairs, allow students to look **ONLY** at the informal text (handout), and ask them to retransform it into a formal text - speaking in pairs.

Links to sites with material on register in English:

This is from the Learn.co.uk site by the Guardian: interactive, designed for UK schools:
<http://www.learn.co.uk/default.asp?WCI=Unit&WCU=96>

The State University of New York's (SUNY) online writing guide on formal writing:
<http://writingguide.geneseo.edu/form.shtml>

This is from another ELT site. The author of the piece Alex Case is currently writing the exams materials for onestopenglish.

http://www.developingteachers.com/articles_tchtraining/formal_letters_alex1.htm

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Read the following text and decide

- i) Who is it written by?
- ii) Who is it written for?
- iii) It is an answer to a previous text. What was the first text about? What did it ask for?
- iv) Is the text written in formal or informal register? What makes you say this?

Thank you for your letter received 14 September 2002. A copy has been sent to company headquarters in addition to a memorandum concerning your financial situation. A meeting has been scheduled for 3 October 2002 at 11 am to discuss your request for a further bank loan. Therefore please inform us of your availability for this meeting at the earliest opportunity.

However, a number of issues concerning your income and expenditure may be queried prior to a loan being granted. Furthermore the General Manager needs to be contacted in order to authorise bank loans of this nature. Moreover, your previous failure to meet payment arrangements will first have to be considered.

Nevertheless, in the interim you are required to complete the enclosed business plan, which should be brought to the meeting.

Step by step worksheet - formal to informal text

1. Exchange these vocabulary items for their more formal equivalents in the text. The item in capitals has been done for you. (See “text to work on – below)

okay *might be asked* *Thanks* *about*
as soon as possible *meantime* *talk about*
if you can make it *to do with* *got* *giving you a loan*
a few things *you didn't keep up with* *SET*
before *along with* *the last time*
fill in *got in touch with* *payments*
let us know *needed* *another* *thought about*

2. Exchange the following conjunctions in the text for their more informal equivalents

Nevertheless **Moreover** **in order to**
Therefore **However** **Furthermore**

3. Are there any other vocabulary items you want to change to make the text less formal?
4. In an informal piece of writing you may find abbreviations, for example “**income and expenditure**” could be written “**inc. and exp.**”.
Make further changes to the text by abbreviating **appropriate words**.

5. Now rewrite the text making the following changes:
- i) Replace formal passive constructions with active phrases, using “**I**” or “**we**” as personal pronouns.
 - ii) Make contractions (**eg. I have – I’ve**) where necessary.
 - iii) Avoid repetition by replacing noun phrases with object pronouns (**eg. This, these, it**). Where possible, without losing the meaning, leave phrases out.
 - iv) Replace longer, complex sentences with shorter simpler ones. (you may need to change punctuation and word order).

Text to work on

Thank you for your letter received 14 September 2002. A copy has been sent to company headquarters in addition to a memorandum concerning your financial situation. A meeting has been scheduled (set) for 3 October 2002 at 11 am to discuss your request for a further bank loan. Therefore please inform us of your availability for this meeting at the earliest opportunity.

A number of issues concerning your income and expenditure may be queried prior to a loan being granted. Furthermore the General Manager needs to be contacted in order to authorise bank loans of this nature. Moreover, your previous failure to meet payment arrangements will first have to be considered.

Nevertheless, in the interim you are required to complete the enclosed business plan, which should be brought to the meeting.

Informal text (after steps 1-5)

Thanks for your letter. I got it 14 Sept. I've sent a copy to comp. H.Q. along with a memo re. your financial situation. I've set a meeting for 3 Oct at 11am to talk about another bank loan. So, please let us know if you can make it a.s.a.p.

But, we might ask you a few things to do with your inc. and exp. before giving you a loan. Also I need to get in touch with the G.M. to okay it. Plus, we'll first have to think about the last time you didn't keep up with payments.

Anyway, in the meantime, you need to fill in this business plan. Bring it to the meeting with you.