Writing: a useful short message

English A1

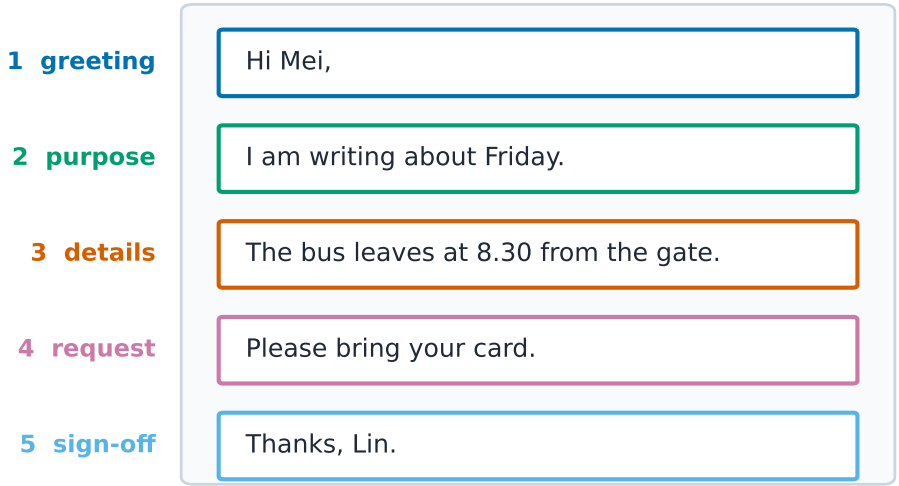
What this topic teaches

A useful **short message** does one job: it makes the reader DO something. Note on a table, text to a parent, message to a teacher: same skeleton, five parts, no wasted words.

- The action comes first or second; the story never comes first.
- Five parts: greeting, purpose, details, **request**, **sign-off**.
- Memory hook: a message is a hand, not a story: it reaches out and hands something over.

The five-part skeleton

Part	Job	Example
greeting	names the reader	Hi Mei, / Dear Ms Gao,
purpose	why you write, in one line	I am writing about Friday.
details	the facts: day, time, place	The bus leaves at 8.30 from the gate.
request	what they must do	Please bring your card.
sign-off	your name, politely	Thanks, Lin. / Best, Lin.



One short message, five parts, always in this order

- The greeting is Hi for friends, Dear for teachers and adults.
- Thanks goes before your name when you asked for something; Best is neutral.

■ A first try

Label the five parts.

- *Hi Dad, I am at Li's house. (greeting, purpose) Dinner at 7? (details, question-request) Love, Mei (sign-off)*

The punctuation kit

A short message needs three marks and one rule about capitals.

- Full stop (.) finishes a statement; question mark (?) asks; exclamation (!) shows energy.
- Capital letters start sentences, names, days, months and the word I.
- *i am late* is wrong three times; *I am late.* is right in three.

Three messages you will really send

1. Running late (text): *Dear Mr Wang, sorry, the bus is late. I will arrive at 8.50. Can you wait for me, please? Lin.*

2. Borrowing a thing (note): *Hi Mei, can I borrow your blue pen for the test today? I will give it back after class. Thanks, Lin.*

3. Changing a plan (text): *Hi Grandpa, we will come on Sunday at 10, not 9. Is that OK? Love, Mei.*

- Message 1 asks the teacher to wait; messages 2 and 3 carry their own requests. Each takes under thirty seconds to read.
- Notice the question forms: *Dinner at 7?* and *Is that OK?* do the asking.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- Do not start with the story: *Today the bus was full and…* – the reader needs the point by line two.
- Do not drop the greeting and sign-off: they are the message's clothes.
- Time needs a small word in front: *at 7*, *on Sunday*, *in May*. Chinese needs no extra word before a day, but English says *See you **on** Sunday.*

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. Name the five parts of the skeleton in order. – **Greeting, purpose, details, request, sign-off.**

2. Write the running-late text to your teacher in two lines. – For example: ***Dear Ms Gao, I am sorry, my bus is late. I will be in class at 8.20. Please start without me. Lin***
3. Where do the capital letters go: *thanks, see you on monday*? – ***Thanks, see you on Monday.*** The start of the sentence and the day.
4. Which one asks: *Dinner at 7.* or *Dinner at 7?* – ***Dinner at 7?*** The question mark does the asking.

■ Practice: repair a message

This text from Lin to a classmate has five kinds of problem. Find them before you read the answers.

> *today the bus was very full and very slow and i waited a long time at the stop. maybe late*

Answer: (1) no greeting; (2) the story comes first, so the point arrives last; (3) no exact time; (4) no request: what should Mei do?; (5) capitals and full stops are missing (*today*, *i*), and there is no sign-off.

Repaired: *Hi Mei, I am late, sorry. My bus is very slow. I will be at the gate at 8.40. Please wait for me there. Thanks, Lin.*

■ Practice: write the message

Task. You are at the library. Write a short message to your mum. Say where you are, say what time you will be home, and ask her to keep some dinner for you.

Model: *Hi Mum, I am at the library with Ana. I will be home at 7.30. Can you keep some dinner for me, please? Thanks, Wei*

Greeting (*Hi Mum*), purpose and details (*at the library*, *7.30*), request (*Can you keep…?*), sign-off (*Thanks, Wei*). Capitals: *Hi, Mum, I, Ana, Can, Thanks, Wei.*

Task 2 (a teacher). You cannot go to the art club on Thursday because you have a doctor's appointment . Write to your teacher, Ms Gao. Say why you are writing, give the reason, and ask her for the homework.

Model: *Dear Ms Gao, I am writing about the art club. I cannot come on Thursday, because I have a doctor's appointment at 4.00. Can you send me the homework, please? Thank you, Lin*

Dear for a teacher, the purpose in line one, the reason with *because*, the time with *at*, a polite request with *please*, and *Thank you* before the name.