

4.2 Formal letter — structure and language

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 18 marks**

KEY WORDS formal 正式 • purpose 目的 • format 格式 • grateful 感激 • slang 俚语

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on the **structure and formal language of a letter** 结构与正式语言 — laying a formal letter out correctly and using the fixed expressions the form expects.

You must be able to:

- lay out a formal letter with the expected paragraphs
- use formal expressions accurately rather than approximately
- avoid the informal habits that break the register

1 Worked examples

■ The four-paragraph shape

1. **Purpose** — why you are writing, in one sentence.
2. **Detail** — the facts: dates, references, what happened, in order.
3. **Request or argument** — what you want, or the case you are making.
4. **Close** — the next step, and an offer to provide more information.

Then the sign-off that matches your greeting.

■ Formal expressions worth learning exactly

- **Opening:** *I am writing to enquire about... / to apply for... / to complain about...*
- **Referring:** *with reference to your advertisement of 12 May / further to our telephone conversation*
- **Requesting:** *I would be grateful if you could... / I should like to request...*
- **Enclosing:** *Please find attached my curriculum vitae.*
- **Closing:** *I look forward to hearing from you. / Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information.*

Learn six exactly. A half-remembered formal phrase reads worse than a simple correct one.

■ Habits that break the register

- Contractions: *I'm, don't, we've*
- Exclamation marks
- Slang or abbreviation: *ASAP, kind of, a bit*
- Emotional wording: *ridiculous, a joke, furious*
- Addressing the reader as *you guys*

2 Practice

2.1 Match each purpose to its opening phrase. [2]

Purpose	Phrase
(a) You saw a job advertised	(i) I am writing to complain about...
(b) A product was faulty	(ii) I am writing to apply for...
(c) You want opening times	(iii) I am writing to enquire about...

2.2 Rewrite each in formal language.

(a) “I’ve been waiting ages and I’m fed up.” [1]

(b) “Can you send me the info ASAP?” [1]

(c) “Thanks a lot, hope to hear back!” [1]

2.3 Put these paragraph purposes in the correct order for a formal letter: request, purpose, close, detail. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Your school is considering closing the library on Saturdays. Write a letter to the head teacher arguing against the decision. Give two reasons, suggest an alternative, and request a meeting. Write about 150 words. [8]

3.2 Read this extract and identify **four** breaches of formal register. [4]

Dear Sir or Madam, I'm writing 'cause your shop sold me a broken lamp!! It's honestly a joke. Get back to me ASAP. Cheers, Wei

Solutions

2.1 (a) ii, (b) i, (c) iii.

2.2 (a) "I have been waiting for a considerable time and am disappointed with the delay."
 (b) "I would be grateful if you could send me the information at your earliest convenience."
 (c) "Thank you for your assistance. I look forward to hearing from you."

2.3 purpose, detail, request, close.

3.1 Content (4): two developed reasons, a workable alternative, and a clear request for a meeting. **Language (4):** consistent formal register, matching greeting and sign-off, accurate and varied sentences, clear paragraphing.

3.2 Any four: the contraction “I’m”; the informal “‘cause” for “because”; the double exclamation mark; the emotional and slangy “It’s honestly a joke”; the abbreviation “ASAP”; the informal sign-off “Cheers”; and the mismatch of “Dear Sir or Madam” with anything other than “Yours faithfully”.