

Writing a Formal Letter or Email

IGCSE English ■ Topic 4

IGCSE English



A useful message makes the next step clear

Think

How would you ask a library manager to change **opening hours**?



Clear facts and **respectful wording** do more work than a collection of long phrases.

Today: plan a request, examine a complete letter, revise a complaint, write a new email.

Correspondence practice and the current exam

Formal 正式 writing

Useful course practice beyond the exam; this topic is not an official current 0510 letter task.

Exercise 5

The 2024–2026 and 2027–2029 syllabuses require an informal email.

Exercise 6

A more formal article, report, essay or review; follow the actual requested format.

Do not transfer blindly

A letter greeting and sign-off do not belong in every essay or review.

1

When to write formally

Reader, relationship and purpose

head teacher 校长

manager 经理

event organiser 活动组织者

may need a clear **professional request**

- Knowing a name does **not** automatically make a message informal
- A familiar teacher can still need **respectful wording**

Semi-formal 半正式 may suit a professional reader you know. Choose the **format** 格式, **purpose** 目的 and tone for the actual situation.

Library request: original task

Task

Write to the named library manager, **Ms Li**, asking her to consider a **four-week trial** of longer opening hours.



Lessons end **16:00**, travel takes **20 minutes**, the library closes **17:00**. Explain the **benefit**, acknowledge a possible **staffing concern**, ask whether a trial is possible.

Classroom target: **100–140 body words** (practice guidance, not an official 0510 limit).

Plan before drafting: original attempt

reader

purpose

supplied facts

requested action

Your turn

- 1 When would a student **arrive**? How much **study time** remains before closing?
- 2 Which detail is **supplied**: the journey time, or a survey saying every student wants longer opening?
- 3 Does a request mean the trial is **already approved**?

Planning: worked check

Reader and purpose	Ms Li in her role as manager; ask her to consider a trial.
Current difficulty	Arrival at 16:20 leaves forty minutes before 17:00.
Proposal	Until 19:00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays for four weeks.
Uncertainty	Staffing is a possible concern. No survey, budget price or approval has been supplied.

A setting supplies no hidden task facts



This office photo tells us nothing about our reader's identity, schedule or attitude.
Use the actual task facts.

Polite can still be clear and specific

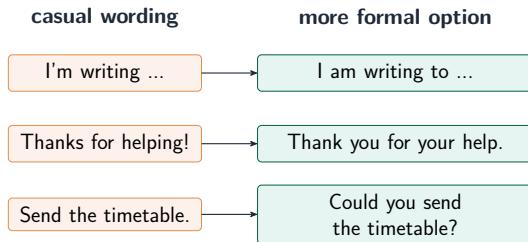
Polite 礼貌 state facts, explain effects and ask clearly. Avoid personal insults or **slang** 俚语 that does not suit the context.

✓ You can express **disappointment** respectfully: emotion is not forbidden

✓ A **contraction** is not automatically a grammar error

Full forms such as “I am” are a **cautious choice** for very formal writing; acceptable tone depends on the situation.

Change tone without changing purpose



Preserve the purpose: statement, thanks or request.

Full forms are a cautious style
choice, not a universal grammar law.

A statement remains a statement; thanks remain thanks; a request remains a request.

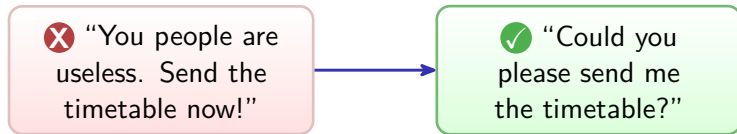
Revise the tone: original attempt

✗ "You people are useless.
Send the timetable now!"

Your turn

- 1 **Keep** the request for the timetable but **remove** the personal attack.
- 2 Do not invent a deadline or a reason. If the task later supplies a genuine deadline, how could you explain it?

Tone: worked revision



- **Clear and respectful:** no invented date, no claim that the reader agreed
- A real deadline? Explain **why** you need the information by then: politeness does not require vagueness
- A polite phrase cannot repair **false facts** or **missing questions**

Physical letters and email conventions



The photograph illustrates a physical letter. Its visible layout does not establish a universal rule for emails.

2

Building a formal letter or email

Build the message around its purpose

Greeting	Identify the intended reader appropriately.
Purpose and details	Say why you are writing, then give relevant facts and reasons.
Next step	For a request, say what you would like the reader to consider or answer.
Closing	Choose a suitable ending and give your name.

Group related ideas. Not every fact needs its own paragraph; an informative reply need not request a new action.

One possible request-letter structure

Dear Ms Li,

I am writing to suggest a short opening-hours trial.

purpose

Relevant schedule, proposed trial and reasons.

related details and explanation

Could you let us know whether a trial is possible?

requested next step

Yours sincerely,

J. Chen

British formal letters use the named/sincerely and Sir or Madam/faithfully convention. Email closings vary.

Choose an opening and closing: original attempt

Choose a suitable **opening and closing** pair for each context:

1

traditional
British formal
letter to **Ms Li**

2

traditional British
formal letter to an
unnamed recipient

3

professional email to
Customer Services

Your turn

Explain why knowing a **name** does not make a request informal.

Opening and closing: possible pairs

Named British letter	Dear Ms Li, / Yours sincerely,
Unnamed British letter	Dear Sir or Madam, / Yours faithfully,
Professional email	Dear Customer Services Team, / Kind regards,
Context matters	Use a supplied title accurately. Role, relationship and purpose still guide tone; other suitable email conventions exist.

Email subjects help identify the purpose

✓ **Subject:** Request for a library opening-hours trial

tells the recipient
what it concerns

✗ **Subject:** Hello!!!

supplies much
less information

Follow a specified **house style** or classroom format. Do not invent postal addresses or personal details to imitate a letter layout.

Clear paragraphs: original ordering attempt

Arrange these **moves** for the library letter:

A Request a reply about whether a trial is possible.

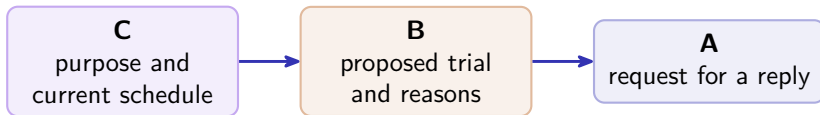
B Explain the proposed trial and its benefit.

C State why you are writing and give the current schedule.

Your turn

Why would “You have agreed to open later” be **inaccurate**?

Paragraphs: worked sequence



- “Could the library stay open...?” presents a **proposal**; “You have agreed...” would **invent a decision**
- Related ideas can share a paragraph: the sequence helps the reader **understand and act**, not a compulsory paragraph count

Formal language must fit the intended meaning

Purpose	I am writing to suggest a short opening-hours trial.
Request	Could you let me know whether a trial is possible?
Another polite request	I would be grateful 感激 if you could consider this suggestion.
Thanks	Thank you for your help. This expresses thanks, rather than asking for future help.

None of these phrases is a compulsory scoring formula.

Repair the grammar: original attempt

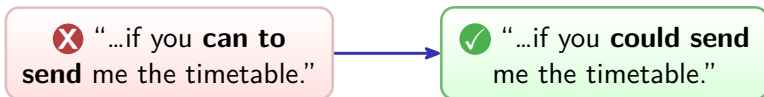
Sentence to repair

"I would be grateful if you **can to send** me the timetable."

Your turn

- 1 Rewrite the request **accurately**.
- 2 Complete "I am writing to..." for the actual library task.
- 3 Why would "I am writing to apply for a job" be **unsuitable**, even though it is grammatical?

Grammar: worked repair



could + base form after “could”, use “send”, not “to send”.

- “I am writing to **suggest a short trial** of longer library opening hours” fits our task; a job application would change the purpose
- Other grammatical, suitably polite requests are valid

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A model formal letter

Read the model against the task facts

- An original teaching model, **not officially marked**
- Body: **121 words** (space-separated count, excluding greeting, sign-off and name)

As you read, find...

- 1 the **purpose** and existing **schedule**
- 2 the proposed **trial**
- 3 the possible **staffing concern**
- 4 the requested **response**

Check: no approval or survey invented.

Library model: greeting, purpose and situation

Model letter, part 1

Dear Ms Li,

I am writing to suggest a short trial of longer library opening hours. The library currently closes at 17:00. Our lessons finish at 16:00, and the journey to the library takes twenty minutes, leaving only forty minutes to study.

purpose in the first sentence

supplied facts and their effect

Library model: proposal and explanation

Model letter, part 2

Could the library stay open until 19:00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays for four weeks? This would give students more time to use the books and work quietly. I understand that extra opening hours may require more staff time. A short trial would allow you to check how many students use the service before making a longer commitment.

the proposal, as a question

the benefit

the staffing concern, acknowledged

Library model: requested response and close

Model letter, part 3

I would be grateful if you could consider this suggestion and let the school know whether a trial is possible. Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,
J. Chen

the requested response

“Dear Ms Li” ... “Yours sincerely”

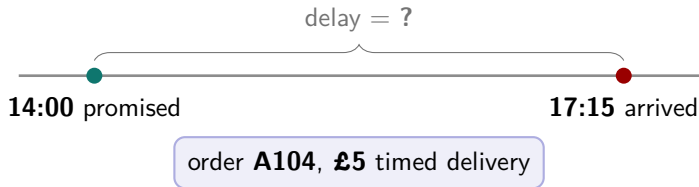
Model: why these details belong

Purpose	A trial is proposed; it is not announced as approved.
Facts and arithmetic	17:00 closing, 16:00 lesson finish and twenty minutes' travel explain the forty-minute window.
Benefit and uncertainty	More study time is explained; extra staffing is a possibility, not a supplied budget figure.
Requested action	Consider the suggestion and tell the school whether a trial is possible.

4

Complaint practice

Timed delivery: original task with all facts



Your turn

- 1 Write a short **professional email** to Customer Services: state what happened and ask whether the **delivery charge** can be refunded.
- 2 **Calculate** the delay. Do not invent damage, a missed event or an entitlement to a guaranteed refund.

Complaint: worked email

Subject: Timed-delivery query — order A104

Dear Customer Services Team,

I am writing about order A104. Delivery was promised for 14:00, but the parcel arrived at 17:15, three hours and fifteen minutes later. I paid £5 for timed delivery. **Could you please explain the delay and let me know whether the delivery charge can be refunded?**

Kind regards,
J. Chen

Every highlighted fact is **supplied or calculated**; the email asks, it does not demand a refund.

Complaint: facts, feeling and requested outcome

Verified delay	17:15 minus 14:00 is three hours and fifteen minutes.
Relevant charge	The supplied £5 is for timed delivery; do not invent a different amount.
Feeling can be appropriate	"I am disappointed that the parcel arrived late" is a respectful expression of feeling.
Request, not guarantee	Ask whether the charge can be refunded; the task supplies no promise or legal entitlement.

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Exam tips

Check the actual assessment format

0510 Exercise 5
an **informal email**

0510 Exercise 6
a more formal article,
report, essay or review

- What matters: relevant **developed content**, appropriate **purpose and audience**, language and organisation
- A memorised greeting or request phrase earns **no automatic mark**

Use correspondence conventions for an actual correspondence task; they cannot repair the **wrong exam format**.

Independent writing: original transfer task

Task

Write a **semi-formal email** to an event organiser, **Mr Chen**, about a science workshop.



Notice gives:
Saturday 10:00–12:00, a
£6 fee



Not stated:
equipment, booking

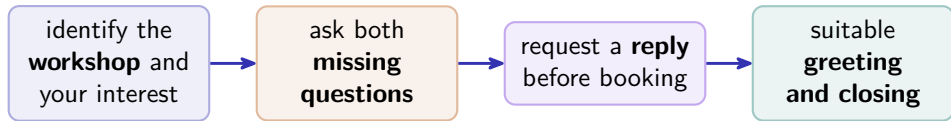
Ask: what to
bring, how to
reserve

Your turn

Explain that you need these details **before booking**. Use only supplied facts: do not claim lunch is included or a place reserved. Draft before checking the next possible plan.

Check yourself

A possible plan



Check your draft

- Are the **two questions** clear? Is every time, charge and claim **supported by the task**?
- Review paragraph **order, tone, grammar** and **spelling**.
- Why does neither a contraction nor a familiar recipient's name alone decide whether a message is **suitable**?