Difference between Formal VS Informal Language in Different Situations

Regardless of the language you speak, you have grown up knowing the importance of using formal language in the situations that best warrant it. Those situations being the ones that either circle around a serious subject or event, or involve people that we do not know well.

Informal language, on the other hand, is more commonly utilized in the situations or scenarios where we are more relaxed and will often involve people that we know on a more personal level.

The use of formal language is more prevalent when we write. Informal language is seen more when we speak. That being said, there are times when writing can be less formal. For example, if you were writing a postcard an email or a text message to a close friend, you aren't likely to take care to use proper grammar and to write in complete sentences.

On the other hand, there are situations where the spoken word needs to be more formal, when delivering a speech or a lecture, for example. The majority of the time, the use of English is considered 'neutral' in the fact that is it neither formal nor informal.

Both formal and informal language is connected with specific grammatical and vocabulary choices.

Things like relative clauses void of a relative pronoun and ellipsis are much more prevalent in informal language.

Here is an example of formal language vs informal language.

Formal:

- They have been arguing all day
- She is very busy
- Many different outcomes were planned for the party
- It is felt that the objective is unreasonable
- The famous soccer team we saw at the bus station went to Toronto
- The receptionist who answered the phone was very rude

Informal

- They've been arguing all day
- She's very busy
- I planned many different outcomes for the party

- We felt the objective was unreasonable
- The famous soccer team we saw at the bus station went to Toronto
- The receptionist who answered the phone was very rude

The appropriate use of Formal Vs. Informal Language

There is a time and a place for everything, and that same rule of thought can be applied to language. There are times when more formal language is required, but there are also times when it is appropriate to adopt a less formal approach.

What is the difference between formal and informal language?

Formal and informal language each serve a different purpose. The choice of words, the tone and the way that each word is strung together will vary depending on the situation and the level of formality. Formal language is, for all intents and purposes, far less personal than informal writing.

This is why it is the appropriate choice for use in professional or academic settings. Formal language does not make use of contractions, colloquialisms, or first person pronouns like "I" or "we."

Informal language, on the other hand, is much more spontaneous and casual. This is the type of language used when communicating with friends or family members and can be used when either writing or speaking.

Informal language is used when writing a personal email, sending a text message and even in some business communications. (However, if you do not know your audience, always air on the side of caution and take a more formal approach.) The tone used in informal language is much more relaxed than it is in formal language.

Informal Writing

- **Colloquial:** Informal writing is similar to conversational English. It might include slang, figures of speech, etc. Informal writing has a more personal tone, similar to if you were to speak directly to your audience.
- **Simple:** Informal writing uses shorter sentence, and some of them might be incomplete.
- **Contractions and Abbreviations:** Informal writing consists of words that might be simplified or contracted.
- **Empathy:** Informal writing allows for the display of emotion or empathy

Formal Writing

- **Complex:** Formal writing uses longer sentences that are as through as possible. Each point is clearly introduced and concluded.

- **Objective:** Formal writing clearly states the primary point and offers supporting information. It avoids emotions or emotive punctuations like ellipses and exclamation points, unless being cited from another source.
- **Full words:** Formal writing requires full, complete sentences. No words should be simplified or contracted. Abbreviations are spelled out in full when first read.
- **Third Person:** Formal writing is not personal – meaning the writer is not connected to the topic and will not use a first or second person point of view.

When determining if it is best to deploy a formal or informal tone, try to mimic the language of those around you. If you are unsure, you should always teeter more on the formal side rather than risking coming across as unprofessional or uneducated. No one will fault you for speaking with confidence and professionalism, but, they will think twice if your conversations are filled with slang and regional dialect that no one but you understands.

What is Formal Language And Where You Need It?

In adulthood, we use formal language in settings where the subject matter is more serious or whenever the conversation includes people we do not know well.

Formal language is more commonly seen whenever we write.

By definition, formal language is defined as being *'a language designed for use in situations where natural language (informal English language) is deemed to be unacceptable.*

Learning when to best use formal language is all part of mastering the English language. In a business situation, it is always best to be more formal. Formal language uses longer and more complete sentences. Often, there are a few sub-clauses used to explain details and possibly even a few unnecessary words.

The school of thought typically suggests that we should be more formal when speaking to people we don't know – but, this isn't always the case.

Imagine how awkward or uncomfortable it might be if you were to meet a stranger on a bus or a train and the conversation started of extremely formal.

This is why it is important to clearly gauge your surroundings and use a level of formality that is equal to the situation.

A Few Formal Language Examples For Better Understanding

Outlined below are a few formal words and their informal equivalents. Notice how the formal words are often longer than the informal ones?

Formal:

- Cogitate
- Purchase
- Comestibles
- Penurious
- Abominate
- Emoluments
- Beverage

Informal:

- Think
- Buy
- Food
- Poor
- Hate
- Fee
- A Drink

You might be tempted to try to use more formal verbiage hoping that it might add more sophistication to what you are saying, or give you some sort of upper hand. You would be wise to try to avoid this urge, particularly if you don't understand the meaning of a certain word.

Using overly formal language, in everyday situations, has the potential to make your writing read like you are pompous or pretentious. Worse, if you use a word incorrectly, it might even make you sound like a fool who lacks credibility.

Consider the following examples:

The guests were stuck without comestibles and beverage for several hours.

OR

The guests were stuck without food and water for several hours.

The use of the more formal language in the first example is not only distracting, it also sounds odd and gets in the way of the intended meaning of the sentence. The use of less formal English, as seen in the second example, has a much better impact.

Remember, when in doubt, formal English is used in more serious situations or in professional text – like government documents, books, news reports, essays, articles, etc. Informal English is used in everyday conversations and in letters written to people you know on a personal level.

If you are writing something for school or work, like an academic report or a financial report, you should always use appropriately formal language.

If you are writing an email or text to a friend, or a Christmas letter to your grandmother, it is acceptable to use less formal language.