



British Museum. London

English B2
IM259, *Lingua Inglese Pari a Livello B2*

Lesson 6

1. Understanding and producing texts

Until now, we have focused on difficult phonological and morphological spots in English.

Now, we'll concentrate on:

reading and writing academic texts.

First of all, let's talk about TEXT. Most of us have a vague idea of what "text" means. But a vague idea is not enough. Let us give a precise definition so we know that, from now on, we'll be talking about the same thing.

1.1. Text (definition)

The term text refers to any passage — spoken or written— of whatever length, that does form a unified whole

Don't let the linguistic jargon impress you. The above definition just mentions the features required for a piece of language to be a **text**:

- Length doesn't matter. A text can be short or long.
- It can be spoken or written. It cannot be a drawing or a picture.

AND, most of all:

- A text must be coherent, i.e. consistent. This means, a text is not a bunch of unrelated sentences.

1.2. Academic Texts:

Here you have a list of texts you'll find in your academic life:

- **Formal e-mails**
- **Curriculum Vitae**
- Letters
- Blogs
- Essays
- Reports
- Presentations
- Instructions
- Leaflets and flyers
- **Papers** (Congress, symposium, course work)
- **Theses** (Bachelor or Master's degree)
- **Dissertations** (Ph.D.)

In this course, we are going to concentrate on the ones emphasized in red. Let's start with the simplest:

1.2.1. Formal e-mail (also written email)

Emails are communication tools we use almost everyday. Before the appearance in our lives of social media, the electronic mail was THE WAY to communicate, either casually or formally. Even though casual emails have almost disappeared from our daily life, the formal email is still widely used.

Formal emails are called for when you're sending an email to someone you don't know well. A formal email is also the right choice for some business situations.

A general rule of use is: If you are not sure whether to send a formal or informal email, **it's usually better to send a formal message**.

In the following, we'll explore the features of a good formal email.

1.2.1.1. Formal email. General features

1. Email tends to be **brief**.
2. Email is generally **less formal** than communication on paper.
3. Email does not communicate emotions as successfully as face-to-face or even telephone conversations. The reader of your email may not be able to tell from your words if you are serious or joking, angry or just surprised.
4. Emails, especially very short emails, can sound angry, unfriendly or rude **when this is not intended by the writer**.

1.2.1.2. Formal email. Structure

a) Salutation:

It is generally a good idea to start an email with a greeting rather than beginning the message immediately. Just like a face-to-face exchange of greetings, email greetings:

- show that you are friendly and pleasant
- show respect for the reader.

a 1) Different cases:

- a. You know the person: Hi, Hello, Hi Paul, Hello Cindy
- b. It's a second (third, etc.) e-mail within a series of messages to the same person: you may omit salutation).
- c. You don't know the person: Hello Mr. Smith. Hi **Ms.** Smith
- d. The person is much older than you. Hello **Ms.** Smith
- e. The person is higher in rank (your employer, your boss, your teacher, etc.). **Dear Ms. Smith; Dear Dr. Smith; Dear Prof. Smith**
- f. The person is from a country more formal than you (?). **Dear Dr Smith; Dear Prof. Smith**

Notes:

- **Ms.** is the abbreviation for women in general, irrespectively of their marital status. This means that the distinction between the old forms **Miss/Mrs.** has been simplified.
- When using the formal salute, you **DO NOT USE first names** (for example, Laura, Rose, James, Donald, etc.). Instead, you use the title and the last name or family name.

Example: you want to write a formal email to your teacher. His name is **Patrick Donahue**. Your salutation would be?

- Dear Professor Patrick, **WRONG!!!**
- Dear Professor Donahue, **RIGHT!!!**

b) Subject

- It must show **the main point** of an email.
- It gives you the chance to tell the reader of your email why you are emailing her/him before they have even opened your message.

b1) Examples of **BAD** subjects:

- Subject: Hi
- Subject: Another thing
- Subject: (empty)
- Subject: same subject of your last mail

b 2) Examples of **GOOD** subjects:

- Subject: Meeting Room changed to 307
- Subject: Lunch (Fri 9 Oct) canceled
- Subject: REQ: Feb sales figures
- Subject: Reminder: conference agenda due

c) Content and length

- Write in short paragraphs.
- Separate paragraphs.
- Use headings within the body of your message if the message relates to several different bjects.
- Consider numbering your points. The reader will find this useful when responding to particular points.
- Use short sentences. Try to keep your sentences to a maximum of 20 words.
- If possible, try to fit your message onto one screen so that the reader does not have to scroll down to see the rest of it.

d) Punctuation and abbreviations

Generally, the rules for spelling, grammar, and punctuation that apply to letter writing also apply to formal or work emails:

- Contractions are acceptable in formal emails: (I'm, he's, can't, etc.).
- Other abbreviations, such as "U" for "you," "plz" for "please," and "thx" for "thanks," though often used in personal email, are generally not acceptable in formal or work emails.
- Likewise, emoticons or smileys are not generally used in formal or work emails.

e) Ending a formal email

e 1) Before Signoff:

- I hope to hear from you soon.
- I look forward to hearing from you.
- I look forward to your response.
- Many thanks for your time.
- Thanks again for this.
- Many thanks in advance.
- Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions.
- I hope this helps.
- Please get in touch if you have any more queries.

e. 2 Signoff:

An email that ends without a signoff can sound a little rude, especially if the content of the email has included a disagreement or problem.

Common **signoffs**:

- Many thanks
- Thank you
- Thanks again
- Best
- Regards
- Best regards
- Kind regards
- Warm regards
- Best wishes
- With best wishes

1.2.1.3. Informal email

a) General features:

- Friendly greetings or salutations
- Loose use of punctuation
- Use of smileys, emoticons and abbreviations:

AFAIK As Far As I Know
AKA Also Known As
ASAP As Soon As Possible
B4 Before
BTW By the way
CUL8R See you later
CYA see ya/see you
CYU See you

b) Before signoff

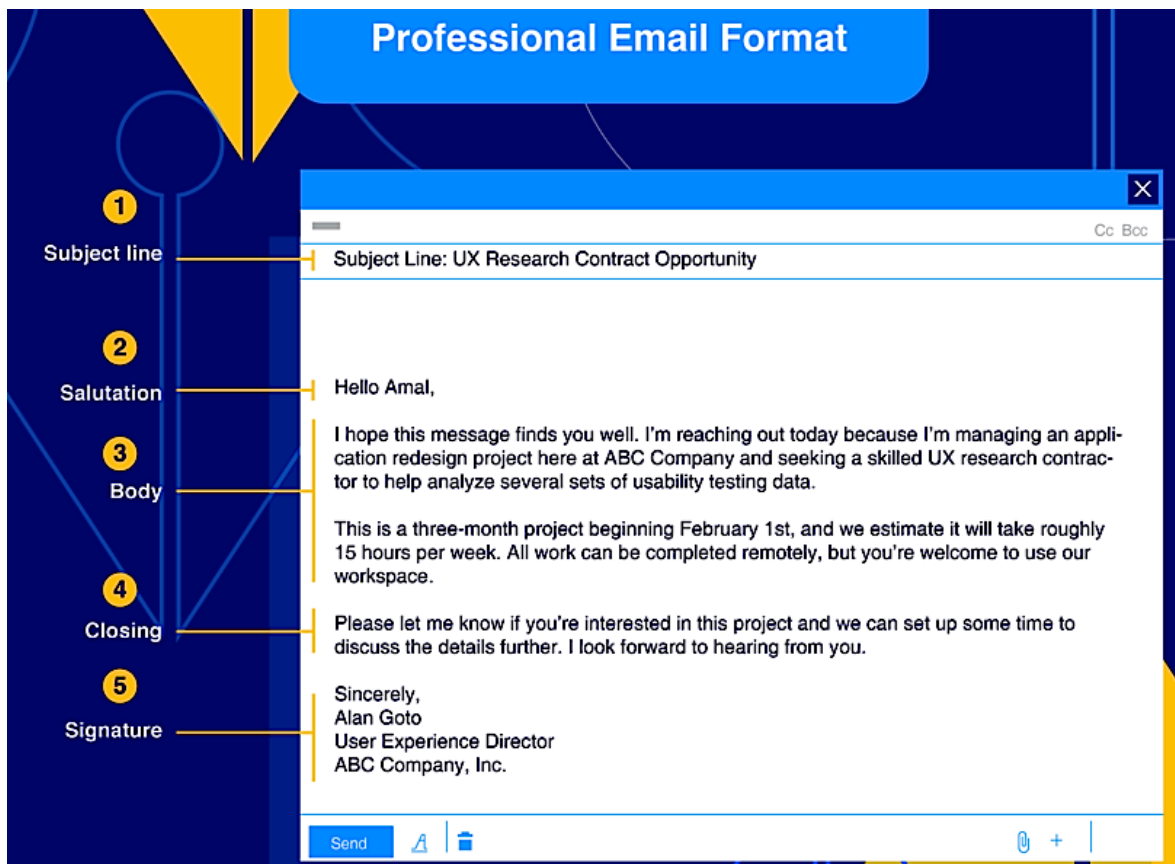
- Talk to you later.
- Hope you're doing okay/well.
- Hope you're all well.
- See you soon.
- Better go now.
- Tell you more when we speak.
- Have a good weekend.
- Hope to see you soon.

c) Signoff:

- Love
- Lots of love
- Take care
- Ciao
- Later
- See you
- **See ya!**
- Cheers

Here is a picture that gives you a good example of a professional well-written email. The source is “Indeed Career guide” form <https://www.indeed.com>

Note that even though it’s a professional mail, the sender uses the recipient’s first name, instead of the family name, and no title. They are probably colleagues and friends, but the subject of the mail requires formality on the side of the sender.



1.2.1.2. The Curriculum Vitae

A *Curriculum Vitae* is a standard document that gives details of your work experience, education, and background. It also gives your full name and contact details.

Other names:

- Resume
- Résumé (from French)
- or simply **CV**

Main differences between Resume and CV:

RESUME	CV
Emphasizes skills	Emphasizes academic accomplishments
Used when applying for a position in industry, non-profit, and public sector	Used when applying for positions in academia, fellowships and grants
Is no longer than 2 pages, with an additional page for publications and / or poster presentations if highly relevant to the job	Length depends upon experience and includes a complete list of publications, posters, and presentations
After 1 year of industry experience, lead with work experience and place education section at or near the end, depending upon qualifications	Always begins with education and can include name of advisor and dissertation title or summary. Also used for merit/tenure review and sabbatical leave

More about CVs:

In American usage, a CV is much more detailed, longer, and presented in a different format than a résumé.

People usually send a cover letter with their résumé or CV. You will find help with this type of letter in the part of this book on writing letters.

A résumé should be as short as possible without leaving out essential information. Job advertisements sometimes specify the maximum length of résumé that is acceptable, but in any case your résumé should rarely be longer than three pages, and if you can get everything important on one or two pages that is best.

In sum, a good CV must be:

- Quick and easy to read.
- Clear and concise.
- Pleasant to look at.

1.2.1.2. CV defects and more tips (Source: jobs.ac.uk):

a) Things to avoid:

- Applying for a position for which you are not qualified.
- Providing irrelevant personal information.
- Burying important information.
- Spelling errors, typos and poor grammar.
- Unexplained gaps in employment.
- **Lying or misleading information.**
- Along, waffly CV
- **Badly formatted CV**
- Meaningless introductions.
- The 'So What' CV

b) Stay away from lying or providing misleading information!!!

jobs.ac.uk states:

“Recruiters are not stupid. They can spot information that doesn't stack up. For example, they're always on the look out for inflated:

- Qualifications
- Salaries
- Job titles
- Achievements”

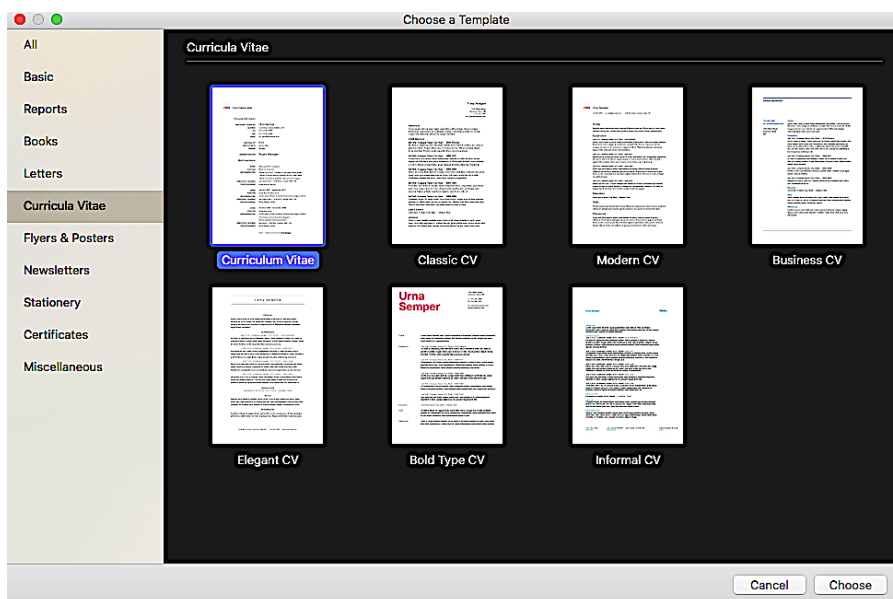
And remember: when providing personal information, if you do not have a work email address or a “serious” email address, please get one immediately. Do not provide addresses like italianmachoman@hotmail.com or sweetkitty@hotmail.com

c) CV Templates: A possibility?

Frequent question: Can I use a CV template?

Answer: Yes, but make sure it is an updated one. Things have changed:

Microsoft, for example offers you a variety of possibilities:



Exercises

1)

a) From your email account copy three formal mails that you have sent in the past.

b) Analyze them according to the guidelines provided: subject, salute, body, before signoff, signoff, and so on.

c) Make the necessary adjustments.

2)

Write your CV following the guidelines provided and keep it for future opportunities.