

Formal vs. Informal Language When Writing a Paper

Formal: characterized by punctilious respect for form; formal language reflects a dignified and respectful regard for the reader based on word choice.

Consider:

- Am I addressing a professor, employer, or colleague?
- Is the writing academic, business, or legal?
- Do I want to convey seriousness in my writing?

If yes, then formal language should be used!

Informal: characteristic of or appropriate to ordinary, casual, or familiar use

This type of language is reserved for private letters or when you want to imply casualness, or even conversation. Contractions like *don't*, *I'll* and also slang terms may be used in this type of writing. The “form” of the writing is not so serious because you are not trying to convey a tone of seriousness.

Consider:

- Am I addressing a close friend or relative?
- Is the writing for personal communication?
- Is it okay for the tone to be relaxed and humorous?

If Yes, then informal language can be used!

Neither formal nor informal language is necessarily better than the other, but one is almost always more appropriate than the other depending on the situation and audience.

Need More Help?

- Bedford: pgs. 220-221
- Examples:
http://www.word-mart.com/html/formal_and_informal_writing.html
<http://blog.ezinearticles.com/2011/03/formal-vs-informal.html>