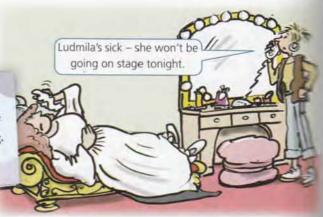
105 Formal language

ROYAL OPERA

Ms Starkova is unwell and will be unable to perform the role of Elvira this evening.



1 Informal and formal language

We show formality through our choice of grammar and vocabulary. Compare:

INFORMAL Ludmila's sick - she won't be going on stage tonight.

FORMAL Ms Starkova is unwell and will be unable to perform this evening.

We use language that is suitable for the situation we are in:

- informal → talking or writing to friends and members of your own family
- formal → talking and writing to strangers or people in authority, business letters and reports, talking to an audience, academic writing

2 Formal grammar

IN WRITTEN ENGLISH	
impersonal pronouns (> Unit 9.4)	One should not judge people by their appearance.
passives (> Unit 83)	Your application will be assessed by the manager.
infinitive clause subjects (➤ Unit 76)	To create a fairer society is the party's main aim.
non-defining relative clauses (➤ Unit 73)	The singer, who performed the same role in Milan, will be appearing in tonight's performance.

IN SPOKEN ENGLISH	
indirect questions instead of direct questions (➤ Unit 106.3/4)	Can you tell me when the performance ends? I'm afraid I don't know who wrote that opera.
* past tenses for a present situation; using would and could: (> Unit 53.1)	Did you want to ask me something? We weren't sure about which model to choose. It would be helpful if you could send me a copy.
* continuous forms of verbs to talk about arrangements, etc. (➤ Units 28, 31, 41, 42)	Excuse me. Will we be stopping during the journey? Will you be coming to the party? I'm afraid I can't come on Friday, I'm working.

^{*} We often use these forms in spoken English to be more polite, or if we are not sure about something.

In formal English we don't usually use passives with *get* (➤ Unit 83.1), longer contractions (e.g. *shouldn't've*) or sentences ending with prepositions (➤ Unit 72.4).

3 Formal vocabulary

We can use most words in any situation. However, there are some words which are usually only used in formal language. Here are some examples:

nouns	performance (show), remuneration (salary), spouse (husband/wife)	
verbs	anticipate (expect), be possible to (can), commence (start), inform (tell), terminate (finish)	
adjectives	delightful (lovely), extensive (large) personable (friendly), unwell (sick),	

INFORMAL Carrie turned down Sean's invitation.

FORMAL Universities have to reject many excellent candidates.