

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

IN SPOKEN ENGLISH

indirect questions instead of direct questions (► Unit 106.3/4)	<i>Can you tell me when the performance ends? I'm afraid I don't know who wrote that opera.</i>
* past tenses for a present situation; using <i>would</i> and <i>could</i> : (► Unit 53.1)	<i>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.</i>
* continuous forms of verbs to talk about arrangements, etc. (► Units 28, 31, 41, 42)	<i>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.</i>

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

INFORMAL *Carrie turned down Sean's invitation.*

FORMAL *Universities have to reject many excellent candidates.*