

■ The tools for formal writing

Before considering the different types of composition you may be asked to write using formal writing, and the different writing techniques involved, we must first examine the tools needed to produce formal writing. These include:

- time fixer phrases
- phrases for introducing points
- phrases for joining points
- phrases for adding support
- phrases for making generalisations
- formal language structures
 - suggestion
 - opinion
 - views and arguments

Time fixer phrases

When writing formally, it is often good style to begin the introduction with a time fixer, such as one from the selection below:

Nowadays

These days

Until now

Every day/week/year

Recently

For many years

In the past

Ten years ago

In the last few/five/days/weeks/months/years

Since + specific time/noun

Look at these examples:

Thirty years ago, nearly all children went to single sex schools.

For many years, environmentalists have been warning about the effects of global warming.

Nowadays, most teenagers own a mobile phone.

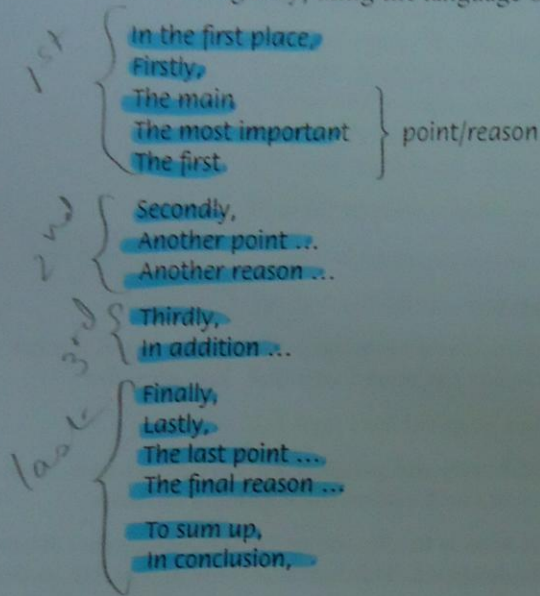
If there has been a *change* in the situation you are writing about, two time fixers can be used to show contrast and create interest.

Thirty years ago, nearly all children went to single sex schools. These days most schools in this country are mixed.

Introducing points

As discussed in the units on friendly letters, listing is considered to be poor style. In formal writing also you should remember to limit the ideas, opinions or suggestions to a maximum of three.

Look at the following examples showing how to introduce points chronologically, using the language of formal register.



Joining points

In formal writing, there are certain ways to join points together, or add more points of the same kind.

- When joining *similar points*, use the following addition words:

Furthermore,
Moreover,
Besides,

Regular exercise is beneficial for health. Moreover, it may result in weight reduction.

(Both sentences are *positive*.)

Smoking can seriously damage health. Furthermore, it is an anti-social habit.

(Both sentences are *negative*.)

- When joining *contrasting points*, or beginning a new paragraph that introduces an opposite opinion, use the following concession words:

However,
Nevertheless,
On the other hand,
Although ...

Note: each of the above phrases *begins* a sentence.

Tourism represents a significant contribution to the national economy. However, it is argued that large numbers of tourists can damage the environment.

(The first sentence is *positive*, and the second sentence is *negative*.)

Adding support

In formal writing, as mentioned above, it is *not* appropriate to personalise, because you are not writing for a reader who knows you. The style is impersonal throughout.

This means that support in formal writing is factual, and can be introduced in many ways, including the following:

This means that ...

As a result, ...

This may lead to ...

This may result in ...

Consequently, ...

Therefore, ...

because ...

, which means that ...

Generalisations

Sometimes a minor modification (change) can make a big difference to your sentence. Some statements can sound very dull. For example:

Tourists drop litter.

Sentences can be modified by the use of various generalisations. You can use these on their own, or in combination throughout a sentence.

- One of the simplest ways is to use one of the following generalisations, at the *beginning* of the sentence. This makes it more acceptable to the English ear. Your sentence will also sound more convincing.

Almost all
The vast majority of
A large number of
Most
Many
Some
A few
Not many
Hardly any

tourists drop litter.

In almost all cases,
In the majority of cases,
In a large number of cases,
In most cases,
In many cases,
In some cases,
In a few cases,
On the whole,

tourists drop litter.

Look at these examples:

Almost all teenagers enjoy watching television.

The vast majority of teenagers enjoy watching television.

In many cases, pollution is the result of ignorance.

These phrases can add focus to a dull statement (as above) or can replace exact figures, numbers and percentages (see below).

Look at this example from a summary passage which includes the following sentence:

A study shows that 95% of teenagers spend five hours a week watching television.

A summary must not contain figures or percentages or specific numbers. Therefore, a generalisation could be used to express the same information:

The vast majority of teenagers enjoy watching television.

- A **frequency word**, such as *generally*, *usually*, *often* or *sometimes* can also be used as a generalisation to achieve a similar effect.

Teenagers often watch television.

Generally, teenagers enjoy watching television.

Teenagers generally enjoy watching television.

★ Note

Generalisations are also very useful for writing summaries of reading passages that contain figures, numbers or statistics.

Formal language structures

The most important tools needed for formal writing are the formal language structures themselves.

In the exam, the question will usually contain a **function word**, for example: opinion, views, arguments or suggestions.

One of the most effective ways to study formal writing is through learning various phrases associated with selected language functions. For example, consider these ways of making suggestions:

In order to reduce pollution, the government should increase tax on petrol.

(This is a simple structure in terms of grammar.)

Surely it would be a good idea if the government increased tax on petrol.

(This is a more advanced structure, using the second conditional with the past tense.)

It is high time the government increased tax on petrol.

(This is an advanced structure, using the phrase 'it is time' with the past tense.)

All the phrases listed in this unit use formal register. Some are more advanced in structure than others, but this does not mean that they are better or more formal than those with a simpler structure. The key is to use what you feel comfortable with.

★ Remember

Any structure that you intend to learn specifically for exam purposes must be learnt thoroughly, through practice, until you are confident that you can reproduce it accurately. This takes time.

In the remaining units of this section, we examine in detail the formal language structures we have been referring to, under the headings:

- Suggestions
- Opinions
- Views and arguments.

Suggestions

There are several ways of introducing, or putting forward, a **suggestion** in formal register, including the following structures and phrases. Here each one is followed by an example sentence relevant to an exam topic.

1 **(Surely) + subject + could/should**

(Surely) an advertising campaign could help/promote awareness of ...

2 **I (would) suggest + verb + ing**

I (would) suggest introducing laws to deal with the problem of deforestation.

3 **I (would) suggest + that + subject + should**

I would suggest that drivers should use unleaded petrol.

4 **It would (clearly/surely) be a good idea if + subject + past tense**

It would be a good idea if

}	we had	} better sports facilities	} at school
	students were made aware of the importance of good study habits.		
the public were better informed about the dangers of pollution.			

5 **Subject + have a responsibility ...**

Television companies (clearly) have a responsibility ...

... to show

... to broadcast

... to screen

... to transmit

} **programmes unsuitable for children late in the evening.**

Schools (clearly) have a responsibility to make students aware of the dangers of smoking.

6 **It is (high) time (that) + subject + past tense**

It is high time that schools introduced classes to inform students about the dangers of smoking.

Opinions

There are several ways of giving your opinion in formal register:

In my opinion,

In my view,

Personally,

It seems to me that ...

As far as I am concerned,

As I see it,

I think

I feel

I believe

} that ...

Many people

} think

} feel

} believe

} that ...

The following examples show how the above phrases can be used:

In my opinion, sport is very important for our health.

In my view, single ^{gender} schools allow students to concentrate fully on their studies.

In many cases, sentences which begin with giving an opinion continue by making a **suggestion**. Look at the following examples:

Personally, I feel that **sport should be part of every school** timetable.

It seems to me that we should judge a person by his actions and not by his appearance.

As far as I am concerned, it is high time we began to respect the environment.

As I see it, schools have a responsibility to educate children about the dangers of taking drugs.

Many people believe that schools have a responsibility to motivate students.

Remember

include details about whose opinion (underlined in these examples) is being expressed to make the sentence more interesting.

A large number of parents believe that schools have a responsibility to motivate students.

In many cases, teenagers feel that it would be a good idea if parents listened to their point of view.

The vast majority of scientists believe that it is high time we began to respect the environment.

Emphasise or develop your opinion 1

When you are confident about using the above selection of opinion phrases, you could try to emphasise or develop your opinion. As opinions are closely linked to the way you *feel* about something, you can use sentences containing verbs of feeling to express your reaction to something. Use verbs such as:

amaze

annoy (= less than angry)

bore

depress

embarrass

frighten

infuriate (= make you very angry)

shock

upset (= make you feel unhappy)

worry

Here are some examples:

People who have no respect for the environment **annoy** me.

People who are cruel to animals **infuriate** me.

Photographs of children with incurable diseases **upset** me.

By turning the verbs into adjectives you can produce a slightly more formal sentence in the following way:

I **find** people who have no respect for the environment **annoying**.

I **find** people who are cruel to animals **infuriating**.

I **find** photographs of children with incurable diseases **upsetting**.

Emphasise or develop your opinion 2

Another way to develop your opinion is to express your attitude by using the phrase the way. Look at the following examples:

1 verb + the way + noun

Sentences constructed this way can be *positive*:

I like the way documentary programmes teach us about wildlife.

I love the way classical music relaxes you.

Sentences constructed this way can also be *negative*:

I object to the way teenagers are treated like children.

2 one thing/what I like about + noun + is the way

Sentences constructed this way can be *positive*:

What I like about mobile phones is the way they make communication easy.

Sentences constructed this way can also be *negative*:

One thing I dislike about parents is the way they never stop talking about studying.

3 what/one thing that + verb + about + noun + is the way

What irritates me about TV is the way the programmes are repeated.

One thing that infuriates me is the way some people waste paper.

Emphasise or develop your opinion 3

Another way to develop personal opinion, is to use an adjective + infinitive:

It is	}	difficult	to	}	believe ...
		easy			hear ...
		frightening			imagine ...
		hard			think ...
		interesting			see ...
		upsetting			realise ...

It is upsetting to think that many children have Aids.

In other words, I think or In my opinion it is upsetting to think that many children have Aids.

Views and arguments

There are several ways of putting forward views and arguments in formal register, including:

1 One of the main arguments } in favour of
The main argument } against (something) is that ...

2 Some people (would) argue that ...

3 Many people } think
} feel that ...
} believe

4 It can be argued that ...

The main argument against tourism is that large numbers of visitors tend to spoil the natural beauty of a place.

In phrases 1 to 4 above, you are putting forward points of view which are well known, but which you may or may not agree with. Phrases 5 to 8, however, express your own, personal point of view. For this reason, some of these phrases can also be used for giving opinions.

5 Personally, I would argue that ...

6 I am } very much } in favour of ...
} strongly } against ...
} opposed to ...

7 It seems to me that ...

8 I } think
} feel that ...
} believe

I am strongly opposed to the use of illegal drugs.

It seems to me that more people are becoming environmentally friendly.

