The following are some guidelines to help you identify and use formal email writing style.

**Openings and closings**
There are a number of common openings and closings to an email which will show you whether the author is being formal, informal, or semi-formal.

**Contractions**
When writing formal emails, do not use contractions, such as *I’m*, *he’d*, *you’ll*, etc.

Formal:  *I am writing to ask if you have seen the news from Jo.*
Semi-formal / Informal: *I’m writing to ask if you’ve seen the news from Jo.*

**Modal verbs**
To make requests and give instructions, formal English frequently uses modal verbs: *would*, *could* etc. However, note that modal verbs are also used in this way in informal and semi-formal English.

Formal: *Would you be able to deliver the report by tomorrow?*
Semi-formal: *Can you deliver the report by tomorrow?*
Formal: *Could you ask Pierre to come to the meeting?*
Semi-formal: *Can you ask Pierre to come to the meeting?*

**Questions**
In preference to asking a direct question, formal emails frequently use indirect questions.

Formal: *I wonder if you would like to join us for dinner on Tuesday.*
Informal: *Do you want to join us for dinner on Tuesday?*
Formal: *Could you see if the components have been ordered yet?*
Informal: *Have the components been ordered yet?*

In addition to this, offers are often made using *would*.

Formal: *Would you like to see the new prototype?*
Informal: *Do you want to see the new prototype?*

**Opening sentences**
After the greeting, English emails normally begin with an opening sentence.

Common opening sentences for a formal email are as follows.

- *I hope that all is well with you.*
- *I was just emailing to request some assistance.* (The past tense is frequently used to make a sentence more polite.)
- *Thank you for your email of 12 March.*

Emails that omit this opening sentence are usually official correspondence between governments and individuals, or formal demands for payment, etc.

**Formal and informal vocabulary**
Formal emails tend to use slightly different vocabulary to informal emails. Informal emails often use phrasal verbs and sound more like standard spoken English.

Formal: *I would like to request some assistance.*
Informal: *I’d like to ask for some help.*
Formal: *Once I have received the information from our suppliers, I will reply to Mr Braun’s email.*
Informal: *After I hear back from the suppliers, I’ll get back to Mr Braun.*

Certain terms have a formal or informal equivalent. Try not to mix informal and formal styles in the same email.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Formal</strong></th>
<th><strong>Informal</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank you</td>
<td>Thanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to apologize for ...</td>
<td>Sorry for ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would appreciate it if you ...</td>
<td>Can you ... ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you happen to know ...?</td>
<td>Do you know ... ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfortunately, I will not be able to ...</td>
<td>I can’t ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am unable to say whether ...</td>
<td>I don’t know whether ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would rather not ...</td>
<td>I don’t want to ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mistakes and apologies

Formal and semi-formal emails are also often used between people who know each other well when the writer is apologizing for a mistake. They are also used when a more senior colleague is being copied into the correspondence. Here are some common phrases used to start an apologizing email.

- I am extremely sorry for the inconvenience caused. (formal)
- I am writing in order to apologize for … (formal)
  
  Example: I am writing in order to apologize for the unfortunate mistake which occurred last week regarding the meeting in Paris.

- Please accept our apologies.
  
  Example: Please accept our apologies for the late delivery of your order.

- I am very sorry that … (formal / semi-formal)
  
  Example: I am very sorry that your shop has not yet received the order.

- Please accept our apologies once again. (formal / semi-formal – used as the sign-off to an email with an apology)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Informal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May I make a request?</td>
<td>Could I ask you for something / some help?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I appreciate that this will be difficult for you.</td>
<td>I know that this is not going to be easy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you be able to attend a meeting on the 4th of June?</td>
<td>Can you meet up on the 4th of June?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please contact me at any time.</td>
<td>Feel free to call any time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to apologize for …</td>
<td>Sorry for …</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>