Register: degrees of formality

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
INTERMEDIATE | B1-B2

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Tick the correct register for each phrase.

Phrase	Formal	Neutral	Informal

1 I'd appreciate it if... [ ] [ ] [ ]

2 Gimme a sec. [ ] [ ] [ ]

3 Could you possibly... [ ] [ ] [ ]

4 No worries. [ ] [ ] [ ]

5 I regret to inform you. [ ] [ ] [ ]

6 That's cool. [ ] [ ] [ ]

7 Please find attached. [ ] [ ] [ ]

8 Check this out. [ ] [ ] [ ]

2 Rewrite each informal phrase in a more formal register.

1 Gimme a sec. → _____

2 That's cool. → _____

3 Check this out. → _____

4 No worries. → _____

5 I wanna ask you something. → _____

6 Can't come, sorry. → _____

7 Let's sort this out. → _____

8 Thanks a bunch. → _____

3 Choose the phrase with the most appropriate register for a formal business email.

1 I'd appreciate it if you could confirm this / Lemme know if this works.

2 Please find attached the requested document / Here's the file you wanted.

3 I regret to inform you that / Sorry, but.

4 Should you require further information / If you need more info.

5 We look forward to your response / Hit us back soon.

6 Kind regards / Later.

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4 Rewrite each sentence in the register indicated.

1 'I wanna reschedule.' → (formal) _____

2 'I regret to inform you the meeting is cancelled.' → (informal) _____

3 'Lemme know what you think.' → (formal) _____

4 'We would be grateful for your prompt response.' → (informal) _____

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Why register shifts matter

Sociolinguists studying register note that appropriate formality is judged relative to context rather than fixed absolutely; a phrase perfectly natural in a text message to a friend can sound jarring or even disrespectful in a formal business email, while formal language used casually among close friends can sound stilted or unintentionally distant. Mastering register requires more than simply learning a list of formal and informal vocabulary; speakers must also judge situational factors such as relative social status, familiarity and the communicative purpose of the interaction. Second-language learners often struggle particularly with register, since textbooks frequently teach a single neutral or formal style without adequately preparing learners for the wide range of everyday informal registers native speakers actually use in casual conversation.

1 How is appropriate formality judged, according to sociolinguists? _____

2 What can sound jarring in a formal business email? _____

3 What can sound stilted when used casually among friends? _____

4 What does mastering register require beyond vocabulary? _____

5 Give an example of a situational factor speakers must judge. _____

6 Why do second-language learners often struggle particularly with register? _____

6 Rewrite each sentence to match the more appropriate register for the context given.

1 'Gimme a call.' (voicemail to a client) → _____

2 'I would be delighted to accept.' (text to a close friend) → _____

3 'Sorry, can't make it.' (formal apology to a professor) → _____

4 'Please be advised that the office is closed.' (casual note to a colleague) → _____

OVER TO YOU

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Write 100-120 words giving the same piece of news twice, once in a formal register and once in an informal register, for different audiences.

[ ] Use at least ten register-related expressions. [ ] Include polite, precise wording. [ ] Organise the account clearly.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Categories

1 Formal 2 Informal 3 Formal 4 Informal 5 Formal 6 Informal 7 Formal 8 Informal

2 Formal rewrites

1 Could you give me a moment, please? 2 That sounds excellent. 3 Please take a look at this.
4 Not a problem at all. 5 I would like to ask you something. 6 Unfortunately, I am unable to attend.
7 Let us resolve this matter. 8 Thank you very much.

3 Suitable register

1 I'd appreciate it if you could confirm this 2 Please find attached the requested document 3 I regret to inform you that
4 Should you require further information 5 We look forward to your response 6 Kind regards

4 Register rewrites

1 I would like to reschedule, if possible. 2 Hey, the meeting's off, sorry! 3 Let me know what you think, please.
4 Let me know what you think soon!

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 Relative to context rather than fixed absolutely.
2 A phrase perfectly natural in a text message to a friend.
3 Formal language.
4 Judging situational factors such as relative social status, familiarity and communicative purpose.
5 Relative social status, familiarity, or communicative purpose.
6 Because textbooks frequently teach a single neutral or formal style without preparing learners for everyday informal registers.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 Please give me a call at your convenience. 2 Sounds great!
3 I apologise, but I am unable to attend. 4 Hey, the office is closed.

Over to you

Answers will vary. Check range, respectful register and clear organisation.