Informal vs formal letters

A. Look at these 4 sample questions for letters or emails. Which ones are formal and which are informal? Who is the target reader for each one?

1 The company you work for wants to plan an event to celebrate their 10th anniversary. Write an email to an event organizer that has been recommended to you.

Your email should include what your company does, what type of event you are interested in, and details of how you want to celebrate the anniversary.

2 You have received an email from an English friend

> …
>
> I'm thinking of moving out of the big city and getting a house in the countryside. I can't stand the noise at night anymore! It would be great for the kids growing up with more space too.
>
> Do you like the idea? What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of each option?
>
> All the best,
>
> Sarah

3 You and your partner recently visited a luxury beach resort hotel for a 1-week holiday. However, the cleanliness and service in the hotel didn't meet your expectations. Write a letter to the manager of the hotel expressing your concerns and asking for some type of compensation.

4 You recently read an article in a magazine which says that technology is making people lazy, claiming that people aren't as hardworking as they used to be. Write a letter to the editor of the magazine expressing that you disagree.

Your letter should include:

- Reasons why technology has improved our lives
- How technology has changed the workplace

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B. This is an email which answers question 2. There are no mistakes with grammar or vocabulary, but this email is a bad answer to the question. Why?

Dear Sarah,

I am writing in reply to the email I received regarding your plan to move to the countryside. I would like to apologise for the delay in replying. I am positive that you will be happy in whatever place you decide to stay. Despite this, I would like to offer you some advice.

I was rather surprised that you say you have a problem with noise in the house you currently live in. Given its location, I expected it to be less of an issue. However, noise can be a terrible burden, especially with young children in the house.

My advice to you is to consider your options carefully. Moving to the countryside has both benefits and drawbacks. While it may be a more attractive place to live, it will suffer in the availability of facilities within a short distance of your home. In comparison, the city has sports facilities, shopping, restaurants and much more at an arm's reach.

With reference to the question of family, I understand your point of view. Living in the big city can be a difficult and often stressful experience for children growing up. Therefore, if this is a significant factor for you, I suggest you make your decision based on that.

Thank you very much for your email. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Kayla Hunter

C. Match the formal phrases from the email above (1-10) to their informal equivalents (A-J). Then rewrite the email in the correct tone using the informal phrases.

1. Dear Sarah,
2. I am writing in reply to the email I received.
3. I would like to apologise for the delay in replying.
4. I would like to offer you some advice.
5. I was rather surprised.
6. My advice to you is...
7. In comparison...
8. With reference to...
9. Thank you very much for your email.
10. Yours sincerely,

A. By the way, about...
B. It was great to get your email.
C. I'm writing to answer your email from the other day...
D. If I were you...
E. All the best,
F. I couldn't believe it.
G. Sorry for being so slow getting back to you.
H. Hi Sarah,
I. Let me tell you what I think.
J. The difference is...

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ANSWER KEY

A. 1 formal: event organiser; 2 informal: Sarah (a friend); 3 formal: hotel manager; 4 formal: magazine editor.

B. It uses the wrong style. It should be an informal email, but there are lots of formal phrases.

C. 1-H 2-C 3-G 4-I 5-F 6-D 7-J 8-A 9-B 10-E

SAMPLE ANSWER

Hi Sarah,

I'm writing to answer your email from the other day about your plan to move to the countryside. Sorry for being so slow getting back to you. I'm sure you'll be really happy wherever you decide to stay. Anyway, let me tell you what I think.

I couldn't believe it when you said you have a problem with noise in the house you live in now! Thinking about where it is in the city, I figured it wouldn't be an issue. It's true though that noise can be a bit of a burden, especially with little kids in the house.

If I were you, I'd think about my options carefully before deciding. Getting out to the countryside could have lots of positives, but there are some negatives too. While it might be a more attractive place to live, there's no way you'll have as many facilities close to where you live. The difference is the city has sports facilities, shopping, restaurants and loads of other stuff right outside your front door.

By the way, about the question of family, I totally get what you mean. Living in the big city is hard and can be stressful for kids as they grow up, so if that's a big deal for you, maybe you should make your decision based on that.

It was great to get your email. I can't wait to hear from you!

All the best,

Kayla

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