Use Formal and Informal Language in Persuasive Text

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Learn to use both formal and informal language in persuasive text.
- Practice using formal and informal language in persuasive text.
- Discuss how they can apply this strategy to their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

- Chart paper and markers
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and practice text onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper.

1. Focus

Explain Using Formal and Informal Language

Say: When I write a persuasive letter, I want people to see things my way. I use different kinds of language to gain support. To connect with my readers, I use informal language. Informal language is conversational; it sounds a lot like the way we speak to one another. Then, to make sure that people believe me, I also use formal language. When I use formal language, I don’t use slang words, and I am more objective—I focus on facts over opinions. Today I’m going to show you ways to use both types of language in persuasive letters.

Model How Writers Use Formal and Informal Language

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

1. As the parent of a seventh grader, let me assure you this town needs a new middle school more than it needs Old Oak. If selling the land gets us a new school, I’m all for it.

2. Last month, my daughter opened her locker and found a mouse. She was traumatized by this experience. She has not used her locker since.

Modeling Text

Read example 1. Say: I notice a few good examples of both informal and formal language in this paragraph. In the first sentence, the writer says, “let me assure you.” Even though assure sounds like a formal word, the overall tone and the method of speaking directly to the reader makes this an example of informal language. In the next sentence, the writer uses the phrase “I’m all for it.” Again, she using an informal expression to connect to readers. As I read this paragraph, I feel that the writer is speaking directly to me.

Read example 2. Say: I mostly see examples of formal language in this paragraph. In the second sentence, the writer says that her daughter was traumatized by this experience. This may be a little dramatic, but I still think it’s formal. She could have written that her daughter was really torn up or really upset, but the tone of the words traumatized and experience make her sound more formal. In the next sentence, the writer says her daughter has not used her locker since. I notice that she uses the phrase has not instead of the contraction hasn’t. Writers are less likely to use contractions when writing formal language. And the sentences in this paragraph are all statements of fact rather than opinion. It makes the writer sound more believable to state the facts plainly and then tell her opinions in other places. The mix of formal and informal language can be very effective in getting points across.
2. Rehearse

Practice Writing Using Formal and Informal Language

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

Dear Editors,
I am writing to ask for more of school time to be spent getting exercise.

Practice Text

Ask students to work with partners to write a short letter that they might send to be printed in a school newspaper. Invite them to write persuasively about using more school time for physical activity or on some other topic of their choosing. Each letter only needs to be two to three sentences long. Remind students to mix formal and informal language. Students should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class. They should be ready to explain how they used both formal and informal language to make their letters persuasive.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite them to read their letters aloud and explain the word choices they made. Record students’ letters and post these as models for students to use as they write or revise their own persuasive letters.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that both informal and formal language have a role in persuasive letters. We use informal language when we want to build a connection with readers. We use formal language to make sure readers find us trustworthy and believable. As you write your persuasive letters, remember that informal language can help you state opinions. You can often use formal language to back up your opinions with facts.

Ask students to identify a section of their persuasive letters to which they could add informal language to connect with readers or formal language to sound more credible. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite volunteers to read aloud a section of their persuasive letters that shows formal language, informal language, or both.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Writing formal and informal language will be difficult for beginning ELs. While other students are working on the practice activity or independent writing, work one on one with ELs to practice writing letters. Help them draft a simple letter using the following sentence frames:

Dear __________, How are you? I am __________.
Yesterday, I ________. Today, I ________.
See you soon! Your friend, ________

Intermediate and Advanced
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the group activity. Provide sentence frames such as the following that students might use to introduce formal and informal sections of a persuasive letter.

Formal: I have noticed that ________.
Informal: Can you believe ________?