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Formal and informal letters (2)

Today, we are looking at the features or characteristics that must be provided if you write a letter at the BECE.

As you know, there are two main types of letters:

1. Formal or Official or Business letters.
2. Informal or Unofficial or Personal letters.

Formal letters deal with or concern official matters such as admission to schools, employment, petitions, complaints, etc and we write them to people in their official

capacities or positions, not as private persons, such as heads of schools, local assembly members, district/municipal/metropolitan chief executives, human resource managers/directors of companies (public and private), regional ministers, etc.

On the other hand, informal letters deal with or concern unofficial or personal matters and are written to people in their private capacities, such as parents, friends, siblings, classmates, schoolmates, pen friends/penpals, etc.

In a formal letter, language should be formal, devoid of slang or terms and cut-offs.

Note that if you are not given a specific number of points to write on, three or four will be enough. There should be a concluding paragraph, in which you sum up what you have written.

For instance: Concluding, I hope you have taken note of the hardships residents of your electoral area

are going through because of the lack of these amenities, for which reason you will come to their aid in due course.

vii. Subscription — for the formal letter, it is always Yours faithfully, followed by the writer's signature and his/her full name in capital letters.

In our last discussion, we looked at the features of the formal letter, where to put them on the page

and how to write them.

Note that, as I indicated last week, the features of what you write are what make a formal letter, and that if any of them is missing or improperly written or placed, you will be penalised.

Therefore, make sure you provide the appropriate features for every type of letter or essay you write to earn marks for your effort.

Features of formal letters

Formal letters should have the following features:

i. Writer's address, written at the top right-hand corner of the page, as in:

**New Tafo
Presbyterian JHS,
Post Office Box 20,
New Tafo, Akyem.**

ii. Date, written in one of two forms:
a. the day first (written in the ordinal form), followed by the month and the year, as in:

**30th June, 2025.
23rd July, 2025.**

b. the month first, followed by the day (in the cardinal form), as in:

June 30, 2025. July 23, 2025.

While you can write any date on the paper, it is advisable that you write the date on which you are writing the examination, so that any reference you make to real time will be realistic.

iii. Recipient's address, written at the top left-hand corner of the page and made up of the recipient's official position, the institution where

he/she occupies the position and the town/city, as in: **THE HEADMASTER MFANTSIPIM SCHOOL CAPE COAST Or**

The Assembly Member, Ati Electoral Area, New Tafo, Akyem.

iv. Salutation— for the formal letter, it is always **Dear Sir**, or **Dear Madam**, (depending on the gender of the recipient) or **Dear Sir/Madam** (if you are not in a position to determine the gender of the recipient).

Note that it does not seem proper to write **Dear Sir/Madam**, when you are asked to write to the headmaster or headmistress of your own school, because you are supposed to know the gender of that person.

v. Title or Heading — every formal letter must come with a short title or heading which reflects what the letter is about. The title is either in capital letters or just capitalised and neatly underlined, as in: **LACK OF**

AMENITIES IN ATI ELECTORAL AREA or

Lack of Amenities in Ati Electoral Area

vi. Body — the body is written in paragraphs, with the first paragraph expanding the title or heading, which is what the letter is about. For instance, the first paragraph of a formal letter with the title:

LACK OF AMENITIES IN ATI ELECTORAL AREA could be:

I am resident in the Ati Electoral Area and I would like to draw your attention to the lack of basic social amenities in the electoral area.

In the subsequent paragraphs, you discuss the amenities that are absent in the area, with each paragraph devoted to one amenity.

Use connectives, such as **MOREOVER, IN ADDITION TO THIS, FURTHERMORE, WHAT IS MORE, ALSO**, to link the paragraphs, since they are connected because they are dealing with amenities.

Informal letters

We usually write informal letters to our family members — parents, siblings, uncles and aunts, cousins — friends, schoolmates, classmates, penpals, etc.

An informal letter must have the following features:

1. Writer's address — written at the top right-hand corner of the page, just like the writer's address for the formal letter.

Note that the writer's address for both formal and informal letters **DOES NOT INCLUDE** the writer's name.

2. Date — written under the writer's address just like the date for the formal letter, that is, either: **11th June, 2025. or. June 11, 2025**

3. Salutation — The salutation for the informal letter is always Dear or Hello or Hi plus any of the following:

i. the recipient's first name (either the name that reflects the day on which he or she was born, as in: Kofi, Kwame, Adwoa, Ekuwa, Abena, etc, or the Christian name (preferably shortened), as in: Becky (for Rebecca), Alex (for Alexander), Tina (for Ernestina, Justina or Augustina), Dan or Danny (for Daniel), Emie (for Emelia), Bob or Robbie (for Robert), Bill or Willie (for William), Lulu (for Lucy), etc.

ii. the recipient's affectionate name (Baaba, Kukua, Paapa, Ohemaa, Naana, Nana, Adepa, Nhyira, Joojo, etc)

iii. the recipient's nickname

(Sky, Slash, Simba, Lady Tee, Stone Pee, Joe Red, Blackus, etc).
Egs: Dear Steve, Hello Blackus, Hi Sammie, Dear Kwame, Hello Baafuor, Hi Becks, etc.

For letters to either of your parents, write:

Dear mum, Dear dad, Dear mummy, etc.

For letters to older siblings, uncles and aunts, write:

Dear Brother Joe, Dear Sister Ama, Dear Auntie Flo, Dear Auntie Vida, Dear Uncle Eddie, Dear Brother Kojo, etc.

Don't write: Dear friend, (because your friend has a name with which you address him or her on a daily basis), Dear mother/father, (because ideally we do not address our parents as mother or father), etc.

Give your informal letter a personal touch by giving it the appropriate salutation.

4. Body — as we have learnt, the body of the informal letter is different from that of the formal letter.

For the informal letter, we have time for what we call felicitations in the introductory paragraph, as we had discussed earlier.

Without this introductory paragraph, an informal letter will cease to be informal. After the introductory paragraph, the next paragraph should link the letter to the question asked, as in:

In your letter, you asked me to

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Informal letters

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update you on developments in my school this term. As you know, a lot of activities take place in my school every term and this term is no exception. Or Stone, I'm writing this letter to you to let you know about the activities that have taken place in my school this term, including our annual inter-class sports competition, the election of new school prefects and an inter-

school quiz.

The letter should be written in paragraphs, with each paragraph containing a specific point or idea which must not run into the idea or point in the subsequent paragraph.

Use connectives or linking words to link paragraphs that are connected because they deal with the same issue.

Since it is an informal letter, you are free to use cutoffs or contracted forms, such as I'VE for I HAVE,

I'M for I AM, MUSTN'T for MUST NOT, COULDN'T for COULD NOT, DOESN'T for DOES NOT, etc.

You may also use slang or terms in your informal letter, provided you put those terms in inverted commas.

As noted earlier, four or five of such terms are enough. Your informal letter must have a concluding paragraph, in which you sum up what the letter is about, exchange greetings with the recipient and your mutual friends or family and request for a reply to your letter, as in:

Stone, I'm sure by now you've got a feel of the things going on here — the inter-school quiz, the elections

and the inter-class sports.

Therefore, I'd like to end here, but before I do so, extend my warm regards to all the guys out there, especially Lord Stab, Mo Stone and Joe Jah. I'm looking forward to hearing from you very soon.

Until then, it's goodbye from Koftown.

5. **Subscription** — for the informal letter, it is always:

Yours sincerely, or **Yours dearly**, or **Yours affectionately**, or simply **Yours**, plus the writer's first name, Christian name, affectionate name or nickname, as in:

Yours sincerely, Joe.
Yours dearly, Herty.
Yours, Nhanh

English Language Objectives

By Joe Boye

At the BECE level, questions on question tags are on how the tags are formed and also how the questions are answered.

For instance, we can have:

- Your friend knows me, —? a) isn't it b) don't he c) doesn't he d) known't he
- Accra isn't the capital city of Nigeria, is it? a) No, it isn't b) Yes, it isn't c) Yes, it is d) No, it is

Last week we learnt that question tags are made up of statements followed by questions; that if the statements are positive, the tags are negative, and if the statements are negative, the tags are positive, as in:

- Your friend knows me, doesn't he?
- Your friend doesn't know me, does he?

Now, let's understand that the tag is made up of a pronoun which agrees in gender and number with the subject of the statement.

For instance, if a male subject, such as **KOFI** or **THE MAN**, is used in the statement, the pronoun in the tag should be **HE**; if the subject used in the statement is **PEOPLE**, the pronoun used in the tag should be **THEY** because **PEOPLE** is plural.

Egs: **THE MAN** came here yesterday, didn't **HE**?

PEOPLE don't like the new Police Inspector, do **THEY**?

The other thing we add to a tag is a verb (because the tag is made up of a pronoun and a verb).

Now, the verb we use in a tag is

determined by the type of verb we use in the statement. In other words, the type of verb we use in the statement we make before asking the question will determine the verb we have to use in the tag. The types of verbs we can use in our statements are:

1. **CLASSIC VERBS** or verbs that denote action, also called action verbs. These include **COME, GO, EAT, WALK, DANCE, STUDY, PREACH, BATHE, WRITE, SPEAK, TEACH, ARGUE, TOUCH, LIFT, THROW, CATCH, PUSH, PULL, COOK, POUND, RUN, JUMP, BEAT, BUILD, WEED, WORK**, etc.

2. **MODAL VERBS** or verbs that are used with other verbs to express possibility, permission, intention, etc. Modal verbs include **CAN, COULD, MAY, MIGHT, MUST, OUGHT TO, SHALL, SHOULD, WILL, WOULD**, etc.

3. The verb **TO BE (AM, ARE, IS)**

4. The verbs **DO/DOES/DID** and **HAS/HAVE/HAD**

If a doing verb (**WALK, EAT, SING, DANCE, CHAT**, etc) in the present tense (**WALK**), third person singular (**WALKS**) or past tense (**WALKED**) is used in a statement, that verb is replaced by the verb **DO** or **DOES** or **DID** in the tag.

Egs: 1. Kofi **WALKS** to school every day, **DOESN'T** he?

2. We **WALKED** to the office by ourselves, **DIDN'T** we?

3. The girls don't **WALK**, **DO** they?

4. Many Ghanaians don't **EAT** well, **DO** they?

Reading Comprehension

Some of the answers to the questions asked in the comprehension aspect of the BECE English language paper can be obtained directly from the passage.

Those questions, referred to as traditional comprehension questions, have their answers stated directly in the passage given and all a candidate has to do is read the passage well, understand it and identify the answers.

As you revise towards the BECE English paper, note the following:

1. Write your answers in the same tense in which the questions have been asked to avoid losing marks. If a question is asked in the past tense, the answer should be written in the past tense.

Eg: **QUESTION:** Why did the man cane his son?

ANSWER: BECAUSE HE FAILED HIS EXAMINATION. Or HE FAILED HIS ...

2. You don't have to repeat the question in the answer that you provide; you waste precious time if you do that and you don't earn any additional mark(s) for doing that.

3. Provide simple, direct and straightforward answers which actually do justice to the questions asked. Simple sentences, phrases, infinitives and even single words are accepted, provided they actually answer the questions.

For instance, to the question: **WHERE DID JOHN GO AFTER SCHOOL THAT DAY?** you can answer:

HE WENT HOME. Or THE HOUSE. Or simply HOME.

You need not write: **AFTER SCHOOL THAT DAY, JOHN WENT HOME.**

4. In comprehension, answers must be devoid of grammatical mistakes

such as misspelling, lack of subject/verb agreement, lack of punctuation, etc.

5. Write the correct question number for the answer you provide, including both main and sub questions. For instance, a) ii, b) i, etc.

6. You are free to answer the questions in your own order (say: question c first, followed by question e, then question a and so on) and not necessarily according to the order in which they are asked in the answer booklet (a, b, c, d, etc), provided you indicate the question number before you provide the answer.

(Remember that it's always advisable to put your best foot forward.)

7. Note that a **WHY** question is asking for **REASON** or **CAUSE**; a **WHO** question looks for a **PERSONALITY** (either by name or description); a **WHAT** question demands **FACT**; a **WHERE** question demands **LOCATION** or **PLACE** (either specific or general location); a **WHEN** question demands **TIME** or **PERIOD/ERA** (specific or general); a **WHOSE** question demands **PERSONALITY** (by name or description), etc.

Egs: 1. **WHO** went to Ms Owusu's rescue when she was being attacked?

ANSWER: Ofo Boateng or her next-door neighbour.

2. **WHY** was Little Johnny sent home from school?

ANSWER: Because he owed school fees. To go and collect his school fees.

3. **WHERE** will the meeting take place?

ANSWER: In front of the chief's palace OR At the community centre. OR The community centre.

4. **WHEN** did Mr Oti arrive home?

ANSWER: Late in the night. OR In the night. OR When everyone in the house was sleeping.