

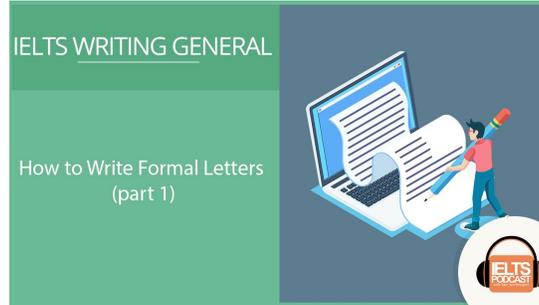
**Ben:** Hello there, IELTS students. Welcome to IELTS podcast. You no longer have to worry, fret or panic about IELTS because we are here to guide you through this test jungle. Enjoy these IELTS tutorials and if you need more help or want to access the famous online course, you can visit us at [ieltpodcast.com](http://ieltpodcast.com).

## INTRODUCTION

[Music]

**Daphne:** Hello, IELTS students. Thanks for choosing to listen to this tutorial from [ieltpodcast.com](http://ieltpodcast.com). My name is Daphne and in this tutorial, I'm going to be talking about letter writing, which is the **Task 1 writing question** for the general training IELTS paper. I am really enjoying marking so many of your amazing letters. They are intelligent, clever, accurate, creative, and sometimes so funny that I'm laughing while I'm correcting them. Thank you all for those ones.

However, I feel that letter-writing is sometimes an area which is a bit neglected; that means not focused on enough and in this two-part tutorial, I'm going to look at the main types of letters which come up in the IELTS exam, help you to think about the context of the letter; that's the

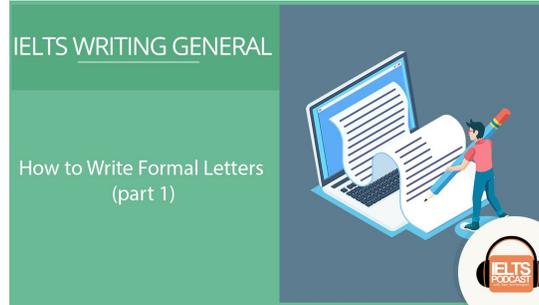


situation, the content so what to write and the register; the level of formality needed for IELTS letters and share with you some key functional language which you will need.

### UNDERSTANDING THE QUESTION AND THE CONTEXT

So, the **aim of the tutorial** here is to help you understand what the question is and the setting or context for the letter, to think about what you have to write about and how to use the prompts that you're given in the question rubric, to work out how creative to be. Is it okay to make up lots of strange facts and information? The answer is yes, by the way, understand how to start on how to finish your letters. This is really important. In IELTS level, you can't make a mistake on this one and finally, how to get your letter in a logical order which will help your coherence and extra, use great grammar, but make it sound natural.

I'm going to talk about a couple of questions which will be on the bottom of the website page that links to this podcast and I'll put a few extra ones up there as a bonus that you can practice with. So, let's start with the overview of [general training Task 1](#) for those of you who are not familiar with it. Maybe if you haven't done your IELTS before.

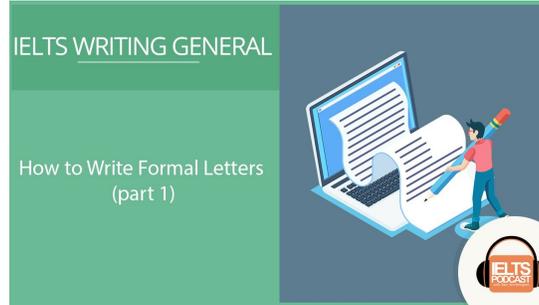


## WHAT YOU'LL NEED TO DO

So, you'll be asked to write a letter. This could be to request information, give personal or factual information, explain a problem or situation, explain wants or needs or make a request, complain about something, make a suggestion, or recommend something. It's quite a wide range. All these letters require what we call **functional language**, which is specifically the kind of language needed to perform certain tasks.

So, for example, I'm writing to complain about, I'm writing with reference to, I would be grateful if you could answer a few questions for me. It is very important that you build up a list of phrases like these really useful and learn them before your exam. So, each essay or letter will require different phrases and I'm going to highlight these as we go along.

Just to let you know on the website, you can find a really, really great list of all these important phrases. So, I would suggest have a look all over the website and find those [general training Task 1 letters](#).

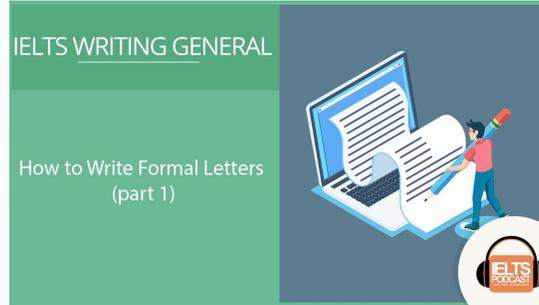


## THE INSTRUCTIONS

So, let's look at the instructions. The instructions will say you should spend about **20 minutes** on this task. Write at least **150 words**. You do not need to write any addresses and sometimes it may say begin your letter Dear Sir/Madam, but this is not always the case.

So, the letter is marked on task achievement. **Does your letter answer all parts of the question? Are your ideas relevant?** [Coherence and cohesion](#): are your ideas well organized, clear, and connected? [Lexical resource](#): have you avoided repeating the same words and copying words from the question? This is important. This means [paraphrasing](#). We talk about this a lot in [Task 1](#) and [Task 2](#) questions; using synonyms, using different words.

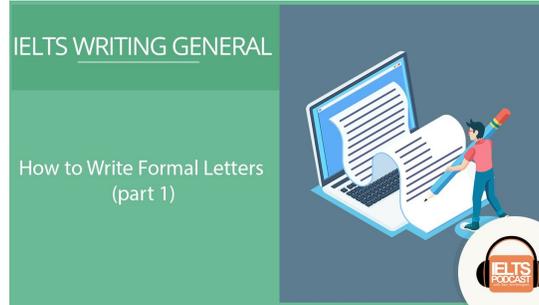
[Grammatical range and accuracy](#): so have you made any **grammatical mistakes** and can you show a good range of [grammatical structures](#)? Incidentally, the most common mistakes I find in letters are the use of tenses and prepositions. So, I'll draw your attention to that as we go along.



## THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF LETTERS

So, here is the first letter I want to look at. **The instructions are:** You have eaten at a restaurant and it was such a terrible experience that you decided to inform the manager by letter of what happened and that you want your money back and then these are the little prompts; the kind of helping bits you have. **1)** Describe the problem. **2)** Explain why you are unhappy. **3)** Say what you'd like to happen next. What really helps you in all these letters is that you're given these prompts; this **help and guidance** that helps you organize it really and as you go along, make sure you address all those three issues.

So, what kind of letter is this? Yes, it's a [letter of complaint](#) and in my opinion, you can have a bit of fun with these letters at the same time **responding to each part of the question**. Let's get quickly organized and do some planning. First thing: **describe the problem they say**. So, we need to sort out some sort of facts and the context. So, that's the situation. Think about this by doing some quick WH questions. **When was it? Where were you? What went wrong?** So, scribble down a few notes.



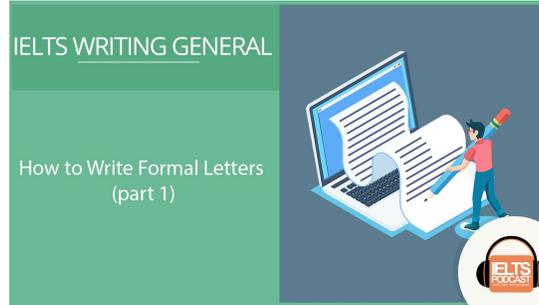
## AN EXAMPLE OF A LETTER

This is a little extract from a letter I want to share with you. So, one of our students writes:  
*Dear Sir/Madam, I'm writing to make a complaint about the extremely unpleasant experience I had in your restaurant last week. I visited it on the 10<sup>th</sup> December for dinner together with two friends of mine to celebrate my birthday.*

Okay, this is a very strong start. **Concise**, sets the scene, provides all the key background information needed. So, it tells me when it was, tells me they were there for dinner with two friends, tells me about the birthday. So, the functional language I'm writing to make a complaint about...

**Good preposition, great grammar.** We've got the [relative clause](#): which I had in your restaurant and extra information: birthday, two friends. We don't need this, but it adds to the **whole context**. It's setting the scene for me and now I need to find out what the problem is and why they're complaining.

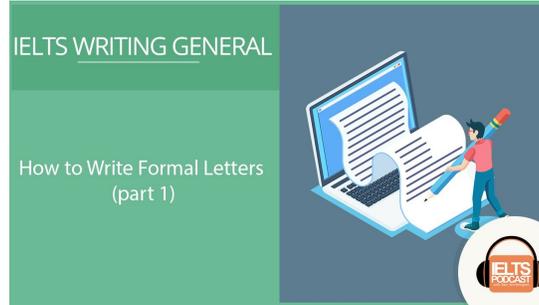
**So, it says why are you unhappy? What are you complaining about?** *We ordered, as usual, spaghetti with clams as the first dish and grilled tuna as the second. Wow! When the dishes*



*arrived, they were cold and too salty and when I informed the waiter about this, he reacted rudely complaining that I was wrong. Although eventually the dishes were replaced, we had to wait for them for more than one hour which I find-- I was going to change that as she found-- totally unacceptable. As a result, my birthday being one of the most important days of the year turned out to be one of the most unpleasant dinners I have experienced in your restaurant so far.*

This is very good. So, the student has explained **what went wrong**, **why she's complaining**, and **what she's upset about** and the language throughout this is very good and would score highly in an exam obviously, but I really liked the kind of extra touches. So, she says as usual. So, we ordered, as usual, spaghetti with clams. So, she's a regular. That's her local restaurant. The most unpleasant dinners-- so, I should say-- sorry one of the most unpleasant dinners I've experienced so far. She may go back there, but it's telling us she's obviously been there before.

Now, in terms of grammar, there are lots of confident touches. So, she's using the **past tense**. This is the most logical one, but also a [modal verb](#): had to wait, **participle clause**: my birthday being one of the most and of course, **the superlative**: the most important days and the most unpleasant dinners. So, although it reads very naturally, there's also a lot of skill in there as well in terms of the grammar and the kind of flexibility of using that grammar. It's good stuff.

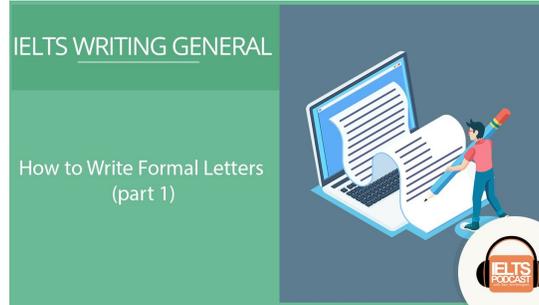


So, the last part of the letter is say **what you want to happen next**. So, here we go. *I therefore request I be given a full refund and suggest you kindly investigate and take action against the staff on duty in both the kitchen and front of house*. So, this is very clear and simple again, answers the task prompt and gives two clear reasons and the action that they want to be taken; first, a refund and secondly, some action or training of the staff.

What is good here and what I want to really highlight is the register; **the tone of the letter**. It's very polite, but it's not rude. So, saying **I therefore request** that I be given a full refund is not the same as give me the money. She's got it absolutely right. It's a [formal letter](#) and therefore the style and the **vocabulary is formal** and never informal and the complaint is done very politely without being rude and threatening. So, we would not be rude and threatening when we write in English. We're generally quite polite.

### LET'S LOOK AT ANOTHER EXAMPLE

Okay, so that gives you one example. Let's look at another example. Same letter; so a letter of complaint, same restaurant problem and I just want to check the greetings. So, we're going to start with the **greetings**. That's the beginning of the end of the letter; formal letter as we said.

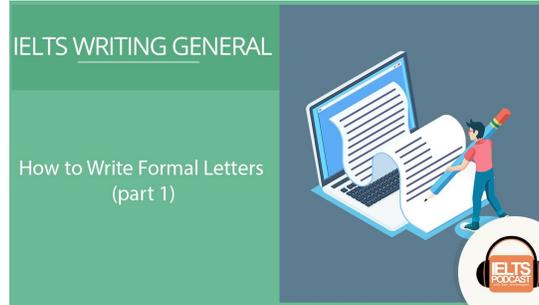


So, *Dear Sir/Madam*-- just starts-- *I'm writing to inform you that I had an unpleasant experience at your restaurant on Sunday and the ending for this one is I will be expecting to hear from you shortly. Yours sincerely, Carlos Brown.*

Okay, so **yours sincerely** is actually not the correct ending when you're using Dear Sir, okay? Yours sincerely should be **yours faithfully**. So, you use yours sincerely when it's somebody that you know. **So, if I'm saying Dear Mr. Smith, I'm going to write yours sincerely. If I'm writing Dear Sir/Madam, I have to write yours faithfully. Make a note of that one if you are not 100% sure on that.**

What I do quite like here is *I will be expecting to hear from you shortly*. I will be expecting to hear. This is very firm using the **future voice** here and obviously, wants action to be taken, expects action to be taken. So, let's look at another few things in this letter.

*I had heard about your gourmet menu and excellent service through different advertisings in TV and social media. Taking all these into consideration, I decided to bring my fiancée to your restaurant to spend a relaxing afternoon.* Okay, there are a few little corrections. I would say different advertisements or adverts not advertisings. I would actually say **take my fiancée** to your restaurant, not bring. This is a difficult one, but this is to do with where you're starting from.

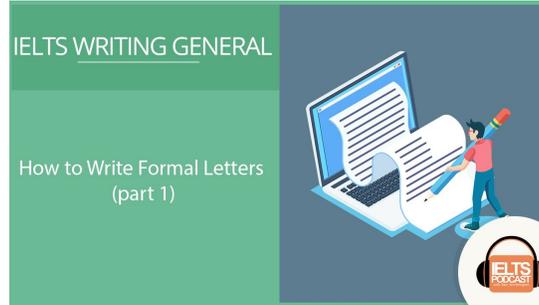


Otherwise, I think it works really nicely in building up a **context**, same as the one before where it was the birthday and the two friends. This is saying hey, I chose your restaurant because I really like the advertisements or the yes, the adverts. I'm bringing my fiancée and we want to spend a nice long relaxing time with you. So, it's showing off some really nice kind of grammar and a really natural way of writing.

So, **here's the complaint**. Now, listen out here because the register for me is not **formal enough**. *So, when we arrived, the host had lost our booking and said that we would have to wait for an available table 30 minutes. It is good that I made the reservation online, which I showed to the host, but he didn't care.*

*When we were finally at our table, the waiter was very kind with positive vibes which really helped and gave us hope. However, the meal was nothing like as we expected. There was a hair in my fiancée's salad and my meat was overcooked. I spent \$50 for a very bad experience.*

Okay. So, as I read that, you're probably thinking oh, oh, I wouldn't say that. So, we want to take a look at how we can be more formal in this. So, he says it is good that I made the reservation online. So, you could say I was relieved to have made the reservation online or kind of maybe simpler having made the reservation online, I showed it to the host and instead of he didn't care, which is definitely too **informal**, maybe I'd say it made no difference.

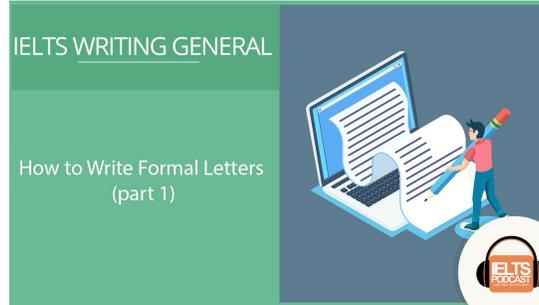


Then he says the waiter was very kind. Now, kind is okay, but if you're going to use kind, which is not a very high-level word maybe put two [adjectives](#) in there. Put kind and friendly something like that which makes it a bit less kind of low-level but there's positive vibes which really helped and gave us hope is not really going to work here. So, that needs to go basically.

The meal was nothing like as we expected. You could say the meal was not up to standard. Later when he says \$50 on a very bad experience, again I think we don't want to repeat experience because we've had that a few times. I spent \$50 for nothing or I felt the evening was not worth \$50, something like that. So, keep on thinking about who you're writing to and this **will keep you on track with the register, with the formality of your letter.**

## A SITUATION LETTER

So, the second example of a kind of letter I want to look at today is a [situation letter](#). This letter also comes from the online course we do. So, the online course is amazing. If you want to work on your writing particularly, we do a lot of work on the [Writing Task 2](#) and obviously the [Task 1s](#) both general and academic as well. This situation letter then.

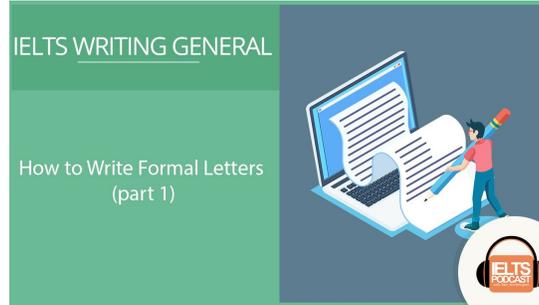


Your next-door neighbor owns a small dog that barks throughout the day and night. Write a letter to your neighbor requesting that something be done about the dog. Include in your letter your **reason for writing, what you would like to happen, and a nice respectful style.**

Those are your three prompts, your three kind of clues as to what you should write and also what order you should write it in so it helps you on the [cohesion](#). This is my favorite letter and you will see. I'm going to read you some examples that some students have a lot of fun with this. It's a perfect example of getting the tone and the register right.

So, we want to look at **neutral informal**. Neutral informal. So, we're not going to be super polite. Why? Because it's your neighbor. You know him or you know of him. You don't want to be formal and you don't want to be completely informal either because it's not like you're writing to a friend. So, let's look at this.

*Dear Mr. Smith or Dear John* is okay, he's your neighbor, so you may well know their name and you want to end with **regards or kind regards**. So, not yours sincerely because that would be too formal and not love from as that is too informal. So, your reason for writing: *I'm writing to complain about the noise coming from your apartment nearly all day long I believe is produced by your poodle who marks any disturbance with loud and continuous barking.*

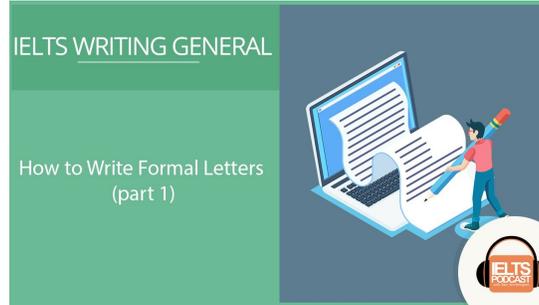


Okay, that's great, isn't it? I'm writing to complain about... Good. **Functional language**. That's the fixed expressions that we want. ...coming from your apartment nearly all day long. **I believe** is produced by your poodle-- and you know it's from the poodle, but you're just being quite polite about it. So, that's the first reason for writing.

**The problem:** *The reason I find the current situation unacceptable is because it deprives my little son of having a long healthy sleep especially at night time. He's two years old and it's crucial for his cognitive development to have a good rest.*

Okay, so now we've got the background, **the context**. I don't like the noise because my poor boy can't sleep and he's only two and he needs to sleep. The cognitive development is quite academic in terms of writing, so maybe a little bit too formal, but you get the idea about giving the background and being polite. So, explaining the problem, but nicely.

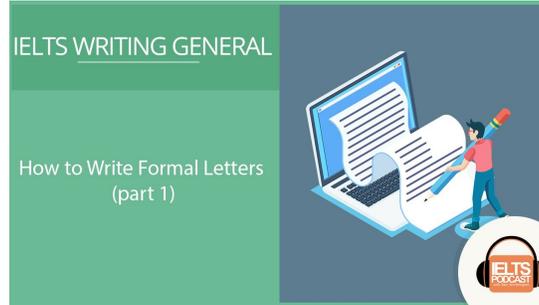
**Now, this solution**-- so, this is the third part; what should they do is lovely. *Having owned a pet in the past, I know one may feel powerless when it-- the pet-- misbehaves. In fact, my dog used to cause similar troubles to my neighbors until I realized it could be trained to behave differently. For your convenience, I've enclosed with this letter a few pamphlets-- that's like information-- about applied behavior therapy courses for dogs. Please take a moment to look at them and consider enrolling your dog on one of them.*



I do think it's quite funny. It's clever. The tone is very polite and friendly, but also quite subtle. It's really saying do something about this now and I'm going to tell you how. You need to take your dog to be retrained and not only take your dog to be retrained, but here you go. Here's a leaflet. Here's some information. So, you really must do something now.

So, I love the-- there's some good grammar here. There are some nice little phrases like **in fact** and **I've enclosed, obviously**. So, that's like the more **functional language**. **Please take a moment to look at them**. Very polite as well and also we've got nice grammar: used to cause similar troubles. So, used to is a nice way of talking about things that you did in the past but you don't do anymore. I've enclosed, so present perfect there and please take a moment. So, you're using a command structure, which we don't use very much. Also, the dog could be trained. So, a nice passive with a modal verb. Some really good stuff there.

There's another one here. So, this is a little bit more chatty, a bit more friendly. It says *I hope this letter finds you well*, which is quite nice because it's a neighbor. *I'm sorry, but I'm writing to you in relation to the puppy dog which you bought a few weeks ago*. So, I'm sorry I'm writing to you is probably better than I'm writing to complain about which is a bit formal.

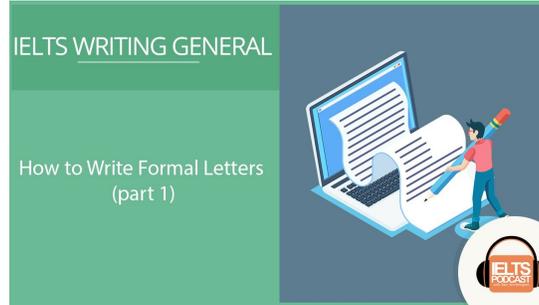


*So, I'm sorry, but I'm writing to you in relation to. I saw the puppy with you in the park last weekend and it was truly cute. However, to be honest with you, I'm doing my dissertation at the moment and I cannot fully focus during the day due to his noisy marks-- noisy barks, sorry.*

So, great start. **Functional language:** I hope this letter finds you well. I'm writing to you in relation. I really like this: to be honest with you. So, the tone of this is really friendly and then you're being really nice about the dog; it's cute and then you're kind of complaining but it barks. So, that's quite clever. It talks-- carries on this letter [unintelligible 00:19:57.12] insomnia. Again, can't sleep.

Then it says here *therefore, I thought I would suggest that some measures could be taken--* again, nice modal verb with a passive-- *to address the issue and could benefit both of us. I'd be grateful if--* good functional language-- *you could find a way to train the puppy to stop yapping--* good word instead of barking-- in the house. *As you may know, our neighbor Jane is an expert in dealing with such problems as she works in a pet shop. That's lucky. So, asking her advice might be very helpful and useful.*

So, it's great. It's a very friendly letter. Super polite, but actually saying please do something about this. I love the **context**. Yes, you've got a new dog. It's really cute. I saw you in the park. Talks about the neighbor, the neighbor works in a pet shop and this is all in 180 words. So, I



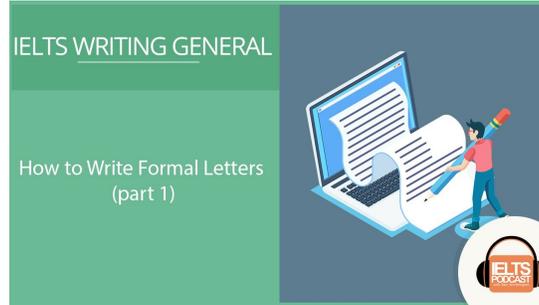
know it sounds long, but actually, this is pretty **concise**. It's very, very good. Lovely paragraph and really nice ending.

**The end:** If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to ask. **Very useful:** if I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to ask. Very, very useful for a lot of letters that. So, the register is great; neutral informal, but still really friendly, natural, and sophisticated. Really clever. So, before we finish, I'm just going to read you one more. This is a really kind one.

So, this says: *I hope this letter finds you well. I've noticed that you've just got a Chihuahua puppy-- small dog-- which I believe is a good source of companionship as you've lived alone for a few years. However, pets can feel very anxious in a new environment.*

Again, **context:** somebody who's living on their own, you've got the small dog. We've got yes of course, the dog is lovely, but there's a problem. Then it goes on: *You've been a neighbor to me for many years and I hope we can resolve this issue immediately.* So, I love this tone. *I hope we can resolve this issue immediately. I do not own a pet and cannot advise you what should be done, but I guess taking the dog to a veterinarian-- a vet-- might be a good idea.*

So, really, really lovely. It's kind. It's friendly. It takes on board the idea you're writing to a neighbor. You don't want to upset the friendship, but also in terms of language because obviously, this is a language exam. I hope we can resolve this issue. I do not own a pet. I cannot



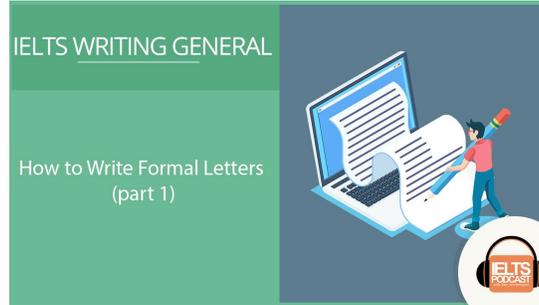
advise you what should be done-- **modal verbs**. I guess taking the dog to a vet might be a good idea-- another modal verb.

Really, really good stuff. So, I hope you found this useful. We have looked at two types of [Task 1 general letters](#) of complaint and situation and I've tried to show you some useful expressions and some ideas about context, content, and register.

**SIGN UP TO OUR TUTORIALS TO HELP YOUR LETTER WRITING**

So, if you're struggling with your [IELTS preparation](#) and want to get some super professional friendly help, **don't forget sign up** for our podcasts and emails at [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com) and the website as well. It's full of [tutorials](#) and guidance. Get involved in the course, essay feedback, modules that you can really see how we put these difficult essays together and that might really, really help you. If you have a friend who's working towards the IELTS as well, then share this podcast with them.

The next podcast in this-- the part 2, I'm going to look at some more letters with you. So, look out for that one. Good luck to all of you with your preparation and talk to you soon. Thank you.



[Music]

**Female Voice:** Thanks for listening to [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com)



---

© IELTSPodcast.com / B.Worthington / BW English Services. 2019. All Rights Reserved.

[How to Write Formal Letters \(part 1\)](#)

[IELTS Online Course - Jump to Band 7 or it's Free!](#)

[IELTS Essay Correction Service](#)

[Click here for IELTS Materials \(free\)](#)