

Parental engagement - Literacy



Miss Scarth- English teacher and Literacy Coordinator at Halewood Academy





The practical use of literacy in everyday life.

Learning objective: To understand how to construct a formal letter using appropriate vocabulary and showing awareness of purpose and audience.



Key focuses:

- Writing skills
- Accuracy
- Vocabulary choices
- Transferable skills/employability skills





Comedian, Rhod Gilbert regularly basis his stand up comedy shows on an array of minor daily inconveniences and annoyances which he then blows massively out of proportion in the name of humour.

On one such occasion, he tells the audience about his experience on the 'quiet carriage' in a train which turned out to be quite the opposite. He lists numerous issues such as the repeated tannoy announcements, the behaviour and particularly the noise of fellow commuters and the relentless stewards interrupting him to offer snacks and check tickets.

We are going to imagine we are Mr Gilbert in this situation and we are going to write a formal letter to National Rail complaining about our experience.



First things to consider before we start:

- Purpose – (What are you writing the letter about/for? What are you hoping to achieve?)
- Audience – (Who is the recipient of the letter? What relationship does that person have to you? Employer? Friend?)
- Language – (Do you need to adopt a formal or informal style of writing? Do you need to keep your language simple? Does it need to be clear? Do you need facts and figures? How can you vary your language to hold your reader's interest?)
- Layout – (Is there a particular format to use when structuring a letter? What should it look like on the page?)



In this case our answers would be as follows:


- **Purpose** -a formal letter of complaint, seeking to express frustration/seek recompense or at least apology
- **Audience** – the recipient is a manager/supervisor in a company, we don't know this person
- **Language** – will need formal language, standard English, persuasive/emotive language
- **Layout** – need to use typical structure of a formal letter



Your information
 Full name
 Full address
 Today's date
 Email
 Phone number

Recipients information
 Full Name
 Company
 Full address

Introductory line
 Dear (insert name),



Your address

**Miss S. Scarth
 Halewood Academy
 Wood Road, The Avenue,
 Halewood,
 L21 IUU**

Their address

**National Rail Enquiries
 Head office, Second floor,
 Aldersgate Street,
 London
 EC1A 4HD**

Today's date

30th June 2020

Formal letter introductory line if recipient is unknown. If you have the person's name, you can put e.g Dear Mr Smith.

Unless you are using the phrase 'to whom it may concern', you should avoid using 'To' at the start of a formal letter.

To whom it may concern,

Dear Sir/Madam,



Since it is a formal letter and we want our argument to be as clear and convincing as possible, we need to carefully consider our vocabulary choices.

We need to ensure that we use standard English at all times and avoid slang or any common grammar mistakes.

Write down as many words as you can to describe your feelings about the service you have received in this situation:

Some of these might be among the first ideas to come to mind:

- angry
- annoyed
- raging
- fuming
- wound up
- rubbish/lousy

TIP: Ask yourself some questions – in what way was it rubbish? What about the service annoyed you? These questions should then direct you to some more specific/precise word choices.

Many of the words on the left are informal, slang expressions and we need to make sure we use only **formal language** in this situation. This is for **clarity** more than anything else. Someone not from our area might not understand or may misinterpret expressions such as ‘fuming’ or ‘boss.’ As such, this would weaken your argument.

Lets think of some more **precise** alternatives we could use meaning the same....

Angry/raging/fuming – furious, irritated, antagonised
Annoyed – irritated, dissatisfied, disappointed
Rubbish – unacceptable, neglectful, inconvenient, unreliable, inconsistent.



Gathering some ideas will help us to sustain clarity and to organise a structure for our argument:

- What might have happened to cause irritation on the train journey?
Here are some possibilities:

- Loud, disruptive fellow passengers (swearing/talking too loud or listening to loud music) [**Words we could use: inconsiderate, disruptive, offensive**]
- Constant tannoy announcements [**Words we could use: persistent, relentless, unrelenting**]
- Regular interruptions from stewards (waking you up maybe to check tickets?) [**Words to use: negligent, disorganised, inattentive, incompetent, shambolic, intolerable**]
- Litter in the carriage [**Words: unacceptable, deplorable, uncaring**]
- Interference on loud speakers [**Words to use: mind-numbing, endless, relentless**]
- Delayed arrival of train at platform/destination [**Words to use: unreliable, disorganised, chaotic, unpredictable, inconvenient, disappointing**]
- Lack of availability of facilities on board [**Words to use: chaotic, misleading**]
- Toilets out of order [**Words to use: inconvenient, negligent, unacceptable, dreadful, awful, outrageous**]



The vocabulary in bold shows examples of higher level adjectives we could use to exaggerate and make our argument convincing and hard-hitting.



Planning our structure:

- The easiest way to do this is to rank your points from most important or strongest to least important.

Here I've ordered our points with 1 being strongest or most relevant to why I'm writing (lots of noise in quiet carriage), 8 is my weakest or least relevant point.

- 1) Loud, disruptive fellow passengers (swearing/talking too loud or listening to loud music)
- 2) Constant tannoy announcements
- 3) Regular interruptions from stewards (waking you up maybe to check tickets?)
- 4) Interference on loud speakers
- 5) Lack of availability of facilities on board
- 6) Litter in the carriage
- 7) Toilets out of order
- 8) Delayed arrival of train at platform/destination

I need to be careful not to use all my strongest points too early or my reader will lose interest. I will save my best point until the middle.



Example opening:

Remember the important things:
paragraphs, capital letters, full stops....

Miss S. Scarth
Halewood Academy
Wood Road, The Avenue,
Halewood,
L21 IUU

30th June 2020

Brief introduction- why
are you writing? Set the
scene.

Get your reader on
side...(show respect or
flatter slightly)

Make your purpose and
tone clear and assertive
(without being rude)

Next you would focus on
a point per paragraph.....

National Rail Enquiries
Head office, Second floor,
Aldersgate Street,
London
EC1A 4HD

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you to express my deepest dissatisfaction with the service I experienced on a recent train service using your company. My husband had booked us tickets as an anniversary present and we were travelling to visit friends in Glasgow. As regular National Rail customers, we are used to receiving high quality service with minimum disruption. Due to this, we were not dissuaded by the recent escalation in prices and decided to remain loyal to your company. However, on reflection it is possible that we have made an error in judgment. **Unfortunately, we are extremely disappointed with the service we received during our journey last month....**



Possible persuasive devices to use:

Direct address (e.g you, we, our, your, you're)

Alliteration (e.g disappointed and dissatisfied)

Fact (e.g the amount of passengers on the service has increased by three times)

Opinion (e.g In my opinion this is dreadful and inexcusable)

Rhetorical question (e.g how would you like pay a considerable price for nothing but disruption?)

Emotive language/exaggeration (e.g this journey was a nightmare!)

Statistics (e.g 75% of National Rail journeys involve a delay of more than ten minutes)

Triplets (e.g unacceptable, complacent and unreliable)

Possible connectives to help you to vary how you start your paragraphs and sentences:

Firstly/Secondly..... Finally

However/alternatively

In addition, furthermore, moreover, additionally

Consequently, resultantly, as a result

Nevertheless, despite this, in spite of this

Similarly

Unfortunately

It is with regret that...



Example paragraph using persuasive language and connectives:

Emotive language/exaggeration (using higher level adjectives)

connectives

Firstly, we had paid a premium at the time we booked our tickets so that we could be seated in the part of the train designated as the 'quiet carriage'. However, to our annoyance and disappointment, this title was misleading and inaccurate. In reality, what we experienced was unrelenting tannoy announcements every five minutes. What made this worse was that we could barely decipher the message due to the poor quality of the speakers! It was disturbance for the sake of mere disturbance! How are you supposed to relax or get any work done when you are being constantly interrupted by a loud, crackling voiceover? This was inconsiderate, extremely irritating and unnecessary!

Emotive language

main argument

triplets

rhetorical question



Concluding your formal letter:

It is important to include a brief conclusion summarising (giving an overview) of your main argument and suggesting a proposed outcome to which the reader can respond.

For a formal letter you need to end it with either 'yours faithfully' or 'yours sincerely'.

- If you have a specific person to send your letter to e.g Mr Smith, then you use 'yours sincerely' because you have a named recipient.
- If you do not know a specific person to whom the letter is addressed and you are beginning with Dear Sir/Madam or To whom it may concern, you use 'yours faithfully'.

In this case we would conclude with something similar to this:

*I look forward to hearing from you soon,
Yours faithfully,
Miss S. Scarth*



Now is your chance to apply this knowledge....

YOUR TASK: Write a formal letter to National Rail complaining about a recent negative experience you had of a journey in one of their 'quiet carriages'.

You should try your best to include:

- a range of connectives/sentence openers
- paragraphs
- higher level vocabulary
- some persuasive devices

Make sure you follow the guidance we discussed about how to structure your letter and about avoiding the use of slang or informal expressions.

★ Remember to proof-read your work when you are finished to avoid making any careless mistakes!





“Literacy is...the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.”

Thank you for listening. I hope you have found this session useful!

