

Giving instructions by email

Learn how to write an email to give instructions to practise and improve your writing skills.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and tips and do the exercises.

Preparation task

What would you expect a house-sitter to do? Tick the three correct answers.

- Water your plants.
- Re-organise your furniture.
- Feed your pets.
- Clean the house thoroughly.
- Make expensive phone calls from your house phone.
- Check the house to make sure everything's fine.

Reading text: Giving instructions by email

To: Meena

From: Suki

Subject: What to do while we're away

Hi Meena,

Thank you so much for offering to house sit for us next week. I'm only sorry we won't get to catch up properly until we get back from our trip. Anyway, here's everything I won't have time to tell you on Saturday morning.

1. The alarm code is 7957. Don't forget to set it when you go out and remember to turn it off when you get back home as it is LOUD!
2. The rabbits need feeding once a day and under no circumstances should they be allowed out of their cage in the garden as the neighbour's cats have attacked them in the past.
3. Please can you use the washing machine in the daytime only as it's old and noisy and the neighbours complain otherwise?
4. Would you mind opening all the upstairs windows for an hour in the morning as the house gets damp at this time of year?

That's about it! You'll find everything you need in the house, and help yourself to anything in the fridge or cupboards. Feel free to call or text if you have any problems/questions.

See you briefly to hand over keys on Saturday morning and looking forward to a proper chat when we get back!

Thanks again!

Suki

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Tips

1. Start by saying thank you if you know that the person has already agreed to help you. End with a thank you as well.
2. Use bullet points or a list to present the instructions clearly for the reader.
3. Phrase the instructions as polite requests, e.g. *Don't forget to ...* , *Please can you ...* , *Would you mind ...* . However, you can be more direct for important instructions, e.g. *The ... need(s) ...* , *Under no circumstances ...* , *Don't forget to ...* .
4. To emphasise the importance of an instruction, explain what the consequence might be if it isn't followed, e.g. *under no circumstances should the rabbits be allowed out of their cage as the neighbour's cats have attacked them in the past.*
5. Let the person know how to contact you with further questions if they need to.

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. You should thank the person for helping.	True	False
2. You should put all the instructions in a single paragraph.	True	False
3. Saying 'Feed the cats' is more polite than 'Please could you feed the cats?'	True	False
4. You can explain the reason why you're asking the reader to do these things.	True	False
5. You should make sure the person has a way of contacting you if there is anything else they need to ask.	True	False

Task 2

Write the phrases in the correct group.

Under no circumstances ...	The ... need(s) ...	Please can you ... ?
Help yourself to ...	Would you mind ... ?	Feel free to ...

Polite requests	Direct instructions	Friendly offers

Task 3

Complete the instructions, requests and offers with words from the box.

Would you mind	Don't forget to	Help yourself
Feel free to	can you	otherwise
		need

- feed the fish.
- Please collect the letters from the box and throw away any junk mail?
- The plants watering twice a week.
- keeping the curtains closed if it's sunny? It gets very hot
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- There's plenty of food in the kitchen cupboards
- watch television and use the computer.

Discussion

What would you ask a house-sitter to do if they were looking after your house or flat?

Answers

Preparation task

- Water your plants.
- Re-organise your furniture.
- Feed your pets.
- Clean the house thoroughly.
- Make expensive phone calls from your house phone.
- Check the house to make sure everything's fine.

Task 1

1. True
2. False
3. False
4. True
5. True

Task 2

Polite requests	Direct instructions	Friendly offers
Please can you ... ? Would you mind ... ?	Under no circumstances ... The ... need(s) ...	Help yourself to ... Feel free to ...

Task 3

1. Don't forget to
2. can you
3. need
4. Would you mind | otherwise
5. Help yourself
6. Feel free to