Learn how to write a formal email to make a request.

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

Preparation task
Match the definitions (a–f) with the vocabulary (1–6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ..... an inconvenience</td>
<td>a. unexpected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ..... due to</td>
<td>b. a repayment of money you have paid for something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ..... enrolled on</td>
<td>c. to delay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ..... a refund</td>
<td>d. a small and perhaps annoying problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ..... unforeseen</td>
<td>e. registered for a course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ..... to postpone</td>
<td>f. because of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reading text: An email request
Dear Ms Leitman,
I am writing to request your help following a change in my circumstances.
As you know, I am enrolled on the Basic Spanish course at your college, which starts in September. However, due to unforeseen family events, I have had to leave the country for a while to assist my parents in Hong Kong.
At present it is not clear when I will be able to return and unfortunately I will not be able to start the course as planned.
I would like to request a refund for the course fees already paid. I apologise for the short notice and for any inconvenience caused. In the event that a refund is not possible, I would be grateful if you could postpone my enrolment until my return.
Thank you in advance for your help and I hope to be able to update you on the situation soon.
Yours sincerely,
Honor Singh
Tips

1. Organise the letter clearly into:
   - The reason for writing
   - The nature of the problem
   - The outcome you’d like
   - An apology for the inconvenience

2. Don’t go into too much personal detail when explaining the problem, as this is a formal situation with a person you don’t know well.

3. To make polite requests use the phrase *I would be grateful if you could* ...

4. Using nouns instead of verbs can make your writing sound more formal. (For example, instead of *My circumstances have changed*, say *There has been a change in my circumstances*.)

5. Sign off *Yours sincerely*, if you know the person’s name and *Yours faithfully*, if you don’t.

Tasks

**Task 1**

Choose the best answer.

1. Which sentence is appropriate for a formal letter?
   a. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances regarding my accommodation I have had to return to my own country.
   b. Unfortunately, my mother and I have argued and I have had to move out of her house. I’m staying with friends but don’t feel comfortable staying too long so I have had to return to my own country.

2. Which sentence is appropriate for a formal letter?
   a. I might be able to come back in September or March. It depends on my visa request, so who knows?
   b. At present it is not clear when I will be able to return.

3. Which sentence is appropriate for a formal letter?
   a. I am afraid I will not be able to attend.
   b. I don’t feel like attending.

4. Which sentence is appropriate for a formal letter?
   a. I am expecting a full refund.
   b. I’m hoping that you will consider issuing a refund.
5. Which sentence is appropriate for a formal letter?
   a. I would be grateful if I could start the course at a later date.
   b. I want to start the course at a later date.

6. Which sentence is appropriate for a formal letter?
   a. I apologise for any inconvenience caused and hope the situation will be resolved as soon as possible.
   b. I apologise for any inconvenience caused and I look forward to your immediate reply on the matter.

**Task 2**
Complete the sentences with words from the box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>planned</th>
<th>longer</th>
<th>due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>event</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>caused</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. As you know, I was …………………………… to start in September.
2. At …………………………… it is not clear when I can return.
3. I will not be able to start the course as …………………………… .
4. I will no …………………………… be able to take my place on the course.
5. In the …………………………… that a refund is not possible, please could you …?
6. I apologise for any inconvenience …………………………… .

**Task 3**
Write one word to complete the more formal sentences.

1. My circumstances have changed. ➔ There has been a …………………………… in my circumstances.
2. I am sorry I didn't tell you earlier. ➔ I apologise for the short …………………………… .
3. Please could you give me back the money? ➔ I would like to request a …………………………… .
4. Can I enrol on the course later? ➔ I would be grateful if you could postpone my …………………………… .
5. I would like to start the course when I come back. ➔ I would like to start the course on my …………………………… .
6. I am sorry if this is inconvenient. ➔ I apologise for any …………………………… caused.

**Discussion**
When was the last time you had to cancel something because of an unforeseen situation?
Answers

Preparation task
1. d
2. f
3. e
4. b
5. a
6. c

Task 1
1. a
2. b
3. a
4. b
5. a
6. a

Task 2
1. due
2. present
3. planned
4. longer
5. event
6. caused

Task 3
1. change
2. notice
3. refund
4. enrolment
5. return
6. inconvenience