

An email request

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).

Vocabulary

1. an inconvenience
2. due to
3. enrolled on
4. a refund
5. unforeseen
6. to postpone

Definition

- a. unexpected
- b. a repayment of money you have paid for something
- c. to delay
- d. a small and perhaps annoying problem
- e. registered for a course
- f. because of

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.

planned	longer	due
event	present	caused

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