What is the Difference between Formal and Informal Writing?

**Formal writing** is writing that generally does not use slang, personal references (I, you, or me, except in some instances like employment cover letters), or shorthand (texting language, abbreviations, or contractions). It is writing that is addressed to a professional audience for a professional purpose. It is written in Standard American English, which means it adheres to conventions that are deemed to be common and proper in professional correspondence or documentation. Often, formal writing will employ language that is specific to a particular field of study or a certain profession or discipline, such as business, science, or information technology.

Formal writing should not be confused with professionalism. Professionalism is the manner in which you conduct yourself and how you communicate. In the workplace and at school, you should always conduct yourself and communicate professionally with instructors, university staff, and fellow students. Professionalism means that despite personal differences you are always polite and treat others with respect. While it is fine to admit to and even bring attention to differences (when it is appropriate), you never demean a person or resort to any type of personal confrontation.

Examples of formal writing include (please click on the links below to take you to the KU resources):

- Academic Writing
- Resumes
- Employment cover letters
- Business Memos
- Business Letters
- Workplace and school emails
- Discussion board responses

**Informal writing**, on the other hand, is usually personal in nature; therefore, slang, personal references, and much looser conventions are appropriate. As mentioned above, there are times when you will write informally, but you should always maintain professionalism at all times at work and school.

Examples of informal writing include:

- Personal letters
- Personal emails
- Facebook posts
- Personal text messages
- Personal instant messages
- Some instant messages for work and school
- Live tutoring
- Seminar