Technical English for Engineers Prof. Aysha Iqbal Department of Humanities and Social Science Indian institute of Technology, Madras

Lecture - 31 Letter Writing and Usage

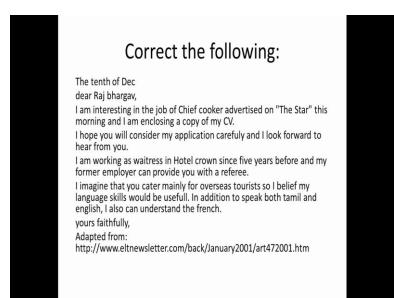
We will continue with our discussion of letter writing today, and along with that I am going to do plenty of usage, or rather, how to use the English language correctly.

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We have been doing this for quite a while throughout the course, but now as we reach, or as we are about to complete this course, I want to revise and revisit some of the concepts that we have already done.

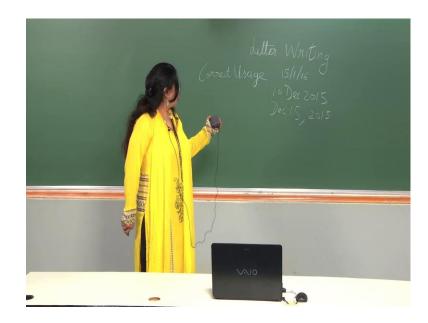
So, good morning friends, Letter Writing, more exercises related to letter writing, and also, some exercises related to word choices, vocabulary and grammar.



To begin with, I would like you to take a look at this slide, and correct the errors wherever you find them. So Please take a look at this slide. This is a letter, and I would like you to tell me what's s wrong with it. And, it's a a, as you can see, it's an application for a certain position, the position of a chef in a hotel. Please look at the slide, and let's is read. The tenth of December; dear Raj bhargav, I am interested in the job of Chief cooker advertised on "The Star" this morning and I am enclosing a copy of my CV. I hope you will consider my application carefully and I look forward to hear from you. I am working as waitress in Hotel crown since five years before and my former employer can provide you with a referee. I imagine that you cater mainly for overseas tourists so I belief my language skills would be useful. In addition to speak both Tamil and English, I also can understand the French. yours faithfully.

What is so wrong with it? First of all, let's us look at the way the writer has inserted the date. We do not write date in words, but rather in number. So, ten as in 10 and December; see, there is no hard and fast rule about writing dates. Many a time, I find people writing date like 10 December 2015, which is perfectly correct.

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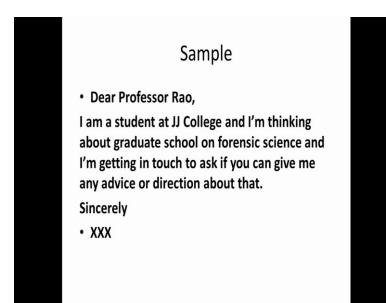
And, if you want to write December 15, 2015; but separate, remember to separate it with a comma, this is correct as well. Of course, there is a very standard formula, 15/1/16, and we know what it suggests. Writing in numbers; however, the rule is that we do not write the year or we do not write the date in words.

'Dear Raj bhargav' look at the way, capitalised or capitalisation has been ignored; please keep looking at the slide. Dear should be d in capital, and Raj bhargav, now of course, it is a proper noun. So, you know how to write it. And, well, 'I am interesting in', it should be I am interested in the job of 'chief cooker'. Now, what is cooker? This is the kind of vocabulary that emerges from the assumption that, because drive has driver, so therefore, a cook, someone who cooks has to be a cooker, which is absolutely not true. So, cook is the right word, a chef maybe; 'advertised in the star this morning, and I am enclosing a copy of my CV. I hope you will consider my'. Now, look at the order. Should this sentence precede everything else? I am asking you. So, please look at it, and correct wherever you think necessary, whether the order has been all mixed up.

'I am working as waitress in Hotel crown' again, look at the use of lower caps for crown, 'since five years before'. Now, do we need to use before, because since five years should be good enough; 'and my former employer can provide you with a referee' or reference. So, reference is the correct form. 'I imagine that you cater mainly for overseas tourists', is anything wrong with that? So, 'I belief', is anything wrong with belief, or should it be believe? So, discuss it among yourself. 'My language skills could be usefull', look at the spelling of usefull is it correct, or does it need a re-think. 'In addition to speak both tamil', should it be to speak? 'both tamil and english', should t and e be in capital, because we are referring to proper nouns here. 'I can also understand the french', should it be 'the french' or only french? Should F be in capital? I am asking you these questions; work in pairs and solve this exercise.

Now, this is another sample. Please look at the slide.

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Now, it's is an interesting letter and most of you perhaps, at some point or the other, may come across a situation where you would want to go for higher studies particularly, do your M Tech, and if you are already a M Tech or MSc, then perhaps your PhDs, and you may want to contact people who could be potential supervisors, PhD guides for you, how to approach them? Not all of us have such excellent networks that we can just walk in, in some professor's room, and ask him or her to be your supervisor. We have to be, we have to always do some research on the kind of college you want to join, the kind of institution you want to join, and the kind of person you want as your guide.

So, here is an interesting sample. 'Dear Professor Rao', please look at the slide. 'I am a student at JJ college, and I am thinking about graduate school on forensic science, and I am getting in touch to ask if you can give me any advice or direction about that. Sincerely' what is so wrong with this letter? After all, the message is quite clear.

But you see it is brief and concise; it does not give extra information. But, on the other hand, it doesn't not give any information. Who is this person? He is just a student at JJ College. Is he talking about his current area of research? Yes, on forensic science, but what is his background? We don't not know that. Has he done any work? Has he done any internship, any project that could be relevant to him? Why does he want to approach Professor Rao? Is Professor Rao an expert in this area? Has he ever met him? Has he ever heard him? Has he ever read published papers by Professor Rao? All these things are necessary, if you want to get in touch with someone of some important stature, especially, when you request him or her to be your supervisor.

So, it has to be; again, letter writing in formal context is a very complex skill. You have to be very careful about what you are asking, and how you are asking. So, all these points should come across very clearly and thoroughly.

So, let me repeat, then, what do you need when you are writing a letter to someone and requesting him or her for PhD supervision. Now, I would like you to do this exercise. You may take down notes that what I want you to do; I want you to write a letter to someone, requesting for PhD supervision. You have to introduce yourself, the kind of work you have done, why you think you are interested in this particular domain, or field of research. You should go down to the next paragraph, the body of the letter, make the request, tell the person how you learnt about him or her, and why you want to work with him or her.

And then, the next paragraph should be request for an appointment. This request would be, if the person is in India, then perhaps, I can come in person and meet you, or perhaps, write an email in greater detail and even via email or perhaps by phone, I can call you if you would just tell me when is the right time to approach you; and conclusion, thank the person in advance for the support that you are expecting from them. And of course, all the relevant attachment should be there; your CVs, your certificates; these are optional, perhaps. The person you are writing to may not be interested, for that moment in supervising or taking research scholars. So perhaps, you have to think of other options. So, it is a long process, a tedious process, and you have to be at it.

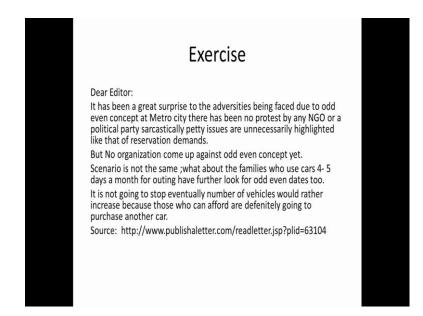
When you are writing a letter, remember that, you have to use appropriate words and vocabulary. Words, such as internship, research, interests, projects, specific projects, I would like to explore, I would like an appointment. So, the kind of verbs and the kinds of nouns that we have been talking about in your particular domain, these are very important to remember, and correct use of that. Remember, you have to always adapt an extremely polite and formal tone when approaching people in higher education and academics.

Now, let's is do some speaking now, as a follow up activity, for whatever we have been doing. I would like you to discuss in pairs, or even groups, small groups, your plans for higher education. Let me repeat, your plans for higher education; your M Tech plans, your MSc plans, or your PhD plans, or even if you want to become project associate somewhere; so, those kinds of plans, you must speak. Your discussion must include where you want to go, what you want to do first, then, where you want to pursue your further education, higher education, and then, give reasons for choosing that particular domain, in that particular institution.

Also useful would be, to talk about someone, who has done considerable amount of work; you know, experts go around the world giving talks, presentations, seminars, they attend conferences, they are invited for workshops, and all. So, perhaps, you have heard, or met someone of great reputation in that area, and you would like to contact that person. Or perhaps, you have read a book by that expert, and you would like to work under him or her. Published papers; you have read something that has been published by, in some academic journal by that person. So, those are the things you should be able to mention, when you are discussing. And also, when you write a letter that, I read this book by you; I am interested in you; I read this article by you, and I am interested in you; those are the things that should be included.

Now, look at the slide here.

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I want you to look at this particular letter. Again, a very formal setting; letter to the Editor; all of us come across, if we are not writing letters to editor, then at least we come across these things very often. Look at the language, look at the ideas and look at the vocabulary, grammar, and tell me how you feel about it and if you think that there is some scope of correction here. Again, this is an exercise that I would like you to do in pairs.

Dear Editor: It has been a great surprise to the adversities being faced due to odd even concept at Metro city'. I am sure, all of you are aware of the odd even situation in Delhi. So, perhaps, we do not need to explain too much here. If you don't not know, by any chance, then please look up the odd even concept in Delhi, and it would give you some idea. 'There has been no protest by any NGO or political party sarcastically petty issues are unnecessarily highlighted like that of reservation demands. But, no organisation come up against odd even concept yet. Scenario is not the same; what about the families who use cars 4 - 5 days a month for outing have further look for odd even dates too. It is not even going to stop eventually number of vehicles would rather increase because those who can afford are definitely going to purchase another car.

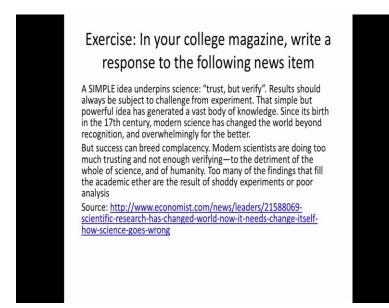
So, I have given you the source of this letter; very interesting letter. Try to revise, and I am giving you a hint; I am not going to give you each and every line now that, how you can improve upon it. But, try to use punctuations. See, if punctuations, full stops, commas at the right places will make the letter read differently. Now, as a follow up exercise, I would like you to do an exercise of this activity. Please look at the slide and you will understand what I want you to do.

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letter of complaint to college management about the
poor condition of canteen
 insufficient table and benches
 food and drinks not covered
too little food counters
 dirty and clogged drains – smelly
 food – expensive and lacks variety
 inadequate food – late comers have nothing to
buy, to eat
 cold food – not fresh
rude canteen workers
 <u>http://goodessays.blogspot.in/2014/02/</u> <u>complain-report-about-school-canteen.html</u>

I want you to write a letter of complaint to college management, about the poor condition of canteen in your college. Perhaps, your college has an excellent canteen; you are very lucky and very fortunate. However, imagine a situation where the college canteen facilities are not so good and cover these points. Insufficient tables and benches, food and drinks not covered, too little food counters, dirty and clogged drains - smelly food expensive and lacks variety, inadequate food - late comers have nothing to buy to eat, cold food, food is not fresh, and rude canteen workers. So, write a letter to the management, to perhaps to the principal, perhaps to the person who manages the canteen, and address it and include all these points. Discuss your answer in pairs and groups.

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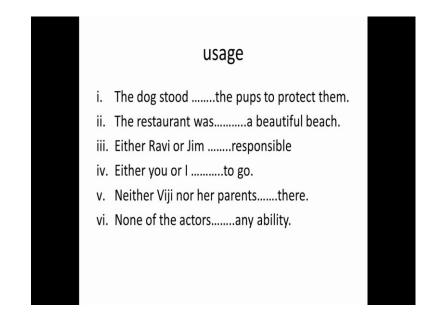
Now, look at this slide, and imagine that, you are a contributor for your college magazine. Here is a news item that you have come across, and I would like you to write a response to this. See, you have nothing to do with this passage. Please understand the question. You don't not have to correct the passage; it's is quite well written. What I want you to do is to write a response to the item.

A SIMPLE idea underpins science: "trust, but verify". Results should always be subject to challenge from experiment. That simple, but powerful idea has generated a vast body of knowledge. Since its birth in the 17th century, modern science has changed the world beyond recognition, and overwhelmingly for the better. But success can breed complacency. Modern scientists are doing too much trusting and not enough verifying - to the detriment of the whole of science, and of humanity. Too many of the findings that fill the academic ether are the result of shoddy experiments, or poor analysis.

Now, what do you think? Do you agree with the position? Do you agree with the premise? Write a response. The response could be for publication in your college magazine. Refer to this news item and give an opinion, take a stand, and support your stand and opinion with a few examples that you come across in your day-to-day life. Follow the format, and discuss your answers in pairs and groups.

Now, let's us move on to do some usage. Look at this exercise, and I want you to fill in the blanks.

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The dog stood dash the pups to protect them. The restaurant was dash a beautiful beach. Either Ravi, or Jim dash responsible. Either you or I dash to go. Neither Viji nor her parents dash there. None of the actors dash any ability.

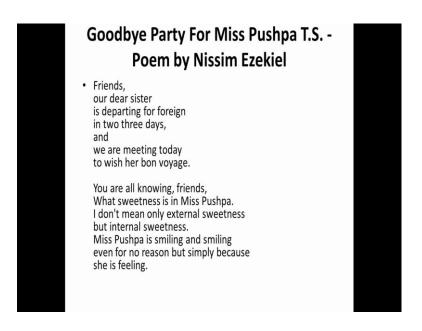
Take a moment; what should be the correct answer? The dog stood, well one answer could be near the puppies; but, if I want you to use something else, what else, or next to the puppies, but where is too. So, when we are trying to protect, the correct preposition now, here is a problem of preposition. So, it is over the pups, to protect them. There is a term like, now we are talking about phrasal verb. So, please revise; when you look over or stood over, it is in the sense of observing something. And here, the sense is, you are protecting someone.

The restaurant was, now, here is a situation, over a beautiful beach, on a beautiful beach; what should you write? One answer could be, was on a beautiful beach; yes, but we don't not say in a beautiful beach; that completely changes the meaning. So, was near a beautiful beach or if you want to talk about spaces, high and low, above a beautiful

beach; sometimes, you come across such constructions also. So, yes, there could be multiple responses to this one.

Either Ravi, or Jim; remember, we are talking about subject verb agreement here. So, first 2 questions were regarding prepositions; rest of the items are all about subject verb agreement. So, two singular nouns or proper nouns is responsible; a singular verb. Either you or i, now what should go with I? Either you or I am to go. The correct response is am, a m. Neither Viji nor her parents; so, remember, parents, the verb will agree with the subject closer. So, here you have were there or are there. And, none of the actors, generally, we use a singular verb with a singular subject and none being a singular, but here, look at the way the sentences is constructed. None of the actors have any ability. We are now looking at the subject closer to the verb. So, we have been doing a lot of technical writing and I think, now is the right time to do something light-hearted. Of course, not throughout the lecture today, but let **s** is have for a change.

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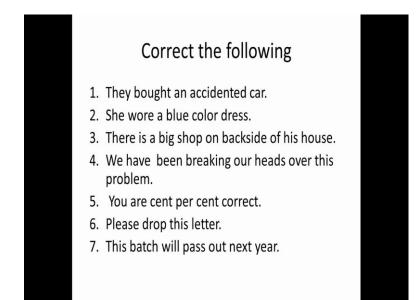
Look at this slide. This is a poem, a humorous poem, "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S." and it's is a hilarious take on a variety of English. it's is a poem by Nissim Ezekiel. 'Friends, our dear sister is departing for foreign in two three days, and we are meeting today to wish her bon voyage. You are all knowing, friends, what sweetness is in Miss

Pushpa. I don't not mean any external sweetness, but internal sweetness. Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling even for no reason, but simply because she is feeling".

Well, this is a great poet, and of course, we know what he is trying to do. He is talking about the way English is used commonly, especially in our situation, where I am talking about the so called Indian English variety. Of course, there are great writers in Indian English also, but this is a hilarious take; some of the common mistakes that people make. You know, it is generally speaking not, it is not a commentary on people whose, or Indians whose English is excellent or very good. So, it is not about that; it is just a humorous take. So, take it in the right spirit please and of course, you know what is so wrong with it.

We don't not say, let's us say, departing for foreign in two three days. Foreign of course, is a very Indian English. The concept foreign-returned is, you might be surprised to know, is unique to Indian English. Generally, people say my relatives are abroad, but foreign, foreign-return, and going to foreign is something peculiar. And, generally speaking, those outside our country they do not understand what we mean when we say foreign; foreign, as in, in this context.

Now, I would like you to look at some examples, which are typical to Indian English. Correct the following, and look at the slide. (Refer Slide Time: 27:02)



This is something that we find very often in the day-to-day speech, and writing of our students. They bought an accidented car. She wore a blue colour dress. There is a big shop on backside of his house. We have been breaking our heads over this problem. You are cent percent correct. Please drop this letter. This batch will pass out next year.

Now, What is so wrong? I think, some of us do use some of these sentences, or these structures. What is the problem? Now, we don't not say accidented car, or accidental car; we say a damaged car or perhaps, a used car. And, if it the used car is a damaged car, then that's is what we say or a dented car, but not accidented car.

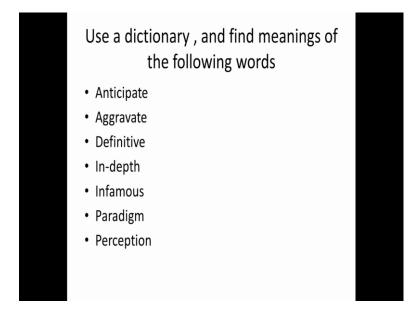
She wore a blue colour dress; very common, red colour, yellow colour, white colour. All you have to say is; She wore a blue dress. You don't not have to use the word colour; that is redundant there. There is a big shop on the backside of his house; very common mistake. You have to say, there is a big shop at the back of his house, backside has a completely different meaning. We have been breaking our heads over this problem. We don't not break our heads, we rack our brains. Again, I know that, many of us use some of these constructions and it has become so prevalent that it has almost become like fossilized error. You know, what is fossilized? It has become deep-seated, fossilized, frozen.

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Therefore, when I get a mail like that; that madam, you said that, there is no plural for equipment; plural is also equipment and no equipments, then I understand that some errors are deep-rooted in us. We need to shake them off, if we are striving to be better users of the English language. Otherwise, you can continue using whatever you wish. You are cent percent correct. You are 100 percent correct; cent percent is again very common in our part of the world. Please drop this letter. The correct and more appropriate is, please post this letter. This batch will pass out next year. Please look up your dictionaries, and look at the meaning of pass out; very common error. The correct usage is, this batch will complete their studies this year, or will graduate next year, but we don't not say, pass out; pass out has a completely different meaning.

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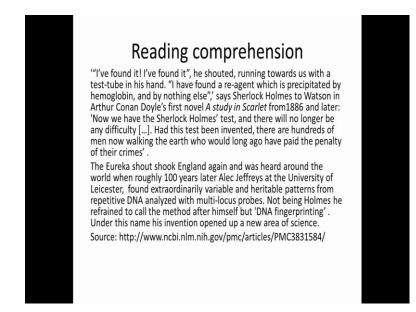
Now, I want you to use a dictionary. let **s** us practice some dictionary skills. Look at this slide and find meanings of the following words. Anticipate, aggravate, definitive, indepth, infamous, paradigm, perception. Using a dictionary, find the meanings of these words.

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Again, look at this slide and practice your dictionary skills. Find the difference in meanings of these pair of words; very commonly confused words. Acquaintance and colleague; adherence and adhesion; alternate and alternative; anecdote and antidote; coarse and course; cloths and clothes, collaborate and corroborate.

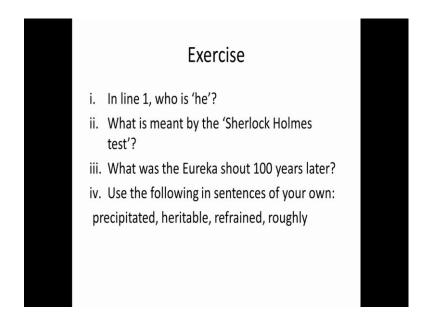
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Now, let's us do some reading comprehension; look at the slide here. It has been quite a while since we last did an exercise like this.

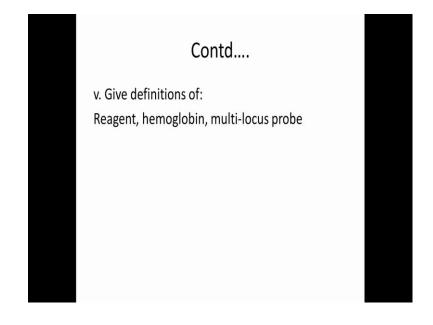
Here is your passage. "I've have found it, I've have found it", he shouted, running towards us with a test-tube in his hand. "I found a re-agent which is precipitated by haemoglobin, and by nothing else", says Sherlock Holmes to Watson in Arthur Conan Doyle's first novel, "A Study in Scarlet" from 1886 and later. 'Now, we have the Sherlock Holmes' test and there will be, no longer be any difficulty. Had this test been invented, there are hundreds of men now walking the earth who would long ago have paid the penalty of their crimes. The Eureka shout shook England again and was heard around the world when roughly 100 years later Alec Jeffreys at the University of Leicester, found extraordinarily variable and heritable patterns from repetitive DNA analyzed with multilocus probes. Not being Holmes he refrained to call the method after himself but 'DNA fingerprinting'. Under this name his invention opened up a new area of science.

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Please look at the exercise. In line 1, who is 'he'? Second question, what is meant by 'Sherlock Holmes test'? Next, what was the Eureka shout 100 years later? And what is eureka shout? And then, I want you to use the following words in sentences of your own: precipitated, heritable, refrained, roughly.

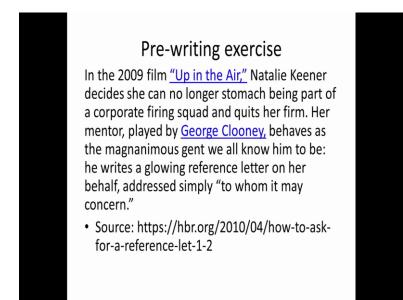
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And, give definitions of the following words: reagent, haemoglobin, and multi-locus probe; write definitions in 1 to 2 sentences.

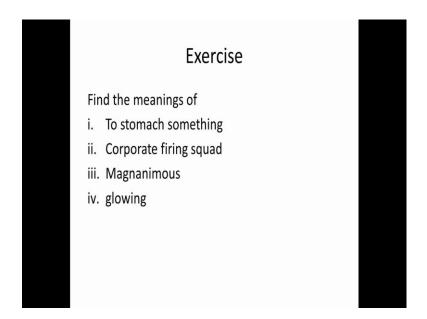
Now, here is another exercise for you.

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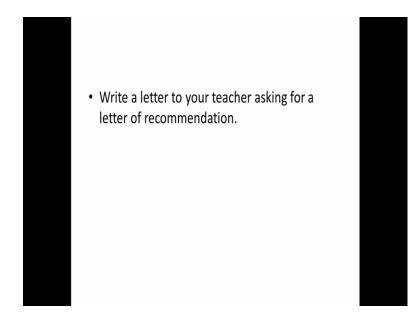
This is your pre-writing exercise. And then, I will give you some exercise to do. Please look at the slide. In the 2009 film "Up in the air", I hope you have seen the movie; if not, please do watch it. it is an excellent film, and has some excellent philosophy behind it, about human relationships. Natalie Keener decides she can no longer stomach being part of a corporate firing squad and quits her firm. Her mentor, played by George Clooney, behaves as the magnanimous gent, we all know him to be. He writes a glowing reference letter on her behalf, addressed simply "to whom it may concern."

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Now, I want you to find the meanings of - to stomach something; look at, you have already read the passage; so Corporate firing squad, Magnanimous and glowing. Find the meanings of these words, and now, we come to your main exercise.

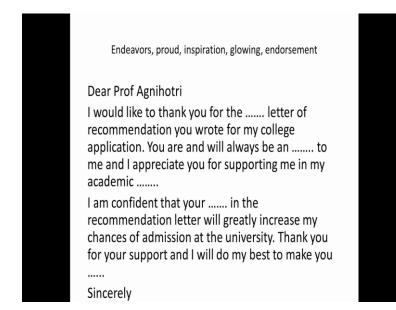
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I want you to write a letter to your teacher, asking for a letter of recommendation, for

admission to a university. I will repeat, write a letter to your teacher, your supervisor, or your current instructor and ask them for a letter of recommendation for admission to another university.

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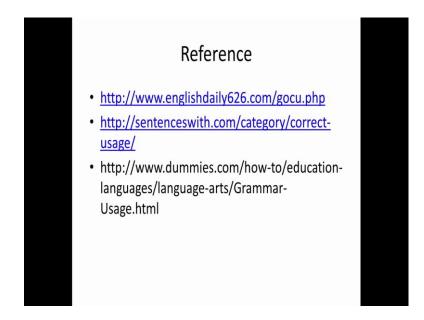


Look at the slide here; this is another exercise. Fill in the blanks using the words that I have already given in the box above; endeavours, proud, inspiration, glowing, endorsement. This is a letter of thanks to a Professor, who has already given a good letter of a reference.

'Dear Professor Agnihotri, I would like to thank you for the dash letter of recommendation you wrote for my college application. You are and will always be an dash to me, and I appreciate you for supporting me in my academic dash. I am confident, that your dash in the recommendation letter will greatly increase my chances of admission at the university. Thank you for your support, and I will do my best to make you proud'.

let²s us a solve this. Dear Professor Agnihotri, I would like to thank you for the glowing letter of recommendation you wrote for my college application. You are and will always be an inspiration to me, and I appreciate you for supporting me in my academic endeavours. I am confident, that your endorsement in the recommendation letter will greatly increase my chances of admission, and I will do my best to make you proud'. This is a very well written letter of thanking someone.

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Look at this slide and this is something where you will find some useful material on correct usage.

Thank you very much, and we will continue with practising our writing in the next class.

Tags

Reading English, English for Engineers, English words, English Exercise, Exercises in English, Grammar usage, English Grammar, vocabulary, words and phrases, spoken communication, written communication, Verbs, Noun, adverb, adjective, suffix, prefix, English writing, English speaking, scientific English, report writing, CV, formal letter,

Essay writing, word categories, word formation, collocation, academic writing, formal tone, paragraph writing, tone in writing, speaking tone, signal words, linking words, descriptive passage, hook, layout of an essay, contractions and abbreviations, Letter writimg, fossilized error