Email writing

Topic: Writing emails

Aims:
- To teach or revise the rules of writing emails in English by studying the differences between formal letters, and informal and semi-formal emails

Level: Intermediate and above

Introduction
The main focus will be on writing semi-formal emails, and the students will send an email to a tourist information centre of their choice using the rules they will have studied in the first half of the lesson. I have done this lesson several times myself and although not all of the students received replies from the information centres they emailed, most of them did, which in itself gave them much satisfaction.

The lesson is suitable for intermediate students and above, although if simplified could be adapted for use with lower levels.

Procedure

- Ask students what factors are important for them when they are choosing a holiday (e.g. weather, accommodation, activities, costs, culture, food, history etc.). Ask students where they usually get information about a holiday destination (e.g. guidebooks, Internet, recommendations from friends). Ask if they have ever emailed a tourist information centre before a holiday. The answer will probably be no.

- Tell them that in this lesson they will be emailing a tourist information centre in a city of their choice to get information about that place. Put the students into pairs and tell them to try to decide on a place in the world that they would both like to visit. Give them a few minutes to discuss this and then go round the classroom asking where each pair would like to go.

- Tell the class that before they write their emails, you are going to go through some of the rules of email writing.

    i)   Ask them what style of writing they would use, if writing a letter to e.g. a prospective employer. The answer is formal.
    ii)   Then ask what style of writing they would use to email a close friend. The answer is informal.
    iii) Finally ask what style of writing they would use if emailing a formal recipient. The answer is semi-formal. Ask them what style of writing should be used to write to a tourist information centre (semi-formal).

- Give out the cut up strips (worksheets 1, 2a and 3) and ask them to group them into a formal letter, a semi-formal email and an informal email, and then to put the strips into the right order. Go round checking.

- Tell the students that you are going to focus on the semi-formal email because emailing has become the main means of communication and so it is important to know the conventions of this style of writing.

- Give the pairs a copy of the semi-formal email as an example of a good email (worksheet 2b) and a copy of the 'bad email' (worksheet 4). Ask them to draw two columns on a piece of paper and write the headings Dos and Don'ts at the top. The students then compare the two emails and try to discover the rules of writing a good email. They should write the rules in the correct column. Give them about 10 minutes to do this.

- Go round the classroom asking for the rules they discovered, and write them up on the board under Dos and Don'ts. (See teacher's notes)

- Tell students that they are going to write an email (on paper) to the information centre of the city of their choice asking for any information they require. Tell them to use the model email (worksheet 2b) as an example and to follow the list of rules they have. Students work in pairs. Go round helping them, reminding them of the rules and helping with any language problems.

- When they have finished writing, ask the students to swap emails with another pair and ask them to proof-read each other's emails. Go round giving each pair feedback helping them with any mistakes they may have made.

- If possible, go to the computer room and ask students to try to find the email address of the tourist information centre of their chosen place. When they have the address, ask them to use their own email accounts to write their email to the information centre. This means they will receive an answer to their own email addresses.

Extra option
- If you have a lot of time, you can ask the students to email another pair with their questions (as well as the tourist information centre). That pair can then use the Internet to research the answers to the questions and reply to the email with the answers. This will give the students extra practice of emailing, and also give them valuable practice of using the Internet for research purposes in English.

Teacher's notes

DOS	DON'TS
• Use an informative subject line, which says what the email is about.	• Write 'hello' as your subject line.
• Write the most important information first.	• Write about irrelevant issues. The reader will soon hit 'delete' if the email doesn't get to the point.
• Use numbers and bullet points to make the message clearer.	• Give personal information that you don't want anyone else to know. (The email could end up in the wrong hands)
• Use simple grammar. Avoid things like the passive. (As emails are a fast means of communication, they tend to be less wordy and complex than formal letters.)	• Use capital letters to write whole words as in emails, this is considered shouting.
• Write short sentences.	• Use different fonts in the email (the recipient's computer may not be compatible)
• Use paragraphs to keep the email clear and easy to understand	• Use Italics (the reason may be misunderstood, due to cultural differences).
	• Use exclamation marks.
	• Use abbreviations like coz and uni, as the recipient may not understand them.
	• Use acronyms like BTW for the same reason.
	• Use smileys. They may be misunderstood and come across as unprofessional.