English Skills

Formal and Informal English for Speaking

This module covers concepts such as

- Understanding the different levels of informality in speech
- Understanding when to use formal or informal English
- Practising some new words and expressions
- Knowing where to find out more

www.jcu.edu.au/students/learning-centre
Spoken English at university can be formal, informal or somewhere in between.

Informal English is common in spoken English at university. In lectures and tutorials, there will be a certain level of formality, but some lecturers will use colloquialisms frequently. Let your lecturers know if you are finding it hard to understand them because of this. Very informal, local language, combined with speaking very quickly, can cause problems for students.

For everyday interactions with students and staff, you need to develop your social English. The best way to do this is to listen to locals whose first language is English and ask questions. Practise some of the informal language you hear, but be careful not to use swear words or offensive language by mistake. A lot of Aussie humour involves word play or requires some understanding of the cultural context. Your language and cultural background will affect how much time it takes you to understand local humour.

Polite language

It can be helpful to use polite language in informal contexts (please, thank you, excuse me, would you mind?, may I add something? I’m afraid I disagree with that because…).

Intonation also indicates the level of politeness. Try asking the question below, with different levels of intonation. Rising intonation is more polite.

“What’s the time, please?”

Informal language:

- Abbreviations (Aussie, barbie)
- Contractions (uni, lab)
- Acronyms (JCU)
- Vocabulary choice (got, chook)
- Phrasal verbs (go up)
- Idioms (to run around like a headless chook)
- Metaphors (a mountain of work)
- Clichés (a nice person)
- Everyday phrases (How are you going? Not bad)

Slang: very informal contemporary language (sweet as, hot)

Swear words & offensive words (avoid these!)

Informal Everyday Phrases and Slang

How are you going? How’s it going?

How are things? How have you been?

Not bad / Good thanks – how about you?

I’ve been flat out!

What have you been up to? What’s up? Sup?

Not much / Dunno / Heaps of stuff
Learning informal Australian English independently

WEBSITES
Australia Network – Learning English
http://australianetwork.com/learningenglish/
AusEphrase
AusEphrase Training Video
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mu68NbGvkhM
National Museum Australia: Australian English
National Museum Australia: Aussie English for the Beginner
Aussie English from the sticks

FACEBOOK GROUPS
Australia Plus Learn English is a free service for anyone learning English and is produced by the ABC, Australia’s national public broadcaster.
https://www.facebook.com/AustraliaPlusLearnEnglish

YOUTUBE CLIPS
Please note: some of these clips include a small amount of swearing or offensive language
An American in Melbourne
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNLV3tcFM4A
Introduction to slang with outback scenery
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsBm2IfEKM
Aus E-Phrase
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Nq-IUHznmU
Adam Hills - Aussie comedian
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpBYnL5fAXE

Summary (to sum up!)
• Spoken English at JCU can be both informal and formal
• Polite language is helpful for both formal and informal spoken and written communication
• To learn Aussie English, explore some websites but, best of all, ask an Aussie!