Formal and Informal words
Introduction

Formality is all about your relationship with the person you're speaking or writing to. If you use formal language, it may be because you wish to show respect, politeness, or to put yourself at a distance (for example, 'official' language). Informal language can show friendliness, equality or a feeling of closeness and solidarity with someone. You should never use informal language just to sound fluent or clever.
Scales of formality

Some groups of words can be put on a scale from (very) formal to (very) informal

- offspring (vf)
- children (f)
- kids (i)
- abode/residence (vf)
- house/flat (f)
- place (i)
- alcoholic beverages (vf)
- drink (n) (f)
- booze (i)
Short, monosyllabic informal words

Informal versions of words are often short and monosyllabic, as we saw on the previous slide. They include slang words.

- It cost me ten **quid**. [pounds]
- I'll help you peel the **spuds**. [potatoes]
- My **bike's** been stolen. [bicycle]
- I always go by **tube**. [word used for the London Underground]
- Come and meet my **Mum** and **Dad**. [mother and father]
- **Hi**! Can't stop; see you, **bye**! [hello; goodbye]
- The milk's in the **fridge**. [refrigerator]
Clippings

Shortening a word tends to make it less formal, as in **fridge.** and **bye.**

• I’ll meet you in the **lab**(oratory).
• What's on **telly** tonight? [television]
• We should put an **ad**(ertilisement) /an **advert**(isement) in the (news) **paper**.
• Shall I (tele)**phone** them?
• Her sister's a **vet**(erinary surgeon).
Formality in notices, instructions, etc.

You will often see rather formal words in notices and suchlike.

Make sure you know the meaning of the words used so that you could tell someone what the notice says using less formal words.
1. THE PUBLIC HOUSE IS CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.
2. Do not alight while the bus is in motion.
3. Do not address the driver unless the bus is stationary.
4. We regret we cannot accept cheques.
5. Tickets must be purchased before boarding the train.
Make this conversation more informal by changing some of the words

JIM: Annie, can you lend me five pounds?
ANNIE: What for?
JIM: Well, I have to go and visit my mother and father, and my bicycle's not working, so I’ll have to take a taxi.
ANNIE: Can't you telephone them and say you can't come?
JIM: Well, I could, except I want to go because they always have lots of food, and the refrigerator at our flat is empty, as usual.
ANNIE: Can't you go by Underground?
JIM: Erm... 
ANNIE: Anyway, the answer's no.
Answers

JIM: Annie, can you lend me five quid?
ANNIE: What for?
JIM: Well, I've got to go and see my mum and dad, and my bike's not working, so I’ll have to take/get a taxi.
ANNIE: Can't you phone/ring/call them and say you can't come?
JIM: Well, I could, except I want to go because they always have lots of food, and the fridge at our flat (or 'our place', which is a common way of talking about your house/flat) is empty, as usual.
ANNIE: Can't you get the / go by tube?
JIM: Erm... .
ANNIE: Anyway, the answer's no.
Say whether you feel the following remark/sentences are okay, too formal or too informal for each situation described. If the remark/sentence is unsuitable, suggest what the person might say instead.
1 (Teenage boy to teenage girl at disco): Do you fancy an appointment one night next week?
2 (Parent to another parent at a school parents meeting): How many offspring do you have at the school?
3 (Dinner-guest to host/hostess): No thanks, I never consume alcoholic beverages when I'm driving.
4 (Student to University Professor): Will there be lab demonstrations next week?
5 (Business letter to a newspaper office): Dear Sir/Madam,
I should like to enquire about the current charges for ads in your paper. My company is considering... etc.
Answer

1 A teenage boy would probably say a date (or 'Fancy going out?'), not an appointment in this situation; appointment is for business contexts; too formal.

2 Offspring, if the parent used it, would be heard as humorous, certainly not the normal word for this situation; children or kids (informal) would be the normal words. Offspring would be suitable for legal contexts, religious language and serious history books/biographies; too formal.

3 As with 2, this would be heard as humorous/mock-serious. Most people would say 'I never drink' or 'I never touch alcohol' in this situation. Alcoholic beverages is very formal/legalistic and you might see it on, e.g. a notice prohibiting drinking in a particular place or the sale of drink at particular times; too formal.
4 Probably acceptable. People who work together or share an institutional context often develop a high degree of acceptable informality. Such is often the case in British universities and colleges. In such institutional settings, clippings and other short forms are widely used by everyone and operate as a sort of slang among the people involved, and are not heard as disrespectful.

5 The use of ads here sounds out of place compared with the formal tone of the rest of the letter ('Dear Sir/Madam ... I should like to enquire ... etc.'), so it is too informal. Over the phone, however, the same person might well say 'Could you tell me how much it'd cost to put an ad in your paper?' in order to create a friendly relationship with the person answering the call.