Opening sentences for neutral and formal emails.

1) Choose words from list below to fit into each sentence. Only one solution is possible.

reference / reply / pleased / enquire / report / regarding / acknowledge / inform / writing / of

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a) I am writing to ( 1. ) about...
b) In ( 2. ) to your email of...
c) We regret to ( 3. ) you that...
d) We are ( 4. ) to inform you that...
e) We ( 5. ) receipt of your email of 10th June.
f) We refer to your email ( 6. ) next week’s meetings.
g) With ( 7. ) to your email of 7th May...
h) I’m ( 8. ) in connection with your request for...
i) I thank you for your price quote ( 9. ) June 28th.
j) I acknowledge receipt of your ( 10. ).

2) Analysis. General questions for discussion.

a) The sentences above are considered neutral or formal (definitely not for informal correspondence). Which words used determine this quite formal register?

b) In 1 and 8 we see: “I am writing” and “I’m writing”. Which form is more formal? When do you think it is best not use contractions in written English?

c) Choose one or more of the above sentences. Can you continue the sentence or think what the following sentence would be in the email? Write your answers and discuss them with the class.
Teacher’s notes.
(Time for activity: 40 mins approx. Level: intermediate.)

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Correct answers to question 1.

1. enquire
2. reply
3. inform
4. pleased
5. acknowledge
6. regarding
7. reference
8. writing
9. of
10. report

Answers to question 2.

a) Basically, all the Latin based or multi-syllable Anglo Saxon words: reference / refer / reply / enquire / report / regarding / acknowledge / inform / regret / receipt / connection / request. This is an important concept when writing business English. Look at further examples with your students.

b) “I am writing” is more formal. The use of contractions is usually fine in neutral everyday business emails. They are usually avoided in formal letters, cover letters, curriculum vitae, formal reports.

c) Students could choose sentences relevant to emails they write themselves or invent a situation. Get them to read out their answers after they have written down some ideas. Look for suitable use of register. Ask the students why they chose that theme. Eg. “We regret to inform you that we shall no longer be able to continue supplying you with you goods you require.”