

Letter of Complaint

A formal letter of complaint is written to complain about a problem which has arisen (*e.g. faulty merchandise, rude staff, inaccurate information, etc.*). It should explain the reasons for the complaint, and usually includes a suggestion/request/demand concerning what should be done (*e.g. refund, compensation, etc.*).

- Mild or strong language can be used depending on the writer's feelings and the seriousness of the complaint, but abusive language must never be used. E.g.
 - **Mild complaint:** *I am writing to complain about a factual error in yesterday's newspaper. I hope that you will give this matter your prompt attention.*
 - **Strong complaint:** *I am writing to express my strong disapproval concerning the offensive behaviour of an employee at your company's Winchester Road branch. I demand a full, written apology or I will be forced to take legal action.*
- The nature of the complaint should be clearly stated in the first paragraph. Each aspect of the topic should be presented in a separate paragraph containing a clear topic sentence. Each complaint should be supported by clear justification.

Useful Language

- **To begin letters:**
 - Mild complaint I am writing to | complain about/draw your attention to (the problem of)...
 - | express my disappointment/dissatisfaction with...
 - Strong complaint I am writing to express my annoyance/extreme dissatisfaction with/anger at/protest about...
 - I regret to/feel I must inform you how appalled/shocked I was...
- **To end letters:**
 - Mild complaint I hope/ trust this matter will | be dealt with/resolved as soon as possible.
 - | receive your immediate attention.
 - | not be treated lightly.
 - I feel that you should.../I am entitled to compensation/a refund/a replacement.
 - Strong complaint I (must) insist on.../insist (that)/demand.../warn you that...
 - Unless this matter is resolved.../Unless satisfactory compensation is offered...
 - I will have no choice but to.../I will be forced to take further/legal action.

EXPRESSING OPINIONS

In a letter of complaint, it is perfectly acceptable to describe how the poor service or product made you feel. Doing so shows the reader how important the subject is to you and helps them understand why you are complaining. Saying how you felt is not the same as being rude. Compare the following sentences:

1. **Your restaurant is terrible! The staff are mean and the food is disgusting!** (rude & exaggerated.)
2. **I was very disappointed by the meal I had at your restaurant last Tuesday. Two of the waiting staff were rude and one of our meals was cold and tasteless.** (It doesn't attack the reader. It refers to specific problems, rather than making general statements which are hard to prove.)

Here are some useful phrases to express opinions when complaining:

Phrases to show that you are normally used to better service:

- *Until recently, I have enjoyed...*
- *...has always been excellent. Recently however,...*
- *I was surprised to experience...*

Phrases to express disappointment:

- *I was (extremely) disappointed to...*
- *I am (very) disappointed in...*
- *I expect a much higher standard of service from...*

Phrases to ask for a resolution to a problem:

- *Unless (X happens), I (will/won't do X...)*
- *Because of X/the fact that + clause, I expect you to...*
- *Due to X/the fact that + clause, I ask/request that you...*

LAYOUT:

Introduction

Paragraph 1

state reason(s) for writing

Main Body

Paragraphs 2-3*

state complaint(s) with justification

Paragraphs 4-5*

suggest what should be done

Conclusion

Final Paragraph

closing remarks

Full name

* The exact number and division of paragraphs will depend on the specific instructions for each letter-writing task.

REPORTED SPEECH

When we want to tell someone what someone else said to us but we can't remember the exact words, we can use reported speech. Reported speech is useful when complaining, because complaints often involve things that were said or promised to us verbally. For example:

- *I was told by your manager that I could have a refund.*
- *Your shop assistant said that I couldn't return the dress.*
- *The person I spoke to promised they would sort this out.*

When we write reported speech, there are a few things to remember:

- We don't need to use quotation marks.
- We do need to use a reporting verb, such as 'said', 'told' or 'promised'.
- When reporting something that was said to us in the past, we need to backshift the verbs (e.g. will → would).
- Pronouns and time expressions need to change too (e.g. today → that day).