

Unit 4. Session 1. Complaint and claim management.



Situation

Read the text and listen to the situation.

It's 8 o'clock and the girls are attending the health and safety training session.

Arthur: Good morning. My name is Arthur Callaghan and I'm here to talk about safety. I would like to start by handing out a questionnaire on health and safety in the claims department. Please, read the questions carefully and try to answer them best you can.



Monica: Hmm, that sounds complicated. Let me see. Is the furniture in the office safe?

Eva: Aha, let's see this list. We have to make sure that everything in the office complies with the health and safety at work regulations.

Monica: Yes, I guess they do. Read another question.

Eva: Are materials neatly and safely made?

Eva: Well, not the materials I have on my desk.

Monica: Oh, here's an interesting one: Are toilets and food preparation areas clean?

Eva: Well, the breakfast room is especially dirty. The microwave oven is filthy and the hallway is full of boxes.

Lewis: Excuse me, ladies at the back. What's going on there?

Eva: Nothing, nothing at all. We're really sorry.

Monica: I can't believe it! I think this is a bad dream!



Think about it

Write in the forum:

- ✓ In your opinion, how should we behave appropriately at our workplace to ensure safety? What are the most important aspects to take into account when making sure that your workplace is safe?




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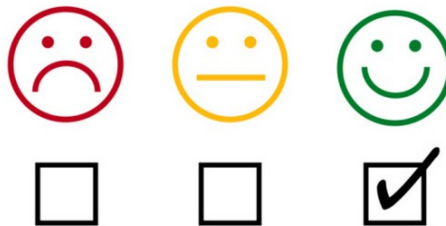
[Aviso Legal](#)


1. Customer complaint form.

The **complaint form** is an official document in which the client can express his complaints, with the certainty that these will be correctly addressed, both by the establishment or the company that provokes them and by the autonomous Administration, which is responsible for this area.

Complaint forms are  therefore an effective instrument that consumers and users can use to defend and protect their interests.

Consumers can express their disagreement to the Administration, with competences in the matter of consumption, in the cases in which they consider that an acquired product, ~~well~~ or service from a retailer or company, does not meet the expected characteristics and requirements.







Through them, the consumer can  denounce a possible infringement or irregularity in the product or service received, or they can demand from the company that provides the service the restoration of the service or product in the conditions initially agreed, or the compensation for damage or injury.

COMPLAINT

The competent Administration will open proceedings, in order to verify possible reported violations, or process claims that are settled through conflict resolution systems, such as mediation or arbitration.

In Spain, these complaint forms are issued by the Autonomous Communities since it is a decentralized country and the powers had been transferred from the central government to the Communities. Hence, there isn't one single model in Spain; it varies from one community to another. Similarly, abroad we will find different models, although they always maintain the same characteristics.

Normally, the complaint forms are made up of a  unitary set of  carbonless forms  made up of an original sheet of white color, which will be sent to the Administration by the consumer. There is a second pink copy, which will be for the establishment or service provider in question; and a third copy in green, which will be the proof that the consumer or user  must keep. The request for a complaint form is a consumer right and the presentation of it is an obligation on the part of any establishment.



You Should Know

The **claims department** is the section that manages the settling and adjusting of **claims**. This **department** is an essential part of any insurance company's operations and is one of its core functions. A well-run **claims department** is key to any profitable and well-run insurance company.



Translation

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La hoja de reclamaciones es un documento oficial en el que el cliente puede expresar sus quejas, con la seguridad de que estas serán correctamente atendidas, tanto por el establecimiento o la empresa que las provoca como por la Administración autónoma que es quien tiene las competencias en este ámbito.

Por lo tanto, las hojas de reclamaciones son un instrumento efectivo que los consumidores y usuarios pueden usar para defender y proteger sus intereses. Los consumidores pueden expresar su desacuerdo a la Administración, con competencias en materia de consumo, en los casos en que consideren que un producto, o servicio adquirido de un minorista o empresa, no cumple con las características y requisitos esperados.

A través de ellas, el consumidor puede denunciar la exigencia de una posible infracción o irregularidad en el producto o servicio recibido. Además puede reclamar a la empresa que preste el servicio la restauración del servicio o del producto en las condiciones pactadas inicialmente, o la indemnización por el daño o perjuicio.

La Administración competente abrirá diligencias, con el fin de comprobar posibles infracciones denunciadas, o dará trámite a las reclamaciones que se efectúen que serán solucionadas a través de unos sistemas de resolución de conflictos, como son la mediación o arbitraje.

En España la emisión de estas hojas de reclamaciones corresponde a las Comunidades Autónomas ya que son estas las que tienen las competencias transferidas del Estado. De ahí que no exista un modelo único para toda España. De igual manera, en el extranjero encontraremos modelos distintos, aunque siempre mantienen las mismas características.


Normalmente las hojas de reclamaciones son integradas por un juego unitario de impresos con autocopia compuesto por un folio original de color blanco, que será enviado a la Administración por el consumidor. Existe una segunda copia de color rosado, que será para el establecimiento o prestador del servicio en cuestión; y una tercera copia en verde, que será el comprobante que debe conservar el consumidor o usuario. La petición de una hoja de reclamaciones es un derecho del consumidor y la presentación de la misma es una obligación por parte de cualquier establecimiento.


El departamento de reclamaciones es la sección que gestiona la liquidación y el ajuste de reclamaciones. Este departamento es una parte esencial de las operaciones de cualquier compañía de seguros y es una de sus funciones principales. Un departamento de reclamaciones bien administrado es clave para cualquier compañía de seguros rentable y bien administrada.

1.1. Complaint process.

If you don't want your claim falling on deaf ears and you want it processed properly, it is vital that you complete it correctly. Take into account the **following process**, step by step:

1. Read the instructions on the back of the claim form.
2. Fill in all the requested fields.
3. The language used should be as standard as possible, avoiding technicality. The facts claimed must be expressed in a simple and clear way.
4. After completing and submitting the claim form at the establishment, the consumer must wait ten business days for them to answer their claim in writing.
5. To process the claim, the consumer must deliver the original to any municipal consumer information office. Keeping the green copy.
6. It is preferable to deliver photocopies and keep the originals.

After the claim is received and registered, the competent  consumer authorities have a period of between **ten and fifteen** business days to acknowledge its receipt, resolve the conflict or file the complaint because there is no substantiated evidence.



Translation

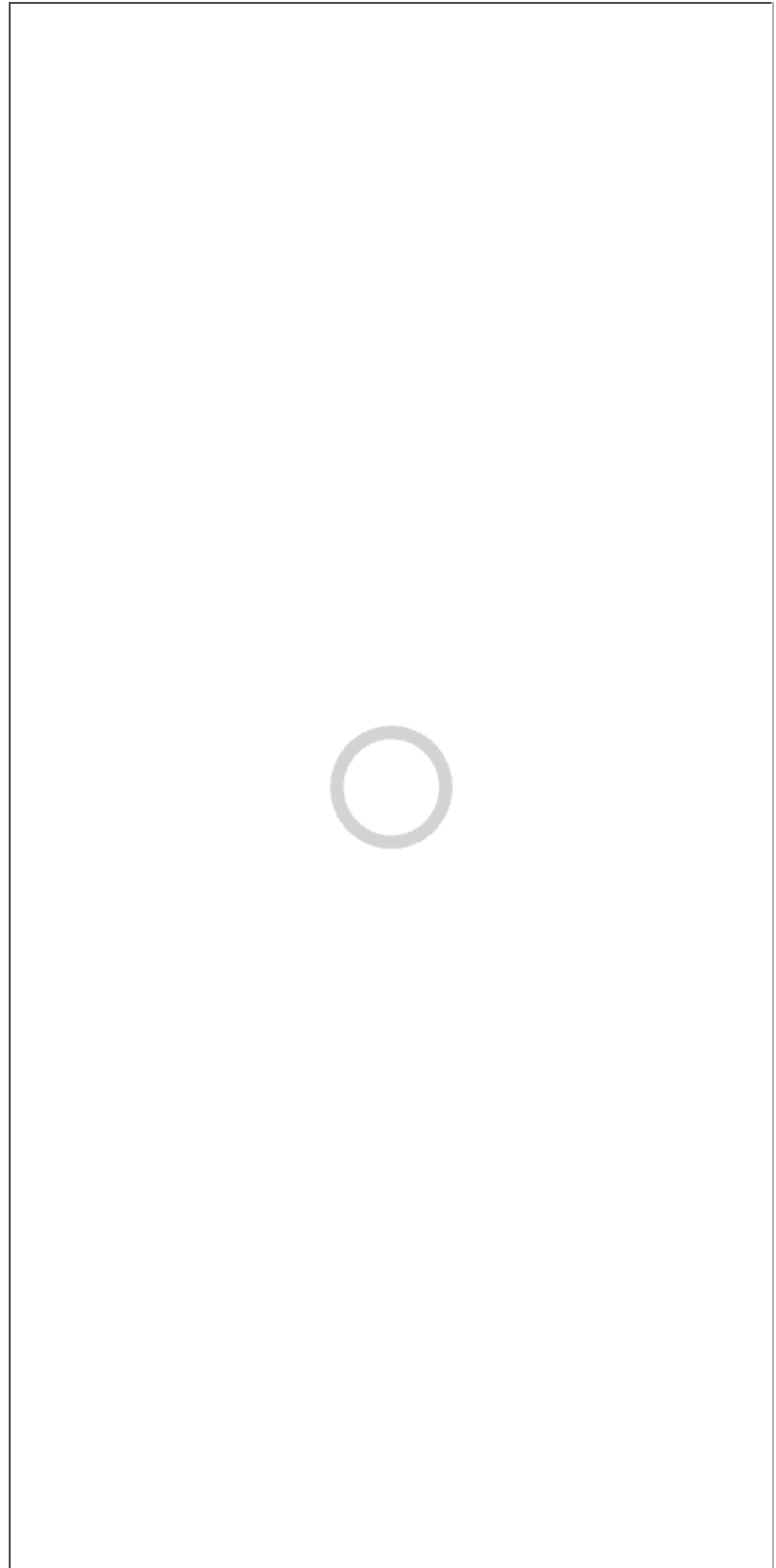
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Si no quiere que su reclamación caiga en oídos sordos y quiere que se procese correctamente, es esencial completarlo correctamente. Tenga en cuenta los siguientes pasos

1. Lea las instrucciones al dorso del formulario de reclamación.
2. Rellene todos los campos solicitados.
3. El lenguaje utilizado debe ser lo más sencillo posible, evitando tecnicismos. Los hechos alegados deben expresarse de manera simple y clara.
4. Después de completar y enviar el formulario de reclamo en el establecimiento, el consumidor debe esperar diez días hábiles para que responda su reclamo por escrito.
5. Para procesar el reclamo, el consumidor debe entregar el original a cualquier oficina municipal de información al consumidor. Manteniendo la copia verde.
6. Es preferible entregar fotocopias y conservar los originales.

Después de que la reclamación es recibida y registrada, las autoridades competentes en materia de consumo disponen de un plazo de entre diez y quince días hábiles para acusar su recibo, dar resolución al conflicto o archivar la queja porque se carece de pruebas con fundamento.

This is an example of a complaint form:




[Download complaint form](#)



A Step Ahead

In this link you have another customer complaint form:

 [Customer complaint form](#)



1.2. Listening test. Complaints record form.



Now it's your turn

Listen to the audio and answer the following questions.



1. Why does Susan ask Adam for help?

- Because she doesn't know how to fill a complaint form.
- Because she is sick.

Correct Option

Wrong

Solution

1. Correct Option
2. Wrong

What did she buy and what is wrong with it?

- She bought a computer and it doesn't work.
- She bought a CD player and it doesn't work.

Wrong

Correct Option

Solution

1. Wrong
2. Correct Option

Why is she unhappy with the company?

- Because the company don't want to give her the complaint form.
- Because the company don't want to give her the money back.

Wrong

Correct Option

Solution

1. Wrong
2. Correct Option

What are they enclosing?

- They are enclosing the receipt.
- They are enclosing the complaint form.

Correct Option

Wrong

Solution

- 1. Correct Option
- 2. Wrong

What did she forget to do?

- She nearly forgot to sign it.
- She nearly forgot to send it.

Correct Option

Wrong

Solution

- 1. Correct Option
- 2. Wrong

1.3. Test yourself.



Now it's your turn

Complete the sentences with the following words:

claim / disappointing / contacting / specify / resolve / mistake / number / apologise / information

1. We can understand how [] it can be when your expectations are not met. However, we would need some more information about your claim and we are sure we can solve it.
2. I would like to [] for that possible error in one of our invoices. We would appreciate if you could [] the invoice number and the order number you refer to in this claim.
3. Thank you very much for [] us and let us know the mistake. We would need some more information to solve the problem such as the order [] you refer to and the exact number of items you have received in that shipment.
4. We are very sorry about the [] and the problems it may have caused to you. However, we need some more information about your [] .

Submit

2. What to say.




Quotation

"Don't complain about the snow on your  neighbour's roof when your own doorstep is unclean."
Confucius




Situation

After a couple of hours the meeting with Mr. Arthur Callaghan finished. The endless training session finally came to an end and the girls went back to work.

However, Mr. Johnson always has plans for them. A  complaint letter from a customer has been received and Mr. Johnson wants the girls to handle and deal with it.



Mónica: Apparently, there has been a problem with the customer service. This customer is upset and wants a  refund.

Eva: A complaint letter, wow!. Let me read it.

Mónica: OK, and  what shall we do?

Eva: Mr. Johnson wants us to reply to this letter. He told me that when we're finished he'll come to revise the letter before sending it.

Mónica: Right. So, let's get on with it.



Think about it

Discuss in the forum:

- ✔ Have you ever had to deal with a complaint?
- ✔ What do you think is the best way to deal with customer complaints?

2.1. Vocabulary about "Complaints and Claims".

Some of the basic terms that we will use when dealing with any complaint or claim that may come to us from our clients are the following:



Basic vocabulary and lexicon about "Complaints and Claims".

Apology for the error or fault / Apologies	Disculpa por el error o fallo / Mis disculpas
A Claim / to claim	Reclamación / afirmar, asegurar
To Complain / a complaint	Quejarse
Accepting a complaint	Aceptar queja, reclamación
Disappointed	Decepcionado
Delay /Delayed	Retraso / Retrasado
Shipment	Envío, cargamento, remesa (so solo por barco, por cualquier medio)
Unsalable	Invendible, no es adecuado para poner a la venta.
Damaged	Dañado
Compensation	Compensación
Inconvenience	Molestia, incomodidad
Consignment	Envío, remesa
Invoice	Factura
Error	Error
Mistake	Error, equivocación
Replacement	Sustitución, reemplazo
Expectations	Expectativas
Faulty goods / Fault / Explanation of the fault	productos defectuosos / Avería / Explicación de los productos defectuosos
Replacement of goods	Reemplazo de mercancía, sustitución de mercancía.
Detriment	Perjuicio
Unproper way	Manera incorrecta

Regret at dissatisfaction	Arrepentirse de la insatisfacción
Acknowledging receipt	Acuse de recibo
Rejecting responsibility	Rechazando responsabilidad
Assurance	Garantía
Build customer loyalty	Fidelizar clientes
Post office drop off	Dejar en la oficina de correos
Be late, not on time	Llegar tarde
The state of being troublesome	Estado que presenta problemas
Displeased	Descontento
Physically harmed	Dañado físicamente
A consignment of goods shipped	El envío de bienes



Quotation

“👉 Complaints drain joy.”

Toba Beta



Think about it

Give your opinion in the forum. What kind of qualities should you have in order to handle difficult clients?

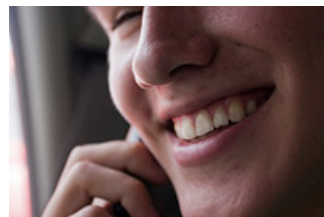
Efficient, polite, patient, 👉 tidy, being nice, friendly, sympathetic, responsible, communicative, non-smoker, happy, 👉 naive, 👉 gullible, sceptic, reasonable.

Give your opinion in the forum. In your opinion, which actions should be taken when handling complaints?

- ✔ Apologise in any situation.
- ✔ 👉 Handle the complaint as soon as possible.
- ✔ Put the blame on some members of the staff and apologise.
- ✔ Be firm but not too 👉 harsh.
- ✔ Listen carefully to what the customer is saying.
- ✔ Smile and be friendly.
- ✔ Thank the customer for informing you.
- ✔ If there has been really a mistake, say that this is a rare and exceptional case.

2.2. Dealing with complaints.

When you are dealing with complaints, you should listen carefully; be polite; and, except when it is absolutely necessary, don't comment until the customer has finished. Then, make a short, clear apology. After that, you should repeat the complaint. This is to make sure that you have fully understood the problem and that there are no misunderstandings. When possible, you should also note down what the customer has said.



Next, you should decide who will deal with the complaint. If it is not a serious one, you can deal with it yourself. You should explain to the customer the action you plan to take and tell him when it will be done. If you decide that a manager should handle the complaint, you should first inform him and then arrange a meeting between him and the customer.



Translation

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- ✓ Cuando se trata de quejas, debe escuchar con atención; ser cortés; y, excepto cuando sea absolutamente necesario, no diga nada hasta que el cliente haya terminado.
- ✓ Luego, diga una disculpa corta y clara.
- ✓ Después de eso, debe repetir la queja. Esto es para asegurarse de que ha entendido completamente el problema y que no hay malentendidos.
- ✓ Cuando sea posible, también debe anotar o digitalizar informáticamente lo que ha dicho el cliente, en función de las herramientas y aplicaciones que posea la empresa para gestionar las quejas y reclamaciones.
- ✓ Posteriormente, debe decidir quién se encargará de la queja. Si no es grave, puede resolverlo usted mismo. Debe explicarle al cliente la acción que planea tomar y decirle cuándo se hará.
- ✓ Si decide que un gerente debe manejar la queja, primero debe informarle y luego organizar una reunión entre él y el cliente.





Now it's your turn

Now use the information in the passage to help you put the following items in the right order. Fill the gaps with the appropriate number, using two digits: 01, 02, ..., 10.

Matching exercise.

Information	Order
Be polite.	<input type="text"/>
Repeat the complaint.	<input type="text"/>
Make a short clear apology.	<input type="text"/>

Information	Order
Inform the manager.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listen carefully.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decide who will handle the complaint.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Note down what the customer has said.	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Don't comment.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deal with the complaint.	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Arrange a meeting.	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you didn't get the exercise right, perhaps you should read the text again more carefully.

2.3. Put it into practice.



Now it's your turn

Once you have learned the vocabulary and based on the following expressions, would you be able to relate each of them to the situation that identifies them?

We assure you that this will not happen again.	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Explanation of the fault.
This was caused by an unexpected malfunction.	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Assurance.
We understand how disappointing it can be when your expectations are not met.	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Rejecting responsibility.
I regret to inform you that we cannot take responsibility for this occurrence.	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Accepting a complaint.
We look forward to your continued custom, and to being or service in the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Apology for the error or fault.
We agree that the usual high standards of our products were not met in this instance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Replacement of goods.
I would like to apologise for the error made by our company.	<input type="checkbox"/>	7. A concluding sentence aiming at retaining 🙌 goodwill.
We have dispatched the new items.	<input type="checkbox"/>	8. Acknowledging receipt of a complaint letter.
Thank you for your email of 2nd May.	<input type="checkbox"/>	9. Regret at dissatisfaction.
Increase operational efficiency and productivity, and at the same time 🙌 engage distribution channels to help clients.	<input type="checkbox"/>	10. Build customer loyalty.

Submit

2.4. Now, it's your turn!

Carefully read the complaint letter and the vocabulary provided. Based on this, would you know how to fill in the gaps in it?

Keep in mind that there are more options than gaps to fill!



Now it's your turn

complaint / complain / damaged / unsalable / consignment / replacement / shipment / disappointed / sincerely

Dear Mr. Smith,

I am writing to [] about the [] we received last Thursday. We found that some boxes were [] and the goods in them are unsalable and therefore we are returning the whole [] .

We suggest a full [] consignment as soon as possible.

Yours [] ,

John Stand

Submit



Think about it

Read the following information.

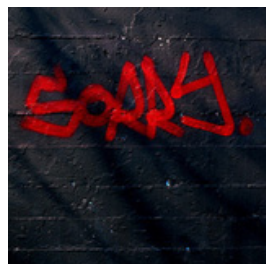
A good customer ordered 2 boxes of your product from Amazon. The order should have been delivered on 14 May.

However, due to problems at the courier company you use, the delivery is late. Your customer has telephoned to complain. You have contacted the courier company and have got a guaranteed date of 19 June for delivery.

Now write a brief note in the forum explaining the problem and promise delivery on 19 June. Use expressions from the table above.

3. Words you need: The basic language of written apologies.

Some complaints are more serious than others and some customers complain more than others. It is often the responsibility of an individual member of staff to deal with the problem. Sometimes, of course, it is necessary for the staff member to refer an unhappy customer to someone else, such as a manager. Most businesses take complaints very seriously.



If you are dealing with people who are 🙄 upset, angry or have an apology try this way of handling the situation:

- ✓ "🙄 *I'm sure that we can sort it out.*"
- ✓ "I'm glad that you have brought this to our notice."
- ✓ "I'm sorry that you have a problem."

Sometimes it is necessary to 🙄 reply to a complaint by writing a letter of complaint. If you must do that, below there are some expressions you can use.

The basic language of apologies.

Written apologies.

- ✓ We would like to extend our sincere apologies for...
- ✓ Please accept my sincere apologies for...
- ✓ May we apologise for...
- ✓ I would like to apologise for...
- ✓ May I offer my profound apologies for...
- ✓ Once again I would like to apologise for... and any inconveniences this may have caused you.
- ✓ We sincerely regret the inconvenience caused to you because of this.



Accepting responsibility.


- ✓ We accept responsibility for...
- ✓ I accept (the fact) that...
- ✓ This problem was caused as a result of / because of our...

Assurances.

- ✓ I assure you that such a thing will not happen in future.
- ✓ We 🙄 reassure you of our...
- ✓ Please accept our assurance / guarantee that...
- ✓ Let me promise / guarantee / assure you that...



4. How to handle complaint letters or emails.

It's very important to decide, before you write the email or letter, if the complaint is  wholly or partly justified or not; if so, decide whether you are going to  merely apologise, give excuses or offer some kind of compensation.

If something is not attributable to you, say so, while expressing sympathy (*I can understand...*). Do not be  rude.





The sentence structure in complaint letter or email is divided into paragraphs:

- ✓ **First paragraph:** Thank for previous email or letter and make general apology.




- ◆  *We very much regret having given you a cause for complaint.*
- ◆ *I am sorry to hear that...*
- ◆ *I am writing to apologise for all the inconveniences...*
 - *caused by...*
 -  *that arose during your stay/ holiday at...*
- ◆ *We are sorry that you have had a problem with this product.*
- ◆ *Please, accept our sincere apologies for this delay and the trouble it has caused you.*
- ◆ *I would like to apologise for the error made by our company in. (verb+ing)*
- ◆ *While we can understand your frustration*



- ✓ **Second paragraph:** Make specific apology and give explanations or reasons for each complaint.

- ◆  *Concerning..., I would like to explain that...*
- ◆ *With reference to...,  I must say that...*
- ◆  *Regarding... , I was surprised to hear that... ; we are looking into the matter and hope to give you an explanation as soon as we find out what happened.*
- ◆ *While we understand that... was inconvenient/ not to your satisfaction, we must remind you that.../ we must tell you that we are not responsible for...*
- ◆ *I would like you to accept our apologies for ( the lack of... the poor standard in...).*
- ◆ *We understand how disappointing it can be when your expectations are not met.*

- ✓ **Third paragraph:** offer some kind of compensation (if applicable), investigate the complaint, accept our responsibility, give an immediate solution

- ◆ Offer some kind of compensation (if applicable):
 - *We apologise for the delay and  enclose compensation.*
 - *As a sign of our concern, we would like to offer...*
 - *Although it is difficult to compensate you for the inconveniences suffered, we would like you to accept...*
- ◆ Investigate the complaint:
 - *Steps are been taken immediately to ...*
 - *Your  claim has been passed on to our department who will get in touch with you soon.*
- ◆ Accept our responsibility:
 - *After investigating your complaint, we have ascertained that an error was made in our dispatch department.*
 - *We agree that the usual high standards of our products/services were not met in this instance.*
 - *As a result of our investigation, we found that ...*
 - *The error was caused by ... /was due to ...*
 - *Apparently, the problem was the result of ...*
 - *The cause of / reason for the mistake was ...*
 -  *Steps are being taken to ensure that such mistakes do not occur in the future.*

- *We have implemented a system to ..*
- ◆ Give an immediate solution:
 - *A replacement for the faulty equipment was 📦 dispatched today.*
 - *As a gesture of our 📦 regret, we are prepared to .../ 📦 we are willing to .../ we would like to ...*
 - *To show 📦 goodwill, we will offer ...*
 - *I'm sorry but we cannot assume any liability as the delay was out of our control.*
 - *We 📦 therefore suggest you to contact ...*
 - *To prevent a 📦 recurrence we have set up a verification procedure.*
 - *We assure you that this will not happen again.*

✓ **Fourth paragraph:** Repeat apology/promise it will not happen again and farewell.

- ◆ *We would like to apologise again, and can assure you that such situations will not occur in the future.*
- ◆ *We have detected the problem, and have taken immediate action to ensure it does not happen again.*
- ◆ 📦 *We look forward to receiving your further orders, and assure you that they will be met correctly/promptly.*



Quotation

“People understand me so poorly that they don't even understand my complaint about them not understanding me.”

Søren Kierkegaard

4.1. Example. Complaint letter.

Sometimes the difference between resolving a consumer complaint and not doing it rests heavily on how you complain.

Here you have a sample of a complaint letter template.

Your name

Address

Phone number

Company official

Company name

Company address

Date

Dear (title) ____:

I wish to complain about ____ (name of product or service, with serial number or account number) that I purchased on ____ (date and location of transaction).

I am complaining because ____ (the reason you are dissatisfied). To resolve this problem I would like you to ____ (what you want the business to do).

When I first learned of this problem, I contacted ____ (name of the person, date of the call) at your company, and was told that nothing could be done about my problem. I believe that this response is unfair because ____ (the reason you feel the company has an obligation to you). I would like a written statement explaining your company's position and what you will do about my complaint.

I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible to resolve this problem. If I do not hear from you within ____ days I will file complaints with the appropriate consumer agencies and consider my legal alternatives. I am enclosing copies of my receipt. I may be contacted at the above address and phone number.

Sincerely,

(your signature)

(Type or print your name)

CC: (local consumer group) (appropriate government agencies)

ATT: (attach and list documentation of your complaint, if any)

Here is the main part of a letter of complaint to British Corporation.

Dear Ms. Karls,

I am writing this letter regarding the unsatisfactory delivery of the items that I received on 14 June. Upon delivery, I found the items were severely damaged.

I would like to make arrangements to return it for a full refund including the shipping charge to send the items back to your warehouse.

I would appreciate your prompt response upon this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any questions. Thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Smith

Here is the reply from the Manager.

Dear Mr. Smith,

We very much regret having given you a cause for complaint due to the fact that the delivery of goods that you received on 14 June was defective. We understand your disappointment and appreciate the inconvenience this must have caused your organization and the logistics problems that ensued. There is no question that the product we delivered did not meet the very high standards our customers have come to expect and should continue to demand.

I can promise you that the highest quality standards will be met in the future because protecting our reputation for delivering the best product on the market is a key priority for us. Again, I apologise for our mistake and regret any inconvenience caused as a result.

Although it is difficult to compensate you for the inconveniences suffered, we would like you to accept a replacement of the product and a full refund including the shipping charge.

If there is anything else that we can do to minimise your inconvenience in regard to this matter, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Karls

Manager

4.2. Example. Complaint email.

Here you have a sample fo a complaint email template.

From: My Name and email (myname@myemailprovider.net)
Subject: (short description of your complaint)
Date: Most email programs enter this field automatically
To: (enter the email address of the person you are contacting)
CC: (local consumer group) (appropriate government agencies)

Dear (title) ____:

I wish to complain about ____ (name of product or service, with serial number or account number) that I purchased on ____ (date and location of transaction).

I am complaining because ____ (the reason you are dissatisfied). To resolve this problem I would like you to ____ (what you want the business to do).

When I first learned of this problem, I contacted ____ (name of the person, date of the call) at your company, and was told that nothing could be done about my problem. I believe that this response is unfair because ____ (the reason you feel the company has an obligation to you). I would like a written statement explaining your company's position and what you will do about my complaint.

I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible to resolve this problem. If I do not hear from you within ____ days I will file complaints with the appropriate consumer agencies and consider my legal alternatives.

I am attaching copies of my receipt or _____ (other proof of payment or documentation of complaint).

You may reply to me at this email or call me at (phone number).

Sincerely,

(your full name)

5. How to deal with complaints on the phone.

What to do and what not to do when you have to complain or someone complains to you on the telephone ...

Telephoning can be the most difficult communication skill, and dealing with negative situations such as problems and complaints is the trickiest situation that most people come across. Dealing with complaints on the phone is therefore a double challenge.

Leading up to complaints on the phone: The most important part of smoothly making and dealing with complaints is how you start. As in complaints by email and face to face communication, this generally means starting complaints as slowly and indirectly as you can.

Making complaints by telephone: The easiest and most common way to do this is to first of all give the topic of the call without saying that there is a problem associated with it yet, with phrases like:

- ✓ “I’m calling / I’m phoning about the latest batch of books.”
- ✓ “I need to speak to someone about my desktop computer”
- ✓ “You remember that I ordered some samples of the new model last week?”
- ✓ “Have I phoned at a good time?”
- ✓ “So, did you see my email about...?”



Especially with important **business relationships**, you can lead up to the topic of the phone call with polite **phrases like:**

- ✓ “Sorry to ring again so soon but.../ Sorry to trouble you again but.../Sorry to phone so early in the morning/ so late in the evening/ at lunchtime”
- ✓ “I’m sure you’re very busy, but...”

When you get down to the actual complaint, it is quite common to start with giving bad news language. Although it is almost certainly not your fault, these phrases are quite similar to apologising phrases, e.g.

- ✓ “I’m sorry to say that...”
- ✓ “Sorry to inconvenience you but...”
- ✓ “I’m afraid.../ Unfortunately...”
- ✓ “I regret to (have to) say that/ inform you that...”

Typical words and phrases to explain the actual complaints include:

- ✓ “there is something wrong with.../there has been a problem with.../ there is an issue with...”
- ✓ “we’re having some trouble with...”
- ✓ “... didn’t arrive (on time).”/ “...hasn’t arrived (yet).”
- ✓ “... isn’t (quite) what I ordered.”
- ✓ “... doesn’t (exactly) match...”
- ✓ “... wasn’t (quite) what I expected”
- ✓ “I’m not very happy with...”
- ✓ “I was given the wrong information about...”
- ✓ “...is/ was delayed / late / is missing.”
- ✓ “... isn’t suitable for / doesn’t work (properly) / isn’t compatible with...”
- ✓ “... is out of date.”

Responding to complaints on the phone Once the complaint has been made, the receiver will generally reply with at least a sympathetic phrase to show their concern and that they understand the feelings of the caller such as (in approximate order of usefulness):

- ✓ “I’m (very) sorry to hear that.”
- ✓ “That sounds awful/terrible/ like a (right) pain”

- ✓ “Hmmm, that is a problem!”
- ✓ “That must be very annoying/ inconvenient/ You must be very worried/ stressed”
- ✓ “You surprise me! / No? Really?”
- ✓ “Wow. I wonder how that could have happened.”

Some similar phrases such as “That’s a shame”/ “That’s a pity” are too impersonal to be suitable for this kind of situation. “I see” is completely unsuitable as it sounds like you are suspicious whether what they are saying is true or not and are waiting for more details before you apologise.

Nice phrases for apologising:

- ✓ “I’m (really/ so/ very) sorry about that/ for the inconvenience.”
- ✓ “Please accept my/ our (sincerest) apologies (for any inconvenience caused/ for...)”
- ✓ “I really am (very/ terribly/ most terribly) sorry (about that).”
- ✓ “I do apologise/I apologise wholeheartedly/ unreservedly”
- ✓ “I cannot say/ express how sorry I am (about that).”
- ✓ “I (of course) take full responsibility for...”
- ✓ “Can I just check (what the problem is)? / Can I ask (what aspect of it you aren’t happy with)?”
- ✓ “Could you tell me (when you were expecting it to arrive)?”
- ✓ “I just need to check (if you mean).../ I just need to know (a few more details)”
- ✓ “Would you mind telling me (the order number)?”



Before or after finding out more details:

- ✓ “If you send it back, I’ll be happy to give you a full refund.”
- ✓ “I’ll check what has happened to the order and phone you right back.”
- ✓ “Would you like me to send you a replacement?”
- ✓ “Shall I get an engineer to come round and check it?”

Positive replies to requests for action include:

- ✓ “Of course. I’ll do that straightaway.”
- ✓ “That’s no problem. I’ll deal with it right away.”
- ✓ “It’s the least I can do. I’ll make sure it happens (by close of business) today.”
- ✓ “Sure. I was just about to suggest that myself.”
- ✓ “That is no problem at all. I’ll investigate it fully and get back to you by the end of this week.”

Polite negative replies to requests for action include:

- ✓ “Hmm, that might be a bit difficult.”
- ✓ “I’m afraid in this kind of situation we usually.../ I’m sorry but for that you’d need to talk to...”
- ✓ “Unfortunately, it’s not generally our policy to...”

You could also suggest an alternative course of action:

- ✓ “However, we can offer you...”
- ✓ “Instead of that, how about...?”
- ✓ “In that case, how about...?”
- ✓ “Can I suggest... instead then?”

Some referring the problem to someone else phrases are:

- ✓ “I’ll check with my boss and...”
- ✓ “The person you need to speak to about this is... I’ll just get his/ her number for you”

Ending complaint phone calls The caller can also move towards that point with phrases like:

- ✓ “So, I think that’s all I needed to discuss, thanks.”

- ✔ “Well, 🗑️ I think that’s dealt with everything, thank you/ Well then, 🗑️ that seems to have covered everything, thanks.
- ✔ “Thanks for all your help. / Thanks (again) for letting us know.”
- ✔ “I look forward to your call.”
- ✔ “Speak to you soon.”
- ✔ “Please let me know if there are any other problems.”
- ✔ “As I said, I’ll phone back...”

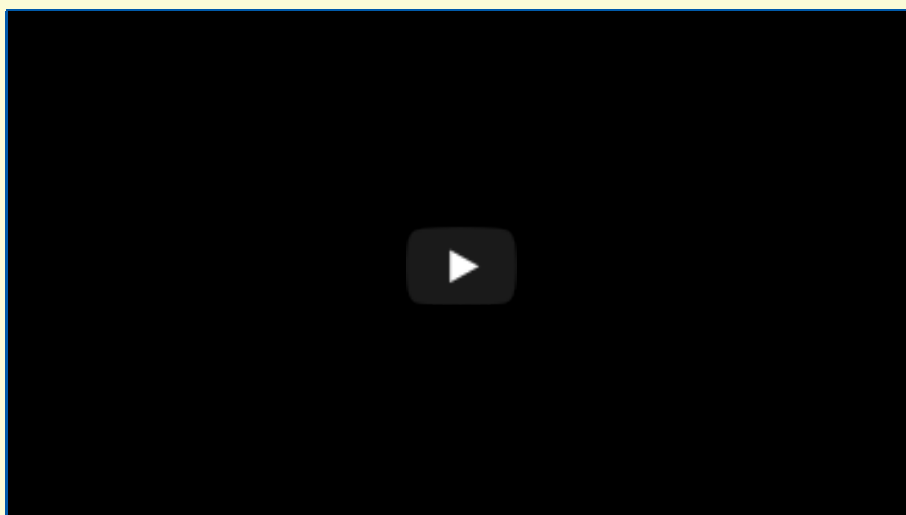
Ending a phone call phrases to match a negative situation, but hopefully not too directly. Include:

- ✔ “Sorry I couldn’t be more helpful.”
- ✔ “Hope I can be more helpful next time.”
- ✔ “🗑️ Thanks anyway./ Thanks for your patience./ Thanks for your understanding”



A step ahead

Here you have a sample topic from Skillsoft’s video-based course “Facing Confrontation in Customer Service” In the full course, you’ll learn about typical trouble spots in dealing with angry customers and guidelines for avoiding or overcoming them. You’ll also learn how to handle a customer complaint by defusing the tension, investigating the problem, and coming to an agreement on a solution.



[Summary text](#)

5.1. Now, it's your turn!. Listening skill.



Now it's your turn

A customer leaves a message of complaint on an answering machine.

Listen and choose the best answer for each question. The answers are not given in exactly the same order. Then listen again to check.



The customer's name is

Nemzies

Menzies

Minzies

Show Feedback

Solution

1. Incorrect
2. Correct
3. Incorrect

His phone number is

349-28831

348-28841

348-26641

Show Feedback

Solution

1. Incorrect
2. Correct
3. Incorrect

His customer number is

45993

44993

34993

44994

Show Feedback

Solution

1. Correct
2. Incorrect
3. Incorrect
4. Incorrect

The order number is

GH12348

GA12338

GH12338

JH12338

Show Feedback

Solution

- 1. Incorrect
- 2. Incorrect
- 3. Correct
- 4. Incorrect

What languages were in the instruction manual?

Polish and English

Spanish and Polish

Spanish and English

Spanish only

Show Feedback

Solution

- 1. Incorrect
- 2. Correct
- 3. Incorrect
- 4. Incorrect

How long did he take to assemble the pool table?

Two hours

Two and a half hours

Two days

Too long

Show Feedback

Solution

- 1. Correct
- 2. Incorrect
- 3. Incorrect
- 4. Incorrect

What was the problem with the white ball?

His friend took it

It was too big

It wasn't there

It was too small

Show Feedback

Solution

1. Incorrect
2. Incorrect
3. Correct
4. Incorrect

What did the defective table cause to happen?

The balls  rolled to the right.

The balls  rolled to the left.

 The balls fell off the pool table.

 The balls didn't roll properly.

Show Feedback


Solution

1. Incorrect
2. Incorrect
3. Incorrect
4. Correct



A Step Ahead

Here you have a link to help you complain about some issues.

 [How to complain.](#)

5.2. Keep testing your ear. Complaint and claim structures.



Translation

Then listen, memorise, and repeat the following complaint structures:



We wish to draw your attention to an error/two matters ...


We are disappointed to find that the quality of ...

This delay is causing us great inconvenience as ...

We shall be compelled to cancel orders if the goods ...

I'm afraid to inform you that two cases in the consignment were damaged.

6. Pronunciation: Weak forms.

 **Weak forms** are syllable sounds that become unstressed in **connected speech** and are often then pronounced as a **schwa**.

Example

In the sentence below the first 'do' is a weak form and the second **do** is  **stressed**.

What **do** you want to **do** this evening?


Many common function words have both a strong form and a weak form.

For example, **them** has a strong form /ðem/ but a weak form /ðəm/. Unless the word is specially emphasised, it is usually pronounced in its weak form.



You should know

If you want to listen to the difference between those two forms, check out this website.

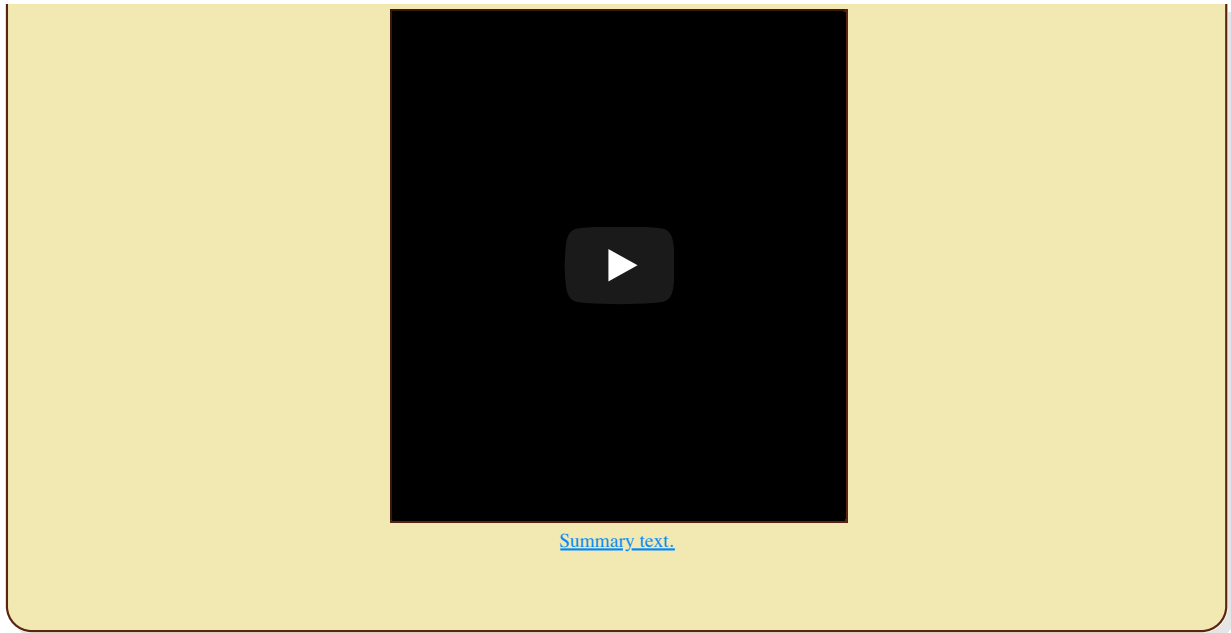
 [Weak forms.](#)

All these words have a strong form and a weak form: **can, must, are, was, from, than, of.**



A Piece of Advice

You can see this video to practise weak forms:



[Summary text.](#)

Appendix.- Licences of resources.

Licences of resources.

Resource (1)	Resource information (1)	Resource (2)	Resource information (2)
	By: grendelkhan. License: CC by-sa. From: http://www.flickr.com/photos/grendelkhan/23428874/		By: Emily Hildebrand. License: CC by. From: http://www.flickr.com/photos/emilyrachelhildebrand/5928253523/
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