

Complaint Letter Assignment

Letters of complaint are a common form of writing in professional settings, both for customers complaining to businesses and even businesses lodging complaints against one another. Hard-copy letters are more effective than phone calls/emails at by-passing bureaucracy and getting results. Complaint letters avoid “he-said/she-said” situations with customer service representatives and can provide useful documentation if the conflict escalates to litigation. Sending a complaint letter through certified mail and requesting a return receipt provides evidence that the recipient received the letter.

Choose a real product or service that you have been displeased with and write a formal, personal letter persuading the company/business to provide compensation.

Rhetorical Situation

Purpose: To persuade a company to provide compensation due to an inadequate product or service

Audience: Senior person responsible for the product or service about which you are complaining

Genre: Formal Personal Letter

Stance/Tone: Firm and direct but not antagonistic or angry

Design: Your choice of formal letter template

Medium: Hard-copy (printed) letter in WORD .docx

Guidance for developing a complaint letter:

A complaint letter makes “an argument” and therefore contains *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*.

- **Explain and Support Your Claim(s) with facts (*logos*)**
Explain why the product or service is inadequate and support your assertions with facts and logic, not anger. Be as specific as possible regarding the details of the purchase or incident. Include: serial or model number (if it is a product) or order number (if it is a service); name and location of the seller or service provider; If you are following up on a conversation, reference with whom you spoke and give details of the discussion. Attach copies of relevant documents like receipts, work orders, and warranties. If you have exchanged emails with a business, attach copies of those conversations. (Always keep your original documents).
- **Appeal to Reader’s Emotions (*pathos*)**
Companies that advertise high levels of customer focus do not like to be criticized. If you have a strong case that makes a business vulnerable relative to their customer service, use as much detail as you can to point out problems in these sensitive areas. Companies don't like to lose customers, especially long-time customers. It costs drastically more to procure new customers than to retain current ones.
- **Enhance your Credibility - Use A Positive and Respectful Tone (*ethos*)**
Remain factual in your claim letter. Don’t get emotional: facts, not feelings, get results. Your tone should convey that you are the innocent victim, and you understand that the company wouldn't have done such a thing deliberately. Remember, the person reading the letter is not responsible for the inconvenience: if you want him/her to help resolve the issue, be professional.

Tips

- Avoid “Dear Sir” or “Dear Madam” or nondirective (“To Whom It May Concern”)
- Avoid anger and sarcasm
- Avoid praising the company or flattering the reader

Content:

- Address your letter to a senior person who has the power to act on your situation (check the company’s web site or call and ask.)
- In intro paragraph, identify that this is a formal complaint letter and provide the basic facts of the purchase, incident, or policy. (For example: the date, place, item, and cost, salesperson, delivery, installation, account details, etc.)
- In the next paragraph(s), describe the problem and support your argument with facts. If you have already spoken to someone regarding the matter, include their name, dates, etc.
- In subsequent paragraph, be very specific about *what* you want and *when* you want it (be reasonable). If you want a full cash refund and additional money for damages, say so. Don’t let the reader decide what you should receive.
- Provide a polite closing
- Provide your contact information
- Attach “evidence”

Rubric: This assignment is worth 100 points

- Follows complaint letter content outlined above and in class
- Written to a specific, senior recipient
- Maintains a formal tone throughout
- 1 page
- Has an appropriate closing
- Contains contact information
- Has attached supporting documentation as applicable
- Utilizes an appropriate formal/business letter template