

Advanced complaining

COMMUNICATION

LEVEL	NUMBER	LANGUAGE
Advanced	EN_BE_3408X	English



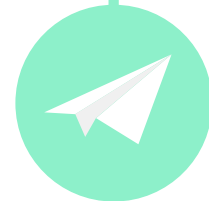


Goals

- Can recognise and recall more advanced structures for complaining.
- Can make a complaint in both formal and informal settings convincingly.



Excuse me, I believe **a mistake has been made** with this account. May I speak to a manager so that this can be **resolved**? I have been overcharged and need this problem **rectified**. Perhaps **compensation** can be arranged?





Different kinds of complaints

Look at the pictures below. What kind of things might you have to complain about in each situation? Think of as many examples as possible.

at the workplace



buying and selling

travelling



home maintenance



Past experience

When was the last time you had to
complain about something?
Have you ever had to complain in
English before?



Keeping your cool



If you have to complain about something, how do you normally act? Are you good at keeping your cool at stressful times?

What are your top tips for staying calm in tense situations?



Formal complaints

- When making a formal complaint, either in writing or in person, we often put some distance between ourselves and the complaint.
- We do this by avoiding placing blame in any particular direction.



Excuse me, I think **there has been a mistake**. I ordered a black coffee, not a cup of tea.

Informal complaints

- If we are making an informal complaint, our speech is more **direct**.
- Informal complaints can be **polite**, but if you are angry then your speech is also more likely to be informal.
- Informal complaints can be ruled more by our **emotions**, as opposed to formal complaints which are far more objective.
- We are more likely to **place blame** when making an informal complaint. Some angrier informal complaints can be quite **accusatory**.



I can't believe this, it's a disgrace! Does your airline seriously expect a family with two children to spend the night in the airport, all because of your **incompetence**?



Dialogue

Read the dialogue below about a customer who is having problems with their internet provider.



Hello, Sunshine Internet, how can I help you?

Hi, I'd like to make a complaint please. Our office has been without internet for 4 days now and we're still waiting for a Sunshine technician to come out and fix it. Our company has phoned your service four times now, but unfortunately it doesn't seem to have had any effect. We're still waiting for an appointment.



I'm really sorry to hear that, but I'm afraid we're very understaffed at the moment....

I don't care how understaffed you are – that's got nothing to do with me! What are you going to do about this? We want an answer today. We're not putting up with this any longer! You're a bunch of liars!





Changes in tone

Answer these questions in relation to the dialogue on the previous slide.



1

Does the tone of the speaker change?

2

Can you find any examples of formal and informal language?

3

When was the last time you had to phone a customer care hotline?



Structuring a complaint

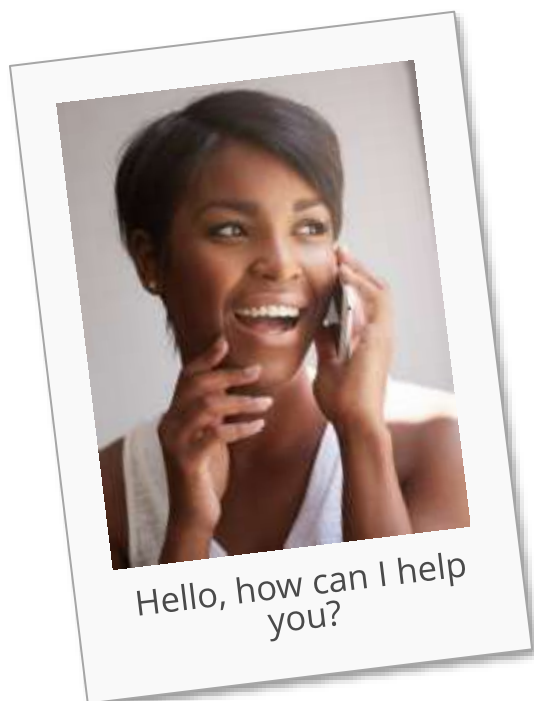
Note the structure of the first part of the telephone call. A common structure of complaints is to first state that you want to make a complaint. Then outline the problem, and finally try to negotiate to find a solution.



Role play

Imagine you have to phone a customer care hotline to complain about a delivery to your office that never arrived. Call twice and practise the two different styles of complaining: formal and informal.

Use some of the prompts below to help you.





Formal vs informal

**Do you think an
informal-style
complaint can ever
be appropriate in a
workplace setting?**



Working in customer service



Have you ever worked in a customer service role?
Which skills do you think are important for this kind of job?



New words and phrases

to sort something out

Can we try to **sort this out** quickly please?

to kick up a fuss

I don't want to **kick up a fuss** but you did promise that the room would be ready by 2p.m., and it's now 2.30.

in due course

My manager will be in touch with you **in due course** to apologise again for the inconvenience caused.

to make matters worse

He arrived late to the meeting and, **to make matters worse**, he hadn't prepared for it at all.

to resolve

I hope this can **be resolved** as soon as possible. I would prefer not to have this situation drag on.

to receive compensation

We would like to apologise again for our mistake. You will **receive the sum of €250 in compensation**, direct to your bank account, within ten working days.



New words and phrases

full refund

We can offer you a **full refund**.

in writing

Please address any further communication **in writing**.

**bitterly
disappointed**

We were **bitterly disappointed** by the lack of good customer service.

**to take care of
something**

That's no problem at all, we can easily **take care of that** for you.

**to take something
to a higher level**

Should I fail to receive a response within 7 working days, I will be forced to **take** my complaint **to a higher level**.

**to take legal
action**

Since you have failed to act within the designated time period, I have no choice but **to take legal action**.



New words and phrases

to rectify

I hope that this issue can be **rectified** immediately.

to not mean to be

I don't mean to be rude, but we are not happy about the service that we have received.

incompetence

The way we have been treated by your company reflects the highest **incompetence**.

to be outraged

Frankly, I am **outraged** at the way in which this problem has been handled thus far.



Serious complaints

In what kinds of situations might you be forced to take legal action for a complaint?





A letter of complaint



Look at the letter of complaint on the next slide. What formal structures and language can you recognise in the letter?



A letter of complaint: part one

When we are writing a letter of complaint we tend to use formal language. Read the example below about a woman who is complaining to a travel agency.

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to complain about the extremely poor level of customer service that my company, Smith Enterprises, received during a recent business trip to Paris, which was booked with Sky High Travel on 6th April.

Upon arrival at the airport on 10th June, my colleagues and I were informed that our flight had been cancelled and that the next available flight was not until the following day, meaning we would have to spend the night at the airport. However, when discussing the situation with a member of staff at the Sky High Travel desk, we were told that no compensation would be provided. Instead, we would need to pay for any hotel and food expenses out of our own pockets and claim these expenses back at a later date. We found this to be very unfair given the high premium our company had already paid to Sky High Travel, who had previously promised to make our trip hassle-free.

Unfortunately, we had no choice but to do what was suggested and pay for food and a hotel room, with the expectation of a refund at a later date.



A letter of complaint: part two

Read the second part of the letter below.

This, however, was not the last of our troubles. Upon arrival at our hotel in Paris, we discovered that there was no record of our booking, and when the receptionist attempted to call Sky High Travel there was nobody available to take the call. Smith Enterprises had not been informed at any point that Sky High Travel does not provide 24-hour customer service. As a result, we found ourselves forced to pay out of our own pockets again for the first night of our stay. We were unable to contact Sky High Tours to confirm our booking until the following morning, when we were informed that we would be refunded at a later date and that an application for this refund would have to be made in writing.

Please consider this letter a reflection of the terrible level of customer service Smith Enterprises has received, as well as a demand for the full cost of the expenses to be refunded as soon as possible. We have no intention of ever using your services again and will make sure to advise our business contacts to avoid using your company.

I hope to hear back from you as soon as possible and, as well as full compensation, would be grateful for an apology.

Yours faithfully,
Alison White



Grammar in letters of complaint

- Did you recognise the **passive voice** anywhere in the letter of complaint? We often use the passive voice to make formal complaints, especially in writing.
- To form the passive voice, combine **subject + conjugated form of 'to be' + past participle**.
- The **subject** in a sentence using the passive voice is always whatever has happened as opposed to whoever has done it.



A **mistake was made** and the **money was incorrectly debited** from your account.



Can you transform the following sentences into the passive voice?

1. My colleague made arrangements for that yesterday morning.



2. The manager told us that we would have to wait for over an hour.



3. I wrote two letters to your company last month.



4. The sales assistant explained that there was nothing he could do.



5. Daniel confirmed that the situation would be resolved within a week.





Structuring a letter of complaint

**Think back to the letter of complaint you read. What was its structure?
Put the cards in order.**

A

Detail the negative experience.

B

State the ideal outcome/proposed course of action for recipient.

C

State the purpose of complaint.

D

List contact details or necessary information and/or closing statement.



Write a formal letter of complaint

You recently took a flight with an airline and your baggage was lost. It is now 3 weeks later and you still have not received your missing baggage or any compensation.

Write a letter of complaint to the airline together with your teacher.

- Try to use the passive voice at least once in the letter.
- Remember to follow the correct structure:
 - State your purpose.
 - Explain your negative experience.
 - Suggest a course of action for the party at fault.
 - Write a concluding statement.





Changing places

Now imagine that you work in the customer service department for the airline. You have to write back to the customer and apologise for their luggage having been lost.

- Use some of the vocabulary and phrases on the right.
- Do not attribute any blame to other colleagues (to achieve this, use the passive voice).
- Remember to offer a solution that is acceptable to the customer.

in due course

generous compensation for your inconvenience

to take full responsibility

a full refund

to go to every length



Tips and advice

Your colleague needs to make a complaint and has asked you for your help.



1

What tips and advice would you give them?

2

How should they handle complaining in person, in writing and over the phone?

3

What are the most important things they should remember?



Reflect on the lesson

Take a moment to review any new **vocabulary, phrases, language structures** or **grammar points** you have come across for the first time in this lesson.

Review them with your teacher one more time to make sure you don't forget!





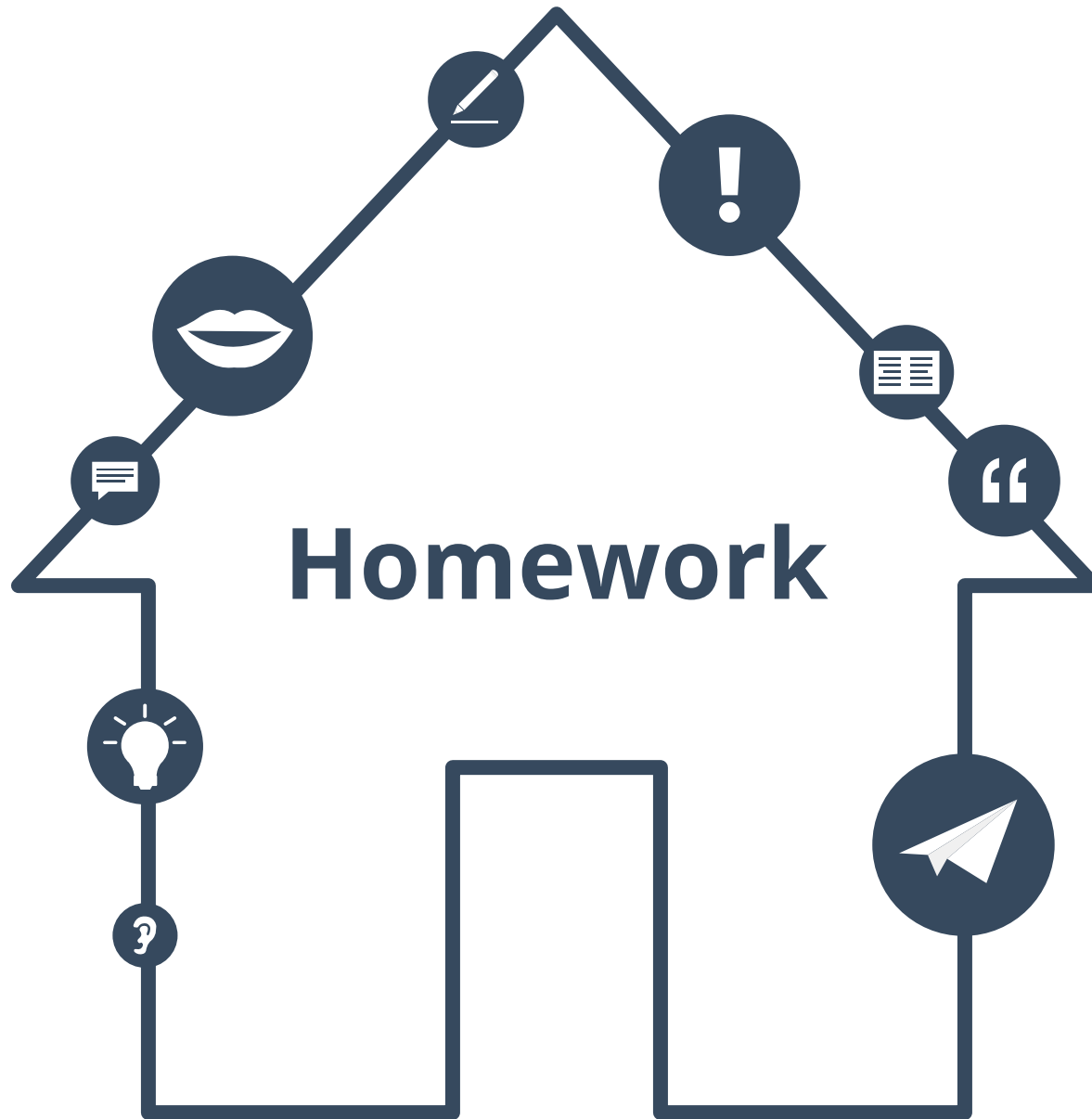
Answer key

Exercise p. 24

1. Arrangements were made for that by my colleague yesterday morning.
2. We were told by the manager that we would have to wait for over an hour.
3. Two letters were written by me to your company last month.
4. It was explained by the sales assistant that nothing could be done.
5. It was confirmed by Daniel that the situation would be resolved within a week.

Exercise p. 25

Order: C, A, B, D





Homework writing activity

Write a formal letter of complaint. You can choose anything to complain about but remember to give full details of your complaint and outline what you expect to be done to resolve the problem.

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Homework evaluation activity

How did you find this lesson? Which parts were most difficult? Which were easiest? Give your feedback here.

A vertical sheet of white paper with a spiral binding on the left side, featuring horizontal lines for writing feedback.



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