

WRITING

# Writing a letter of complaint

**LEVEL**

Upper-Intermediate  
(B2)

**NUMBER**

EN\_B2\_2132W

**LANGUAGE**

English



## Learning outcomes

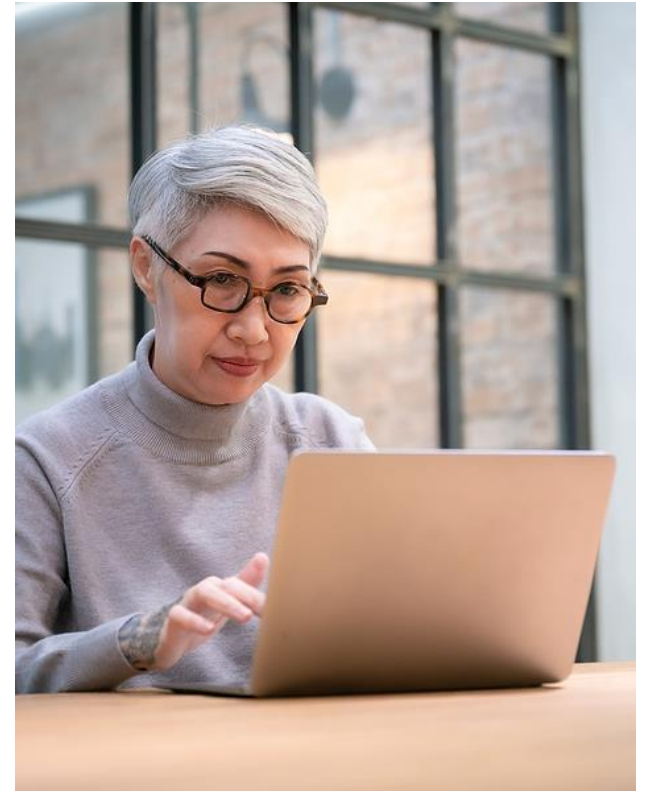
- I can identify and recall the characteristics of a letter of complaint and produce my own example.
- I can explain the distinguishing features of a letter of complaint.



## Warm-up

**When was the last  
time you wrote a  
letter of complaint?**

**Share your answer with the  
rest of the class!**



# Writing an effective letter of complaint

**Read** the tips for writing an effective letter of complaint below.



An effective **letter of complaint** needs to be **clear** and **easy to understand**.

The person you are writing to needs to know:

- **Why you are complaining:** clearly set out in the introduction to your letter the **reason** you are complaining.
- **What happened:** Give **details** about what happened. Include **dates**, **times**, and even **staff names** if appropriate.
- **What should happen next:** Once you have outlined your complaint, explain what you would like to be done to resolve the situation. Would you like your money back? An apology? Compensation?



# Writing an effective letter of complaint

Read the tips below.

## The tone of your letter



Often when we write a letter of complaint, we are very angry. It's perfectly acceptable to write your letter of complaint using an angry tone. However, don't be rude.



You can write your letter using an angry tone and still be polite. Use **formal language** and tell the person you are writing to how angry or disappointed you are.



This is a better way to write a letter of complaint than calling people names.



# Categorise

**Categorise** the phrases into the one of the boxes below.

**1**

I am writing to  
complain  
about...

**2**

I used it/them  
only a few  
times...

**3**

I am writing to  
tell you how  
disappointed I  
feel about...

**4**

I demand a full  
refund...

**5**

To make matters  
worse...

**6**

I haven't  
received the  
goods I  
ordered...

**7**

The least you  
can do is...

**8**

I am writing to  
express my strong  
dissatisfaction  
with...

**9**

Although I was  
told there would  
be...

**10**

I feel you have a  
responsibility  
to...

**introducing your  
complaint**

**explaining what  
happened**

**what you would like  
to happen next**



# Letter of complaint

1. **Read** the letter of complaint. 2. Then **answer** the questions below.

Dear Shiny Computers,

I am writing to complain about our recent order with your company. We ordered three new computers for our office, and these arrived last Friday, 6th March. However, we ordered three *desktop computers* and received three *laptop computers* instead.

Despite numerous attempts to reach your sales representative, Gary Stewart, we have not had any response from your company. We are extremely disappointed in the service we have received and cannot believe we are still waiting for a response from you. We expect this situation to be rectified as soon as possible, if not we will be forced to complain to a higher authority.

We expect a response from you within the next 48 hours.

What is the reason for this complaint?

What happened—dates, names, etc.?

How might this situation be resolved?



# Letter of complaint

1. **Read** the letter of complaint. 2. Then **answer** the questions below.

Dear Happy Birthday Cakes,

I am writing to complain about the terrible service I received from your company. I ordered a birthday cake for my 10-year-old son for his birthday last Saturday, 7th June. I ordered the cake three weeks before his birthday, well within the one-week limit as stated on your website. I received an email confirming my order and delivery the day before his birthday.

Sadly, the day before his birthday, the cake had not arrived. I phoned your company twenty times, but no one answered. On the day of his birthday, the cake still had not arrived. Finally, it arrived today, two weeks late! This is completely unacceptable. I would like a full refund and appropriate compensation.

What is the reason for this complaint?

What happened—dates, names, etc.?

How might this situation be resolved?





I **would**...

You **could**...

You **should**...



Remember to be **polite** in your letter of complaint.  
One way to do this is to use **modal verbs**.

# Writing an effective letter of complaint (1/3)

You are going to write your own letter of complaint.

1. Get out a **pen** or **pencil** and a **piece of paper**.
2. **Complete Step 1** below.



**Decide** who you want to write to.

**Brainstorm** some ideas of why you are complaining.

**Write down** some notes, using the phrases on the right.

*I am writing to complain about...*

*I am writing to tell you how disappointed I feel about...*

*I am writing to express my strong dissatisfaction with...*



# Writing an effective letter of complaint (2/3)

Complete Step 2 below.

1



**Decide** who you want to write to.

**Brainstorm** some ideas of why you are complaining.

**Write down** some notes, using the phrases on the right

2



**Describe** what happened.

**Include** details.

**Use** the phrases on the right.

*I used it/them only a few times...*

*To make matters worse...*

*I haven't received the goods I ordered...*

*Although I was told there would be...*

*Despite numerous attempts to reach you...*



# Writing an effective letter of complaint (3/3)

Complete Step 3 below.



*I demand a full refund...*

*The least you can do is...*

*I feel you have a responsibility to...*

**Explain** what you would like to be done to resolve the situation.

Would you like your money back? An apology? Compensation?



# Reflection

In breakout rooms or together as a class, **answer** the questions below.

**What do you find most challenging about writing a letter of complaint?**



**Have you ever received a letter of complaint? How did you respond?**



# End of the lesson

Idiom

***at a crossroads***

**Meaning:** at a point where a decision must be made

**Example:** As a company, we're at a crossroads. We can take the risk or play it safe.





# Additional practice



# Letter of complaint

1. **Read** the letter of complaint. 2. Then **answer** the questions below.

Dear Fast Wings,

I am writing to complain about our recent experience with your company. We were due to fly from New York to Las Vegas on Tuesday, 17th November at 10am. When we arrived at the airport at 7am we were told our flight had been cancelled. We were given no explanation for the cancellation. Your staff could not offer us any help and instead, simply recommended we book a new flight with a different airline as they explained that the next flight with your company wasn't until three days later!

I cannot believe an airline that offers such terrible service is still able to exist in today's competitive climate. Unless I receive a full explanation and adequate compensation for this behaviour, I will be reporting this experience to the local authorities.

I expect a response from your company within one week.

What is the reason for this complaint?

What happened—dates, names, etc.?

How might this situation be resolved?



# Discuss

**Answer** the questions below.

**What is the culture of complaining like in your home country?**



**What do you normally complain about?**



# Be polite!

1. **Read** the angry expressions below.
2. What could you **replace them with** when writing an effective letter of complaint?



I hate your company!

I am going to call the Prime Minister to report you!

I expect you to come to my door personally and apologise.

My lawyer is on her way over right now!

You are a terrible, terrible firm!

You've ruined my life!

I want all the members of your staff to be fired.

This is the worst thing that has ever happened to me.

I will do everything in my power to bring your company down!



# Resolving a complaint

1. **Read** the complaints below.
2. What kind of **response** might you ask for in order to resolve the complaint?

late delivery of  
an item

travel delays

a bill that was  
accidentally  
charged to  
your account

very bad  
customer  
service





# Answer key

**P.6:** *suggested answers*

**introducing your complaint:** 1, 3, 8

**explaining what happened:** 2, 5, 6, 9

**what you would like to happen next:** 4, 7, 10



# Summary

## Tips for writing a letter of complaint:

- An effective **letter of complaint** needs to be **clear** and **easy to understand**.
- The person you are writing to needs to know **why you are complaining**. So, clearly set out in the introduction to your letter the **reason** you are complaining.

## More tips for writing a letter of complaint

- **What happened:** Give **details** about what happened. Include **dates, times**, and even **names**!
- **What should happen next:** Once you have outlined your complaint, explain what you would like to be done to resolve the situation. Would you like your money back? An apology? Compensation?

## Getting the tone right

- Often when we write a letter of complaint, we are very angry. It's perfectly acceptable to write your letter of complaint using an angry tone. However, **don't be rude**.
- You can write your letter using an angry tone and still be polite. Use **formal language** and tell the person you are writing to how angry or disappointed you are.

## Sounding polite

- Remember to be **polite** in your letter of complaint. One way to do this is to use **modal verbs**.
- *I **would** like to complain about...; I think I **should** be given a refund.; You **could** retract the statement.*





# Vocabulary

compensation

to make matters worse...

the least you can do is...

dissatisfaction

numerous

