

Letter of complaint

I can write a letter of complaint.

- 1 SPEAKING** Work in pairs. Look at the words below and say what kind of travel they are most likely to apply to (road, rail, air or sea). Which problems have you experienced?

Travel problems cancellations collision congestion delays diversions gridlock industrial action lost luggage mechanical fault overcrowding a pile-up a puncture road works a security alert tailbacks turbulence

- 2** Read the task and the letter below. How many of the problems from exercise 1 does it mention?

You recently missed a flight because of a problem with your bus to the airport. Write a letter of complaint to the bus company explaining what happened and demanding action.

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to express my dissatisfaction with the service I received from your bus company on 14 August this year, which resulted in my missing a flight from Heathrow Airport.

The problems I experienced were a direct result of your company's failure to provide me with accurate travel information. I had booked a seat on the 06.40 bus from Oxford to Heathrow and arrived at the bus station in good time. When our bus failed to arrive, I and several other passengers sought to discover the cause of the delay by various means: we made enquiries with the staff at the bus station, we consulted your website and we attempted to contact your helpline. However, it was not until 07.30 that we were informed that the bus had been cancelled and that no further service would be available until 08.40. By this time, it was too late for me to make alternative travel arrangements, with the result that I arrived at Heathrow twenty minutes after boarding had closed for my flight.

I understand that a collision on the motorway had caused severe tailbacks and delayed the arrival of several buses. Whilst I appreciate that certain events may be beyond the control of your company, I can see no reason why passengers cannot be kept fully informed of the situation. In this instance, had I known that the delays were so severe, I would have endeavoured to reach the airport by other means.

I fully expect your company to offer compensation, since it was their mismanagement of the situation that prevented my reaching the airport on time. I would very much appreciate your giving this matter your immediate attention. Should you wish to speak to me in person, I can be contacted on the number below.

Yours faithfully,

Mr CF Chapman

- 3** In which paragraph of the letter (1–4) does the writer:

- give a detailed account of the events?
- clearly state what he expects to happen next?
- summarise his reason for writing?
- provide more information about why he is complaining?

Writing Strategy

To make the language of a letter appropriately formal, we often use:

- *should* + subject + base form instead of *if* + subject + present simple in first conditional sentences:
Should you wish to complain, call this number.
- a possessive adjective instead of an object pronoun in verb patterns that include a gerund:
I understand your wanting to complain.
- a variety of higher-level vocabulary instead of simple verbs like *go*, *try*, *do*, etc.
We proceeded to the check-in area and attempted to find the correct desk.

- 4** Read the **Writing Strategy**. Then find in the letter:

- an example of a first conditional sentence with *should*.
- two examples of a possessive adjective with a gerund.
- three more formal synonyms for *try*.
- a more formal way of writing *If I had known ...*

- 5** Use the words below to replace the less formal words in the sentences.

boarded declined departed developed endeavoured experienced located purchased required withdrew

- When the ticket inspector went away, I then found my ticket.
- Before the train left, I tried to find a seat.
- More passengers got on the train and needed seats.
- Some passengers bought an upgrade to first class but I said no.
- We had problems when our train got a mechanical fault.

- 6** Read the task below. Then plan your letter using your answers to exercise 3 to help you.

You recently missed an important event because of a problem with your train. Write a letter of complaint to the train company explaining what happened and demanding action.

- 7** Write your letter (220–260 words) using your plan from exercise 6. Remember to include formal language from the **Writing Strategy**.

CHECK YOUR WORK

Have you ...

- written 220–260 words?
- used appropriately formal language?
- checked your spelling and grammar?