

Complaining by Kat Robb

Age:	Teenagers / Adults
Level:	Upper-intermediate
Time:	60 minutes
Objective:	to learn to write an effective email of complaint and negotiate compensation
Key skills:	writing, reading, speaking
Materials:	one copy of the badly written complaint email per student; one problem situation from the complaints sheet per pair of students

Before the class

Cut up the problem situations from the complaint sheet. You should have enough for one per pair of students.

Procedure

1. Warmer (5 minutes)

Tell the students about a bad experience you have had, such as a dirty hotel room. Ask students for help and suggestions about what you can do in this kind of situation. They will probably say 'speak to the manager' but tell them the manager is not available. Continue until someone suggests you send a letter of complaint.

Alternatively, show this 40 second video clip from YouTube, a scene from *Fawlty Towers*, to set the scene of complaining and get the students to guess what the lesson will be about – 00:27–01:07 www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcliR8kAbzc.

2. Speaking (5 minutes)

Ask students to think about any problem situations they have encountered on holiday or in a restaurant and discuss in pairs what the problem was, what action they took and what the outcome was.

3. Reading, speaking and writing (20 minutes)

Give each student a copy of the badly written email. Tell students that it is neither polite nor formal enough. Students should read the email and discuss the language in pairs, deciding what language and phrases could be changed to make the email sound more polite. They should note down their ideas.

In open class, write up on the board suggestions from the students to create a model polite email of complaint. Help the students with any language. Some example language:

- *I am writing because I wish to complain about ...*
- *It is with great regret that I am writing this email.*
- *To resolve this problem, I would like you to ...*
- *I think this would be a good gesture on your part.*
- *I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible to resolve this problem.*

4. Writing (15 minutes)

Give each pair of students a problem situation from the complaint sheet. In pairs, they respond to the problem by writing a polite and formal complaint email, using the language on the board and their own.

5. Reading and speaking (10 minutes)

Students swap emails with another pair who read the email, imagining they are the managers of the establishment where the incident took place, and discuss what compensation they think is appropriate.

6. Speaking (5 minutes)

The pairs of students group together in their fours. The recipients offer their compensation and the complainers decide if they want to accept it.

Extensions

- Students swap their complaints with another pair. One student in each pair becomes the customer and the other the manager. They role-play the situation.
- Students write a complaint role-play and act it out for the whole class.
- Students write a role-play and give it to another pair of students to act out for the whole class.

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Send



Attach



Picture



High Priority



Low Priority

To:

Cc:

Subject:

Dear Continental Airlines

I am disgusted as I write this email to you about the miserable experience I had when I sat in seat 29E on one of your aeroplanes. As you may know, this seat is just opposite the loo and I could even touch the door with my hand. It smelt bad and there were lots of people always crowded around my seat.

I think you should let people have this seat for free. A refund would be nice.

Cheers

Kat

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You and your partner went for a romantic Valentine's meal in a well-known, expensive restaurant. Your food was served cold so you complained to the waiter. He just heated up your dish in the microwave for five minutes so, when he brought it back to you, it was overcooked and inedible. You want a complimentary three-course meal for you and your partner.

You want the cost of your cashmere winter coat in compensation because it was returned from the dry cleaners with a hole in the collar. You only noticed once you had paid and collected it.

You want your money back from a course that promised it would be able to make you give up smoking. You still smoke 20 cigarettes a day.

You buy a packet of crisps to eat on the train home. When you open them there is a dead mouse inside. You want compensation.

You bought a new shirt from a well-known clothes shop. However, you cut the label out because it irritated you. When you washed the shirt it changed colour but it now has no label. You want a replacement.

You took a train from London to Edinburgh that arrived three hours late due to a fault on the line. You missed an important meeting. You want a full refund for the £120 return ticket.

You ordered a book online for your mother's 60th birthday that was guaranteed next-day delivery. The book arrived four days late. You want a full refund and compensation.

You ordered a bottle of £40 whiskey for your dad's birthday from an online retailer. They sent a bottle of wine that cost £7.50 instead. You want a refund and compensation.

You want a refund from a hotel because there was no hot water in the bathroom and the room was noisy. You complained to the receptionist when you checked out but she told you the manager is the only person who can authorize a refund and he wasn't available. You paid the full amount for the room.