

CHAPTER 6

COMPLAINT AND ADJUSTMENT LETTERS

Outline

1. Characteristics and Organization of Complaint Letters
2. Characteristics and Organization of Adjustment Letters
3. Grammar Review: If-Clauses

Main Ideas

1. Complaint Letters are letters that ask for satisfaction. The reasons for writing complaint letters' vary according to certain circumstances. Complaint letters contain conciseness, completeness and politeness. The organization of complaint letters takes a direct approach.

2. Adjustment Letters are letters that explain the causes of mistakes and dissatisfaction. The characteristics of adjustment letters are promptness and courtesy. Appropriate reasons must be given in cases where the adjustment cannot be made.

3. The if clause is a useful element of grammar that enhances an effective business writing style.

Objectives

Students are able to:

- 1. Write complaint letters with conciseness, completeness and politeness using a direct approach.**
- 2. Write adjustment letters with promptness and courtesy in a direct approach.**
- 3. Use the if-clauses correctly in writing business correspondence.**

A complaint letter is a type of business correspondence that you, a business writer, have to write in such circumstances as mistakes in merchandise: late delivery, wrong amount due for merchandise, errors in the quantity, size, color, and quality of merchandise. The writer of a complaint letter needs to have these mistakes corrected and to have full satisfaction in business transactions.

1. Characteristics and Organization of Complaint Letters

Like other types of business correspondence, complaint letters need to be **time-efficient**. Therefore, it is best policy to respect the following characteristics:

1.1 Conciseness. The language used in complaint letters is concise, direct, and to the point. However, be careful not to be impolite and accusing. Keep the neutral tone. Do not write using sarcastic remarks or threatening vocabulary. Remember that

reasonable complaint letters tend to be taken care of much more readily than aggressive and impolite ones.

1.2 Completeness. Give all necessary details in your complaint letters. A complete complaint letter may be roughly divided into, at best, 4 paragraphs. The first paragraph gives details of the mistakes or dissatisfaction that leads to the writing of a complaint letter. In cases where the mistakes involve the merchandise, specify all necessary details, i.e. the order number, the date of the order, the date of arrival, the amount due, the specification, quantity, size and color of the merchandise. These details will make it quicker and more convenient for the supplier to look into the causes of errors. This in turn will lead to a faster adjustment.

The second paragraph explains the inconvenience or damages, which result from such errors.

The third paragraph may state the supplier's good and reliable reputation. Reminding the supplier of this fact will affect the supplier's pride and reinforce his need to maintain such an impeccable reputation. This will also serve to ensure a good result from the company's **handling of** your complaint. Remember not to use impolite or threatening language which will offend the reader. Offending the reader will only result in delay, or in even **further** dissatisfaction.

The fourth paragraph may include suggestions to rectify the errors. If you do not know how to correct the situation, ask for the supplier's opinion. Nevertheless, honesty is still the best policy in business transactions.

1.3 **Politeness.** Courtesy always works best in writing business correspondence. Do not write any letter when you feel angry, or upset. Calm down and relax before writing any correspondence. Be reasonable and accept the fact that mistakes and errors occur. Keep in mind that nothing and no one is perfect (proverb: “All men err”) and try your best to better any problematic situations. In other words, be an understanding person and deal with any problem with reasons not emotions.

The following is a list of some expressions and sentences you may use in writing a complaint letter.

- Weregrettohavetoinformyouthat.. ..
- We are experiencing difficulties in
- We’areatalosstolmowhow.....
- We believe this matter will receive your prompt attention.
-has proved unsatisfactory.
.....is totally inadequate.
- Please substitutefor
- I am returning thisto your store and would appreciate your replacing it with
-has always represented quality service and quality merchandise.
- I would appreciate your prompt adjustment.

Here are some examples of complaint letters. Notice that the organization takes a direct approach.

A. A complaint letter for wrong merchandise:

Sneiber Company
923 Bangrak, Siphya
Bangkok 10400, Thailand
Tel: 214 - 4614, Fax: 214- 4617

27 February 19..

Singapore Trade Corporation
48 Orange Grove
Singapore 102.5

Dear Sir:

On 2 January 1997, we sent you an order No. 358, for 500 dozen steel rulers priced at S\$2.55 per dozen. On opening the parcel received this morning, we found 500 dozen plastic rulers.

Since we do not order plastic rulers and do not want them, we would like to return them. Please tell us what to do with them.

Enclosed is a reorder for 500 dozen steel rulers. Will you please deal with this matter immediately?

Yours sincerely,
John Sneiber
John Sneiber
Marketing Manager
JS/mn
Enc.

B. A complaint letter for the quality of merchandise:

8 14 Barneston Street

Duluth, Minnesota 58503

13 March 19..

Metro Tire Inc.

1876 Livingston Avenue

Cleveland, Ohio 44102

Dear Manager:

The 175/RS • Preventive Tire which I purchased on 2 January 1997 from the Quality Tire Agency, Avenue C, **Denton**, Texas, has proved defective after 500 miles of use.

Since I bought this tire while I was on a business trip in the South, I am unable to take it back to the dealer **from** whom I bought it. I would like to have it replaced. Is it possible to instead contact your dealer, Metrolinks Tire, Inc. in my town?

I have been your customer for more than ten years and I am pleased with the mileage and safety that I have enjoyed driving on Metro tires. This experience makes me anxious to know why this **Preventive** tire wears out so quickly.

Since I expected this new tire to last for at least 2,000 miles, I received a lot of inconvenience and I am certain that I will have a 55 percent discount on a new replacement tire, calculated on a mileage basis.

Sincerely yours,

Donald Pickens

Donald Pickens

C. A complaint letter for a wrong billing amount:

**ABC Media Co., Ltd.
1301 Rockaway Parkway
Brooklyn, New York 11236**

3 March 19. .

The Manager
New **Mayura** Hotel
17 St. James Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612

Dear Sir:

Subject: Invoice No. 15784

We have received your invoice for the expenses of our conference at your hotel during 22-25 February 1997, and there is an error. The total amount after 40 percent discount should be \$1,500 not \$2,200.

Will you please look into this matter? Meanwhile we have enclosed our check for \$1,500 plus 10% service charge, although your invoice is for \$2,200.

Yours sincerely,

Maria Garcia

Maria Garcia

Accounting Department

Enc.

Activity 1 A

You are the President of the English Club. Ramkhamhaeng University, Bangkok 10240. Thailand. You ordered 200 copies of Business Correspondence by James T. Fields and they were due to arrive a month ago. Write a complaint letter to Mr. Alexander Hamilton, the Manager of Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited, 1714 Mandei Parkway, Fort Worth, TX 76111, USA.

Activity 1 B

You are Linda Jones of 307 Carlton Street Long Beach, CA 90840. You bought a pair of walking shoes from Briggs Footwear Inc., 76 Royal Palm Boulevard, Palm Springs, CA 90804, last week. After a month's use, the shoes cracked and became very stiff. Write a complaint letter mentioning the company's good reputation and asking for a replacement.

2. Characteristics and Organization of Adjustment Letters

Adjustment letters are letters that explain the causes of mistakes, errors, or delays. Adjustment letters normally try to make customers satisfied with the supplier's service or merchandise. However, the fault is not always the supplier's. In that case, a very reasonable letter is needed, that fully explains why an adjustment cannot be made.

Whether you can adjust the customer's complaint or not, it is always best policy to remember these characteristics of an adjustment letter.

2.1 Promptness. As soon as you receive any complaint letter, carefully check into the causes of mistakes, errors, or dissatisfaction. Immediately inform your customer; of those causes and tell **them** what your company is going to do regarding the matter. If the company is not at fault and you cannot give the customers an adjustment as requested, reply to them promptly and explain the reasons appropriately. The following is a list of some expressions and sentences that you may find useful in writing an adjustment letter that shows promptness:

- Right **after** I finished reading your 2 May letter, I looked into the matter of
- We immediately traced the errors that occurred in the invoice No. 146 FT, about which you wrote to us.
- The **refrigerators**, model MK 405, arrived this morning and they are already on **their** way to you.
- I personally saw to your order this time, to make sure that you would receive the correct merchandise.

- Your letter arrived this morning, and we have already looked into your shipment.

2.2 Courtesy. Remember that politeness wins the heart of the reader. Although the writer of a complaint letter writes in **his/her** moments of anger and dissatisfaction, never write in foul language. Do not respond to the complaint with emotions. Be reasonable and write your adjustment letter politely. Goodwill and acceptance of your mistakes always count in business transactions because they show your honesty and sincerity. If you have to refuse a requested adjustment, do it politely and appropriately. Do not use negative words and accusations. Show understanding in the matter.

It is important to note that as a writer of an adjustment letter, you do not say that you are surprised that the mistakes occurred. Also, do not imply that no other customers have made the same complaint. Although the company is at fault, do not overemphasize the company's carelessness. Rather, you had better concentrate on how to correct those mistakes. Accept your fault courageously. Do not try to put the blame on others. Lastly, do not make a promise that such mistakes will never occur again. If you do and the same mistakes are repeated, the customers will be more offended.

The following is a list of some expressions and sentences you may use in writing an adjustment letter that shows courtesy:

- Thankyouforyourletterof
- We will be more careful with your future orders.

- Our driver returned your parcel to our store because the house number was not on the address.
- We are glad to receive your helpful suggestions.
- We can assure you that
- We will try our best to... ..
- We will do our best to ensure that
- You may confidently leave the matter in our hands.
- We know how you feel about
- You are entirely right about
- Indeed, we can understand that
- Your point is well taken and
- We have been in the same situation and
- Certainly you have a right to feel that
- We are glad that you called our attention to the late arrival of your order 4787.

Every adjustment letter should tell your customers exactly what you are going to do to correct the mistakes.

The following expressions and sentences may be useful to you in writing an adjustment letter that shows exactness:

- Our check for \$65, which is a refund for your purchase of a pair of sneakers, has been sent **to you** today.

- You will have your new Travel-Lite baggage to replace the wrong model you received.
- You are exactly right. The discount to which you are entitled was not shown on your statement. We will credit the amount of \$5 to your account.
- We are pleased to give you a replacement for the broken wine glasses that were not carefully wrapped **from** our factory.

Examples of adjustment letters are as follows:

A.

**Singapore Trade Corporation
48 Orange Grove
Singapore 1025**

2 March 19..

Mr. John Sneiber
Marketing Manager
Sneiber Company
923 Bangrak, Siphya
Bangkok 10400, Thailand

Dear Mr. Sneiber:

Five hundred dozen steel rulers are on their way to you today. We will be more careful with your **future** orders. The mistakes occurred as a result of staff shortage during this

unusually busy season and the fact that the stock number **and** appearance of the packages is **almost** identical.

As for the 500 dozen plastic rulers, could you please keep them on a consignment basis for six months in order to save us the cost of return shipping?

We thank you for pointing out this matter to us and hope to serve you again soon.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas Lau

Thomas Lau

Manager

B.

Metro Tire Inc.
1876 Livingston Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44102

17 March 19..

Mr. Donald **Pickens**

814 Barneston Street

Duluth, Minnesota 58503

Dear Mr. **Pickens**:

We agree that you should expect more than 2,000 miles of service from the 175/RS - Preventive Tire. As you know **from** experience, Preventive Tires are built to give 3,500 miles of **trouble-free** service under normal conditions.

Our service department will carefully examine your tire if you send it to the dealer near your place. If the tire **has** some defect, we will grant you a new one with the discount you asked for. However, in case of something else, we will find a way to carefully see to the matter and the solution.

Please immediately contact our dealer and get the tire sent to our company for close inspection.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas Bellamy

Thomas Bellamy

Service Manager

C.

**New Mayura Hotel
17 St. James Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612**

7 March 19.

Ms. Maria Garcia
ABC Media Co., Ltd.
130 1 Rockaway Parkway
Brooklyn, New York 11236

Dear Ms. Garcia:

Thank you for your letter of 3 March 1997 bringing our attention to the invoice No. 15784. We have checked the invoice and the terms of agreement we made and found that you are entirely right about the amount of \$1,500 to be paid.

The mistake occurred because we hadn't taken into account the fact of special discount when we sent you the invoice.

It was a pleasure to serve all of you and we thank your company for choosing us as the site of your conference. We hope you had a successful meeting and that you will return to the New Mayura Hotel again soon.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas Derks

Thomas Derks
Manager

Not all complaint letters receive adjustment. In certain circumstances, it is the customer's fault in ordering the merchandise incorrectly. At times, customers want discounts when the discount programs have already ended. In some cases, both suppliers and customers may have to share the responsibility for the error. In certain cases, a third party is at fault.

To deal with cases where you cannot make any correction, you need to politely thank the customer for writing to the company and restate the adjustment the customer believes should be made. Give the reasons why it is not possible to grant the adjustment. Offer helpful advice, if possible. Close your letter with a message of goodwill.

Below are some examples of letters refusing adjustment:

A. The customer incorrectly ordered the merchandise:

Payson Supplies
78 East Main Street
New York, NY 11230

2 June 19..

Mr. Bruce Franklin
Franklin Electric Corporation
100 Franklin Street
Chicago, Illinois 60 142

Dear Mr. Franklin:

Thank you for writing to us about the "Easy Shaver" model LP741 that you wish to return for credit.

Immediately after receiving your letter, I rechecked your May 20 order. The order specified the "Easy Shaver" model **LP741**; the bill of lading matches your order in all respects. In fact, you have already paid the invoice for this shipment. Under the circumstances, we are unable to accept these shavers for credit.

The "Easy Shaver" model LP741 has proved a great success with our several dealers. May we suggest you keep them since you **may enjoy** a considerable success as well. Enclosed is our latest catalog for Spring.

We look forward to serving you again soon,

Sincerely yours,

John Payson

John Payson

Manager

B. The discount period ends:

**Bloomingdale Inc.
1872 Dallas Parkway
Dallas, TX 73241**

7 July 19..

Mr. Donald Kitchens
1853 Greenville Village
Rustic Valley
Dallas, TX 76472

Dear Mr. Kitchens:

Thank you for your check for \$575 in payment of your June account.

We appreciate having had the opportunity to serve you.

On receiving your letter of 3 July 1997 this morning, asking for a 10 percent discount for your purchase of a set of living-room furniture, we checked with the special campaign manager. He told us that the discount applied to customers who made payment within 10 days after the purchase.

You have been our good customer for many years and we would like to grant you the discount. However, it would be unfair to other customers who have followed the rules.

Therefore, please send us the remaining \$50. Thank you for your kind cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

John Willis

John Willis

Manager

C. The Shipping Company is at fault:

(The letter was actually sent by fax with a cover sheet to ensure that it arrived before the air freight.)

Hick's Fruit Supplies
893 South Loop
Atlanta, GA 30312

5 August 19. .

Don's Fresh Mart
748 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10038

Dear Sir:

Thank you for your letter of 1 August 1997 bringing our attention to a spoiled carton of cherries you received for your order No. 75842.

We have sent a replacement to you today, by air freight, carefully wrapped and packed. You will receive it in the afternoon.

We are entering our claim against Mercida Shipping Company for the spoiled carton because apparently, the sign "Keep in a Cool Place" was printed on the crates.

We have always appreciated an opportunity to serve you.

Sincerely yours,
John Humphrey
John Humphrey
Sales Manager

Since mistakes do occur, you as a writer of a complaint letter should be reasonable and clearly explain the inconvenience or damage the supplier causes you.

Appropriately offer suggestions as to what action you want the supplier to take for adjustment. Do not use threats or impolite language, if you want the supplier to quickly grant your adjustment. In case you have to write an adjustment letter, **keep in mind** that promptness and courtesy help to ease dissatisfaction and pacify the anger of customers. Explain the causes of error and accept the mistake courageously. Politeness and sincerity, more often than not, win.

Activity 2 A

Write an adjustment letter in response to a complaint letter in activity 1 A. Offer a two-week strike in the printing house as a reason for delay.

Activity 2 B

Write a letter refusing a full adjustment in response to a complaint letter in activity 1 B. Offer alternate exposure to extreme heat and cold as a reason for the shoes cracking and becoming stiff.

3. Grammar Review: If-Clauses

The knowledge of conditional sentences is useful to you in writing business correspondence. Conditional sentences describe creativity that may or may not occur, depending on circumstances. Sometimes, conditions play an important role in business transactions. Mastering the use of conditional sentences, or if-clauses will be beneficial and enhance your ability to write business correspondence more

effectively. Review the basic rules regarding if-clauses and do the following activities.

Activity 3 A

Fill in the blanks with the correct conditional tenses.

1. If you re-order printing paper Model **784J** right now, you (receive) a ten percent discount.
2. Mrs. McKay (type) the minutes herself if she didn't have a secretary.
3. If we had advertised this new product earlier, we (sell) more.
4. Were I to complete this report, I (stay) at the office tonight.
5. If it doesn't rain this afternoon, our staff (hold) a pool-side party.
6. If the strike (not, occur)..... last week, we could have shipped your order on time.
7. Please tell John to wait for me if he (come) while I am in the meeting.
8. If you (order) five dozen T - shirts, you will get a five percent discount.

9. Had he not been promoted, he (never, remain) with the company.

10. If I had invested in that stock last month, I (be) rich now.

Activity 3 B

Underline the correct tenses in the following conditional sentences.

1. Bill will expand his company if he (has, had) the cash he needs.

2. Mary would have told me about the project if she (met, had met) me.

3. If he bought more land, he (could build, built) another plant.

4. More people (could have been employed, could be employed) if the expansion had been completed.

5. The price has to be increased unless the production cost (is reduced, was reduced).

6. The President (would present, would have presented) better if he'd had enough time to prepare.

7. Susan could be a perfect candidate for that position if she (knew, knows) French.

8. If Peter (could use, used) his expertise to the full, he would not resign from the company.

9. You would be encouraged to apply for this job if you (don't have, didn't have) motion sickness.

10. I would have gone to Switzerland if I (had saved, saved) enough last summer from my part-time job.

*To be effective, a topical paragraph must meet four requirements. First, it must discuss one topic only; that is, it must have unity **of** subject matter. Second, it must say all that a reader needs to **know** about the topic; that is, it must be complete enough to do what it is intended to do. Third, the sentences within the paragraph must follow some reasonable order that a reader can recognize and follow. Fourth, the sentences within a paragraph must have coherence; that is, they must be so tied together that a reader can read the paragraph as a unit, not as a collection of separate sentences.*

James M. McCrimmon

Writing with a Purpose, 102.