

LETTER WRITING**Claim and Adjustment Requests**

Ideally, everything runs smoothly in the operation of an organization -- no mistake, no problems, no defects, and no misunderstandings. However, even in the best-managed organizations, dissatisfactions are bound to occur. In recent years both buyers and sellers are more aware of problems caused by business errors. When a product or service does not meet customers' expectations, the customers are disappointed and usually complain.

Their complaints should not be called *complaint letters*, because *complaint* connotes *irritation, unpleasantness, negativism*, and even *anger*. Using a word with such negative connotations could lead to a bad attitude toward customers. Letters about such complaints should be called ***claim letters***.

Countless aspects of business dealings can break down, but the most common causes for claims are:

1. an incorrect bill, invoice, or statement
2. a bill for merchandise ordered but never received;
3. delivery of unordered merchandise;
4. delivery of incorrect merchandise;
5. delivery of damaged or defective merchandise

Two other more specialized types of claims are:

1. a request for an adjustment under a guarantee or warranty;
2. a request for restitution under an insurance policy.

A claim is written to *inform* the company of the problem and *suggest* a fair compensation. No matter how annoying the nature of the problem, how great the inconvenience, the purpose of a claim is NOT to express anger, but to get results.

Therefore, it is important to avoid a hostile or demanding tone. A claim must be calm and polite though, of course, also firm.

A claim should begin with the facts, first explaining the problem such as the condition of the merchandise or the specific error made. Then all the necessary details should be described in a logical order. These details may include the order and delivery dates, the order or invoice number, the account number, the method of shipment, etc. A copy of proof of purchase, such as a sales slip or an invoice, should be included whenever possible. (Always, of course, keep the original.)

In most cases, and especially in your first letter, assume that a fair adjustment will be made, and follow the plan for direct requests. Begin with a straightforward statement of the problem, and give a complete, specific explanation of the details.

Politely request specific action in your closing, and suggest that the business relationship will continue if the problem is solved satisfactorily.

The following direct organizational plan is used for writing claims.

A. Direct statement of the Request

1. Write a claim letter as soon as possible after the problem has been identified.
2. State the need for replacement, refund or correction of the problem.
3. Maintain a confident, factual, fair, unemotional tone.

B. Justification, Explanation, and Details

To gain the reader's understanding praise some aspect of the good or service or at least explain why the product was originally purchased.

1. Present facts honestly, clearly, and politely.
2. Eliminate threats, sarcasm, exaggeration, and hostility.
3. Specify the problem: product failed to live up to advertised standards; product failed to live up to sales representative's claims; product fell short of company's policy; product was defective; customer service was not up to the mark.
4. Make no accusation against any person or company, unless you can back it up with facts.
5. Use a non-argumentative tone to show your confidence in the reader's fairness.
6. If necessary, refer to documentation (invoices, cancelled cheque, confirmation letters, etc., but mail only photocopies.
7. Ask the reader to propose fair adjustment, if appropriate.
8. If appropriate, clearly state what you expect as a fair settlement, such as credit against the next order you place, full or partial refund of the purchase price of the product, replacement or repair of the defective merchandise, or performance of services as originally contracted.
9. Do not return the defective merchandise until you have been asked to do so.
10. Avoid uncertainty or vagueness that might permit the adjusters to prolong the issue by additional correspondence or to propose a less-than-fair settlement.

C. Courteous Close with Request for Specific Action

Summarize desired action briefly.

- Simplify compliance with your request by including your name, address, phone number and hours of availability.
- Note how complying with your request will benefit the reader.
- Consider another example that how the writer conveys his message of inconvenience in calm manner.

Dear Sirs,

On March 1, we ordered and subsequently received one case of handsaws, model 88b. We paid for the order with our cheque no. 7293, a photocopy of which is enclosed.

When we decided to order these saws instead of model 78b, it was at the urging of your sales representative, Mr. Ali Nacem. He assured us that the new saws were more durable and efficient than the older model.

However, we have now had the saws on our selling floor for three weeks, and already six have been returned with broken teeth by extremely dissatisfied customers.

We are therefore returning the entire order of 88b saws and would like to be refunded for their full purchase price plus shipping expenses.

Yours truly,

Here is a well-written letter requesting an adjustment. Notice that this writer reverses the order of the three steps, but the letter gets the job done just as well.

Gentlemen,

Please repair or replace my calculator watch, Model C863, and send it to me at the address above.

After six months of use, the musical alarm has quit working.

Enclosed is my watch, a copy of the sales receipt showing the date of purchase, and your warranty, which guarantees material and workmanship for one year.

Yours Sincerely,

Granting Requests for Adjustment

An *adjustment letter* is the reply to a complaint (called a *claim letter*). In general, the best attitude is to give the customer the benefit of the doubt. Most persons are honest in their claims, and it is usually better to make the desired adjustment than to risk losing a customer.

Even though your firm's adjustment policy may be generous, the ultimate success of your good-news adjustment letters depends not only on *what* you say but also on *how* you say it. Always Choose neutral or positive language in referring to a complaint.

Whether or not your company is at fault, even the most annoying or demanding claim should be answer politely. An adjustment letter should NOT be negative or suspicious; it must NEVER accuse the customer or grant any adjustment grudgingly. Remember, your company's image and goodwill are at stake when you respond even to unjustified claims.

There Can be Three types of adjustment letters.

1. When the seller is at fault
2. When the buyer is at fault.
3. When the third party is at fault.

The following organizational plan is suggested for answering claim letters.

A. Initial Statement of the Good News or Main Idea

1. State immediately your willingness to honour the reader's claim.
2. Accept your reader's account as entirely accurate unless good business reasons demand a different interpretation of some points.
3. Adopt a tone of consideration and courtesy; avoid being defensive.
4. Thank the reader for taking the time to write.

B. Middle, Informational Section

1. Minimize or, if possible, omit any disagreements with your reader's interpretation of events.
2. Maintain a supportive tone through such phrases as "Thank you for," "May we ask," "Please let us know," and "We are glad to work with you."
3. Apologize only under extreme circumstances; then do so crisply and without an overly apologetic tone.
 - Admit your firm's faults carefully.
 - Avoid blaming any particular person or office.
 - Avoid implying general company inefficiency.
 - Avoid making unrealistic promises about the future.
 - Remind the reader of your firm's quality controls.

C. Warm, Courteous Close

1. Clarify any necessary actions that your reader must take.
2. Remind the reader of how you have honored the claim.
3. Avoid negative information.
4. Encourage the customer to look favorably on your company and/or the product in question (resale information).
5. Encourage the customer to continue buying other goods from you (sales promotion), but avoid seeming greedy.

Writing Letters Granting Adjustments

When granting a request for an adjustment, follow these four steps:

1. Tell the Reader That Full Adjustment Is Gladly Granted

Give the good news in the first sentence. Don't let the reader feel you are doing him or her favour, even if you feel that you are making a special concession. Instead, convince the reader that goodwill and friendship are more important to you than the money involved and that your organization always wants to take good care of its customers.

2. Express Sincere Appreciation for the Reader's Adjustment Request

Acknowledge your reader's inconvenience in writing the letter and waiting for the adjustment. Emphasize that you welcome this opportunity to set things right. Let the customer know how his or her letter has helped the organization to improve its products or service.

3. Stress Your Organization's Effort to Prevent Further Customer Dissatisfaction

Accept the blame and apologize if your organization is at fault. If appropriate, explain what caused the problem, but don't blame the computer. Most people know that computers don't make errors only the operators do. Don't make the mistake of telling your reader "This will *never* happen again." No one can promise that. If appropriate, explain what your organization is doing to prevent a repetition of the problem.

4. End the Letter Positively

Don't end with a negative phrase, such as "We hope you do not have any more trouble with your washing machine." The best ending for a letter granting an adjustment makes no reference to the original problem. End on a note that implies future dealings, and don't overlook the possibility of doing some effective sales promotion for related products or at least some reselling of your organization.

Consider the following example:

Dear Mr. Ali,

Your new lawn umbrella is being shipped prepaid today. It should arrive in a few days.

Thank you for returning the torn one. Because a mended umbrella might not be water-resistant, we are sending you a new one, so that you can keep your new lawn table protected. You will notice that the new umbrella is made of vinyl-coated nylon, which has proved superior to the polyester and cotton one you bought last year.

When you need lawn furniture and accessories, you will find everything from small tables to foundations in our latest catalog. You can rely on our guarantee of high quality and "satisfaction or your money back."

Yours sincerely,

Note the organization of the letter to Mr. Ali. First comes the news he wants to hear that is a new lawn umbrella is on its way. Next comes the writer's appreciation for the customer's calling attention to the defect. Then the writer explains the change in materials, an explanation owed to the reader, and one that in this case can make the organization look progressive and concerned. The final appeal for another sale is appropriate because the adjustment has been granted and the reader will be satisfied.