

WR 122—Formal Complaint Letter

Basic Prompt

This 400 – 600+ word assignment will build skills that immediately translate into the real world. We have all been disappointed with products or services in our past, but very few of us have ever sent a formal complaint letter to the companies or service providers that failed to meet reasonable needs. This letter offers you an opportunity to identify some product or service which has failed you, and address that failure in a professional way. It will also allow you to explore argumentation inside a challenging, but familiar form: the professional letter.

Key Elements

In this letter you will

- format the assignment to match the letter format example attached to this document
- identify the product or service that disappointed you
- explain your initial expectations for the product or service
- show these expectations to be reasonable
- identify how and why these expectations were not met
- discuss why this failure to meet your expectations is a serious issue
- develop and organize these materials inside effective paragraphs
- use a firm, but professional tone throughout this letter

Formatting

Make sure that you use the attached template as a guide for this assignment. In a real world situation this letter would be single spaced, but for this assignment please remember to **double-space the body of the letter**. Again, if you are going to actually send this letter, you will want to adjust the formatting to single-spaced before you send it away, but in this class I will need your body to be double-spaced.

The assignment must be 400 – 600+ words in length. You are encouraged to err on the side of 600 words or more.

Assessment

Unity, organization, structure, clarity, and development at the essay, paragraph, and sentence levels will be the major focus of my assessment. I will also assess your appropriate display of tone and argument, and your displayed understanding of your audience's needs. Identification of clear harm caused and a direct course of action the audience can take is a required component of this assignment.

Final Note

Please let me know if you have any questions about the expectations of this assignment or if you are having difficulty finding a clear occasion to discuss.

(Your address – or the school's if you are concerned about privacy)
(City, state, zipcode)

January 13th, 2020

Rick Anderson (Contact name)
Consumer Complaint Division (Department name)
Sophie's Surplus Supply Store (Company name)
707 Marlon Street (Company address)
Townington, OR 97322

Dear Rick Anderson:

The body of your letter should consist of paragraphs which are not indented. These paragraphs should introduce the product or service you are writing about and explain why you are complaining about that product. Identify the issue in the first paragraph.

The body should also introduce your point of view, explain why you chose to purchase or use the thing that ultimately disappointed you and why you were disappointed by it, and show why your expectations were reasonable for. If you feel like you have a solution to the problem you are writing about, you should propose that solution somewhere in the text.

Remember to keep focused on your audience's needs. You want them to understand your complaint, but you don't want to insult them. Losing a good customer is generally frowned on. Losing a psychotic or angry customer is generally viewed in a better light. Ask yourself, what will help this company understand your plight and their responsibility for it.

Tone can be both good and bad, though strong or offensive tones will often cause your reader to dismiss your otherwise valid thoughts. That said, certain situations have the potential to elicit varying responses; readers often expect complaint letters to be negative in nature. By definition, the writer is complaining about something. When taken to an extreme, almost all readers will eventually lose all receptiveness — a hostage negotiator is one of the only audiences that will listen effectively to extreme tones.

There is a problem with using a tone that is overly nice, too. Many people avoid conflict, and the idea of writing a formal complaint letter, or complaining about anything in general, is anathema. A lack of assertion can often result in your reader not taking your complaint seriously: "well, this person doesn't seem to be very upset so a brief apology will probably address the situation."

Letters of complaint, and perhaps arguments in general, need to be balanced in tone — respectful enough for the reader to not mistake the wording for the message, and assertive enough to call for an action beyond a superficial response.

Sincerely yours,

(Your name here)

[The following page lists tips for successfully completing this assignment]

There are some basic strategies for writing an effective letter of discontent:

1. State the issue or problem explicitly — avoid beating around the bush.
2. Inform the reader that you would like a specific response.
3. **AVOID** making remarks about the intentions of others unless you have explicit admissions.
4. **DO** include remarks about how you were personally affected
5. **DON'T** have a disproportionate response (think road rage)
6. **DO** describe positive aspects of your encounter
7. **DON'T** let the issue be lost in pleasantries
8. **ABSOLUTELY** use proper spelling, grammar, and syntax.