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- By the time you need to write a complaint letter, you may be angry. If your letter reflects your annoyance and anger, you can come across as petty and irrational
- The best complaint letters—the ones taken seriously—do not sound complaining

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Effective complaints letters should be:

- Concise
- Authoritative
- Factual
- Constructive
- Friendly

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- *Concise* letters are understood quickly
- People in complaint departments receive many letters. The only letters that are fully read are the most concise, clear, and compact letters. Letters that ramble on or are vague will not be read fully. It's simple--to get action, your letter must be read. To be read, your letter must be concise. A concise complaint must make its main point in *less than five seconds*. The letter may subsequently take more time to explain the situation, but the main point must be understood *quickly*

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- If the situation is complex with a lot of history, it's a good idea to keep the letter short and concise, and then append or attach the details, in whatever format is appropriate (photocopies, written notes, explanation, etc). This allows the reader to understand the main point without having to read twenty pages of history and detail
- *Do not bury your main points in a long letter.* Make your main points in a short letter, and attach the details

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- *Authoritative* letters have credibility
- An authoritative letter is especially important for serious complaints or one with significant financial implications
- To make a letter authoritative, the writing must be both firm and clear, the grammar and spelling perfect, and the presentation of the letter professional
- You want to establish that you can be trusted and believed, you know your facts, and you have a point

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- *Factual* letters help the reader immediately see the relevant details, dates, requirements, etc., and to justify action to resolve the complaint
- You want your complaint resolved. That means the organization must spend money. And that requires accountability and justification for the expense
- Put another way, without sufficient justification, the problem can't be resolved
- Always include relevant dates, names, and details. Make sure to include all the necessary facts that justify your complaint
- But be concise. Just the key facts!

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- *Constructive* letters with positive statements suggest positive actions and encourage quicker decisions
- State the facts and then suggest what needs to be done
- Say that you'd like to find a way forward, rather than terminate the relationship
- Think about it... if you tell them you're taking your business elsewhere and that you will never use them again, there's less incentive to help you
- Most companies appreciate customers who stay loyal and will work through difficulties, rather than jump ship when there's a problem
- You want your complaint to be seen as an opportunity to improve things

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- *Friendly* letters that have a considerate, cooperative, and complimentary tone, encourage the reader to respond positively
- Not surprisingly, threatening people does not produce good results
- A friendly approach encourages the reader to reciprocate. He or she will want to build the relationship and keep you as a loyal customer
- People like helping nice people. People do not like helping angry people who attack them
- This is the most important rule of all when complaining. *Be kind to people and they will be kind to you*

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To write an effective complaint letter, follow this pattern:

- Identify the problem or faulty item(s) and include relevant information such as invoice numbers, part names, and dates, as well as a copy of the receipt, bill, or contract
- Explain logically, clearly, and specifically what went wrong—especially for a problem with a service. (Avoid speculating about why you think a problem occurred)
- State what you expect the reader to do to solve the problem to your satisfaction

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- Think in terms of the acronym AIDA: attention, interest, desire, action. This is the fundamental process of persuasion
- Yes, complaint letters are *persuasive* letters
- A complaint letter seeks to persuade the reader to do what you want

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Tips for Success:

- Remember the person who receives your complaint may not be the one who was responsible for the problem
- An effective letter should assume that the recipient will conscientiously correct the problem
- To reach someone who can help you in a large company, first check the Web site or call the main office so that you can address your letter to the appropriate person or department (often Customer Service, Consumer Affairs, etc.)
- In smaller companies, you might write to a vice president in charge of sales or service. For very small businesses, write directly to the owner