

## LETTER OF COMPLAINT

Unfortunately, there are many things to complain about in the world today, from poor service in a restaurant or store, to the high price of gasoline and rising income taxes.

Complaints are often most effective when made in writing. There are two advantages to writing a complaint letter rather than talking about it. First, you feel better. And second, the person or organization causing the problem takes you much more seriously when you commit your thoughts to paper.

**Format:** [See Appendix A: Fig. A-1. Simple format for letters and memos.] Typed/word-processed. Personal letterhead.

**Style/Tone/Voice:** Formal. Cool and collected, but serious in your resolve. Active voice. [See Part I for more on these subjects.]

**Structure:** (1) Recall the specific incident, (2) State your specific complaint, (3) Give appropriate, specific details, (4) Enclose and cite any backup proof or documents (e.g., a previous letter from the reader), (5) Say what you expect the reader to do, if appropriate, (6) Close by saying you look forward to a speedy resolution and to continuing the relationship.

**Handy Phrases:** I want to bring [blank] to your attention; Are you aware that; You may not be aware that; Do you think; Do you feel.

**See also:** Part II: Letters to Editors; Letters to Elected Officials; Part IX: Letters Expressing Dissatisfaction.

September 10, 2004  
Mr. Roger Beecher  
Learn It Now! Network  
Anytown, USA

Dear Roger:

I attended “Cold-Calling for the Non-Salesperson” last night and thoroughly enjoyed the session. However, I did want to bring something to your attention. The session’s description (copy attached) listed Stephen Carter — a well-known guru and the reason I registered for the session — as the seminar presenter. In reality, Stephen gave a half-hour presentation and then turned the program over to his colleague, Michael Snyder.

Michael was terrific. I was engaged, I took copious notes, I walked away satisfied with the content. But I felt I was misled by the description in your catalog.

I’m taking Carol Connor’s “Clutter-Free Basement” session on October 10 and since she’s also a guru, I’m leery of the possibility of having the same experience I did last night.

Again, “Cold-Calling” was a great session and I understand that it’s difficult to monitor every course, so I did want to let you know about my experience.

Sincerely,

Fern Dickey

## Tips for Writing Letters of Complaint

- Before giving a negative, start with a positive. Say what you liked before getting to what you didn’t like.
- Make a specific rather than a general complaint. Focus on the part that was defective. Isolate and confine your complaint to that part.
- Be courteous in tone throughout.
- Don’t threaten. As the adage goes, “You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.”
- Say what action you want the reader to take, if any.

## MOTIVATION

Your child is away at college and getting a D in freshman chemistry. Your brother got passed over for a big promotion. Your best friend’s dot.com crashed and his stock is worth as much as a roll of toilet paper.

A pep talk can help in situations like these. Communication vehicles of choice can include a face-to-face talk, phone call, letter, or e-mail. The advantage of sending a letter is that the recipient can keep it for rereading and inspiration; some readers have saved especially meaningful personal letters for their entire lifetime.

**Format:** [See Appendix A: Fig. A-1. Simple format for letters and memos.] Handwritten or typed/word-processed. Personal letterhead.

**Style/Tone/Voice:** Informal. Active voice. [See Part I for more on these subjects.]

**Structure:** (1) Say why you are writing, (2) Identify the problem and how you know about it, (3) Offer your advice, (4) Close with an offer of additional help and support.

**Handy Phrases:** You can do it; Believe in yourself; I have faith in you.

**See also:** Part II: Giving Advice; Part V: Offering Advice.