



I. BUSINESS FOCUS: COMPLAINING

1.  Imagine that you work for a company and you receive a letter of complaint from one of your major customers. The letter ends with the sentence below. What would your reaction be? What would you think of the person who wrote such a letter?

If you don't deliver the goods immediately, we will look for another supplier!

2.  In the letter of complaint below, the sentence above is expressed more diplomatically. What makes it more diplomatic? Read the whole letter and underline the words and phrases which make the letter sound more tentative. Then consult the Forum to find out how your partners in other countries reacted to the sentence in the box above.

Dear Mr Gray,

We regret to inform you that the consignment of washing machines, order number 4457, which we were supposed to receive two months ago, has not arrived yet.


We were promised an early delivery by your representative, and this was an important factor in persuading us to place this order with you.

The delay in delivery is now causing serious inconvenience for our company as some of our customers are already cancelling their orders. We must therefore ask you to complete the order immediately, otherwise we shall be obliged to look for another supplier.

Your prompt reply will be appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

II. BUSINESS STRATEGIES: POLITENESS

1.  Here are some linguistic tips you could use in tricky situations. Read and discuss the following points and improve the examples (b.) in each section.

(1) It is usually better to avoid expressions like must, mustn't, should, shouldn't, can't, or impossible. You can rephrase the idea in a less authoritative and uncompromising way.

a. We can't give you a bigger rebate. → It's **rather difficult** for us to give you a bigger rebate.

b. It's impossible for me to finish the reports this week. → ?

(2) Negative adjectives (bad) sound very direct and abrupt. By using NOT + POSITIVE ADJECTIVE (not very good, not quite right) you will sound much friendlier. Look at the following pair:

a. *This was a terrible presentation.* → *This was **not a very good** presentation.*

b. *These figures are inaccurate.* → ?

(3) By using SOFTENERS like slightly, somehow, minor, etc you make bad news sound better.

Can you think of other words with a similar softening effect?

a. *Your prices are too high.* → *Your prices are **rather** high.*

b. *We will have to introduce changes.* → ?

(4) Expressions like UNFORTUNATELY, I'M SORRY and I'M AFRAID indicate that bad news is coming. By using them we warn the other person to be prepared for a shock. Improve the following:

a. *Mr Novak is not available today.* → *I'm afraid Mr Novak is not available today.*

b. *We won't be able to deliver in two weeks.* → ?

(5) Time fillers (well, actually, as a matter of fact, etc.) and expressions containing the idea of respect (with respect, with all due respect) also alter the force of the message, making it less direct and more polite.

a. *We can't agree to this.* → ***With all due respect**, we can't agree to this.*

b. *I think there are other options.* → ?

(6) Rather than directly accusing the recipient of the letter, write indirectly by using expressions such as WE WILL BE FORCED TO ..., WE WILL HAVE NO OTHER OPTION BUT TO..., WE SHALL BE OBLIGED TO ..., WE WILL HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO ..., etc.


a. *We will look for another supplier.* → ***We shall be forced to look for another supplier.***

b. *We will sue you!* → ?

(7) There are some other ways of avoiding direct disagreements, such as using WOULDN'T/COULDN'T instead of CAN'T; SEEMS TO BE instead of IS; WE UNDERSTOOD instead of YOU SAID, etc.

a. *We can't agree to this.* → ***We wouldn't be able to agree to this/ We couldn't agree to this***

b. *There's a problem.* → ?

2.  Make the following sentences more diplomatic and polite by using the hints/prompts in brackets.

a. We must decide on this by tomorrow.

(actually / be important for us)

b. You don't realize how valuable this information is.

(respect / don't seem / quite how)

c. This calculation is wrong.

(not quite)

d. We are dissatisfied with your offer.

(not completely)

e. This is an outrageous proposal.

(not very attractive)

f. Tuesday is most inconvenient for me.


(not very)


g. This is illegal.

(afraid / would not / quite)

h. This is a lie.

(sorry / not quite true)

 Check the answers in the key.

3.  Rephrase the following sentences to make them more diplomatic, polite or tentative.

a. We can't agree to this. _____

b. We want a shorter delivery period. _____

c. We must sign the contract as soon as possible. _____

d. We don't like your terms of payment. _____

e. You said you would give us a substantial discount. _____

f. You made a mistake in your invoice. _____

g. This is too expensive. _____

h. There will be a delay. _____


i. The prices will go up. _____

j. We'll have to make amendments. _____

 Check the answers in the key.

III. WRITING: A LETTER OF COMPLAINT


In business, complaints are frequently made in the following situations: the goods have been delivered damaged or late; the goods received are not the goods ordered; poor service has been received; the quality of goods is not satisfactory; the prices charged are not as agreed, etc.


1.  *Your company has ordered corporate gifts, fountain pens and lighters, to give away to your major customers. Your order was placed on the basis of samples left by the representative of a company specialised in selling such gifts. As you were impressed by the quality of the samples, you ordered a considerable quantity of goods. However, when the consignment arrived, you realised that the quality of the goods received was nothing like the quality of the samples. You therefore wrote a letter of complaint but as you were really furious, your first attempt was not very diplomatic. Rewrite the letter below, making it more polite.*

Mr Smith!

I was absolutely furious when I checked the consignment of corporate gifts which we ordered from your company. You must be completely crazy! How can you expect to be taken as a serious business partner if you sell products which don't match the samples? How can we give away pens that leak and lighters that don't work? If you don't send the right goods immediately, we will never ever order anything from you again!


Yours in fury,

 *Compare your letter to the one in the key.*


2.  *The jumbled sentences below were taken from a complaint in which the Swiss company F&I Switzerland Ltd complained about the delivery of wine bottles from the Slovenian company Wine TRANSPORT. Match the beginnings and ends of the sentences and rewrite the complaint by considering the following description of the parts of complaints:*

- ✓ Introductory statement
- ✓ Reason(s) for complaint taking the kinds of products ordered into account
- ✓ Enquiry as to why problems have arisen
- ✓ Suggestion(s) for further procedures
- ✓ Setting date for dealing with the problem(s)
- ✓ Final statement

<i>We have received the delivery of the consignment</i>	<i>and look forward to hearing from you.</i>
<i>We are returning the damaged goods to you carriage forward</i>	<i>and suggest keeping the undamaged bottles if you grant us a 20% reduction in price.</i>
<i>Unfortunately your recent shipment</i>	<i>as per our order of 1000 bottles of wine dated 13 December 2002.</i>
<i>Up until now, we have been very satisfied with your service</i>	<i>and the quality of your products.</i>
<i>We trust that you will deal with the matter without delay</i>	<i>as to how this could have happened?</i>
<i>May we ask you to give us an explanation</i>	<i>that several bottles of wine were broken.</i>
<i>On opening the cases we saw</i>	<i>the goods were poorly packed.</i>
<i>This is probably due to the fact that</i>	<i>was not to our satisfaction.</i>


 Check the answers in the key.

IV. INTERCULTURAL FOCUS

1.  Look at the situations below and discuss the following questions:

1. Would you complain if it happened to you?
2. How would you complain? What would you do?
3. What would you expect for compensation?

- You are about to eat a yoghurt which you have just bought, but then you realise that it has exceeded the “sell by” date.
- You are staying in a five-star hotel and you notice that a towel in the bathroom is slightly stained.
- In a restaurant you order a bottle of sparkling water but the waiter brings a bottle of still water.

 Send a message to the Forum to find out how people would react to these situations in other countries.

 Write a letter of complaint to your corresponding partners.