**COMPLAINTS, REPLIES TO COMPLAINTS**

When sending a complaint, you will need to decide whether it is appropriate to use fax or email, where privacy cannot be guaranteed, or to write a letter. Some complaints, e.g. a mistake in a small payment or in the number of goods dispatched, can be faxed or emailed, but a letter should be used for larger or more serious complaints.

**COMPLAINTS**

**I. Introductory Phrases**

Do not delay. Complain as soon as you realize a mistake has been made; delay weakens your case and can complicate the matter as details may be forgotten. There is no need to open by apologizing for the need to complain (*We regret to inform you..., I am sorry to have to write to you about ...)* as this also weakens your case. Simply begin:

*- We would like to inform you...*

*- I am writing to complain about …*

*- I am writing with reference to Order No. P32, which we received yesterday.*

**II. The language of complaints**

Emotional terms like disgusted, infuriated, or amazed have no place in business. You can express dissatisfaction by saying:

*- This is the third time this mistake has occurred and we are far from satisfaction with the service you offer.*

*- Unless you can fulfill our orders efficiently in the future we will have to consider changing to another supplier.*

*- Please ensure that this sort of problem does not arise again.*

Do not be rude or personal. In most cases correspondence between companies takes place between employees in various departments. Nothing is gained by being rude to the individual you are writing to. You may antagonize someone who has probably had nothing to do with the error and, rather than getting it corrected, he or she could become defensive and difficult to deal with. Therefore, do not use sentences like:

*- You must correct your mistake as soon as possible.*

*- You made an error on the statement.*

*- You don’t understand the terms of discount. We told you to deduct discount from net prices, not CIF prices.*

Use the passive and impersonal structures:

*- The mistake must be corrected as soon as possible.*

*- There appears to be an error on the statement.*

*- There seems to be some misunderstanding regarding terms of discount. Discount is deducted from net prices, not CIF prices.*

Do not use words like fault or blame - these expressions are rude and childish. Do not write:

*- It is not our fault. It is probably the fault of your dispatch department.*

*Instead, write:*

*- The mistake could not have originated here, and must be connected with the dispatch of the goods.*

Never blame your own staff, and finally, while writing the complaint remember that your supplier will almost certainly want to help you and correct the mistake. Suppliers are not in business to irritate or confuse their customers but to offer them a service.

**III. Explaining the problem**

If you think you know how the mistake was made, you may politely point this out to your supplier. Sometimes, when a mistake occurs several times, you may be able to work out why it is happening more quickly than the company you are dealing with.

*- Could you tell your dispatch department to take special care when addressing consignments? My name and address are… .*

*- Could you ask your accounts department to check my code carefully in future? My account number is 246-642, but they have been sending me statements coded 642-246.*

*- I think the reason that wrong sizes have been sent to me is because I am ordering in metric sizes, and you are sending me sizes measured in feet and inches. I would appreciate your looking into this.*

**IV. Suggesting a solution**

If you think you know how the mistake can be corrected, let your supplier know:

*- The best solution would be for me to return the wrong articles, charging you P&P (Packing & Postage).*

*- Rather than send a credit note you could send six replacements, which would probably be easier than adjusting our accounts.*

**REPLIES TO COMPLAINTS**

**I. Opening Phrases**

Acknowledge that you have received the complaint, and thank your customer for informing you:

*- Thank you for your letter of 6 August informing us that…*

*- We would like to thank you for informing us of our accounting error in your letter of 7 June.*

*- We are replying to your letter of 10 March in which you told us that...*

**II. Asking for time to investigate the complaint**

Sometimes you cannot deal with a complaint immediately, as the matter needs to be looked into. Do not leave your customer waiting but tell them what you are doing straight away.

*- While we cannot give you an explanation at present, we are looking into the problem and will contact you again shortly.*

*- As we are sending out orders promptly, I think these delays may be occurring during transit. I shall get in touch with the contractors.*

*- Would you please return samples of the items you are dissatisfied with, and I will send them to our factory in Dusseldorf for tests.*

**III. Explaining the mistake**

If the complaint is justified, explain how the mistake occurred but do not blame your staff. You employed them, so you are responsible for their actions.

*- The mistake was due to a fault in one of our machines, which has now been corrected.*

*- There appears to have been some confusion in our addressing system, but this has been sorted out.*

*- It is unusual for this type of error to arise, but the problem has now been dealt with.*

If you think the complaint is unjustified, you can be firm but polite in your answer. But even if you deny responsibility, you should always try to give an explanation of the problem.

*- We have closely compared the articles you returned with our samples and can see no difference between them. Therefore, in this case we are not willing either to substitute the articles or to offer a credit.*

*- Our factory has now inspected the unit you returned last week, and they inform us that the circuits were overloaded. We can repair the machine, but it will be necessary to charge you as incorrect use of the unit which is not covered by our guarantee.*

**IV. Solving the problem**

Having acknowledged your responsibility and explained what went wrong, you should put matters right as soon as possible, and tell your customer that you are doing so.

*- We have now checked our accounts and find that we have been sending you the wrong statement due to a confusion in names and addresses. Please contact us again if a similar situation arises, and thank you again for pointing out the error.*

*- The fabric you complained about has now been withdrawn. The fault was in the weave of the cloth, which was due to a programming error in the weaving machines. This has now been corrected and replacement fabric will be sent to you.*

**V. Closing Phrases**

It is useful when closing your letter to mention that the mistake, error, or fault is an exception, and it either rarely or never happens. You should also, of course, apologize for the inconvenience your customer experienced.

*- In closing we would like to apologize for the inconvenience, and also point out that this type of fault rarely occurs in this equipment.*

*- Finally, may we say that this was an exceptional mistake and is unlikely to occur again. Please accept our apologies for the inconvenience.*

*- Replacements for the faulty articles are on their way to you, and you should receive them tomorrow. We are sure that you will be satisfied with them and there will be no repetition of the faults. Thank you for your patience in this matter, and we look forward to hearing from you again.*

**VI. Sample Letters**

**Letter 1**

Head Office

Nesson House

Neweli Street

Birmingham

BC3 3EL

Telephone: +44 (0) 21 2366571

Fax+44(0) 21 23685912

Email: pcrane@lynch.co.uk

Your ref:

Our ref: Order No.14478

Date: 15 August 2015

Satex S.p.A.

Via di Pietra Papa

00146 Roma

ITALY

Attn. Mr. Daniele Causio

Dear Sir

Our Order No.14478

I am writing to you to complain about the shipment of sweaters we received yesterday against the above order.

The boxes in which the sweaters were packed were damaged, and looked as if they had been broken open in transit. From your invoice No.18871 we estimate that thirty garments have been stolen, to the value of £ 550.00. Because of the rummaging in the boxes, quite a few other garments were crushed or stained and cannot be sold as new articles in our shops.

As the sale was on a CIF basis and the forwarding company were your agents, we suggest you contact them with regard to compensation.

You will find a list of the damaged and missing articles enclosed, and the consignment will be put to one side until we receive your instructions.

Yours sincerely

Peter Crane

Peter Crane

Chief Buyer

Encl.

**Letter 2**

Satex S.p.A.

Via di Pietra Papa

00146 Roma

ITALY

24 August 20-

Mr L.Crane

Chief Buyer

F. Lynch & Co. Ltd

Nesson House

Newell Street

Birmingham 83 3EL

UNITED KINGDOM

Order 14478

Dear Mr Crane

Thank you for informing us about the damage to our consignment (Inv. No. 18871).

From our previous transactions you will realize that this sort of problem is quite unusual. Nevertheless, we are sorry about the inconvenience it has caused you.

Please would you return the whole consignment to us, postage and packing forward, and we will ask the shipping company to inspect the damage so that they can arrange compensation. It is unlikely that our insurance company needs to be troubled with this case.

If you want us to send you another shipment as per your order No.14478, please let us know. We have the garments in stock and it would be no trouble to send them within the next fortnight.

Yours sincerely

Daniele Causio

Daniele Causio

Sales Director

**Letter 3**

Drivers Co.  
3489 Greene Avenue  
Olympia, WA 98502

August 17, 2015

Richard Brown

President  
Document Makers  
Salem, MA 34588

Dear Mr. Brown:

As someone who has worked with your company for over 3 years, we were very disappointed to see the documents you produced for our latest Drivers Co. publicity campaign.

As our written agreement stipulated, we expected full color leaflets with fancy explanatory texts, but instead, we found that black and white photos had been included in the prepared leaflets. I think you will agree that a communication problem exists.

We would like you to send out a photographer to provide us with the promised color coverage, or provide us with a refund.

Yours truly,

T.R. Smith

Thomas R. Smith  
Director

TRS/LJ