

# **COMPLAINTS**



# COMPLAINTS

## OVERVIEW

In this unit, you will be attending a workshop which will give you the opportunity to fine-tune your English language skills.

You will be working with the following functions:

- **making complaints**
- **handling complaints**



## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. For each of the following situations, circle the expression you would feel most comfortable using and explain why:

1. The person who shares your office always forgets to lock up important documents. Once again, you were the one who was reprimanded.

- a) I'm fed up with your absent-mindedness. You forgot to lock up that file and I was told off again this morning.
- b) Why didn't you lock up the filing cabinet last night? I got told off again this morning.
- c) I hate to complain, but you forgot to lock up the filing cabinet last night and I got told off again this morning.

Explanation:

2. You have reported a leaky faucet in your apartment three times. It still hasn't been fixed.

- a) I hate to mention this again, but my faucet's still leaking.
- b) If you don't fix my faucet, I won't pay my rent.
- c) Can't you do something about my faucet? I've already reported it three times.

Explanation:

3. Three people in your division are on extended leave. The two of you who are left have been assigned their work on top of your own. You decide to tell your boss you feel overloaded.

- a) I'm fed up. There's just too much work for two people.
- b) I have a complaint. There's just too much work for two people.
- c) I hate to bring this up, but there's too much work for two people.

Explanation:

4. Read the following possible responses to a complaint you have made. Which response(s) would you find least satisfactory? Most satisfactory? Explain why.

- a) I'm sorry, but you'll just have to wait.
- b) Nothing can be done. It's a busy time of year.
- c) Nothing can be done.
- d) I'm sorry. I know it's a problem, but I'm afraid nothing can be done. It's a busy time of year.
- e) I'm sorry. Nothing can be done; it's a busy time of year.

Explanation:

2. Discuss your responses with the class.

## MAKING COMPLAINTS

1. Read the expressions below for making complaints. Which of these do you use/know? Do you know any others? Add them to the list.

Do You Remember...?

**Something's bothering me.**

**Something's wrong. (Statement of problem)**

**Something's wrong with my air conditioner.**

**There seems to be something wrong.**

**I've got a problem.**

**I have a complaint. (Statement of problem)**

**I have a complaint } about the noise in the hallway.**

**I'd like to complain }**

**I hate to mention it, but....**

**"X" peeves me.**

**I'm tired of....**

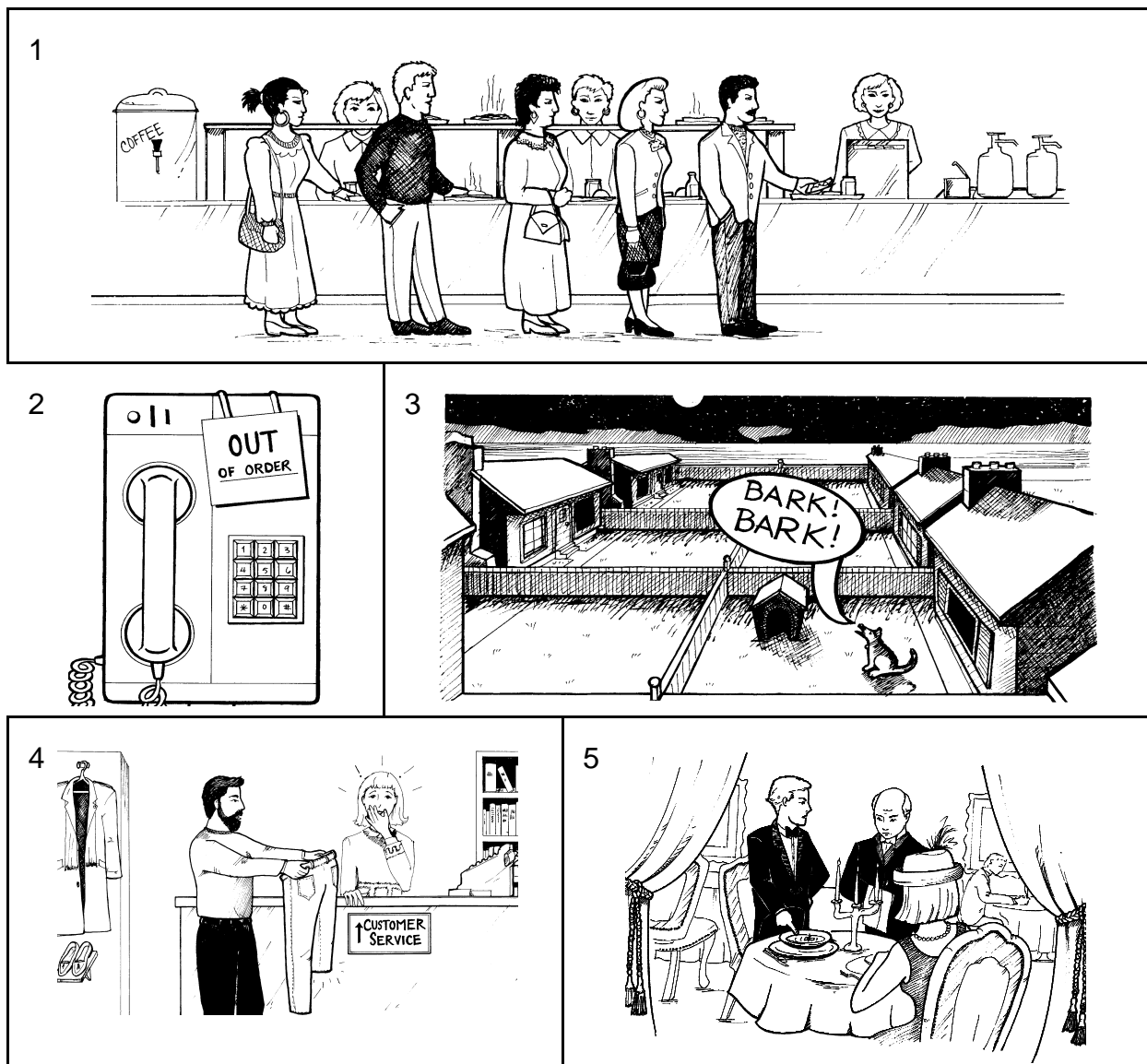
**I'm sick of....**

**Enough's enough!**

**I have a bone to pick (with you)!**



## Practice Activity 1



Work with a small group. Look at the pictures. With your group, discuss which of the expressions on page 79 could be used to complain about each situation.

a) To **soften** your complaint, you can say

### Could anything be done about the noise?

b) To **strengthen** your complaint, you can say

**I don't know what kind of service **you're** offering...**

c) To **express** your **feelings**, you can use these expressions:\*

If **you don't** do something immediately, I'll have to { talk with your manager. }  
{ call your PR director. }



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## Practice Activity 2

Work with a partner.

Read the situations below. Individually, decide on two or three expressions to use for each situation, then discuss your choices with your partner.

Situations:

1. a) It is past midnight. There is a noisy party going on next door at the home of neighbours who have just moved in and whom you don't know very well.  
  
b) It is now five weeks later. Your neighbours have continued to hold noisy parties late at night. You and other neighbours have complained several times about the noise.
2. a) You are in your doctor's office. It is now 3:30 p.m. Your appointment was for 2:00 p.m. You need to pick up your children at 4:15 p.m.  
  
b) You are in your doctor's office. It is now 3:30 p.m. Your appointment was for 2:00 p.m. You don't want to have to find another doctor because this doctor makes house calls.
3. a) You are phoning the Transit Company to complain about the bus service. You had to wait 25 minutes for the bus. When it arrived it was full and didn't stop.  
  
b) You are phoning the Transit Company to complain about the bus service. You had to wait 25 minutes for the bus. Then two buses arrived together. The first one was full and only picked up 2 people. The other one was empty but didn't stop. You were late for work.

### Practice Activity 3

#### PREPARATION

Divide into two teams. On separate pieces of paper, write down ten situations you feel are worthy of complaint. For example:

- Your colleague borrows your books without asking your permission, and doesn't always return them.
- Your colleague goes into your files and leaves them in a mess.
- Your supervisor doesn't always tell you where she is going and what time she will be back. You have to take her phone calls.
- Your colleagues often leave dirty dishes in the communal kitchen area.
- Your colleagues often leave rotting food in the communal refrigerator.
- The person in charge of computers in your division has made changes to your programs without telling you. You can't do your work properly.
- Several attempts have been made to fix a problem with the air conditioning in your office, but it is still too cold.
- The coffee in your cafeteria has begun to have a metallic taste.
- Your own ideas.

For each situation you describe, make sure to give sufficient details: where the situation takes place, who is involved and what has happened. You can follow this model:

Place:	Your home
Who:	You and your neighbour
What has happened:	The neighbour's car frequently blocks your driveway.

Place:	Your apartment building
Who:	You and the superintendent
What has happened:	The washers and dryers have been out of order for several days.

Place:	Your apartment
Who:	You and your roommate
What has happened:	Your roommate insists on watching late night movies and keeps you awake.



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## PROCEDURE

Exchange your team's situation papers with the other team.

Decide which team will first act as Complainers. The other team will be the Scorers.

### **Complainers**

Pick a situation from the situation papers you have been given, and read it aloud.

In turn, make complaints about the situation. Each team member must use a different, appropriate complaint expression from the list above.

### **Scorers**

Together, score each complaint according to the following system:

5 points: if the complaint is both appropriate and correct

3 points: if the complaint is appropriate but incorrect

1 point: if the complaint is correct but inappropriate

When all the Complainers have complained about the situation, tell them their total score.

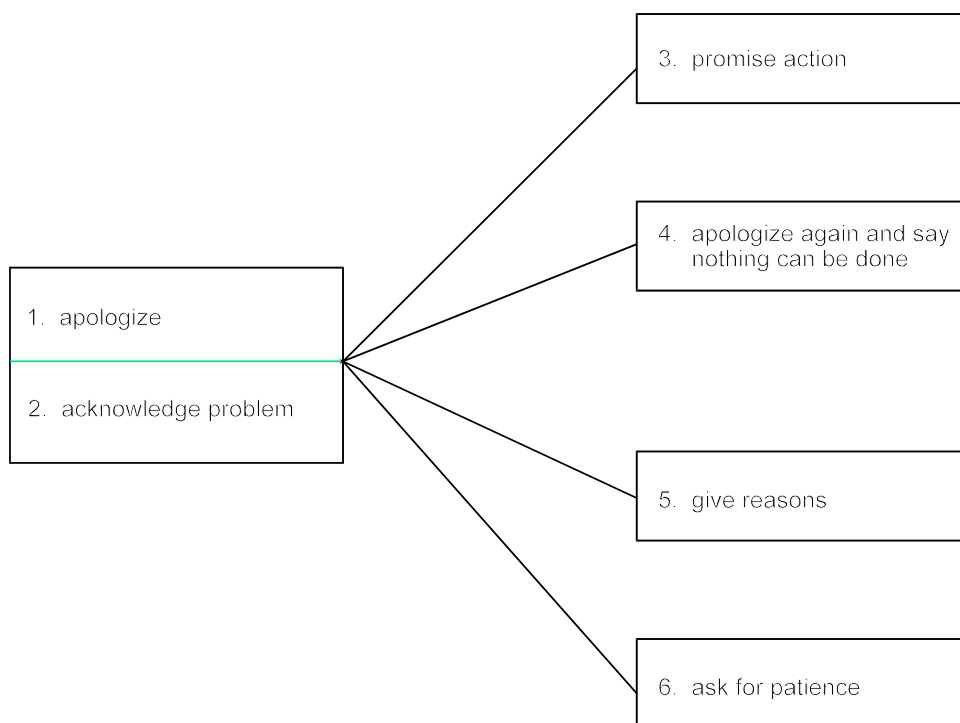
Then take your turn as Complainers. Pick a situation from the situation papers your team has been given and continue the activity following the procedure above.

## HANDLING COMPLAINTS

When someone complains to you, what do you say?



Depending on the circumstances, you can use the formula below:

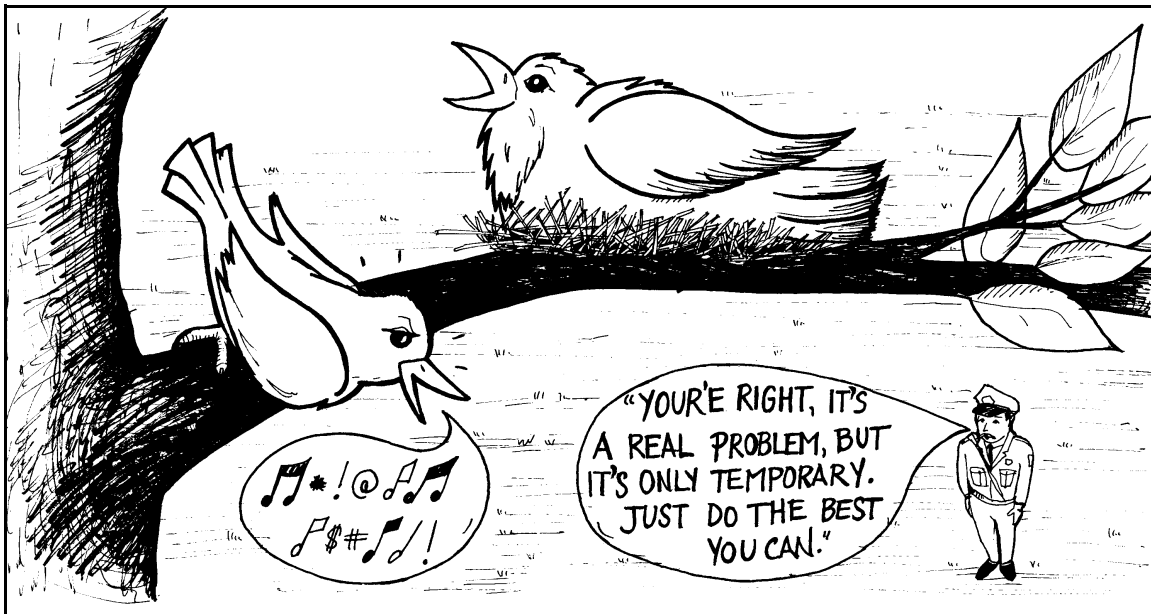
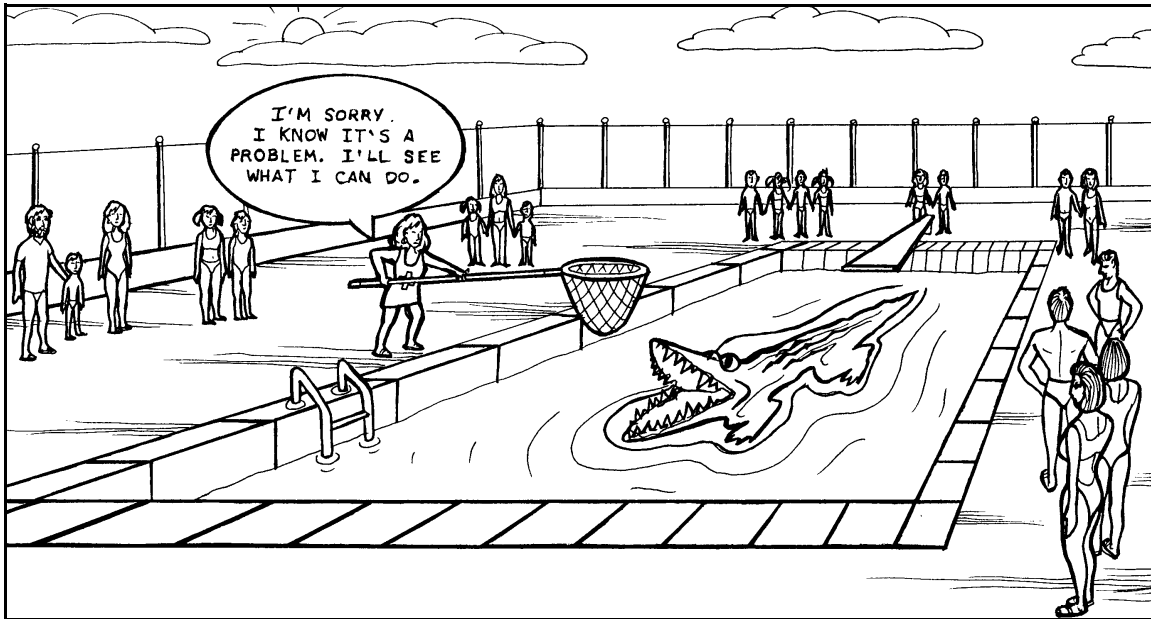


(See also *Interface Canada* Inventory of Functions and Grammar, page 151.)

See examples on the next page.



## Examples



## Practice Activity

### PREPARATION

Work with a partner. Look at the complaint scenarios below.

### SCENARIOS

- You have reported a defective light bulb three times. It still hasn't been fixed.
- You have to take too many phone messages for a colleague.
- You have worked in your section longer than anyone else. You feel that a new employee gets all the choice assignments.
- You can't meet your deadlines this month because of extra work.
- You are often asked to do tasks that aren't part of your job.
- You have to cover for colleagues who often return late from lunch.
- You have had to do another colleague's work in order to meet a deadline.
- You have been blamed for not locking important files when in reality another colleague was responsible.
- A scenario of your own.

Select at least four scenarios and decide together, for each scenario, who will make the complaint and who will handle the complaint.

### PROCEDURE

In turn, make and handle each of the complaints you have selected.

When you are handling a complaint, you are free to decide which of these three possible response strategies to use: promise action, say nothing can be done and give a reason, or say nothing can be done and ask for patience.

When you are making a complaint, you are free to express your frustration where appropriate.

After you have performed all the conversations for yourselves, perform them for another pair or for the whole class.



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## CONSOLIDATION ACTIVITY

GOAL: To be the first to get your complaints handled (i.e. to collect the Matching Cards which correspond to your Complaint Cards.)

### PREPARATION

Working alone, make up at least three pairs of cards. For each pair, write COMPLAINT CARD at the top of one card and MATCHING CARD at the top of the other.

Now think of at least three different complaints. For example:

- Lack of heat in your apartment
- A repair bill which is much higher than the estimate
- An empty supply cupboard in your office
- Overflowing garbage cans in your parking lot
- Cigarette butts all over the ground outside your office building entrance
- Neighbours' kids' tricycles left on your lawn
- Neighbours' kids tricycle all over your lawn leaving ruts
- Neighbours' cats damaging your grass and flowers

Write one of the complaints on both cards of each pair as shown here.

**COMPLAINT CARD**

*Vending machine still broken after  
three complaints*

**MATCHING CARD**

*Vending machine still broken after  
three complaints*

## PROCEDURE



Collect all the Complaint Cards in one pile and all the Matching Cards in another pile. Shuffle the Complaint Cards and distribute them equally. Shuffle the Matching Cards and distribute them equally. Now try to find the people who can handle each of your complaints. When your complaints are handled, collect the Matching Cards.

The activity proceeds as follows:

### WHEN YOU ARE MAKING A COMPLAINT:

1. Choose one of your Complaint Cards, approach another player and make the complaint on the card. (e.g. I have a complaint about the vending machine. It's not working and I've already complained three times.)
2. If the person you approached can handle your complaint, you will receive the corresponding Matching Card.
3. If the person you approach cannot handle your complaint, see if you can handle that person's complaint.
4. Now decide if you wish to ask this person about your other complaints or if you wish to approach a different person.
5. Repeat steps 1 to 4 until you have collected all the matching complaint cards for your complaints or until time has run out.

### WHEN YOU ARE APPROACHED WITH A COMPLAINT:

1. Look at your Matching Cards. If one of your Matching Cards corresponds to the complaint made, deal with the complaint. You are free to deal with the complaint in any way you choose (promise action, say nothing can be done and give reasons, say nothing can be done and ask for patience). Use any of the expressions given in the  and  sections.
2. Once you have handled a complaint, give the Matching Card to the person who made it.
3. If none of your Matching Cards corresponds to the complaint made, state that you are not the right person to handle the complaint.

