



### Dealing with complaints phrases politeness practice

*Read and/ or listen to the dialogue and say how similar to or different from conversations that you might have.*

**A:** Good morning, British Corporation English Language Teaching Department. Corporate Contracts Section. Alex speaking. Thank you for your call. How can I help you today?

**B:**

**A:** I really am most terribly sorry to hear that. What seems to be the trouble exactly?

**B:**

**A:** That sounds like it must be very inconvenient for you. How exactly can we help you with your problem?

**B:**

**A:** Would you mind terribly if I asked you for just one or two little details? Wh...?

**B:**

**A:** I'm afraid company policy doesn't allow me to offer ... in those particular circumstances. Would you possibly be willing to accept...?

**B:**

**A:** I totally understand your position Sir/ Madam, but I'm afraid... is simply not possible in situations such as this. I've had specific instructions on that from my boss. Would an additional... perhaps be acceptable?

**B:**

**A:** Thank you for your understanding, and I'd like apologise once again for any inconvenience caused to you and your company. We very much appreciate you continuing to do business with us. I'll do my very best to ensure that ... is sorted out within two working days at the very latest.

**B:**

**A:** Is there anything else I can help you with today?

**B:**

**A:** Thank you for calling. Bye.

*Many phrases above are too formal for most situations. Change any which you think are too much for you to use.*

*Roleplay a similar situation, first using your edited version to help you, then with no help.*

*Do the same with email complaints and replies.*

*Brainstorm useful phrases for starting and ending emails connected to complaints.*

*Brainstorm similar phrases for the body of communication dealing with complaints into these categories:*

- **Apologising**
- **Showing you are listening and sounding sympathetic**
- **Asking for details**
- **Giving excuses/ Giving reasons**
- **Talking about future action**

## Suggested answers

*Compare your brainstormed phrases with this list*

### Apologising

- I am/ We are (very/ so/ extremely/ truly/ terribly/ most terribly) sorry (for...)
- Please forgive me/ us (for...)
- I (do/ would like to ) apologize (wholeheartedly/ unreservedly) (for...)
- Please accept my/ our (sincere/ sincerest) apologies for...
- I cannot say how sorry I am that...
- There is (really) no excuse for...

### Showing that you are listening and sounding sympathetic

- Really?
- I see
- I'm surprised to hear that.
- That sound awful/ very inconvenient.
- I know how you feel.
- I am very sorry to hear that.
- Uh-huh
- Okay

### Asking for details

- (Before I respond) Could you give me some more details?
- So, what exactly is the problem?

### Excuses/ Reasons

- This was (a one off problem) due to/ because (of) (circumstances beyond our control)...
- This problem happened/ arose because...
- The (main) reason for the... was...
- Unfortunately, there was an unavoidable... due to...
- This was caused by...

### Talking about future action

- We would like to offer you...
- In future,...
- We will make sure that/ ensure that...
- Please rest assured that (this won't happen again/ this is an isolated incident/...)
- In the future we will...
- To make up for this...
- Due to the inconvenience we have caused you...
- We wonder if you would be willing to accept...
- Please accept...
- In order to show how sorry we are...
- To compensate you for...
- We will shortly/ soon be back to normal service
- That will (absolutely) be the last time that happens