



HOW TO WRITE CONSUMER COMPLAINTS



Most Indian buyers are not well aware of their rights. As a result, traders are tempted to indulge in diverse unfair practices. On the other hand, an Indian consumer does not consider pursuing his/her complaint because of the time, energy and the perceived high cost involved in obtaining redressal of his/her grievance and dispute through long court procedures.

With this issue, we introduce a series of articles that will help the readers understand better the procedure to file a complaint. It will be a systematic guide to solving your grievance.

Why Complain?

Indian consumers are covered by the Consumer Protection Act 1986, special consumer courts and a Directorate to implement the Act. A number of Acts have come into existence to ensure the protection of consumer rights like the standard of Weight & Measures Act 1976 Essential Commodities Act, 1955 Packaged Commodities Rules, 1977, which requires weights, price, date of manufacture and ingredients to be marked on all packages. This Act as well as “Agmark” and the “ISI” mark can be of substantial assistance in the fight for consumer’s rights.

Before You Complain

Be clear in your mind why you are dissatisfied. Were you treated in a proper manner? A wrong decision? Defective goods? What exactly went wrong? What do you expect from the person/organisation who caused the grievance?

Be clear in your own mind what you expect as a result of making a complaint. Do you want an apology? Do you want a different decision? Do you want the proper service that should have been provided in the first place?

Do you want the goods to be replaced? You should mention this to the organisation you are complaining to and ask for prompt action.

Deal with the issue as soon as possible. If a product is defective, it is important that you return it as soon as possible after you notice the fault. If you keep a faulty item for a long time, you may be considered to have accepted the item in that state. The situation is similar for services that you are unhappy with. In some cases, there are time limits for taking certain procedures (for example, if you have a complaint about a package holiday, you need to complain to the Tour Operator within 28 days of returning from the holiday). Even where there are no time limits set down, it is easier for you and the organisation to deal with recent events.

Keep all relevant documents about your complaint. You may need these records later if you take your complaint to another authority to solve it. Keep track of the steps you have taken to address this complaint. Keep receipts or cheque-stubs as proof of purchase for the products or services. If you complain by telephone, record details of the calls: whom you spoke to, what was agreed, etc. If your complaint is in writing, keep records of what you write, send photocopies of receipts and keep originals.

Proof of purchase. It is your responsibility to prove that you bought the goods or services that you are complaining about. A receipt is just one way to prove it. If you have paid for the item by credit card, you can use your credit card statement as proof of purchase and or charge slip as well. A cheque stub can also be used as proof. If you do pay for an item in cash, ask for a receipt and keep it safe. A receipt issued following a cash transaction is your only record that you have bought an item.

Tips for Writing Complaints

- * Try to make sure your letter is sent to the right person or department.
- * Keep your letter short.
- * Be polite, avoid being sarcastic or rude.
- * Say what you want for your complaint to be resolved.
- * Give a reasonable time limit for action before you consider other options.
- * Keep a copy of letters you write.
- * Acknowledgement of complaint to be taken.
- * Always send zerox copies of your bills. None original with your complaint
- * Always mention your telephone number for contact.
- * Mention the opposite party's name and number for easy contact by consumer groups.

MODEL COMPLAINT LETTER FOR GOODS PURCHASED

[Your address with postal code]
[Other contact details you may wish to give, phone, e-mail, etc.]

[Name of contact person, if available]
[Title, if available]
[Customer Services Manager, if you don't have a contact name]
[Company Name with postal code]

[Date]
Re: [Account number, goods purchased, etc.]

Dear [Contact person or Customer Service Manager],

On [date], I bought a [name of goods purchased, model number etc.] at [location and other details of the transaction].

I am disappointed because your [name of goods purchased, etc.] has not performed as it should, [was faulty, etc.] because [state the problem as you understand it giving as much detail as possible]. Therefore, this product is not [of satisfactory quality, fit for the purpose described] as laid down by the law.

Ref. To earlier telephonic talk/correspondence.

To resolve the problem, I require you to [state the action you require, e.g. refund, repair, etc.] while I reserve my right to claim against you. Enclosed is a copy/are copies of the [receipt, contract, etc].

I look forward to hearing from you and to the resolution of this problem. I will wait for [set a time limit] before seeking help from [Trading Standards, consumer group, solicitor, etc. (details of relevant authorities can be found through our complaints procedures section)]. Please contact me at the above address or by phone [give numbers].

Yours sincerely,
[Sign]

[Print your name]
Enclosures: [state documents you have enclosed, if any]
Cc: [Include name, company, if you want to send a copy of this letter to someone else.]

MODEL COMPLAINT LETTER FOR SERVICES AVOIDED

[Your address with postal code]
[Other contact details you may wish to give, phone, e-mail, etc.]

[Name of contact person, if available]
[Title, if available]
[Customer Services Manager, if you don't have a contact name]
[Company Name with postal address]

[Date]
Re: [Account number, service provided, etc.]

Dear [Contact person or Customer Service Manager],

On [date], I [bought, rented, was provided with, etc.] a [service performed, etc.] at [location and other details of the transaction].

I am disappointed because [the service you provided, your service, etc.] was [unsatisfactory, unfinished, defective, etc.] because [state the problem as you understand it giving as much detail as possible].

Ref. To earlier correspondence / telephonic talk

To resolve the problem, I require you to [state the action you require, e.g. refund, service performed again, rectified, etc.] While I reserve my right to claim against you. Enclosed is a copy/are copies of the [receipt, contract, etc].

I look forward to hearing from you and to the resolution of this problem. I will wait for [set a time limit] before arranging for the matter to be corrected by a third party at your cost or seeking help from [Trading Standards, consumer group, solicitor, etc]. Please contact me at the above address or by phone [give numbers].

Yours sincerely,
[Sign]

[Print your name]
Enclosures: [state documents you have enclosed, if any]
Cc: [Include name, company, if you want to send a copy of this letter to someone else.]

STEP 1: Start at the Least Formal Level

Begin by making your complaint informally: give the retailer or service provider the first opportunity to solve the problem. It is advisable to speak to a 'decision-maker' such as a supervisor or a manager who may have the authority to give you a refund or replacement. If informal contact with them doesn't work, put your complaint in writing. Keep a note of the conversation also and mention in the letter.

Exhausting less formal routes shows that you took all reasonable steps to redress your complaint before complaining formally and that the retailer had opportunities to set matters right.

STEP 2: Write a Complain

Check in advance if the business has a customer complaint form to fill in. When you put your complaint in writing, be clear and state all the facts of the case. Remain objective and avoid giving personal opinion or comments. (See the two sample complaint letters alongside.)

Remember

Various valuable hints which should help you to get the result you are looking for:

Stay Calm. If you have confronted someone directly, then don't let the emotion of the moment overcome you. If you are clearly not getting an adequate response, take the next step in the procedure as advised above. Don't be shy to use a bit of humour.

Be clear and concise. Don't be afraid to convey the detail of any incident and to articulate your disappointment.

Make an attempt to know your rights. Equip yourself with adequate knowledge regarding your rights. You may browse the Internet or go through books for updating your knowledge on the same subject.

Don't give up. Praise where praise is deserved. Organisations welcome complaints but most certainly praise too!

Sources: <http://www.consumercourt.netfirms.com/>,
<http://www.cgsiindia.org/forum.html>,
<http://www.howtocomplain.com/info/cl-template.shtml#tips>,
Consumerism Strategies and Tactics,
[Http://www.citizensinformation.ie.com](http://www.citizensinformation.ie.com)