



Dealing with complaints phrases Politeness

Are these phrases okay for you, or do they need to be shortened? If the latter, make them the right length and level of formality for your business life.

A: Good morning, British Council 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.

What is the situation above?

Roleplay a similar situation, using your edited versions of the phrases above to help you if you like, then do the same with emails.

What is the usual paragraph structure for an email of complaint and an email responding to complaints? What are the usual opening and closing sentences? Brainstorm phrases into these categories:

Apologising

Showing you are listening and sounding sympathetic

Asking for details

Giving excuses/ 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