

9 Rules for Effective Complaining

If your new TV is on the blink . . . your lawn mower doesn't work . . . the store or mail order company cashed your check but did not send the order . . . or your car keeps leaking oil after three trips to the garage . . . how do you call attention to the problem and get it corrected? Speaking out when problems occur and getting favorable responses are techniques worth cultivating.

Although most business transactions go smoothly, you should be prepared for the exceptions. Make a habit of:

- Keeping receipts, warranties, use and care instructions, or other documents that define rightful expectations of buyer and seller.
- Carefully reading and following all instructions.

How To Complain

An effective complaint doesn't just happen. It is carefully planned and presented. There are nine rules to observe when complaining.

1. **PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST.** Read the instructions to be sure you haven't goofed. Then if the product still is not right, check the guarantee or warranty to know what is or is not covered. Now you are ready to contact the responsible party—store, serviceman, or manufacturer. If you haven't kept your instructions, contact the seller or manufacturer to see if you can get a copy.

2. **BE FRIENDLY BUT FIRM.** Approach the other person in a non-threatening manner. For example, "I know you want to correct the problem . . ." Sarcastic or abusive letters or phone calls are easily ignored by the complaint manager.

3. **BRIEFLY STATE THE FACTS.** Tell where and when you bought the product, its model number, brand name, its price, and what's wrong with it.

4. **CLEARLY STATE WHAT YOU THINK THE OTHER PERSON SHOULD DO TO CORRECT THE PROBLEM.** Be positive and have clearly in mind an acceptable solution to the problem. Don't wait and

hope the other person will make an acceptable offer.

5. **WRITE A LETTER IN ADDITION TO ANY PHONE CALLS YOU MAKE.** A letter helps make the complaint clear and also makes it a matter of record. Keep a copy of the letter.

6. **PRESENT A FAIR, HONEST, STRAIGHTFORWARD REQUEST.** Design your request to include the interest of the other party. Don't try to get more than you are entitled to.

7. **KEEP COPIES OF ALL INFORMATION.** If you must send warranties, sales slips, etc., make and send a copy. Keep the originals of all your documents.

8. **APPROACH THE OTHER PERSON AS ONE WHO IS FAIR,** helpful, and reputable in order to elicit such behavior. For example, "I know you take pride in your product (work, store, etc.), and it bothers me that this problem exists."

9. **WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS,** call or write the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division, 560 S. McDonough St., Montgomery, AL 36104 (1-800-392-5658, toll-free number). The Better Business Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, the Retail Merchants Association, representatives of Congress, and the President's Special Assistant for Consumer Affairs are also offices to contact when you need help with a complaint. Send a copy of your complaint to the offender.

So, when things go wrong as they sometimes do—**SPEAK UP.** Ask that the situation be corrected. But, remember: The way you plan and present your complaint often determines the results. Use these basic rules to plan what you will say and how you will say it.

When making a complaint, use the form on the back as a guide to be sure you have included the necessary information.

Consumer Complaint Report

Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: Home _____ Business _____

Nature of complaint: _____

Amount involved: \$ _____

Dealer name and address: _____

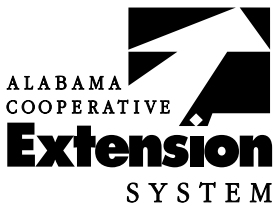
Date product was bought: _____

Product name: _____

Model number: _____ Style: _____

Manufacturer's name and address: _____

How you want the matter resolved (refund, work performed, contract fulfilled): _____



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For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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