



Ljiljana Breulj
Štimac,
Smart Business
Program Manager

TALKING ABOUT COMPLAINTS

We have all been in a situation where the service at a restaurant or a hotel was far from satisfactory, or when our suppliers were late with their delivery. Making a complaint is a way of expressing our displeasure or annoyance in response to an action we see as unfavourable. Although our first reaction can be very direct ('Where are our goods?', 'Why haven't you paid your debts yet?'), it is best to phrase our complaint more politely, especially when referring to foreign business partners and/ or clients, for example:

- I'm afraid there may be a misunderstanding.
- I understand it's not your fault ...
- I'm sorry to bother you ...
- I'm sorry to say this but...
- Maybe you forgot to...
- I think you might have forgotten to...
- Excuse me if I'm out of line, but...
- There may have been a misunderstanding about...
- Don't get me wrong, but I think we should...

Instead of: **That's ridiculous / unfair!**

It's just not fair to charge us for the starters!

We are angry and refuse to do any business with you in future!

Exactly when were you thinking to pay us?

In a conversation, you can use certain words to signal your disagreement, such as **'well'** and **'actually'**:

- Well, I have to say that the service was pretty slow, so I don't really feel like leaving a tip.
- Well, I don't think it's fair to make us pay extra for the covert.
- Actually, I don't think you should charge us for the starters.

If you are on the other side, i.e. you need to answer to a complaint, here are some examples of how to do it:

Positive response to complaints:

- I'm so sorry, but this will never occur / happen again.
- I'm sorry, we promise never to do the same mistake again.
- I'm really sorry; we'll do our utmost/best not to do the same mistake again.

Negative response to complaints:

- Sorry, there is nothing we can do about it.
- I'm afraid there isn't much we can do about it.
- We are sorry to hear this, but the food is alright.

1. Quiz: Choose the correct answer to each question. Each question has only one correct answer.

- 1) I'm sorry to have _____ but you need to send us those goods ASAP.
 - a) to say this
 - b) to tell this
 - c) say this
- 2) I'm sorry _____, but this steak is not satisfactory.
 - a) to answer you
 - b) to bother you
 - c) to distract you
- 3) _____ to phone Jill to tell her about the meeting this Friday.
 - a) Maybe forgetting
 - b) Maybe you forgot
 - c) Maybe forget
- 4) I think you _____ to bring our wine.
 - a) might forgotten
 - b) can't have forgotten
 - c) might have forgotten
- 5) Excuse me if I'm _____, but you haven't fulfilled your obligations from the contract.
 - a) out of touch
 - b) out of stand
 - c) out of line
- 6) There may have been _____ about what I wanted.
 - a) a misunderstanding
 - b) an understanding
 - c) a bad understanding
- 7) Don't _____, but I think we should take a different course of action.
 - a) have me wrong
 - b) get me right
 - c) get me wrong

Key: 1a, 2b, 3b, 4c, 5c, 6a, 7c

2. Match the expressions on the left with their synonyms or explanations on the right.

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| a) compensation | 1 damaged |
| b) assertive | 2 furious |
| c) faulty | 3 confident |
| d) receipt | 4 a written statement saying that money has been received |
| e) refund | 5 reward |
| f) fuming | 6 to have your money returned |
| g) assure | 7 guarantee |
| h) complain | 8 say you are unhappy about something |

Key: a5, b3, c1, d4, e6, f2, g7, h8

Lekcija 16. ŽALBE I REKLAMACIJE

SMART Business

Palinovečka 19 (Vrbani III), Zagreb

Mob: +385 91 3874 357

Tel: +385 1 3874 355

E-mail: business@smart-jezici.hr

Web: <http://business.smart-jezici.hr/>

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