

Complaints and apologies

Lesson description

In this lesson you will role-play situations in which you need to complain and apologise. You will also look at expressions for complaining and apologising and work on vocabulary to describe unsatisfactory products and services.

Aim

Making a complaint and giving an apology.

Language

Expressions for complaining and apologising.

Vocabulary for describing unsatisfactory products and services.

Task

Role-play a conversation to complain and apologise.

Materials

Handout

Audio 9.1 and 9.2

Photocopiable resources (role-play cards)

Suggested running order



Lead-in situations.	Discuss personal opinions and experience of customer service and complaint situations.
Input	Listen to two complaining situations, one unsuccessful and one successful. Answer questions and complete gapped audio script.
Language focus	Sort expressions for complaining and apologising. Practise through recreating the first dialogue. Match adjectives to products and services.
Task	Role-play complaining and apologising situations.

Lead-in

- 1 Ask students to discuss the questions in small groups and then get feedback with the whole class.

(The saying 'The customer is always right.' was coined in the very early 1900s either by Harry Gordon Selfridge, the founder of Selfridge's department store in London, or Marshall Field who had a department store in Chicago and who Selfridge had worked for earlier. It was used to convince customers that they would get good service at the company **and** to remind employees to give customers good service.)

Input

- 1   Tell the students they are going to listen to two conversations in which someone is complaining in different situations. Tell them to answer the questions as they listen. Play the two audios.

Let the students discuss their answers in pairs then get feedback. Ask them to explain why the second conversation was more effective.

Answers

9.1

- 1 *It takes place at the hotel reception desk.*
- 2 *The staff didn't remember to give the guest a wake-up call and she has missed her flight. Because of the offhand attitude of the receptionist the guest starts to complain about other things – the room, the staff, the food.*
- 3 *It isn't sorted out.*

9.2

- 1 *It takes place in a shop selling mobile phones.*
- 2 *The customer's new phone stopped working after a couple of days.*
- 3 *The shop assistant realises the phone wasn't charged. The charger was missing from the box so he offers her a replacement phone.*

The second complaint is dealt with well. The assistant is polite and helpful, very apologetic and the problem is easy to solve. There is no resolution to the first complaint because the receptionist is not polite or helpful and this makes the guest even angrier.

- 2  Play 9.2 again and have students complete the gaps.

Answers

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 <i>actually, I'd like to make</i> | 9 <i>work out what the problem is</i> |
| 2 <i>What seems to be</i> | 10 <i>just assumed</i> |
| 3 <i>It's about</i> | 11 <i>that'll be</i> |
| 4 <i>it's stopped working</i> | 12 <i>offer you a refund</i> |
| 5 <i>I'm sorry to hear that</i> | 13 <i>'ll go for</i> |
| 6 <i>it was working fine</i> | 14 <i>would you like to keep</i> |
| 7 <i>went blank</i> | 15 <i>there you go</i> |
| 8 <i>it won't turn on again</i> | 16 <i>you've been really</i> |

Language focus

1/2 Ask students to look at the script to find expressions to write under the headings in the table. Elicit one or two examples and then have them work in pairs. They should then add the expressions from the wordpool. Monitor. Model and drill as appropriate.

Answers

A The customer

Introducing a complaint	Explaining the problem	Thanking
<i>Well, actually I'd like to make a complaint.</i>	<i>It's about the ...</i>	<i>Thank you, you've been really helpful.</i>
<i>I'm afraid I have a problem.</i>	<i>It's stopped working</i>	<i>Thank you so much for your help.</i>
<i>I'm afraid I want to complain about ...</i>	<i>It was working fine ... but ...</i>	
	<i>... the screen went blank ...</i>	
	<i>... it won't turn on again.</i>	

B The assistant

Apologising	Asking for details	Explaining what you can do	Closing the conversation
<i>I'm sorry to hear that sorry about that</i>	<i>What seems to be the problem?</i>	<i>Let's see if we can work out what the problem is.</i>	<i>Any problems, then give us a call or come by the shop again.</i>
<i>I'm very sorry about that.</i>	<i>Could you tell me exactly what happened?</i>	<i>I'll need to return it to the manufacturers.</i>	<i>Pleasure, madam. Is there anything else I can help you with?</i>
		<i>I can either offer you a refund or, if you prefer, a replacement ...</i>	<i>Bye, now. Have a good day.</i>
		<i>I'll speak to the manager and get back to you by the end of the day.</i>	<i>Will there be anything else?</i>
		<i>I'm afraid it's not our responsibility. You need to contact ...</i>	
		<i>I'll see what I can do.</i>	

3 Remind students of the first conversation they listened to. Ask them to work in pairs to recreate the situation but make it have a positive outcome. They should use some of the phrases they have been looking at.

Have some of the pairs say their dialogues to the class. Feed back on language.

- 4 Ask students to look at the words in the wordpool and pick out any they don't understand. Encourage students to explain the vocabulary to each other. Alternatively, you could do this as a dictionary exercise. Then get the students to put the words into the table. Remember to point out that some words can be used more than once.

Suggested answers

hotel room	member of staff	car repairs	mobile phone
<i>shabby</i>	<i>unhelpful</i>	<i>badly done</i>	<i>dirty</i>
<i>sub-standard</i>	<i>inefficient</i>	<i>unsatisfactory</i>	<i>scratched</i>
<i>dirty</i>	<i>incompetent</i>	<i>sub-standard</i>	<i>broken</i>
<i>run-down</i>	<i>bad-mannered</i>	<i>shoddy</i>	<i>cracked</i>
<i>pokey</i>	<i>offhand</i>	<i>slapdash</i>	
	<i>rude</i>		

Task

- 1 Tell the students they are going to take part in some complaint situations. Tell them the aim is to resolve the situations in as polite a way as possible. Distribute the role cards to each pair and give students time to prepare what to say. Have them act out their role-plays.
- 2 Swap role cards and repeat. You could ask some of them to act out their conversations in front of the class.
- 3 Feed back on content – were all the complaints resolved satisfactorily?
Feed back on language and review learning objectives.

Extra activities

- 1 Can you think of situations when it is better not to complain about something.
Example: You were overcharged by 10 cents – it's not worth complaining.
- 2 Read an article about why the customer is not always right.
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alexander-kjerulf/top-5-reasons-customer-service_b_5145636.html

Audio script
9.1

A = Anne, hotel receptionist; B = Barbara, customer

A Erm, excuse me, do you work here?

B Yes. [*unnaturally long pause*]

A Right, well the thing is I'm really not very happy ...

B Oh. What's the problem?

A Well, last night before I went to bed I asked for a wake-up call for 6.30 this morning and never got one, so now I've missed my flight home.

B Oh dear. [*unnaturally long pause*]

A Er, is that all you're going to say? You're going to have to do better than that, I'm afraid.

B Well, there's not much I can do about it now, is there? And I wasn't here this morning.

A Well an apology would've been something ...

B Sorry ... *[insincere tone]*

A Listen, I've got to say I've been really disappointed with my stay here. Actually, it's been pretty poor all round if I'm honest. Not at all what I was expecting.

B Oh.

A Really, the bedroom was pokey and pretty shabby and the bathroom didn't look as if it had been cleaned properly.

B But we always clean the bathrooms. *[defensive tone]*

A And the staff, including you, have been rude and the food in the restaurant was really not up to standard ... *[fade]*

9.2

A = Andy, a shop assistant in a mobile phone shop; B = Beth, customer

A Good morning. How can I help you, madam?

B Well, actually, I'd like to make a complaint.

A Right, OK. What seems to be the problem?

B It's about the mobile phone I bought here last week. I only got it on Monday and now it's stopped working.

A Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Could you tell me exactly what happened?

B Well, it was working fine in the shop and when I got home, but a couple of days later the screen went blank and now it won't turn on again.

A OK. Let's see if we can work out what the problem is. Do you have the phone with you now?

B Yes, here you are.

A Hmm, OK, when did you last charge it up?

B Charge what? The battery? It didn't come with a charger, so I just assumed that these new smartphones don't need to be charged.

A Ah, I see, that'll be the problem then. I'm afraid you still need to charge it every few days. They must have forgotten to include the charger – so sorry about that. That's very unusual. Have you got the box there? I'll need to return it to the manufacturers.

B Yes, here you are.

A Thanks. I'm very sorry about that. OK, then, I can either offer you a refund or, if you prefer, a replacement phone.

B OK, that's great. I'll go for the replacement phone if that's all right.

A That's fine. Right, ... here's your new phone then. Let me just check ... yes, the charger's inside. Now would you like to keep the same number?

B Oh, yes.

A So just let me change over the SIM card ... there you go. And you've still got all your contacts there.

B Great, thank you.

A Any problems, then give us a call or come by the shop again.

B Thank you, you've been really helpful.

A Pleasure, madam. Is there anything else I can help you with?

B No, that's fine, thank you.

A Bye, now. Have a good day.