

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY VOICE YOUR CONCERNS

BY TANEKA SHEHEE - OMBUDSPERSON



A **complaint** is when you want to express your dissatisfaction with something that you believe is unacceptable. The Office of the Ombudsman provides assistance to Juvenile and Adult Probation clients, their families, and the community at large with their concerns related to service delivery, policies, and procedures. In other words, we receive complaints from everyone regarding everything Probation-related.

One of the things we ask is what is the goal of the complaint. Do you just want to get something off your chest? Do you want someone to just listen to your concern because you know it cannot be changed? Or do you want positive change or resolve?

When you are trying to obtain resolve, there are steps which should be taken. Verbal expression is used often, however, written expression is most useful. The purpose of the written complaint advises the reader of an issue with the service provided or lack of service expected to be provided. The objective is to provide detailed information regarding this interaction to serve as a document to recording the writer's claim and request for resolve. To effectively voice your concern, include the following in your complaint letter.



What is the goal of the complaint?

Do you just want to get something off your chest?

Do you want someone to just listen to your concern because you know it cannot be changed?

Do you want positive change or resolve?

Identify Your Reader

A complaint letter should be addressed to the person who is most likely and able to resolve an unsatisfactory situation. Keep in mind that your reader may not be the person responsible for the issue. Rather than being angry, use a firm but courteous tone when stating a complaint. Remember, this is not just a gripe, you want resolve.

Establish Your Objective

The objective of a complaint letter is to prompt an action that resolves a conflict. You should avoid threats and accusations when providing the details of your complaint. Stick to the facts and your reader will comprehend what went wrong and what action you expect them to take.

Determine Your Scope

The scope of a complaint letter should include only those facts and relevant information that validate your claim and is necessary to resolve or correct the perceived error. It should provide the reader with exact descriptions, including dates, times and places. It should also include corrective action steps.

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Write in as natural a sounding voice as possible this may ensure that your thoughts and ideas are conveyed in a cohesive manner. Read your draft out loud and concentrate on communicating your objective to your reader.

Organize Your Letter

Organizing your complaint will establish a logical order in which to present your information. A simple outline is useful. Begin by creating a list of points that your letter will address then put them in the sequential order that best helps your reader comprehend the issue. Your outline will become a checklist.

Be clear and concise. Describe the item or service you expected and the problem. And never assume the reader knows what you are talking about - break it down.

Draft Your Letter

Working from an outline is the simplest way to draft a complaint letter - turn each fragment into a full and complete sentence expressing a single thought or idea. Try not to digress.

Write in as natural a sounding voice as possible this may ensure that your thoughts and ideas are conveyed in a cohesive manner. Read your draft out loud and concentrate on communicating your objective to your reader. Make sure that the scope of your letter contains all the relevant information included in your organizational list.

Keep in mind this is a rough draft - ignore spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence and paragraph structure.

Review and Revise Your Complaint Letter

Reviewing and revising your complaint letter is the final step in the writing process. You will check your draft in this step, making sure that your objective is clear and your scope is concise. Put yourself in the reader's shoes as you examine the rough draft. Ask yourself, as the recipient, whether you are able to comprehend the request.

Look for the obvious errors first. Check for spelling, sentence structure and grammar mistakes. Remember that a passive voice is not as commanding as an active one.

Examine your word choices carefully. Ambiguous words lead to confusion. Be careful of jargon, slang, affections, cliches and trite language as they may obscure your objective. You want to help your reader understand exactly what it is that you want, so remove all language that is not helpful.

Voice your concern. Advocate for yourself. Correct the perceived wrong.

Remember, learning to value the complaint you may receive is an important step in providing outstanding customer service. When you understand how to handle them, complaints can be turned into constructive opportunities for us and the Department to grow.

The Office of the Ombudsman can be contacted at 877-822-3222 or by email at Ombudsman@probation.lacounty.gov

Tips adapted from Colorado State University article on ["Writing Business Complaint Letters"](#) and the Federal Trade Commission, ["How to write an effective complaint letter"](#), September 4, 2015 by Colleen Tressler.

Probation News

