

A letter of complaint

Learn how to write a letter of complaint.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and tips and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. a prescription
2. dismay
3. a pharmacy
4. to call for something
5. to take steps to do something
6. to bring something to someone's attention
7. an overdose
8. on duty

Definition

- a. a strong feeling of disappointment or worry
- b. a shop that sells medicine
- c. a piece of paper from a doctor that says what medicine you need
- d. to demand or ask for something
- e. an amount of a medicine or drug that is dangerous for a person
- f. at work; doing work
- g. to inform someone of something
- h. to take action to achieve a particular result

Reading text: A letter of complaint

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my dismay at the service at your Eden Hill branch on Saturday 14 January.

I often collect prescriptions from the pharmacy on behalf of my grandmother, Mrs Elaine Bingham. On this occasion there were two prescriptions: one for 10 x 50 mg Kendomol and one for 50 x 100 mg Leoprone. I was served quickly even though there appeared to be only one pharmacist on duty. However, as I was leaving I saw that I had been given 500 mg tablets of Kendomol. This is ten times stronger than the prescription called for.

If I hadn't noticed the difference between the prescription and the actual tablets, my grandmother could have taken a dangerous overdose of Kendomol. I would be worried about getting any future prescriptions at Eden Hill.

The pharmacist apologised and corrected the mistake but I wanted to bring it to your attention. I think it happened because there were not enough staff on duty. I understand that

mistakes happen but there needs to be a minimum of two pharmacists at all times so all prescriptions can be checked.

I hope you can take steps to make sure this mistake does not happen again.

Yours faithfully,

Roger Bingham

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Tips

1. Focus on the most important facts. Don't give unnecessary background information.
2. Make sure you include:
 - the reason for writing (e.g. *I am writing to ...*)
 - what went wrong
 - what you would like to happen now.
3. Complaint letters are usually written in a formal style.
4. Use passives to be less direct and more formal, e.g. *I was served quickly*.
5. Use *Yours faithfully* to sign off if you don't know the name of the person you're writing to.

Tasks

Task 1

Match the sentences (1–6) with the parts of the email (a–f).

Sentences

1. Yours faithfully,
2. I have been a regular customer of your shop for many years.
3. I would like a refund of the difference as soon as possible.
4. Dear Sir/Madam,
5. I am writing to express my dissatisfaction at the service I received.
6. After leaving your shop today, I realised I had been charged £100 instead of £10.

Parts of the email

- a. greeting
- b. introducing your reason for writing
- c. background information
- d. what went wrong
- e. what you'd like to happen
- f. closing

Task 2

Write the sentences in the correct group.

I trust that you will replace the item.	There is an error in the bill.	I would be grateful if you could look into the matter.
There seems to be a problem with the battery.		The delay was unacceptable.
When I checked the item, I found that it had been damaged.	I must insist on a full refund.	I hope you can take steps to make sure this does not happen again.

What went wrong	What you'd like to happen

Task 3

Rewrite these sentences using the passive to avoid saying *the pharmacist*.

- The pharmacist served me within ten minutes.
I within ten minutes.
- I realised the pharmacist had given me the wrong medicine.
I realised I the wrong medicine.
- The pharmacist should have checked the prescription more carefully.
The prescription should more carefully.
- The pharmacist corrected the mistake.
The mistake
- The pharmacist must not make this mistake again.
This mistake must again.

Discussion

Have you ever made a complaint? What happened?

Answers

Preparation task

1. c
2. a
3. b
4. d
5. h
6. g
7. e
8. f

Task 1

1. f
2. c
3. e
4. a
5. b
6. d

Task 2

What went wrong	What you'd like to happen
<p>There is an error in the bill.</p> <p>There seems to be a problem with the battery.</p> <p>The delay was unacceptable.</p> <p>When I checked the item, I found that it had been damaged.</p>	<p>I trust that you will replace the item.</p> <p>I would be grateful if you could look into the matter.</p> <p>I must insist on a full refund.</p> <p>I hope you can take steps to make sure this does not happen again.</p>

Task 3

1. was served
2. had been given | 'd been given
3. have been checked | 've been checked
4. was corrected
5. not be made | n't be made