

## An email explaining an incident

Learn how to write an email to explain an incident to your manager to practise and improve your writing skills.

### Before reading

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

### Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–f) with the vocabulary (1–6).

#### Vocabulary

1. .... disciplinary proceedings
2. .... to alleviate
3. .... to outline
4. .... in light of
5. .... an incident
6. .... to keep you in the loop

#### Definition

- a. an unpleasant or unusual event
- b. to give the main facts about something
- c. to make something bad less severe
- d. a series of steps taken after an individual has broken a professional code of practice
- e. bearing in mind
- f. to keep you informed

### Reading text: An email explaining an incident

**To:** steve@red-ribbon.com

**From:** sanjit@red-ribbon.com

**Subject:** Process issues in the team

Dear Steve,

Since you requested in our recent line management meeting for me to inform you of any issues, I'm writing to tell you about a recent incident. Last week, after experiencing some difficulties with the order processing system, tensions arose in the team and a confrontation occurred between two team members.

I've outlined what led to this incident below:

1. There was a system update that we weren't expecting last week. The update slightly changed the interface menu. Everything is still there but people have said it's not easy to find some of the menu items they're looking for.
2. There seems to have been a period of time after the update that new entries weren't being saved. This led to some work being lost. We worked overtime to catch up on everything and all orders have been processed. But as a consequence there was a general feeling of pressure and tiredness in the team.

As a result of these challenging circumstances there was some tension, leading to a disagreement between Johann and Maria. Johann lost his temper and made some inappropriate remarks to Maria.

I met with them both in order to reflect on and resolve the conflict. Johann has apologised for his behaviour and he realises that Maria could have chosen to start disciplinary proceedings. They have worked together on a plan to improve communication and therefore alleviate tensions within the team.

I've also asked our colleagues in the IT department to run a training session for us all on how to best use the system in light of the recent software upgrades.

There's no specific action for you to take, but I felt it important that you're kept in the loop.

I'll keep you posted.

Regards,

Sanjit

.....

## Tips

1. Write clearly and get straight to the issue.
2. Soften the impact of bad news by using words like *issue*, *challenge* and *difficulty* rather than *problem*. Using *seems to be* rather than *is* also has the same effect.
3. Use positive words with a negation, e.g. *not easy*, rather than negative-sounding words, e.g. *difficult*.
4. Focus on the issue rather than people involved by using passive forms, e.g. ... *new entries weren't being saved*.
5. Focus on solutions rather than problems.
6. State clearly what action, if any, is necessary.

## Tasks

### Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	<b>Answer</b>	
1. There were both problems with the ordering system and between people in the team.	True	False
2. A lot has changed in the system and some menu items are missing.	True	False
3. People worked overtime and now they're tired.	True	False
4. Johann felt very annoyed.	True	False
5. Sanjit needed help to repair the relationship between Johann and Maria.	True	False
6. Someone from the IT team is going to train them in how to use lights in the system.	True	False

### Task 2

Match the endings (a–f) with the beginnings (1–6) of the sentences.

#### Beginning

1. ..... The issues with the team have
2. ..... There are three main areas
3. ..... There seems to
4. ..... There is a general
5. ..... The customer was somewhat
6. ..... We've put a plan

#### Ending

- a. feeling of frustration in the team.
- b. have been an issue with the ...
- c. disappointed with our response.
- d. led to further challenges.
- e. in place to improve communication.
- f. of concern.

**Task 3**

Choose the best option for softening the impact of the message.

1. I'm writing to tell you about a recent .....
  - a. incident
  - b. disaster
  - c. accident
2. After the software update we ..... the order process.
  - a. had a problem with
  - b. got in a mess with
  - c. experienced some difficulties with
3. As a result of ....., there was some tension in the team.
  - a. this predicament
  - b. these challenging circumstances
  - c. these worries
4. There was ..... between Johann and Maria.
  - a. a fight
  - b. a disagreement
  - c. a quarrel
5. Johann .....
  - a. made some inappropriate remarks to Maria
  - b. insulted Maria
  - c. picked on Maria
6. The ..... now seems to be resolved.
  - a. issue
  - b. headache
  - c. chaos

**Discussion**

Do you ever have to write emails like this at work? Do you find it difficult to give bad news?

## Answers

### Preparation task

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

### Task 1

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. False
6. False

### Task 2

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

### Task 3

1. a
2. c
3. b
4. b
5. a
6. a