

How to Complain Politely in English

No matter how unfair the situation, it's best to phrase your complaint politely. In English, you'll sound more polite if you use indirect language. Here are some examples:

I'm sorry to bother you ...

Starting a complaint with "I'm sorry to bother you" puts the listener at ease. Use this phrase if the situation isn't that serious. For example, "I'm sorry to bother you, but I wanted a baked potato, not fries."

Can you help me with this?

Everyone would much rather be asked to do something than told! So try phrasing your complaint as a request for help: "Can you help me with this? My shirt came back from the laundry missing buttons."

I'm afraid there may be a misunderstanding.

This is a polite way of saying, "Your information is wrong. Please fix it now." You'll most likely use this phrase if you made reservations for a flight, hotel or restaurant, and when you arrive, it's not what you expected. For instance, "I'm afraid there may be a misunderstanding. I requested a non-smoking room."

I understand it's not your fault ...

Often when you make a complaint, you deal with a person who was not directly responsible for the problem. But the problem isn't your fault, either! This phrase is helpful when you need swift action. Tell the person you're dealing with you understand they're not at fault and then directly state the problem: "I understand it's not your fault, but the airline promised they would deliver my baggage yesterday."

Excuse me, but I understood that ...

Using this phrase lets the person know you're well-informed and are suspicious they might be trying to take advantage of you. Don't say, "Hey! You're trying to cheat me!" Instead, start indirectly by stating what you know to be true: "I understood that the taxi ride to the airport was only 25 dollars." Then give them an opportunity to respond.