

How to make an effective complaint

This factsheet can help you make an effective complaint about organisations including government agencies, education providers, health insurers and postal operators.

Our Office often asks complainants to complete an organisation's internal complaints process before we can consider the complaint. This is because the organisation can solve your problem. Having us investigate can add time to the process, so it can take longer for you to get an outcome. Complaining directly also means the organisation hears your concerns and can use your feedback to improve its service.

By using the principles outlined in this factsheet, you may be able to get your complaint resolved sooner, without needing to complain to us.

Making an effective complaint

An effective complaint clearly explains the problem, provides relevant information and evidence, and identifies what you would like to happen. By taking care with the information you provide, you can make your point of view and request for action easy to understand.

Contact the organisation you are unhappy with

The Commonwealth Ombudsman expects that all government agencies, education providers, health insurers and postal operators in our jurisdiction have a free and accessible complaint handling process.

Tips for lodging a complaint with the organisation you are unhappy with

- Check the organisation's website for its complaints policy.
 - This could have a different name like a grievance, appeal or feedback policy. The policy explains the best way to raise your concerns. Some organisations prefer that you raise your complaint informally first, and some have online web forms for lodging complaints.
 - Usually, the complaints policy also says roughly how long it will take the organisation to respond to you.
- Think about the main issue(s) that you want to complain about. If it is hard to be clear about your complaint, ask a friend or support person to help you with this process. Explaining the problem to someone else can help to clarify the issues in your own mind.

Contact us
1300 362 072

GPO Box 442
Canberra ACT 2601

1

Lodge a complaint through the organisation's complaints process.

2

If you are not satisfied with their response, you can ask for an appeal or review.

3

If you are still dissatisfied, you can contact the Ombudsman.

- Write out the main issues:
 - Be clear and brief – try not to repeat information.
 - Structure your complaint by explaining events in the order they happened.
 - Be specific about the problem. For example, write ‘Your exam policy does not make fair allowances for reading disability’, rather than ‘Your exam policy is unfair’.
 - Focus on the individual facts that are relevant to your complaint.
 - Explain when you first became aware of the issue and how you tried to resolve it. Include details of who you spoke with and what happened.
 - You can write about the impact that the issue has had on you but try to avoid using emotional or blaming language. Mistakes happen and do not always reflect bad intentions.
- Explain what you would like to happen to fix your complaint. Be realistic and practical about the outcome. For example, if a decision has been delayed, we suggest asking that the organisation decides the matter as soon as possible, rather than immediately.
- Find and attach the evidence that supports your complaint.
 - Give the attached files meaningful names to ensure the receiver understands what they are. For example, you could name a document ‘Email from organisation granting permission to defer’.
 - To avoid confusion, attach only one copy of each file.

You can use the complaint letter template at the end of this factsheet to help structure your complaint.

After you have lodged your complaint

- Allow reasonable time for the organisation to consider your complaint. If your complaint is complex, it might take a complaints officer 10 to 15 business days to gather information and respond to you. However, an organisation should acknowledge receiving your complaint sooner than this.
- Ask for a complaint reference number and keep copies of any written complaint you make and responses you receive.
- Make notes of any phone conversations you have with the organisation about the complaint including the time and date, details of what you discussed and the name of the person you spoke with.
- Remain calm and cooperate with the person helping you with your complaint and treat them respectfully.
- Contact the organisation again if it does not respond within the expected timeframe.

When to contact the Ombudsman’s Office

If you have been through the organisation’s complaints process (including the organisation’s internal appeal or review process) but it did not resolve your complaint, you may be able to complain to the Commonwealth Ombudsman. You can also contact us if you have genuinely tried to raise your complaint with the organisation, but it is not available or not responding.

You can contact us by lodging a complaint online at ombudsman.gov.au or calling us on **1300 362 072**. Our service is free.

You can find more information on making a complaint to the Commonwealth Ombudsman in this [brochure](#).

Complaint letter template

Your name
Your address
Your suburb and post code
Your email address
Contact phone number

Date

Insert name of person receiving complaint (if known)

Re: Complaint about [issue] to (name of business or organisation)

Part 1: Complainant details/Reference Number.

Part 2: Summarise the complaint issue.

'I am complaining about [add details]. I am unhappy with this because...'

Part 3: Summarise what happened, including dates. Refer to your evidence (attachments) to support your story.

Part 4: Explain what outcome you are looking for.

Part 5: Explain how you would like to be contacted (for example, by email, by post or by phone) and the best time to contact you.

Your signature

Attachments:

Attach evidence to support your claims. Give the attachments a logical name, for example:

- [YYYYMMDD] - Receipt for fees paid on ...
- [YYYYMMDD] - Email from ... about ...
- [YYYYMMDD] - Screenshot¹... form submission evidence ...
- [YYYYMMDD] - Letter of offer...

More information is available at www.ombudsman.gov.au.

Please note: This document is intended as a guide only. For this reason, the information should not be relied on as legal advice or regarded as a substitute for legal advice in individual cases. To the extent permitted by the law, the Commonwealth Ombudsman is not liable to you for any loss or damage suffered as a result of reliance on this document. For the most up-to-date versions of cited Acts, please refer to www.legislation.gov.au.

¹ Avoid sending screenshots if possible. It is better to attach complete messages and documents because these may have important information not visible on a screenshot.