

The Legal Ombudsman's top tips for responding to complaints

1. **Keep it simple** - Avoid jargon, pretentious language and using legal / technical terms. They may seem common place to you but they can be confusing and intimidating to customers. If you need to use legal / technical terms, you need to explain what they are.

"It was just really longwinded, high-fallutin, legal jargon, the way that solicitors write letters, they make it so that you have to use a solicitor just to understand the language."

...In the circumstances, our client is considered that [name] was accordingly negligent, failing to advise the impact of utilisation of the CMS. Namely once the detriment was made there was no enforcement of the maintenance, against the maintenance continued to do so in the event....

2. **Be timely** - Give a timeframe for how long you will take to investigate and respond. This will reassure the customer that the complaints process will not go on indefinitely. It would also be useful to note how you will respond so that the customer doesn't have to check for letters / emails.

"It's nice to know that you've got that timeframe because you want to, kind of, know that in eight weeks' time you're going to get a resolution from it, whether it be good or bad."

3. **Take it seriously** - Ensure that it is clear that you are taking the complaint seriously. Overly informal language or poor grammar / processes can suggest that no formal investigation is underway.

"Overly informal response. Feel unclear if being dealt with through proper process."

We've had a word...

4. **Acknowledge stress or inconvenience caused** - For many, the decision to make a complaint is not taken lightly. Complaining is seen as negative activity and people lack confidence in the process and fear jeopardising their relationship with the service provider. It is therefore important to empathise with the situation they are in and reassure them that you understand their position.

I apologise for the inconvenience this may have caused you.

5. **Don't be afraid to apologise** - Start with a proper apology and avoid burying it at the end of lengthy letters. If you've made a mistake say 'sorry' without caveats and conditions. Justifying what has happened can play to customers' fears that the complaint handling stage will be subject to the same negativity as the original transaction.

Instead of this:

I'm sorry you feel this way
I'm sorry you have felt the need to complain....

Use this:

I apologise for not providing the quality of update that our processes intend to cater for...

I am sorry you had cause to complain but I would like to thank you for bringing these matters to our attention.

6. **Appreciate feedback** - Demonstrate to the customer that you appreciate their feedback and the opportunity to improve your service. There can be positive aspects of complaining, this can also reassure the customer that their complaint is being taken seriously.

Good examples:

We assure you that customer satisfaction is a key priority for us and we want the service you receive to reflect that principle.

We welcome comments from people who use our services and aim to improve our services. I hope that we have been able to fully address all our concerns.

7. **Be clear** - When responding, detail the customer's concerns one by one. Use bold headings to structure the response around the details of the complaint. It is also important to give an explanation of what evidence you have looked at and what your conclusions are. Ensure that, when you signpost a customer to the Legal Ombudsman, the information is clear and easy to find. This will reassure complainants and give them a sense of security that there are other avenues.

Remember to:

- Detail the customer's concerns, one-by-one
- Use headings to aid recognition of each element
- Keep it concise