

Complaining with confidence by Genevieve White

Age:	Teenagers, adults
Level:	Intermediate / Upper Intermediate
Time:	60 mins
Aim:	To help students acquire the linguistic confidence to make a complaint; to enable them to use the fixed phrases necessary when complaining about something; to review lexis associated with eating out and driving
Key skills:	Reading and speaking
Materials:	One copy of the <i>disgruntled diner</i> and <i>weary waiter / waitress</i> role cards per pair of students, one copy of the <i>miserable motorist</i> and <i>dodgy car dealer</i> role cards per pair of students

Warmer

Begin by telling the class about a recent occasion when you have had to complain: a lousy meal or a disappointing holiday, for example. Remember to tell your students what the outcome was!

Ask students to tell you about a situation from their own lives in which they either complained or wanted to complain about something. If they did complain, what was the outcome? If not, then why didn't they?

Procedure

1. The students are going to perform a role-play. Set the scene by reading out the following scenario:

You've been saving for months in order to take your loved one to the smart new restaurant that has opened in town. You're planning a glorious evening of fine food and romance. Unfortunately, the food is appalling, the service is terrible and, to make matters worse, your date starts to feel ill halfway through the meal and wants to go home before dessert. What do you say to your waiter or waitress?

Students work in pairs for a few minutes to brainstorm things they would say.

2. Write the students' ideas on the board. You may wish to include some of the following suggestions:
 - It was absolutely appalling!
 - I'm very disappointed.
 - It's just not up to scratch.
 - I would like a refund.

- I'd like to know what you are going to do about this.
 - Could I speak to the manager, please?
 - I wanted ..., but I got ...
3. Divide the class into two groups: disgruntled diners and weary waiters. Give each member of each group the appropriate role card. Tell the disgruntled diners that they have ten minutes to formulate a complaint using the information on the worksheet – their aim is to get their money back for the terrible meal. Tell the weary waiters that they do not like criticism (or giving refunds) and are to think of an excuse for every criticism!
 4. Using all available space, position the disgruntled diners around the room. Then assign each diner a waiter. Students begin their role-play.
 5. Circulate, noting down good (and not so good) examples of complaint language. After a few minutes ask students to stop. See if anyone has got their money back yet! Highlight examples of good language use. If time allows, get the students to swap partners and practise again.
 6. Get the class back together again. Give the group who were waiters in the first role-play the miserable motorist role cards. The other group should get the dodgy car dealer role cards. This will ensure that every student has the opportunity to use the complaint language.
 7. Repeat stages 3, 4 and 5 with the new scenario. Make sure you circulate, noting how well the new language is being used.
 8. Ask the students how they felt about the activity and invite whole-class feedback. Discuss examples of good, effective complaint language you have heard and draw attention to any significant errors.

Note: Clearly, cultural differences exist in this communicative area. It is important to bear this in mind. You may find you need to focus on intonation and word stress during the feedback session.

Possible extension tasks

- In the next lesson, students can work in pairs to role-play a real-life situation in which they have had to make a complaint or have wanted to, using the language learnt here.
- The students can write a letter of complaint, looking at how the language used in written complaining is more formal.



DISGRUNTLED DINER

You are absolutely furious! You took your date out for a romantic evening in one of the town's best restaurants and it was a disaster. You decide to complain to the waiter / waitress. Here are some of the things you might want to mention:



- You found a long red hair in your soup.
- The soup was cold.
- Your date had almost finished his / her main course while you were still waiting for yours to arrive.
- You saw the chef smoking in the toilets.
- The waiter / waitress flirted with your date and was rude to you.
- The cutlery was greasy.
- The 'background music' was so loud that you could hardly hear what your date was saying.
- You would like a refund.



Weary waiter / waitress

You've been working for five hours without a break and you're exhausted. Now an angry customer is complaining. You must stay calm and polite but you must try to avoid giving him a refund. Your boss gets very angry when customers are refunded. The customer will probably complain about the following things:



- There was a long red hair in the soup.
- The soup was cold.
- The customer's date had almost finished his / her main course while the customer was still waiting for his / hers to arrive.
- The customer saw the chef smoking in the toilets.
- You flirted with the customer's date and were rude to the customer.
- The cutlery was greasy.
- The 'background music' was so loud that the customer could hardly hear what his / her date was saying.



Miserable motorist

You hired a car from a dodgy dealer when you were on holiday in a little cottage in the French mountains so that you could see the surrounding countryside. However, on your first trip you realized – almost too late – that the car was in a very bad state of repair. You nearly had an accident and had to drive the car into a river. You go back to the dodgy dealer without the car (stopping in a pub on the way to calm your nerves). Here are some of the things you might want to mention:



- The brakes didn't work, so you had to drive the car into a river to prevent a more serious accident.
- The rear lights didn't work.
- The seats were dirty and it smelled bad inside.
- There was litter in the glove box.
- The car was supposed to have a CD player but it only had a tape player. The radio didn't work.
- You would like a refund and compensation to pay for your clothes and expensive camera (which no longer works, as water got into it).
- The car was not roadworthy and should never have been hired out.



Dodgy car dealer

A holidaymaker has just returned to your car hire service without the car he / she has hired. The car is in a nearby river. He / She is wet and angry. These are some of the things he / she will mention:



- The brakes didn't work, so he / she had to drive the car into a river to prevent a more serious accident.
- The rear lights didn't work.
- The seats were dirty and it smelled bad inside.
- There was litter in the glove box.
- The car was supposed to have a CD player but it only had a tape player. The radio didn't work.
- He / She would like a refund and compensation to pay for his / her clothes and expensive camera (which no longer works, as water got into it).
- The car was not roadworthy and should never have been hired out.

You are not happy that the car is in the river. You suspect the driver might have been drinking and you will make this your excuse for not giving him / her a refund.