



Lesson Plan 20

Responding to Complaints

CLB Level(s): 5-6

CLB Skill(s): Speaking, Listening

Essential Skill(s): Oral Communication

Objective(s)	Audience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To be able to identify implied and explicit complaints ■ To be able to respond appropriately to complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Learners who currently face or will face situations where they need to respond to complaints ■ Learners who would benefit from learning an expanded range of appropriate apologies ■ Learners who are reluctant to provide explanations and excuses
Grammar/Language Focus	Time Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ appropriate tone for apologies ■ prepositions that follow apologies ■ indirect, passive construction 	2 hours
Vocabulary	Materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vocabulary and expressions related to apologizing, providing excuses and explanations and offers to improve the situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Appendices 1.1, 1.2, 2.1 3.1 ■ Audio Monologue 20.1.1_Eng.mp3 (Activity 1)

Workplace Culture

In the Canadian workplace:

- Workers at all levels are expected to take responsibility.
- Blaming others for mistakes, even when justified, does not reflect well on the worker.
- Out of politeness, some complaints are not always reported directly. The worker must infer that there is a complaint being made.
- In response to a complaint, an explanation is also an excuse. These should be used with caution.



Learning Activities

Warm Up

1. Demonstrate two apologies, one using appropriate tone and the other using an insincere tone after actions such as bumping into a learner or pushing a learner's pen off their desk.
2. Ask learners to explain what happened, helping learners to identify that in both cases you apologized but with a very different tone.

Activity 1: Listening to Complaints

1. As a class, generate a list of situations where workers might need to apologize at work. Answers may include:
 - When you make a mistake
 - When you are interrupting someone
 - When someone makes a complaint
2. Inform learners that today's class will concentrate on apologizing in response to complaints.
3. Distribute Appendix I.1 and ask learners to read the three scenarios to themselves. Discuss to ensure learners understand all three.
4. Play the voicemail message then work as a group to identify which of the three scenarios described accurately reflects the recorded message. (Answer: scenario 2)

Listening Text (20.1.1_Eng.mp3)

Hi Raj this is Pedro from Felix Fine Furniture. We received our latest order from you today. Um, order 2562 for your reference. Have a look at the order. You'll see we ordered more stock on eight products from your Modern Elegance line.

There's a problem. The two drawer fronts we ordered arrived scratched, and instead of getting brass round handles and nickel cube handles we got nickel round handles and brass cube handles. (increasingly upset tone) That's problems with three of the eight items in the order! That's almost half the order!!

The real problem is that this isn't the first time. We had problems with last month's order and we had problems in February too. I'm not sure what to say. You know we've been loyal clients of yours for years, but these problems are costing us money. The time we should be spending assembling, we're spending calling our customers about delays.



Learning Activities

You need to give me a call right away. Right now it's uh Monday at 11:00. I'm here until 1:00, then I have a meeting. I should be back at my desk by 2:30 at the latest. I'll have to work late to sort this out, which I'm REALLY unhappy about. I'll probably be here until after 7:00 tonight. The number is (604) 557-5978. Call me.

5. Distribute Appendix I.2. Ask learners to read the questions to themselves before you play the voicemail with the answers. Play the voicemail as many times as required to get the details. Debrief responses to the questions as a group, discussing learner responses to question 8.

Activity 2: How to Respond to Complaints

Part 1

1. Have learners work in groups of 3-4 to brainstorm possible responses for Raj. Encourage learners to consider what they might say in addition to providing an apology.
2. Debrief as a whole group. Make a list of learner responses on the board in three unlabelled categories (you may need a fourth category for greetings).
3. Label the categories at the end of the debriefing. For example:

Apologies	Explanations and Excuses	Offers to improve the situation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm really sorry about the mistakes. I'm so sorry Pedro. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have had problems with our computers. We have new staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will send you the right products right away Although this won't happen again, I can offer you a 10% discount I will personally check your next order

Part 2

4. Add to the phrases used for apologizing if necessary. For example:
 - I apologize for...
 - I'm sorry about...
 - I'm upset to hear that...
5. You may wish to teach or review the construction of these phrases, for example the prepositions that follow different apologies.



Learning Activities

- Review and discuss how tone affects the apology. Provide controlled practice activities learners can use in pairs to practise apologizing using the expanded list of apologies.

Part 3

- Distribute Appendix 2.I. Have learners work with a partner to complete the activity before debriefing and discussing as a group. Point out that in this case explanations are the same as excuses. If any of the explanations and excuses suggested by learners in part I are inappropriate, revisit the list with the class to cross those off.
- You may wish to provide a lesson on indirect, passive constructions. For example, the use of 'the parts were lost' instead of 'Joe lost the parts' as a way to acknowledge without assigning blame.

Part 4

- Lead a discussion about including an offer to improve the situation. Get learners to recognize that different listeners may interpret these offers differently. For example, some may interpret the offer of a discount as a generous gesture, whereas others may interpret the same offer as an attempt by the speaker to minimize the problem.

Part 5

- Have learners work in pairs to practise leaving a message for Pedro in response to his message. Learners should be encouraged to provide constructive feedback on the responses provided by their partners.

Activity 3: Responding to Complaints

- Distribute Appendix 3.I.
- Have learners work in pairs to answer the questions at the top of the page in order to practise responding to the complaints.
- Debrief as a whole group by having volunteers share their responses one situation at a time.

Additional and/or Extended Learning Activities

- Have learners select a situation described on Appendix 3.I to respond to via e-mail. Have them write you an e-mail that evening in response to the complaint. This can lead to a lesson on responding to complaints in writing.

Reflective Evaluation



Learning Activities

Circulate while learners are working on Activity 3. Monitor production to determine if learners:

- are able to identify the complaints in the situations described
- are able to respond appropriately to the complaints

Debriefing/Wrap-up

- Review how to respond to complaints:
 - apologize, then provide an explanation, then offer a way to improve the situation
 - explain that taking responsibility, whether it was your own fault or not, is typically expected in the workplace
 - point out that, just like in the activity 3 situations, sometimes the complaint is not obvious and must be inferred
- Tell learners that we have to deal with complaints both in the workplace and outside the workplace as well. Brainstorm as a class additional situations where you might need to respond to a complaint. For example:
 - A classmate complains that your task is taking too long, delaying his or her own work.
 - A neighbour complains that you are playing music too loudly.
 - A housemate complains that you take too long in the shower, leaving insufficient water for themselves.



Skill Descriptors	
Canadian Language Benchmarks Skill(s)	Essential Skill(s)
Speaking What the Person Can Do (Social Interaction: Interpersonal Competencies) <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Express or respond to apology, regrets and excuses (CLB 6) What the Person Can Do (Suasion) <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Make a simple formal suggestion; provide a reason (CLB 6)	Oral communication Functions <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Deals with minor conflict and complaints. (ES 2)■ Leaves and receives complex recorded messages. (ES 2) Information <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Moderate range of subject matter, familiar topics, usually one main issue. (ES 2)■ Deals mostly with facts but may also deal with emotions and opinions. (ES 2)■ Less predictable context. (ES 2)
Listening Performance Indicators (Social interaction) <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Identifies specific factual details and inferred meanings in video-and audio-mediated listening texts/discourse as required. (CLB 5 and 6)■ Identifies the emotional state of the speaker (CLB 5). What the Person Can Do (Suasion) <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Demonstrate comprehension of details and speaker's purpose in suggestions, advice, encouragements and requests. (CLB 6)	

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Scenario 1:

Pedro works for Felix Fine Furniture. He has called Raj because he is unhappy with the quality of the handles he received today. This problem is causing Felix Fine Furniture to lose money. The first order Pedro placed with Raj's company was in February. Pedro wants Raj to call him before 1:00.

Scenario 2:

Pedro has called to complain about his most recent order. Pedro is unhappy because lately he has received damaged products and products with mistakes. Pedro wants Raj to call him as soon as he gets the voicemail message.

Scenario 3:

Pedro has called Raj because he is unhappy that he has to work late tonight. Pedro has been ordering supplies from Raj's company for years, but the problem now is that the supplies cost more money. Pedro wants Raj to call him after 7:00 tonight.

1. Who does Pedro work for?
2. What order number is Pedro calling about?
3. How many products did Pedro order?
4. What is the problem with the drawer fronts?
5. Instead of brass round handles, what did Pedro receive?
6. At what time will Pedro be leaving for his meeting?
7. What is Pedro's telephone number?
8. How does Pedro feel? Why?

Activity 2: How to Respond to Complaints

Appendix 2.1

The following are possible excuses and explanations Raj can provide to Pedro. Decide whether these are appropriate.

Excuse / Explanation	Appropriate?	
	Yes	No
1. It wasn't my fault, it's the new staff in shipping.		
2. We have many new staff members in shipping who are still in training.		
3. We have changed our computer systems and some of the product codes have become mixed up.		
4. The drawer fronts weren't scratched when they left here. The shipping company probably did it.		
5. There is no excuse, but it looks like your order was recorded incorrectly.		
6. We have been having problems with our old order system.		
7. Alex must have entered the order incorrectly. He's always doing that!		
8. It's because you wrote the wrong number on the order form for the handles.		
9. We should have double-checked before we sent you the products, but it looks the product number and description on your order didn't match.		
10. It's our dumb computer program. It's old and wasn't good quality when it was new.		

Respond to the following situations. For each situation:

1. Identify the complaint.
2. Decide how to respond: in person, on the phone or by e-mail?
3. Decide what you would say

Situation 1

Your supervisor e-mails to complain that the newsletter article you wrote is full of errors. She is upset because she has had to spend extra time fixing your mistakes.

Situation 2

A client writes a letter to tell you that they were dissatisfied with the service at your hotel. They include a list of things the hotel front desk clerk said that insulted them.

Situation 3

In a casual conversation, a co-worker in the next office points out that he can hear every word of your phone conversations and meetings. He later adds that he does not like to listen to the radio while working because it distracts him.

Situation 4

A customer calls to complain that the product they purchased is defective.

Situation 5

A co-worker in a different city calls to get clarification on an e-mail you sent. They seem frustrated and repeat that they still do not know what to do, despite your explanations.