



OKLAHOMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

4-H Fabrics & Fashions

Consumer Education

Advanced Level (15-19 Years)

How to Make a Formal Complaint

What do you do when a ready-made garment doesn't live up to claims about its performance? Throw it away? Try to mend it? Return it to the store where you bought it? Manufacturers certainly won't know about a customer's dissatisfaction unless the customer speaks up. So the next time you aren't satisfied with a purchase, here's what to do.

First, decide if you have a valid complaint. Did you abuse the garment in any way? You can't expect good performance if you did not follow care instructions or if you treated the garment carelessly. Some buyers make unjustified complaints and pressure a merchant to make an adjustment on a garment when the merchant really has no responsibility to do so. Businesses try to protect their image, and people sometimes take advantage of that fact by making complaints, demanding adjustments, and leveling criticism at a store when they really have no just cause for such action. But if you have a legitimate complaint, you are ready to inform the store or manufacturer.

Next, return to the business and present your complaint. Try to start with the salesperson with whom you did business. If the store has a complaint department, go there. If you do not get a satisfactory adjustment, ask to see the manager. Usually a business with a reputation for dealing fairly with its customers will make a fair

adjustment of complaints, partly because they feel it is their responsibility. If you can't make your complaint in person, write a letter clearly stating your complaint. A letter makes your complaint a matter of record. A telephone call, on the other hand, is very easy to ignore. If possible, type your letter. It will look more business-like. Be sure to keep a copy for yourself. Typed letters usually get quicker results and are less likely to get lost than hand-written ones.

If you must telephone, keep your cool, no matter how angry you are. If you're angry, you will forget to give key facts. Ask the name of the person with whom you are talking. It's easier to deal with someone when you know his or her name.

If possible, take the garment back to the store where you purchased it. Be sure to give the sales clerk all the pertinent information:

- Where and when you bought it.
- How much you paid for it.
- How long you've had it or the number of times you have worn it.
- What you have done to care for it (laundering procedure, number of times laundered, type of detergent used).
- What is wrong with it.
- Any other pertinent information that would help the person understand your complaint.

Keep sales slips, price tags, and care instructions. If you complain in person, take along these records and copies of any letters you may have already written about the garment. Don't send documentation in a letter or give them to the sales clerk.

Don't get angry. Let the facts speak for themselves. Be polite! Sarcastic or abusive letters and phone calls are easily ignored by the complaint manager. Handled well and in good humor, your complaint will stand out and receive attention more quickly. When customers are honest and friendly, retailers will usually bend over backwards to make an adjustment, even when the complainers are more at fault than the garment.

When returning an item, be courteous. The fact there is a problem with the item is not the sales person's fault. Be clear and concise. Describe what the problem is and how you would like to have it resolved.

Returning Merchandise to a Store

Clothing products that do not perform satisfactorily should be returned to the store where purchased. Stores like to know when merchandise they sell does not perform, because they do not want dissatisfied customers. If that isn't possible, write a letter to the manufacturer.

Role-play returning a clothing item to a store. The reason could be that the garment faded or shrank when washed, was the wrong color to match something else, doesn't fit or something else. Discuss with club members what you did and why. How could the exchange be improved? Have club members ever returned clothing to a store? What was their experience?

On another sheet of paper, have club members describe the role play situation. What was the reaction of your fellow club

members? What did you learn?

Letter of Complaint

Select a clothing item that has failed to perform satisfactorily. It is easier if you choose something you or someone in your family has actually owned. On a separate piece of paper, write a complaint letter, and then attach the letter to your project book.

Here are guidelines for writing a letter of complaint about a textile product:

1. Write the manufacturer's relations department. The address may be on the label or available from the local library reference department.
2. Give the name, identification number (if available), and description of the product. This includes style numbers, size, price, color, fiber, care, etc.
3. Include the name of store, location, and date of purchase.
4. Explain all facts related to the product's failure to perform and your dissatisfaction. Include care procedures you used. Be clear and concise. Avoid emotional overtones.
5. Make a specific request for compensation (repair, replacement, refund).
6. Indicate that a reply is expected soon.
7. Ask if the company would like the merchandise sent for inspection. If you are returning the item, insure the package.
8. Include your name, address and telephone number.
9. Keep a photocopy of the letter and any enclosures, such as sales slip.
10. Type the letter, if possible, and use a business letter format.