Handling customer complaints English

Customer service English for complaints: listening and showing empathy, apologizing, asking for details, explaining what happened, offering solutions and following up, plus phrases customers use to complain.

Model dialogue

Customer	Hello, I'm calling to complain about my order. The coffee machine arrived damaged.
Agent	I'm sorry to hear that. Could you give me your order number, please?
Customer	It's 48213. And this is the second time this has happened.
Agent	I completely understand how frustrating that must be. Let me look into this for you.
Agent	It seems the box was damaged during delivery. Would you prefer a refund or a replacement?
Customer	A replacement, please. But I need it before Friday.
Agent	We can send you a replacement today by express delivery, and as a goodwill gesture, we'll give you 20 percent off your next order.
Customer	OK, thank you. That's helpful.
Agent	Thank you for your patience. I'll email you the tracking number this afternoon.

Key vocabulary

Word	Meaning	Example
complaint	a statement that something is wrong	We received three complaints this week.
refund	money paid back	I'd like a full refund.
replacement	a new item instead of a broken one	They sent a replacement the next day.
faulty	not working correctly	The charger is faulty.
invoice	a document that shows how much to pay	There's a mistake on the invoice.
compensation	something given because of a problem	They offered a voucher as compensation.
warranty	a promise to repair a product for a time	The laptop has a two-year warranty.
escalate	to pass a problem to a more senior person	I'll escalate this to my manager.

Useful phrases

Making a complaint (customer)

I'm calling to complain about my order.	starting a complaint
I'm afraid there's a problem with the invoice.	polite complaint
The product arrived damaged.	describing a problem
This is the second time this has happened.	showing it is repeated
I'd like a refund, please.	asking for money back

Listening and apologizing (staff)

I'm sorry to hear that.	showing empathy
I completely understand how frustrating that must be.	strong empathy
I do apologize for the inconvenience.	formal apology
Could you give me your order number, please?	asking for details
Let me look into this for you.	promising to check

Explaining and offering solutions

It seems there was a mistake in our warehouse.	explaining
We can send you a replacement today.	offering a solution
Would you prefer a refund or a replacement?	giving options
As a goodwill gesture, we'll give you 20 percent off your next order.	compensation

Closing and following up

Is there anything else I can help you with?	checking
I'll email you the tracking number this afternoon.	follow-up
Thank you for your patience.	ending positively

Practice and role-play

A. Complete the phrases

Write one word in each gap.

1. I'm _____ to hear that.
2. I completely understand how _____ that must be.
3. Let me look _____ this for you.
4. Would you prefer a refund or a _____?
5. The product arrived _____.
6. I'd like a _____, please.
7. Thank you for your _____.
8. Is there anything else I can _____ you with?

B. Correct the mistakes

Each sentence has one mistake. Rewrite it correctly.

1. I want to make a complain.

2. Sorry for the inconvenient.

3. Please give me your order number.

4. It's not our fault.

C. Role-play

Student A. You are a customer. You booked a hotel room with a sea view, but your room faces the parking lot, and the air conditioning doesn't work. Complain politely but firmly.

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Student B. You work at the hotel reception. The sea-view rooms are full tonight. Show empathy, apologize, and offer two possible solutions.

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Answer key

A: 1 sorry · 2 frustrating · 3 into · 4 replacement · 5 damaged · 6 refund · 7 patience · 8 help

B: 1 I want to make a complaint. · 2 Sorry for the inconvenience. · 3 Could you give me your order number, please? · 4 Let me look into what happened.