

Handling guest complaints

by Jamie Keddie

Level: Intermediate - advanced

Section/subject: ESP > Hotel and tourism > Skills > The ability to handle verbal complaints

Time needed: 90 minutes

Objective/summary: This lesson aims to equip students with the language they will need when transferring the skill of handling guest complaints effectively from their own language to English.

Lesson plan

1 Write the following on the board and invite students to offer suggestions for the missing word:

Man invented language to satisfy his deep need to _____

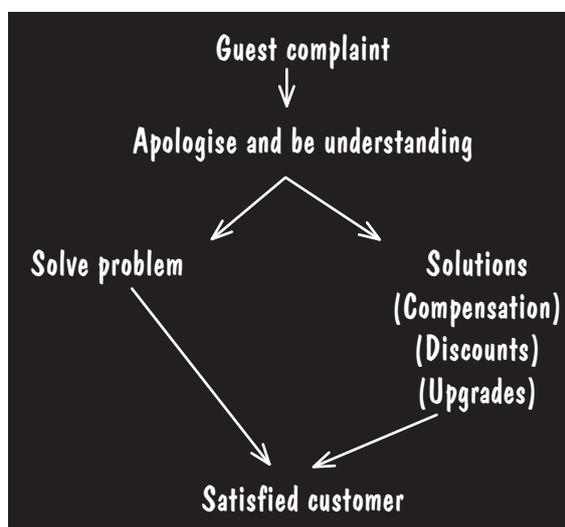
(Answer – complain. This is a quotation from US actress, Lily Tomlin.)

Does this strike a chord with your students? Find out how often your students have to deal with complaints. Find out if anyone has dealt with a complaint that day. What was it about? There is a lot of potential for good engaging conversation here.

2 Tell your students that you have a list of common hotel complaints. Invite them to predict what is on it.

After a few predictions, give out the list. Have students decide which complaints are most relevant for them according to the instructions on the sheet.

3 Write the following on the board and have students copy it into their books:



4 Ask each student to think back to a recent complaint that they dealt with successfully, face-to-face with a guest. Encourage them to select complaints that they have already identified as being particularly relevant and recurring in their jobs. Also encourage diversity – for example if there are 6 students, try to have them come up with 6 different complaints.

Ask each student to write a brief summary of the complaint. You can ask for the following information to be included: -

- Who was/were the complaining guest(s)
Give a description
- Where exactly in your hotel did the dialogue between yourself and the guest(s) take place?
- When did it take place (date and time)?
- What was the complaint about?
- What outcome did the guest(s) want?
- Were you apologetic and understanding?
- Did you solve the problem?
- If not, what other solutions were available to you and which one did you opt for?
- Was the guest satisfied?

Help students with any necessary vocabulary or provide dictionaries.

(N.B.: The more information you can obtain at this stage, the more authentic and memorable the following task will be.)

5 Invite students to read out their logged complaints to the rest of the class.

6 Now that each student has reactivated the details of a customer-employee dialogue, get them to write out the dialogue as accurately as they remember it. There are two possibilities here – the dialogue can be written out in English or it can be written out first in the students' L1 and then translated to English.

Elicit and offer useful language that students will need in order to create a successful text. For example:

Well, first of all I'd just like to apologise.

I'm very sorry for the inconvenience.

I'm very sorry that ...

I'm very sorry about ...

I understand that ...

I understand what you are saying.

You see what has happened is that ...

Here's what we'll do.

If you can just leave it with me.

We take this type of thing very seriously.

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- 7 Have students act out the dialogues in front of the rest of the class (it may be necessary to make photocopies of dialogues so that two actors can have the same script).
- 8 After each performance, offer suggestions for improvement or open issues up to the rest of the class. For example, you could draw attention to:
- Eye contact
 - Body language
 - Talking speed
 - Grammar / vocabulary / pronunciation
- 9 It can be good to take some time to work on the dialogues and then make photocopies of all dialogues for all students to have and keep for their own reference.

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BUSINESS & ESP

List of complaints

Decide which of the following complaints you have to deal with most. In each case, enter a number in the box.

0 = I never have to deal with this type of complaint.
 1 = I occasionally have to deal with this type of complaint.
 2 = I often have to deal with this type of complaint.

Billing disputes and overcharges

- I didn't make these phone calls.
- I didn't take anything from the mini-bar.
- I thought the breakfast was included in the price of the room.

System failures

- The air-conditioning in my room doesn't work.
- There's no hot water in my bathroom.
- My phone/TV doesn't work.
- I didn't get my wake-up call this morning and I was late for an important meeting.

Noise

- I can hear the cleaners talking/vacuuming in the hall/room next door in the morning while I'm trying to sleep.
- The guests in the room next door are noisy.
- Your hotel sounds like a building site (referring to refurbishments).
- The noise from the traffic in the street by the hotel is keeping me awake.

Restaurant

- The service was bad.
- The waiting staff were rude.
- The food was bad.
- My steak has been overcooked.
- This wine is fizzy (and it's not supposed to be).

Booking problems

- What do you mean you have no record of my reservation?
- I asked for a room with a double bed and it has two singles.
- I asked for a room with a view.

Miscellaneous

- I left £100 my bed and it's not there now.
- My room/bathroom is dirty.
- There is a damp smell in my room.
- What do you mean I can't smoke?

Are there any other important ones that aren't on the list?

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