

Response Writing



1. Apologise if you mean it

If your investigation finds that mistakes have been made, then you should say sorry. It's not an admission of guilt or negligence (outline in the Compensation Act 2006) and saying sorry is the right thing to do. Apologies should be fulsome and sincere. You need to be mindful of the words you use to apologise. The 'if you mean it' means you shouldn't say 'I'm sorry if you felt that way' 'I'm sorry if you were offended' 'I'm sorry you felt you had to complain' etc. These are not conducive of a true apology. Instead, be specific, say 'I'm sorry for' 'I'm sorry that x has happened'.

You could always thank the person for bringing their complaint to you if there is no apology needed. 'Thank you for taking the time to bring this to our attention.' Saying sorry can be really powerful, but it needs to be done right.



2. Make sure the complainant knows the decision

Be specific with your decision. Let them know if you've upheld or not upheld the complaint. Remember you can't partially uphold, and you should leave no room for misunderstanding, so be clear on your outcome.



3. What will happen next?

If you can offer a resolution then you should. Let the complainant know what will happen next and by when. If you aren't delivering this resolution, give them a contact for who is. It could even be something that they need to do, so give all the information in your outcome letter.

Your stage 2 letters should also contain information on where the complainant can escalate their complaint if they remain dissatisfied e.g. to the Ombudsman or the Information Commissioner's Office.



4. Share an action plan if possible

If you have learned lessons following your investigation, you can share an action plan of the changes that are being made. Think back to the barriers in the first session where we spoke about people not wanting to complain because they didn't think they would be listened to, or nothing would happen as a result. How powerful is it to be able to share an action plan of changes being implemented because of their complaint?



5. Get important information in early

This is also known as the funnel technique. People take more notice of the top of the letter, so get any important messages in first. This could be your apology, outcome, or any next steps. The reader's attention will funnel off, so get your key information in early.



6. Make sure the basics are right

You might think that this is an obvious suggestion but please make sure you check the basics such as:

- The person's name
- Your name
- Any dates, times, or locations
- The address.

If you make a basic mistake like this, your hard work during the investigation will be undone. Is your complainant going to think that you've carried out a thorough investigation if you haven't spelt their name correctly?

So, give yourself time to proofread the letter, read it from the bottom up or look at it the next day with a fresh pair of eyes.



7. For humans, by humans

The average reading age in the UK is 9 years old, and so not everyone is going to understand a technical detailed letter. From speaking with the complainant, you should be able to tailor a letter to their needs - remember you're writing to be understood. By calling and speaking with the complainant to deliver your outcome, it can also make your letter writing easier as you can refer to the conversation.