

Can You Complain in English?

“I'm fed up with it!” “I have had all I can take of this!” “If I get put on hold one more time. . .” These are all great phrases for when you just have no more patience. They're the kind of English that I hope you never have to use—I'm a cheerful, happy kind of guy—but if you ever have anything to complain about, I want your English to be as good as you are angry.

Last week, I was teaching a private group when one of my students said “I can't tell you about my boss. . . I only know positive English.” We all laughed, because those two sentences did tell us a lot about his boss. But he was right: in our English lessons, we sometimes focus on positive English. In our native languages, though, a lot of our communication is about things we don't like.

This week we're going to get started on the long job of talking about things we don't like. Our focus this week will be on describing our feelings: how did it make us feel? To do this, we'll learn some vocabulary tomorrow, and some grammar on Wednesday. On Thursday, we'll have some 'real' complaints in 'native' English that I pulled off of the Internet.

But first, it's time to get ready.

Pre-Writing

Before we get any further into the topic, take a moment and think of something you'd really like to complain about. Write it at the top of a piece of paper. Then, try to write down exactly what happened in English. Write down how it made you feel.

Is your English good enough? Can you say in English what you'd say in your native language? If you had no problem, then good for you. But, if you can't say what you want, you'll want to pay attention this week.

We're going to get ready to really complain. To do that, you might want some general complaint vocabulary.

Vocabulary

Unsatisfactory: This is a big word that basically means 'not good enough.' You can use it in sentences like “The service was simply unsatisfactory.” “I'm sorry, but that answer is unsatisfactory.” Or “your behavior towards your customers is unsatisfactory.” It's a great word for things you think should be better, because that's what it means.

Intolerable: Have you ever experienced something so bad that you couldn't live with it? Then you know the meaning of the word 'intolerable.' Literally, it means you can't put up with, or live with

something. And it's a step more critical than **unsatisfactory**. My father often told me my behavior was intolerable, and you can use it in a lot of other contexts: "It's intolerable that I have to pay full price after waiting an hour for my food." "The hotel room was intolerable: I just had to move to a different hotel." "The food in my child's school is intolerable."