



NATIONAL BUSINESS INITIATIVE



TOURISM LESSON PLANS

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

Learning Outcome 4: Customer Care and Communication;
Assessment standard 11.4.2

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This teaching guide has been sponsored by Air France and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines. It will provide you, the educator, with information and tools to assist and enhance your teaching methods. It is linked to Learning Outcome 4, Assessment Standard 11.4.2 of the new National Curriculum Statements and will assist you teach your learners about how to handle customer complaints

Grade 11 learners should by now have an understanding of the concept of 'service' as this is covered in the Grade 10 curriculum. The Grade 11 curriculum builds on this knowledge and addresses 'the correct procedures to follow when dealing with different types of customer complaints'.

Learning Outcome 2: Customer Care and Communication

The learner is able to apply effective communication skills to demonstrate professional conduct, deliver service excellence and function as a member of a team.

Assessment Standard 11.4.2

Describe the correct procedures to follow when dealing with different types of customer complaints.

The learning Programme Guideline for this assessment standard states that learners should know:

- The correct procedure to follow when dealing with customer complaints
- The importance of dealing with customer complaints promptly
- That complaints may be received in different ways, for example a comment of dissatisfaction, verbal abuse, and a formal written complaint. Learners should discuss the most effective way of dealing with each type of complaint.
- That a complaint is an opportunity to improve a situation. Learners should exchange constructive criticism and handle criticism in a mature manner.

By the end of this lesson, your learners will be able to:

Contents

This teaching guide is arranged into 7 sections:

1. Introduction	Page 2
2. Air France and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines	Page 2
3. Customer service	Page 3
4. Customer Complaints in the Tourism Industry	Page 4
5. Why do people complain?	Page 5
6. Types of Customer Complaints	Page 5
7. Dealing with Customer Complaints	Page 6



Outcome	Outcome is achieved when the learner
Explain the importance of providing good customer service	Successfully completes activity 1 & 2
Demonstrate knowledge as to the reason why customers complain	Successfully completes activity 3
Describe the different types of customer complaints	Successfully completes activity 3
Deal with different types of complaints	Successfully completes activities 4



1

Introduction

Anyone who works in the tourism industry will have to deal with customers as part of their job. When dealing with customers, it will happen on occasion that the customers will have complaints. These must be dealt with professionally and efficiently even if the person receiving the complaint may not be directly responsible for the problem. They will still be required to assume responsibility for the complaint on behalf of the organisation for which they work.

How anyone in a public position deals with a complaint will reflect directly on both them as individuals, and on the company that employs them. This lesson plan has been developed to provide information on the types of complaints that are likely to be encountered, and also gives guidelines on handling the different types of complaints.



2

Air France and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines

Air France and KLM are international airlines that operate worldwide. These leading airlines are the sponsors of this lesson plan. The two airlines, Air France and KLM merged in 2004 to become the two main subsidiaries of the airline company that is the largest airline company in the world in terms of turnover.

Air France and KLM operate independently from their respective hubs in Paris and Amsterdam. Together they employ approximately 94 000 people, transport 22 million passengers per year and serve about 250 destinations worldwide with a fleet of some 565 aircraft.

Travelling is exciting for anyone, but it can also be stressful. Long and crowded flights, delays in flights and queues are all part of air travel, and can make passengers very tired and grumpy. This often results in customers making complaints to the airline with which they are travelling. The airline personnel who handle the complaints must understand the stresses of air travel on their passengers, and handle them accordingly with friendliness, efficiency and with an aim of solving the problem as best and fast as possible to make things better for the passenger.

With a combined number of 22 million passengers per year, there are bound to be complaints that happen along the way. On the occasion that these do happen, Air France and KLM have a standardised and professional approach to dealing with these customer complaints to make the customer a happy, satisfied and loyal customer to their airline. The company and its 94 000 employees understand that a complaint is an opportunity to improve service and customer relations, and may bring some operational problems to light so that they can be solved by the company. This is why complaints are welcomed, not avoided.

Special policies and procedures are therefore in place to assist the airline staff to handle complaints in the best and most efficient way possible. In this way, the customer is more likely to become a satisfied customer instead of an angry one.



Learner activity 1: Definitions



Teacher guidelines for learner activity 1

Divide learners into groups of 5 and supply each group with a dictionary. Learners should discuss in their groups and formulate their own definitions of what is meant by the following terms: 'customer', 'complaint', 'prompt', 'efficient' and 'professional'. Each group should present their definitions to the class.

After each group has presented their definition to the class you should facilitate a class discussion on each of these terms, and what they mean in relation to effective customer service and complaint handling. Learners should write down the definitions in their workbooks.

3 Customer service

The issue of customer complaints cannot be dealt with in isolation to the concept of customer service. Grade 10 learners will have already dealt with the concept of service but the concept should be re-introduced when dealing with this section of the curriculum.



Learner activity 2: Customer service



Teacher guidelines for learner activity 2

Make photocopies of Case Study 1– 'Customer Service – The Magic 10' and hand to each learner. The examples in the case study refer to general retail organisations and situations. Learners must work in pairs. For each 'commandment' learners should identify, from their knowledge and experience of the tourism industry, examples where organisations follow the 'commandment' and situations where customer care would have been improved if the 'commandment' had been followed. At the end, hold a class discussion in which learners share their ideas.

This case study is based on an article in Travel Weekly (3rd November 2006) by Marc Thornton of retail consultancy, srcg. The article gives the 10 'Commandments' or top tips about Customer Care for retail organisations. The article is reproduced here with the kind permission of srcg, a retail consultancy that helps retailers to better understand their customers.

Case study 1: Customer Service – The Magic 10: Why do some people go back to the same shop, eat at the same restaurant or fly with the same airline? The answer is simple: they like it and want to go back for more. The very best retailers deliver excellent customer service every day, but since it costs five times more to attract a new customer than retain an existing one, it makes sense to look after them. Be warned, poor customer service can be the death knell of your business. Remember, the average business will never hear from 96% of its satisfied customers, but it is estimated one dissatisfied customer will tell up to 10 of their friends about their bad experience. Companies that understand their customers' needs and give them service beyond their expectations will be rewarded with loyal customers and increased profits.

Here are 10 Commandments to follow if you want to give your customers the kind of service that will keep them coming back to you.

The 10 Commandments of Customer Care

- 1. Bring them back.** Ask customers what they want and give it to them again and again. The best source of ideas is the customers themselves. They will set the standards if you will listen to them. Give them what they want and they will come back again and again.
- 2. Under-promise and over-deliver.** Customers expect you to keep your word, but you should exceed it. Many companies do not keep their promises. How many times have you waited for a delivery that never came? Customers are delighted when the service is better than expected so deliver on their expectations, but don't over-promise.
- 3. The customer is king – long live the king!** If we make it difficult for the customer or don't respond to their requests, they will go elsewhere. A retailer should be as flexible as possible and willing to act on customers' ideas. If customers complain, listen to what they have to say and make changes to improve the problem. Treat customers as you would like to be treated – like a king!
- 4. I will look after it.** Every staff member who deals with customers should have the authority to handle complaints. Customers want staff to solve their problem. They don't want to be dumped on another staff member and have to explain their problem all over again. The best retailers empower staff to deal with customer complaints on the spot. A problem becomes more 'expensive' and time consuming the more it is passed up the line. For example all Tesco (a supermarket in the UK) staff have the power to replace products up to the value of £20 pounds.

5. Encourage complaints. It may seem strange to encourage complaints but they can often be the best way to improve your business. Complaints should not be seen as a personal attack on anyone, it may be the system that needs changing. Don't leave phones unanswered during lunch hours. Introduce a staff rota to ensure customers are not penalised.

6. Say what you can do rather than what you can't do. How often do you hear "That's not my job" or "It's not my fault"? Customers want to see changes and the company that takes action will attract more customers. Whatever the customer asks, the answer is always yes.

7. People buy people first. First impressions are vital. If the sales person doesn't impress a customer, are they going to trust the company? Money invested in staff training is money well spent. For example: if correctly done, greeters at store entrances can set the tone for the business.

8. Customers buy benefits not features. Don't use jargon or technical terms. Just tell customers how you are making their lives easier.

9. Use the customer's name whenever possible. Being remembered makes you feel like a king. Remember people's names and use them.

10. It's the difference that makes a difference. Customers need to be aware of the differences you have introduced. For example: opticians ring customers a few days after they receive new glasses to see how pleased they are with them. Petrol station assistants clean the car windows while customers pay for their petrol.

4 Customer Complaints in the Tourism Industry

When customers complain, they are doing so because they are unhappy with the product or service that they have received. They want further action to be taken, and an apology or explanation. They want their rights to be acknowledged and for someone to take action to prevent such an incident from happening again. A client who receives prompt action after a complaint and a satisfactory conclusion will usually praise the way the complaint was handled. This will take care of any ill feeling that was caused by the issue. A client whose complaint is not satisfactorily dealt with then has two cases for complaint!

Why is handling customer complaints so important?

Let us answer this question by looking at some facts about customer service and customer complaints:

- A negative experience has a greater impact than a positive one. In other words, a customer who has a good experience will tell this only to 6 to 10 other people. However, someone who has a bad experience will tell 10 to 15 other people.
- It is five times cheaper to keep an existing customer than to gain a new one – in other words, marketing and advertising are expensive – and the customers you already have are very valuable, so you must treat them well.
- Customers who have had a problem, but whose problem was solved to their satisfaction turn into more loyal customers than those who have never had a problem with a company.
- When passengers let us know what they think about our services and performance, they provide very valuable information about the products and services of that company. Complaints or customer responses can tell a company:
 - Where they have failed in the delivery of expected service.
 - Where the company can improve on their service and performance.
 - What customers appreciate.

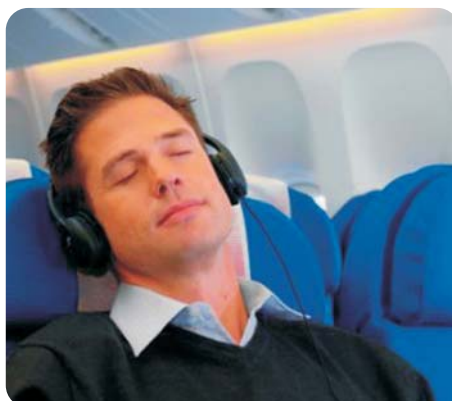
A customer who complains is giving the company a second chance. Sometimes it may be a last chance, depending on what has happened. This is why complaints are very important to grow good and strong customer relationships, and why we should be thankful for any complaints received, and deal with them effectively.

Prompt Action

The Oxford dictionary defines 'prompt' as '*done at once*'. It is really important to understand that customer complaints should be dealt with as soon as they are received. This is for the following reasons:

- So that the customer can see that the complaint is being taken seriously and that something is being done to solve it
- To prevent the situation from getting worse
- To help the customer with their problem and
- To satisfy the customer

A complaint that is not dealt with promptly will most likely result in further complaints, and greater dissatisfaction by the customer.





5 Why do people complain?

People complain because they are unhappy about the product or service that they received. In the travel and tourism industry, products are usually experiences rather than something one can buy and keep.

The product may therefore be:

- An airline flight (with or without meals)
- A hired car
- A package tour
- A night of accommodation in a hotel or B&B
- A meal in a restaurant

Services in the tourism industry include:

- A check-in experience at an airline
- Service on board an aircraft by cabin crew
- The guiding on a tour
- Making an accommodation reservation
- Service of a meal in a restaurant

Complaints can therefore be about the product itself (the *what*), or *how* it was delivered to the customer – which is the service element.



Learner activity 3: Group brainstorm



Teacher guidelines for learner activity 3

Divide learners into groups of 5. Each group must identify at least three examples of complaints that they or their family or friends have made in real life.

The groups must briefly describe the situation and identify if the complaint was about a product or a service. They may also relate how the complaint was made and how it was handled by the company or person to whom the complaint was made. Each group should present their experiences to the class.

6 Types of customer complaints

Customers will complain in various ways, depending on the circumstances of the complaint. Complaints may be received in different ways, for example:

Verbal complaints

These are made face-to-face by the person who has reason to complain, to an employee or representative of the company that the complaint is addressed to.

Formal written complaints

These are written by the complainant to the company that the complaint is addressed to and may be made by postal service or by email.

Complaints may also be immediate or belated

• Immediate

The customer complains at the time of the incident – these are usually verbal complaints.

• Belated complaint

The customer complains after the incident has already occurred – these are usually written complaints.

There are different ways of dealing with the different types of complaints. We will have a look at these in the next section.



7

Dealing with Customer Complaints

When you are dealing with customer complaints, it is best to have a specific way of dealing with them so that you can handle the complaint objectively and efficiently.

Sometimes things go wrong, despite our best efforts. It is how we handle and respond to complaints that will either develop or damage customer relations and reflect on the service that the company delivers. An angry and frustrated customer can be turned into a happy and grateful customer if we know how.

Customers can accept that sometimes things do go wrong, but what we do to rectify the situation is important. All customers will want the problem sorted out quickly and efficiently.

Dealing with verbal complaints

In the case of verbal and immediate complaints, the customer may be very upset – in which case they must be dealt with very carefully so as not to upset them any further, and to turn an unpleasant situation into a pleasant one. These complaints may be in person or may be telephonic.

Important: anyone who deals with customers should be authorised to make decisions. A customer who is complaining does not want to be referred to other people – they want their complaint to be resolved immediately. The person who handles the complaint should have enough authority to be able to make a decision to solve the problem.

The best approach for handling verbal complaints, especially for angry or upset customers, is to let them have their say and to handle them diplomatically and very politely and professionally.



Below is a 6-step approach to dealing with customer complaints.

1 Listen to the complaint

2 Apologise

3 Sympathise with their problem

4 Fix the problem

5 Report back

6 Follow up

Let us take a closer look at each of these:

1 Listen to the complaint

The customer may be angry or upset – allow them to vent their frustration. Listen carefully to their complaint and let them say all that they have to say. Do not interrupt or make any excuses. Just listen with the right body language – eye contact, nod your head, and make affirming sounds like *hmm*, *uh-huh*, and so on. Let them talk or rant until they run out of steam.

2 Apologise

Apologise to the guest even if it is not your fault.

They need to hear an apology, so give them one – even if it is a general apology. Say something like: “I am really sorry about this”.

3 Sympathise with their problem

Imagine if you were sitting with a similar problem, and how that would make you feel – for example, their flight was delayed and they have now missed their connecting flight – you would also want to complain. If you have travelled across the world and were exhausted and when you arrived and missed your connection – you would also be upset! Sympathise with the customer by saying that you would also be upset under the circumstances. This will make them feel that they are understood.

4 Fix the problem

Take some action to fix the problem – make a plan! Tell the customer what you are going to do to fix the problem. Make it your responsibility to help them.

5 Report back

Once you have taken action, tell the customer the progress to fix the problem. Keep them informed of the progress if it is relevant to them so that they know you are doing something to help them.

6 Follow up

Check up later to see if all is well with the customer and that they are happy again.

End in a positive manner

Thank the customer for his complaint, for example, ‘thank you for bringing this to our attention’.

Avoid

- Immediately defending yourself or the organisation
- Denying anything about the complaint (for example, saying ‘no, that cannot be possible’)
- Blaming someone else (for example the customer or the travel agent)
- Taking complaints personally



Dealing with written complaints

Written complaints are often more easy to deal with than verbal complaints because the complaint is not made face to face by an angry person. Usually a written complaint is a written statement of an event or series of events that occurred to the customer, or it is a product related problem. The complaint may therefore either be product or service related.

When handling written complaints:

- Check the facts with the people concerned in the complaint
- Determine a solution for the complaint – this may be a refund, a voucher or an apology.
- Make sure that the solution is within company policy and is within your level of responsibility to offer it. If necessary, get approval for your action from a supervisor or manager.
- Contact the complainant – either telephonically or by return letter or email and propose the solution to the complaint.

While it is always important to respond promptly to complaints, the same urgency does not apply to written complaints. There is time to check the parties concerned and determine all the facts of the complaint before responding.

There may be some standard complaints that a company receives regularly. The company may have a set policy or standard letter and solution that may be offered to the customer to rectify the situation. Such an example is the overbooking of flights – which all airlines do in order to make up for last minute cancellations. Sometimes, if there are no cancellations, there will be too many passengers for a flight. If this is the case, then the check-in staff are authorised to offer standard alternatives such as free tickets on other scheduled flights to customers.



Learner activity 4: Dealing with different complaints – Role play



Teacher guidelines for learner activity 4

Divide learners into 5 groups. Copy the role play scenarios provided on page 8 and give one to each group. Each group must prepare a role play on one of the following situations:

Situation 1 – Complaint “It is just so busy at the counter”	Group 1 prepares situation 1
Situation 2 – Complaint “Missing suitcase”	Group 2 prepares situation 2
Situation 3 – Complaint “Family can not be seated together on the plane”	Group 3 prepares situation 3
Situation 4 – Complaint “Bad service from cabin crew during last flight”	Group 4 prepares situation 4
Situation 5 – Complaint “No assistance for disabled passenger”	Group 5 prepares situation 5

Each group must present their role play to the class and must follow the guidelines for handling complaints during their role play.

Once they have done the role play, the exercise can be extended to include written complaints. Each learner must write a letter of complaint to the company about the issue that they are dealing with. Thereafter learners should swop their letters with one another and respond in writing to the complaint received.



This section should be photocopied and distributed to learners

Learner Activity 4: Dealing with different complaints – Role play

Situation 1

Complaint "It is just so busy at the counter"

Ms Moyo has had to wait for 45 minutes for attention at the check in counter because of long queues and hold-ups at the check-in desk. By the time she gets there her flight is nearly closed and only middle seats are still available on the flight. She specifically got to the airport early to get a window seat on her flight, but due to the queues and number of people at the counter, she has not been able to and is now very upset.

Situation 2

Complaint "Missing suitcase"

Mr Naidoo disembarks from a flight and his suitcase does not appear on the carousel. The baggage handlers and ground crew do not know where it is – all the luggage has been removed from the aircraft and placed on the conveyor. Mr Naidoo has been travelling overnight, has not slept on the aircraft, and is tired and grumpy and wants to get to his hotel and have a shower and a sleep.

Situation 3

Complaint "Family cannot be seated together on the plane"

Mr and Mrs Bender, travelling from Schipol to Oliver Tambo International Airport with their 3 children want to sit together. By the time that they check in, there are not 5 seats available in a row and they will be split up over different seats in different areas of the aircraft. All the children are under 10 years old and the parents want to be able to look after them during the 11 hour flight. They are very unhappy about this as they had asked their travel agent to make sure that they were all seated next to each other in one row.

Situation 4

Complaint "Bad service from cabin crew during last flight"

Mr Gallagher has just flown in from Europe. He has not had a good flight. He feels that the cabin crew did not provide him with good service because by the time they served his dinner, his menu selection, beef, was not available, and there was only the fish option left. Mr Gallagher does not like fish, and the flight crew were not able to offer him an alternative. He is very angry about this as he went without dinner on the flight.

Situation 5

Mr Kent is a paraplegic who is wheelchair-bound. His secretary booked him a KLM return flight to Schipol Airport in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. As usual, she requested ground assistance for disabled passengers at the airport. When Mr Kent got to the airport to check in, he discovered that no passenger assistance was available to him – it did not appear to have been booked. He was under a lot of work pressure, and was very upset about this.



Ideas Box

Teaching Ideas and Learner Activities

- **Travel section of newspapers:** Most Saturday newspapers include a travel section. You will notice that people from the public often write in and complain about the service they have received. Set learners the task of looking out for these letters of complaint. They should cut these out of the newspaper and bring them to class. Host a class discussion about the letter of complaint and ask learners to explain whether they believe the complaint is justified or not and how the situation could have been avoided.
- **Guest speakers:** Invite a guest speaker from local industry to come and talk to the learners about how customer complaints are handled. A good example would be a front of house manager from a 5-star hotel.
- **Written complaint:** describe a situation that would warrant a complaint to the learners. They must each write a letter of complaint about this situation to the company concerned.
- **Response to written complaint:** provide learners with an example of a written complaint and an outline of the situation. They must write a formal response to the complaint.

8

Answers to learner activities and case studies

Learner activity 1: Definitions

Please note that verbatim definitions are not required. Learners are encouraged to formulate their own definitions of the terms.

Learner activity 2: Customer service case study

For each 'commandment' learners should identify, from their knowledge and experience of the tourism industry, examples where organisations follow the 'commandment' and situations where customer care would have been improved if the 'commandment' had been followed. At the end, hold a class discussion in which learners share their ideas.

Learner activity 3: Group brainstorm

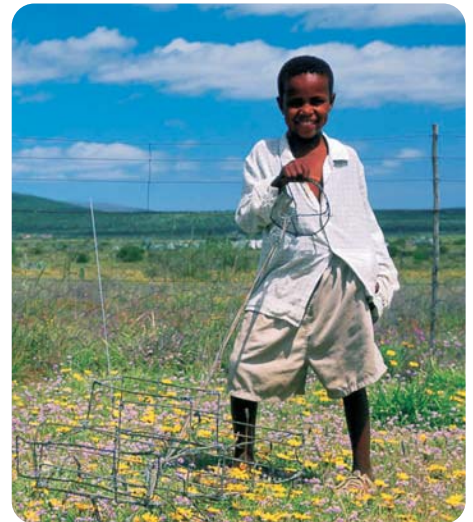
Ask the learners to relate as many examples to the tourism industry as possible. This could include the hospitality industry and complaints about restaurant food or service, hotel accommodation, and so on.

Learner activity 4: Role play

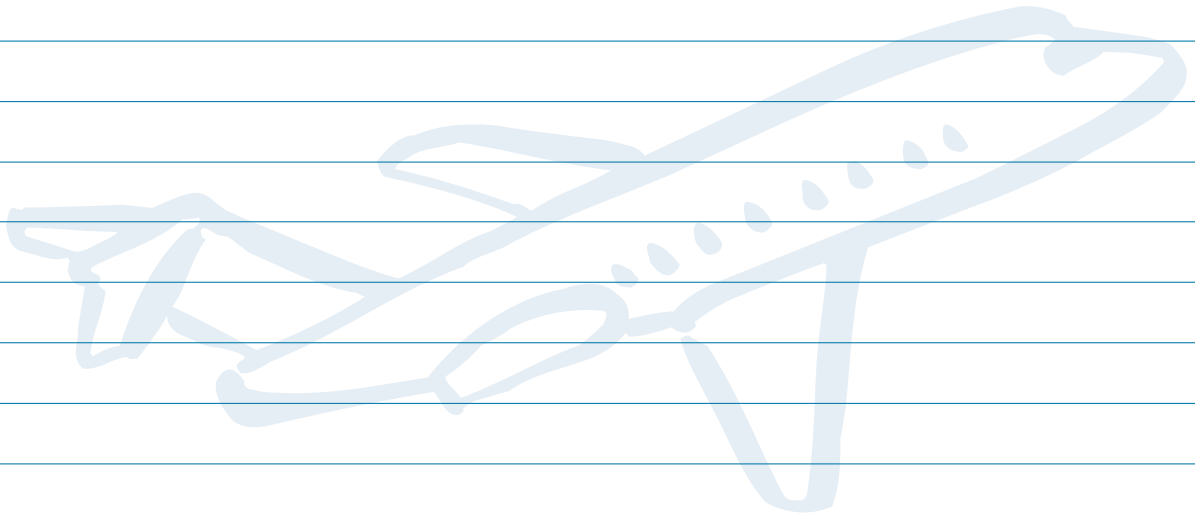
Allow the learners 10 minutes to prepare. Each group should nominate an 'actor' to play the part of the complainant, and another 'actor' to play the part of the service agent who handles the complaint.

The service agent must follow the 6-step approach to handling complaints. The class must observe and then provide a critique of each situation or make suggestions on improving the handling of the complaint.

After the role plays, set the learners homework. They must firstly assume the role of the passenger and compose a letter of complaint to the company. Thereafter learners must swap their letters with one another and each learner must respond in writing to the complaint received. Ensure that the letters are business like, properly addressed with the correct titles of the people that they are writing to and do not contain any spelling mistakes.



Notes:





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