Making and responding to complaints politely requires some diplomacy. Here are some tips for complaining politely:

Before we make a complaint, we usually make a neutral statement that provides some context:

- I’m calling about a product I purchased in your store two weeks ago.
- I’m calling about an experience I recently had with one of your agents.

Then we state the problem or complaint, often using “hedges” to reduce the impact of a statement:

- There seems to be a discrepancy on my bill.
- There appears to be something wrong with the keyboard.

We use the passive voice to avoid blaming someone directly:

- The wrong order was shipped (instead of You shipped the wrong order).
- I was overcharged (instead of You overcharged me).

To soften your language, you can also express uncertainty and avoid using negative adjectives:

- I don’t think it’s working the way it’s supposed to.
- I’m not very happy with your service (instead of I’m unhappy with your service).

When responding to a complaint, it is important to show the customer that you are taking the complaint seriously and that you empathize with his/her situation. For example:

- I’m sorry to hear that …; I apologize for the inconvenience that has caused you; I can understand how frustrated you must be about …

1. Rewrite the following sentences to make them more polite by using diplomatic language.

1. That will be too long! I can’t wait until next week for the delivery.

2. You made the delivery to the billing address instead of the delivery address.

3. It’s not my fault the dishwasher isn’t working.

4. Your agent was not helpful.

5. You made a mistake on my bill.

6. You have no Internet connection? Too bad!
2  Audio 7.14: Listen to a telephone conversation between a customer service representative and a customer. Answer the questions.

1. What is the complaint about?
2. Describe the customer’s tone of voice.
3. What diplomatic phrase does the customer use to make her complaint?
4. What strategies does the customer service representative use to clarify information?
5. How does the customer service representative express empathy?
6. What does the customer service representative do to address the customer’s complaint?

3  With a partner, prepare a telephone dialogue about one of the following situations. If you are the caller, make a polite complaint. If you are the receptionist, be sure to convey empathy towards the customer.

1. Your cable is not working properly. The picture on the screen is scrambled and you can’t get any reception on certain channels.
2. You cancelled an insurance policy last month. This month there was a withdrawal from your chequing account for the same insurance policy.
3. You booked a hotel room for two nights. When you received the confirmation, it was for the wrong dates.

4  Read information about making a complaint in the online publication titled Canadian Consumer Handbook.

Possible search term: Canadian consumer handbook

Make a list of tips for making oral and written complaints, and share them with the class.