

HOW TO COMPLAIN EFFECTIVELY

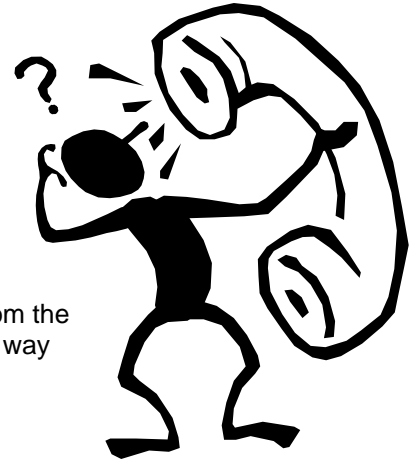
By [Patti Jones](#), *Seattle Times* staff reporter

The magazine company won't stop sending you a magazine every month.

Your phone company bills you for a \$200 midnight call to London, England, presumably made by your cat while you were sleeping.

Complain? Many of us would rather not. After all, complaining is an art. It takes know-how to do it well. And if you don't do it well, you come off looking like a loony.

That's why we've filled this page with tips from complaint experts. Touching on issues from the personal to the professional, we aim to give you a leg up on how to object and gripe in a way that will get you what you want — and still feel good the next morning.



THE WRONG WAY

Dear Manager,

Your gas station stinks. I purchased fuel for my car and was charged for 12 gallons of super, when my tank only holds 11. Explain that! When I protested, your pea-brain cashier just brushed me off. FIRE HER! Or at least give me free gas, after all you've put me through.

I will expect to hear from you. Or else.

Sincerely,

K. Smith

TIPS

1. Be cool. If you flame, you'll put others on the defensive and consign your complaint to the trash, says Ellen Phillips, author of *Fight Back and Win: How to Work with Business and Get What You Want* (First Books Library, \$15). A better idea: Behave as if you need help with a problem. ("I'm not sure what to do about this. I was at the gas pump and ... ") If you appear reasonable, your target will respond in kind.

2. Be specific. Investigators need times, dates, places and names of people you talked to, says Craig Leisy, manager of Seattle's Consumer Affairs Unit. (If you don't know names, try a description — "the teller with ruby glasses.") Also helpful: a copy of your receipt and other records.

3. Be fair in what you ask for. "I knew a man whose baggage was torn by an airline," Phillips says. "In return he demanded first-class tickets to anywhere, and the airlines never responded. Had he asked for new baggage or a \$100 voucher off his next flight, he would've received it."

4. State your full name and phone number. The name proves you're a real person with a legitimate gripe rather than, say, a disgruntled ex-employee, Leisy explains. The phone number allows inspectors to ask follow-up questions and to report their actions.

5. Provide a deadline. If you say, "I'll expect this matter to be resolved by Nov. 31," it'll be clear that you won't just fade away, Phillips explains.