



### Apply your skills: Dealing with a complaint

#### About this assignment

A literacy assignment is a piece of work where you can brush up and practise a number of skills together to solve an everyday workplace challenge. It asks you to think through, read and write in an everyday life or work situation. You will need to use several texts, e.g. letters, advertisements, leaflets, e-mails.

The assignment is divided into **three** parts.

#### Part 1

This will help you to develop your skills in reading for meaning.

#### Part 2

You will be asked to use these skills to answer questions on what you have read and to write your own response.

#### Part 3

This will help you to think about your writing and check your answers.

In this assignment you can develop and practise the following skills:

- reading for meaning by finding key points
- recognising the writer's purpose in writing
- recognising the style of writing in the text you are reading and knowing whether it is formal or informal
- writing a suitable response to what you have read.

Rt/L1.1, Rt/L1.2,  
Rt/L1.3, Rt/L1.5  
Wt/L1.1, Wt/L1.3,  
Wt/L1.5

**tutor notes**



### Part 1: Reading skills

In this part you will look at two letters, two e-mails and a note taken from a telephone conversation. They all relate to the same situation. Read them through and think about the questions and guidance that follow each item.

When you have read through Part 1 and thought about the questions and guidance that follow, try the questions and tasks in Part 2.

#### Setting the scene

Imagine that you are working in the office of an estate and letting agent. Your boss has sent you an e-mail with copies of two letters to read.

The e-mail from the boss:

**From:** Janet Lewis

**Sent:** 23/09/08

**To:** Jack King

**Cc:**

**Subject:** Complaint/Ms Sumner

Jack,

Hirmal, on reception, has just had Ms Jane Sumner on the phone. She rents one of our properties in Station Road. She is really angry about the way we have been dealing with her and gave Hirmal a real talking to. I need you to sort this out please ASAP. We can't have this sort of thing.

Look at the paperwork and write Ms Sumner a suitable reply. Follow it up with a phone call. Make sure you offer her a personal visit to talk about it or something. I don't want us ending up in the letters bit of the newspaper, if she feels she needs to take it further. I will forward you the e-mail I have received from Paul Roberts, who sent the first reply to her, so you can see what's happened so far. Ms Sumner's letter and Paul's letter to her are in the internal mail to you.

Janet



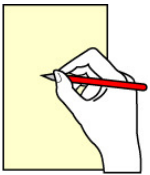
## Assignment: Reading and writing for meaning and purpose



How did you read the e-mail? Think through how you did this. Did you skim read it first to get the overall message?

A good way to take in all the detail is to do this first and then go back again, reading more carefully and asking yourself questions as you read.

- What does your boss, Janet Lewis, want to happen?
- Do you think she is angry, worried, irritated or calm? How are you getting this impression? Underline or highlight the words and phrases giving you this impression.



When you have read Janet's e-mail, read the letters she has copied to you.



As you read the first letter, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 What are Jane Sumner's complaints?
- 2 The letter is partly formal (businesslike) and partly informal (everyday, chatty with slang or abbreviations). Which parts are formal and which parts are informal? Make a note of these on the letter.
- 3 What do you think Jane wants the reader of the letter to do?
- 4 Is there any part of her complaint that you may be unable to deal with?

If you are working with another learner, discuss your thoughts together.



## Assignment: Reading and writing for meaning and purpose

Letter 1: from the tenant, Ms Jane Sumner

23 Station Road  
Halifax  
HX 3FG

23/11/08

Dear Sir,

I want to complain about the appalling state of my flat. I have been in it now for five weeks and it has been nothing but a headache. It looked OK when I first saw it but, now I am in it, I realise the problems.

First it's the smell. I think the previous tenant must have had a dog. It certainly smells like it and the carpet in the back bedroom has some suspicious looking patches. Then there's the taps. Twice the bathroom basin tap has come off in my hand. I can't plug in the washing machine in its socket, under the work surface in the kitchen, as that doesn't work. I have to use another one and have the flex trailing across the room.

The gas fire in the sitting room doesn't seem to work at all. Thank goodness the central heating is OK. It wasn't as clean as I'd have liked to see it, but I have done something about that, although I shouldn't have had to. It should have been in good condition when I took over. That's what it says in my rental agreement.

I thought your firm had a good reputation, otherwise I wouldn't have used you. My upstairs neighbours don't empty their bins, so there's mess outside too. They tramp around upstairs like a herd of elephants. I am very disappointed and expect you to do something about it all.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jane Sumner'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jane Sumner



## Assignment: Reading and writing for meaning and purpose

*Letter 2: from Paul Roberts of Richards Estate and Letting Agents to Ms Jane Sumner*



Richards Estate and Letting Agents  
63–67 Crowmarsh Road  
Halifax  
HX23 0DP

26 November 2008

Ms Jane Sumner  
Flat 9  
23 Station Road  
Halifax  
HX13 1FL

Dear Ms Sumner,

I am replying to your letter sent on 23 November 2008, which outlines your concerns about the state of your flat.

We strive to maintain the highest possible standards of customer service at all times and are very concerned that on this occasion you feel this has not been the case and that your flat is in an unsatisfactory state.

The flat was inspected before you moved in and appeared to be in a satisfactory condition then. As the previous tenant did not report the state of the taps or the broken socket for the washing machine, there is no way we could have known about these. However, we will send someone around to inspect in more detail as soon as possible.

We cannot, of course, be held responsible for the state of your neighbour's bins or their noisy behaviour, as we do not handle the letting of that flat.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Paul Roberts'.

Paul Roberts  
Lettings Administrator

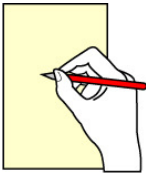


## Assignment: Reading and writing for meaning and purpose



Stop again and look back at Paul's letter. Ask yourself:

- What is Paul's purpose in writing this letter do you think? How do you know this?



Now read Paul's e-mail to your boss.

**From:** Paul Roberts

**Sent:** 26/11/08

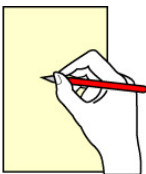
**To:** Janet Lewis

**Cc:**

**Subject:** Dealing with complaint - J Sumner

Just to let you know, I am dealing with a complaint from the above about the state of her flat. Strikes me as one of those who complain about everything and anything, but I'll send someone round to have a look and let you know what happens. I sent her the attached letter.

Paul



Stop again and think about Paul's message.

One part of this e-mail suggests that Paul is not taking the complaint seriously. Highlight the part.



## Assignment: Reading and writing for meaning and purpose

Telephone message taken on: 10/12/08

Taken by: Hirmal

Time of call: 14.20

Ms Jane Sumner rang (01484 479000).

She was very upset and annoyed.

Had written complaining about flat and received reply but no action.

Nobody been round to look.

Going to write to the Evening Post if not sorted out.

Noisy neighbours real concern but other things too.

Nobody available to talk to her.

Going on holiday for three days,

but expects a response on her return.

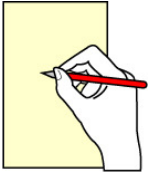
Wanted this to go straight to manager.

Now you have read all the texts, what do you think needs to be done? In Part 2 you will be asked to answer some questions and write a reply.

Make your own notes here on what you think should be done or points you need to remember.



## Part 2: question section



When you have read the two letters, two e-mails and the telephone note, answer the following questions. Have the printout of Part 1 nearby as you tackle the questions.

In the first three questions you need to find information by scanning the letters. Read each through once to get the overall message of the letter, and then read again to find the detail.

In Ms Sumner's letter, try listing or highlighting the problems she mentions. Look at the question and look back at the letter. Ask yourself which problem listed in the question is **not** mentioned by Ms Sumner.

- 1 Which of these problems is **not** listed in Ms Sumner's letter?
  - A Broken taps
  - B Gas fire not working
  - C Worn carpets
  - D Noisy neighbours



*In your reading, ask yourself what the main purpose of the letter is. What does the writer want to happen? Why is she writing? An important word here is 'main'. She may have more than one purpose. You are looking for the one you think is clearest.*

- 2 What is the **main** purpose of Ms Sumner's letter?
  - A To inform the agent of the problems with the flat
  - B To complain about the condition of the flat and request action
  - C To question the agent's reputation
  - D To inform the agent about the noisy neighbours





## Assignment: Reading and writing for meaning and purpose

Now use the same method you used on question 1 when reading Paul Roberts's letter.

3 In Paul Roberts's reply to Ms Sumner, he says that the agent cannot be responsible for:

- A the cleanliness of the flat
- B the state of the neighbour's bins
- C the broken taps
- D the electric socket for the washing machine not working.

4 Read the two letters again and decide how formal/businesslike or informal they are.

Fill in the grid below with examples you find. The grid has been started for you.

Examples of formal writing	Examples of informal writing
Layout of addresses – the address of the person to whom the letter is being sent is included, as well as that of the sender.	Abbreviations such as 'it's' are not used in formal letters.



Ask yourself who is writing the more formal letter – Ms Sumner or Paul Roberts? Think through how you know this.



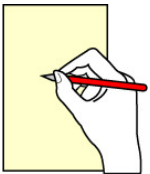
## Assignment: Reading and writing for meaning and purpose

### Reading between the lines



*This is called inferring meaning, which is the impression you are gaining from the texts: not just through the words being used, but for other reasons too.*

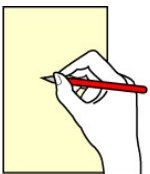
- *Are there things not there that you expect to be there?*
- *Do the words used give you a particular impression?*



**Look at all four texts again. How well has Paul Roberts been dealing with Ms Sumner's complaint do you think? How have you gained this impression?**

If you are working with another learner, why not talk this through? If you are working alone you can make your notes here.

### Writing the reply to Ms Sumner



**Now follow the instructions in Janet Lewis's e-mail on page 2 and write an appropriate letter to Ms Sumner.**

- What will the purpose of your letter be? Chose a layout and style that goes with this.
- Lay it out like a formal letter. (You can remind yourself of how to lay out this type of letter by looking at Paul Roberts's letter on page 4 of Part 1.)
- What action will you offer Ms Sumner?
- How will you word your letter so she will feel that her concerns are being met?
- How will you tell her what will happen next?

**For guidance and feedback, go to Part 3 of this assignment: How did you get on?**



### Part 3: How did you get on?

In this part you will find the answers to questions, and suggestions for approaching the writing.

#### Questions about the letters

1 Which of these problems is **not** listed in Ms Sumner's letter?

- A Broken taps
- B Gas fire not working
- C Worn carpets **Answer**
- D Noisy neighbours

Jane Sumner mentions a suspicious stain on the carpet, but not that the carpets are worn. She does list all the other items as part of her complaint.

2 What is the **main** purpose of Ms Sumner's letter?

- A To inform the agent of the problems with the flat
- B To complain about the condition of the flat and request action **Answer**
- C To question the agent's reputation
- D To inform the agent about the noisy neighbours

Jane does give information about all the things she has found wrong with her flat, but the letter reads like a complaint.

- The opening sentence states that she wants to complain, and her final statement expects that the estate agent will do something about this.
- The way she gives the information about the faults suggests that she is complaining strongly – the list pours out through the letter. 'Then there's the taps', the neighbours are 'like a herd of elephants'.

Answer B is her main purpose.



## Assignment: Reading and writing for meaning and purpose

3 In Paul Roberts's reply to Ms Sumner, he says that the agent cannot be responsible for:

- A the cleanliness of the flat
- B the state of the neighbour's bins      **Answer**
- C the broken taps
- D the electronic socket for the washing machine not working.

This question is asking you to find information in Paul Roberts's letter.

If you use the technique of looking at each paragraph and finding the most important piece of information there, the answer to this question can be found in the last paragraph.

### 4 Guidance notes

Whose letter is more formal, Paul Roberts's or Ms Sumner's? Think through how you know this.

Paul Roberts's letter is more formal than the one written by Jane Sumner.

Paul Roberts's letter	Jane Sumner's letter
Both addresses are used. This is the style for a formal business letter.	Uses abbreviations such as 'it's' and 'can't'.
No slang terms, abbreviations or everyday chatty words are used.	Starts with a formal 'Dear Sir', but ends with just 'Yours' rather than 'Yours faithfully'.
The letter starts 'Dear Ms Sumner' and ends 'Yours sincerely'.	Casual, chatty expressions like OK and thank goodness are used.
The letter is organised into separate paragraphs. Each paragraph deals with a separate point.	Many points are made in the letter but they pour out as if the writer was talking rather than writing, e.g. 'then there's the taps'.
Paragraph 1 states the reason for writing.	Sentences are often short and sound like conversation, e.g. 'First it's the smell.'
Phrases are used that are mainly used in formal writing, e.g. 'strive to maintain'.	



### Reading between the lines

Here are some of the points you may have gathered by ‘inference’: that is, reading between the lines.

1 From Janet Lewis’s e-mail:

<b>Reading between the lines</b>	<b>How you might have got this impression</b>
Janet is suggesting that the complaint has been handled badly before.	She reports that Jane Sumner is really angry ‘about the way we have been dealing with her’.
She is concerned that if it is not sorted out it might become public and do the firm harm.	‘We can’t have this sort of thing.’ ‘I don’t want us ending up in the paper.’
Janet wants the problem dealt with urgently.	‘I need you to sort this out ASAP.’

2 From Paul Roberts’s letter:

<b>Reading between the lines</b>	<b>How you might have got this impression</b>
Paul’s apology may have been rather detached and insincere. He conveys an impression of lack of urgency.	Stresses Jane’s concerns and feelings rather than the actual details of the complaint.  He says he will send someone to investigate as soon as possible – not urgently or immediately.  He stresses that he cannot be held responsible for the neighbours and does not express sympathy for her situation.
He is not prepared to take responsibility for the situation.	He explains why he didn’t know about the problems, rather than giving an assurance that they will be corrected.



### Writing to Jane Sumner

#### How did you get on?

You might have included the following:

- a sincere apology for the fact that the flat was not as she expected when she moved in and for the lack of action in putting the situation right
- an offer of an immediate inspection on her return from holiday and a programme of work following this
- a gesture of apology such as waiving a month's rent
- an offer to draft a letter for her to her noisy neighbours requesting reduced noise
- clear information on how the complaint will be followed up.

Lastly, can you apply this to your everyday life and work?

- What different kinds of text do you read? Which are formal and which are informal?

Here are some ideas for applying the skills you have learnt in this assignment.

- Look out for the next formal or informal piece of text you get to read. Look out for the points you have noticed in these letters.
- Look out for the next time you need to 'read between the lines' or work out what is being implied in a piece of text.



## Assignment: Reading and writing for meaning and purpose

### Laying out a formal letter: a reminder

34 John Dawson Street  
King's Lynn  
Norfolk  
PE30 5TY

21 May 2003

Mr Jack Stephens  
87 East Street  
Peterborough  
Cambs.  
PE2 7JH

This is a formal business letter, so the address of the sender and the person to whom it is sent are both given.

Dear Mr Stephens,

The opening line states why the author is writing.

I am writing to confirm your tenancy of 23 Station Road. The rent for the property will be £350 per calendar month. This is to be paid to this office monthly in advance, beginning on the first working day, or week, of each month. Before the tenancy starts, I will need a deposit of £400.

A separate paragraph is used for each new point.

The property will be let to you for no less than six months. Should you wish to move out before the six months are finished, you need to give one month's notice.

Two copies of the contract are enclosed with this letter. One is for your files; the other is for you to sign and return to me by 1 June.

The writer knows the name of the person he is writing to and so he uses 'Yours sincerely'. If he did not know the name he would use 'Yours faithfully' in a business letter.

Yours sincerely,

P. Gill