

Quick Guide

Reporting a Problem or Writing a Complaint

Introduction

It is important to tell your landlord when there is a problem that they need to address, but it can be difficult to organise your thoughts and focus on the key points, whilst at the same time making sure you have covered all they need to know.

This guide provides section-by-section advice on what to include. It doesn't matter whether the problem is anti-social behaviour, a broken door, or an error on your rent calculation. The approach is the same.

Online and Postal Communications



Many housing associations now have online systems where you can type your message directly onto a web page and then 'submit' it to the landlord.

Even in these circumstances, it can be useful to write it out for yourself first.

Either way, if you want to follow up with more detail, this template can be helpful in guiding you towards setting out a fuller picture of the problem.

Your landlord's website should have a postal address for sending your finished letter.

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Personal Details

First set out your personal information so that they can easily contact you with their response.

- Name:
- Address:
- Phone:
- Email:
- Tenancy reference:
- Other references: If this is part of an ongoing issue and the landlord has already provided a reference or case number, it is best to include that too.

If there are times when you are unavailable to speak, for example when you are likely to be at work, set those out here.

Summary of the Problem

Set out a summary of the complaint or the issue you want to report. It is useful to ask yourself the questions:

- **What** happened?
- **Where** did it happen?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Who** is involved or affected?
- **Why** did it happen?
- **How** did it happen?
- **What** effect is it having on you and others?

Not all questions will be relevant, but it's useful to work through the list so you don't miss anything.

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If you are making a complaint, it is good to be explicit about it when writing this section, for example by starting *“This is a formal complaint about ...”*.

Stick to the Facts



Try to distinguish between facts and beliefs, and where possible, stick to the facts. For example, instead of saying *“I think the hot water pipe has broken under the bathroom floorboards and it is creating a damp patch on my living room ceiling, but I’m not sure as I can’t see what’s causing it”*

It is enough just to say *“There is a damp patch on my living room ceiling, and I can’t see what is causing it”*.

Many complaints become complex and unclear because the writer adds a lot of irrelevant information. This makes it harder for the reader to understand exactly what the issue is that the tenant wants addressed. Checking each line and asking whether it adds useful information or just offers an opinion is a good way to avoid this happening.

Remedy

You’ve described the problem, now tell the landlord what you want them to do about it.

Try to set this out as clearly as possible, rather than relying on the landlord to know. In more complex problems like anti-social behaviour, it can be very hard for the reader to guess at what would satisfy you.

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“In order to resolve the situation, I would like you to ...”

Even in obvious cases, like a broken water pipe, it is best to be explicit.



It is worth giving thought to the remedy before you send the report or complaint. It can end up in frustrations and delays if you keep having to go back to add other items onto your list.

You can start by asking yourself whether you want them just to deal with the immediate problem or are there other things to consider.

For example, a burst pipe needs fixing, but may have caused a damp patch on your ceiling, so you would want the pipe and the ceiling repaired. It may also have damaged furniture or other items that will need to be replaced.

You should be clear about whether you want items replaced or prefer to have compensation to buy new ones yourself.

There may be other costs that resulted and for which you need compensation. One example would be lost income because you had to take time off work while repairs were carried out.

If you are asking for compensation, find out and provide the figure for how much a replacement would cost. Both are important. Don't just quote a figure, try to get accurate estimates and say how you arrived at the amount.

Evidence

Photographic or other evidence can be very helpful. If you have something that will support your complaint or problem report, it is a good idea to include it with your letter.

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For example, if you are raising a repair request and can send photos of the damaged or problem area, that will help the tradespeople understand the problem better and be ready to repair it properly. If your doctor has advised that you need an adjustment to your property to help you manage a disability, then that will be informative.

However, only ever send copies of documents or photos, never the originals. It is possible for letters to get lost in the post or in the organisation's processes.

Keep a Copy

Finally, keep a copy of the letter and any evidence you send, and file them where you can find them. It sounds obvious, but given the length of time it can take landlords to respond, it is all too easy for things to get lost.



Note the date you posted it if you aren't using recorded or registered delivery. If you are using a timed delivery, keep the receipt with your copy of the letter.

Never rely on the landlord having a copy of what you sent – all too often they will deny ever having seen it. You need to be able to tell them what you sent and when, and re-send it if necessary.

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