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Name:

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ALLAMA IQBAL OPEN UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD

Course: Business Communication (1416) • Level: BA/BS

Semester: Autumn 2026

Assignment No. 1 (Units 1–5)

Total Marks: 100 • Pass Marks (BA): 40 • Pass Marks (BS): 50

SOLVED ASSIGNMENT GUIDE

(For Study & Reference)

Note: This guide is prepared for study and reference purposes. Students are advised to read the relevant units of the course book, understand the concepts, and write the assignment in their own words. Copying this guide word for word is not recommended.

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Question 1: Components of the Communication Process and the Problem of Noise (20 Marks)

Question: Explain the main components of the communication process; evaluate how breakdown or "noise" at any stage or part of this process could lead to miscommunication and what that might entail for a business setting.

Introduction

Communication is the lifeblood of every organisation. Managers spend most of their working day giving instructions, receiving reports, attending meetings, writing letters and emails, and persuading customers and colleagues. Yet the mere fact that a message has been sent does not mean that communication has taken place. Communication is successful only when the receiver understands the message in the same sense in which the sender intended it. To understand why messages so often go wrong, we study communication as a process — a sequence of connected stages through which an idea travels from one mind to another. This answer explains the major components of that process one by one, and then evaluates how "noise",

 WhatsApp Orders: +92 324 5836626

the term used for any disturbance or breakdown in the process, can distort the message at any stage, and what such miscommunication costs a business in money, time, safety and goodwill.

The Major Components of the Communication Process

The communication process is usually described through seven inter-related components: the sender, encoding, the message, the channel or medium, the receiver, decoding, and feedback. Context and noise surround the whole process. Each component performs a distinct function, and the quality of the final understanding depends on the weakest link in the chain.

(1) The sender (communicator or source) is the person who initiates communication because he or she has an idea, information, an instruction, a feeling or a decision to share. In business, the sender may be a manager issuing an order, a salesperson describing a product, or an employee reporting a problem. The sender's knowledge, attitude, social position and communication skill strongly influence how the message will be framed and received.

(2) Encoding is the process of converting the idea into a form that can be transmitted — words, numbers, pictures, gestures or symbols. The sender must choose words the receiver knows, arrange them in a logical order and give the message a suitable tone. Encoding is where much communication is won or lost: a clear thinker who cannot put the thought into the receiver's language will still fail to communicate.

(3) The message is the encoded content itself — the letter, email, report, speech, notice or signal that actually travels. A good business message is complete, clear, concise, correct and

courteous. The message must be distinguished from the idea behind it: two senders with the same idea can produce very different messages, one effective and one confusing.

(4) The channel or medium is the route by which the message travels: face-to-face conversation, a telephone call, a written memo, an email, a video conference or a notice board. Channels differ in richness and speed. Face-to-face communication is the richest because it carries words, tone, facial expression and instant feedback; a written notice is slower and leaner, but it creates a permanent record. Choosing the wrong channel — for example, announcing a sensitive dismissal by a group email — can damage a message before it is even read.

(5) The receiver is the person for whom the message is intended: a subordinate, a customer, a supplier or the public. Communication is receiver-centred; the receiver's knowledge, experience, expectations and mood determine what the message will finally mean to him or her.

(6) Decoding is the receiver's counterpart of encoding: the receiver interprets the symbols and reconstructs the meaning. Decoding is never a perfect reversal of encoding, because the receiver interprets the words through his or her own background. Words such as “as soon as possible”, “a large order” or “minor repairs” decode differently for different people unless the sender has defined them precisely.

(7) Feedback is the receiver's response, which travels back to the sender and completes the loop. Feedback may be a reply letter, a nod, a clarifying question, a completed form — or significant silence. It tells the sender whether the message was received, understood and acted

upon. Without feedback, communication remains one-way and the sender is merely guessing. Two-way communication with honest feedback is the foundation of coordination in any organisation.

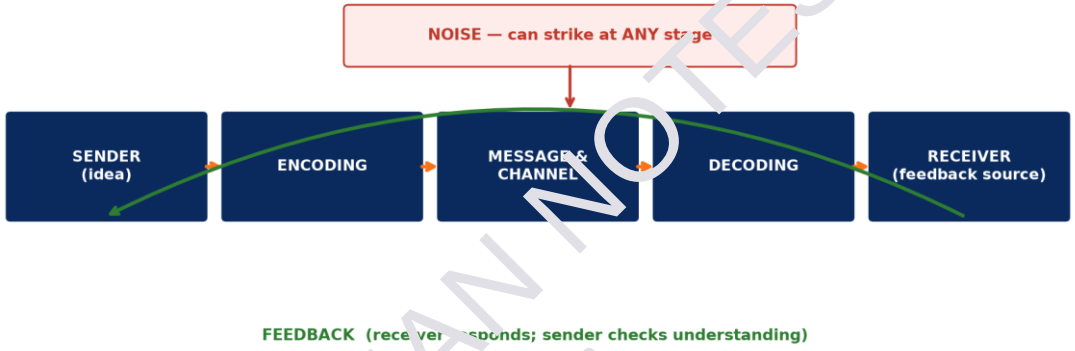


Figure 1: The communication process — sender, encoding, message and channel, decoding, receiver and feedback, with noise able to strike at any stage.

Noise: Breakdown at Any Stage

"Noise" is anything that interferes with the accurate transmission or interpretation of a message. It is not limited to physical sound. Communication scholars classify noise into several types. Physical noise includes poor telephone lines, illegible handwriting, a faulty printer, background machinery or a weak internet connection. Psychological noise includes prejudice, anger, worry, over-confidence and closed-mindedness in either party. Semantic noise arises from language itself: jargon, technical terms, ambiguous words, difficult vocabulary and poor translation. Organisational noise includes messages distorted as they pass through many hierarchical levels, overloaded in-boxes, and rumours filling gaps where official information is missing.

Noise can strike at every stage, and each strike has a characteristic result. If noise affects the sender — for example, a manager who is angry, rushed or unclear about his own decision — the message is defective from birth. If it strikes during encoding, correct ideas come out as wrong words: a price quoted in the wrong currency, or "15th" typed as "5th". Channel noise corrupts the message in transit: an email goes to spam, an attachment fails to open, a letter is delivered to the wrong branch. Noise at decoding produces the classic "I thought you meant…" situation, where the receiver honestly reconstructs a different meaning. Finally, noise in feedback is dangerous because it removes the safety net: a subordinate who fears the boss nods agreement he does not feel, so the sender proceeds on a false assurance that all is understood.

What Miscommunication Entails for a Business

The business consequences of such breakdowns are concrete and costly. First, there are direct financial losses: wrong quantities manufactured, goods shipped to a wrong address, discounts promised by mistake, tenders submitted after a misunderstood deadline, and rework that consumes labour and material twice. Second, there is loss of time and coordination: departments work at cross purposes, meetings are repeated, and decisions are delayed while people discover they were following different versions of the same instruction. Third, miscommunication damages industrial relations and morale. Employees who repeatedly receive unclear, contradictory or late instructions lose trust in management, and grievances and rumours multiply in the vacuum. Fourth, there are safety and legal consequences: a misunderstood safety instruction can cause injury, and a carelessly worded letter can bind a

firm to terms it never intended, or offend a customer into a legal complaint. Fifth, external miscommunication — unclear advertisements, wrong product information, unanswered complaints — destroys reputation and customer goodwill, which take years to rebuild and days to lose.

A simple illustration shows the chain reaction. A sales manager emails a factory: “Increase the production of the blue model by about 10% before the festival season.” The phrase “about 10%” is semantic noise; the factory decodes it as 10% of last month's output, the sales department expected 10% above the festival forecast. The email is read late (channel noise), no one asks a clarifying question (feedback noise), and the result is a warehouse short of stock in the peak season and surplus afterwards. Every stage contributed, and the loss appeared not as a “communication problem” but as lost sales — which is why managers often underestimate how much of their operational failure is really communication failure.

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Reducing Noise: Practical Safeguards

Businesses cannot eliminate noise, but they can design against it. Senders should plan messages, use the receiver's language, prefer simple and exact words, and put critical figures in writing. Important instructions should be repeated through more than one channel. Receivers should be encouraged to ask questions, and senders should actively seek feedback by asking the receiver to restate the task rather than asking “Understood?”, which invites a false yes. Written confirmations of oral agreements, standard formats for orders and reports, and a culture in which admitting confusion is not punished all reduce noise at its commonest points.

Conclusion

In conclusion, communication is a process of sender, encoding, message, channel, receiver, decoding and feedback, operating within a context and constantly exposed to noise. Because the process is a chain, a weakness at any single stage — a confused sender, careless encoding, a wrong channel, inattentive decoding or dishonest feedback — is enough to produce miscommunication. For a business, miscommunication is not a minor inconvenience; it converts directly into wasted money, lost time, disputes, accidents, legal exposure and lost customers. Effective managers therefore treat communication as a skill and a system to be managed: they word messages carefully, choose channels deliberately, verify understanding through feedback, and work continuously to reduce the noise that surrounds every message they send.

Question 2: Verbal and Non-Verbal Factors of Effective Speaking (20 Marks)

Question: Discuss the verbal and non-verbal factors of effective speaking and evaluate how an improper use or breakdown in any of these could be fatal for a speaker; identify the ideal means to be found in each case.

Introduction

Speaking is the most frequently used form of business communication. Interviews, presentations, negotiations, meetings, telephone calls, sales talks and instructions are all carried mainly by the spoken word. Yet speaking is never words alone. Every spoken message travels on two channels at the same time: the verbal channel, which carries the words and the

voice, and the non-verbal channel, which carries the body — posture, gestures, facial expression, eye contact and appearance. Research on face-to-face communication repeatedly shows that when words and body disagree, listeners believe the body. This answer discusses the main verbal and non-verbal factors of effective speaking, shows how the misuse or breakdown of any one of them can be fatal for a speaker — destroying credibility, understanding or persuasion in a single moment — and identifies the ideal standard to be aimed at in each case.

Verbal Factors of Effective Speaking

The verbal side of speaking has two layers: the language itself, and the voice that delivers it. Under language come clarity of words, correctness, organisation and appropriateness. The speaker must choose simple, exact and familiar words, avoid needless jargon (or explain it when it is necessary), and use correct grammar and pronunciation, because errors distract the listener and quietly lower the speaker's authority. Ideas must be organised: an opening that states the purpose, a logical sequence of points supported by facts and examples, and a clear conclusion or call to action. Language must also fit the audience: the same proposal is explained one way to engineers and another way to customers, and courtesy — respectful forms of address, no sarcasm, no personal remarks — keeps the listener receptive.

Under voice (the vocal or para-language element) come volume, pitch, pace, pause, emphasis and articulation. Volume must be audible to the last row but not shouting at the first. Pitch variation keeps the talk alive; a monotone signals boredom and invites it. Pace should be moderate — fast enough to hold energy, slow enough for important points to be absorbed —

with deliberate pauses before and after key statements so that they register. Emphasis placed on the right words guides the listener to the speaker's meaning, and clear articulation, especially of names, numbers and technical terms, prevents costly misunderstandings.

How Verbal Breakdown Can Be Fatal

A breakdown on the verbal side can destroy a speech even when the speaker's knowledge is sound. Wrong or ambiguous words can reverse the intended meaning — a misplaced “not”, a wrong figure, or a technical term the audience does not know can make an entire proposal incomprehensible or, worse, understood wrongly and acted upon. Disorganisation is equally fatal: a speaker who wanders, repeats and backtracks loses the audience's attention within minutes, and an audience that has stopped following cannot be persuaded. A voice that is too soft makes the speaker appear weak and unprepared; shouting makes him appear aggressive; a rushed delivery suggests nervousness or concealment; and a flat monotone puts listeners to sleep regardless of content. In an interview or negotiation, one careless phrase — an exaggerated claim, a discourteous reply, a promise the firm cannot keep — can end the matter on the spot. The ideal in each case is the opposite discipline: precise and simple words, a visible plan, a trained and varied voice, and the habit of checking understanding as one proceeds.

Non-Verbal Factors of Effective Speaking

The non-verbal side includes kinesics (body movements), facial expression, eye contact, posture and gestures, proxemics (use of space and distance), appearance, and the use of time. Facial expressions should match the message: a smile when welcoming, seriousness when discussing a loss. Eye contact distributed around the audience or across the table communicates honesty

and confidence and lets the speaker read reactions. Gestures should illustrate and emphasise — pointing to a chart, counting points on the fingers — while fidgeting, pocketed hands and crossed arms communicate nervousness or defensiveness. An upright, relaxed posture signals confidence; leaning slightly towards listeners signals interest. Physical distance should respect the relationship and the culture: too close invades, too far disconnects. Neat, situation-appropriate dress and punctuality are also messages: they tell the audience, before a word is spoken, that the speaker is professional and respects their time.

How Non-Verbal Breakdown Can Be Fatal

Non-verbal failure is often more fatal than verbal failure, because listeners treat body language as the truthful channel. A sales representative who praises his product's reliability while avoiding eye contact and shifting nervously will be disbelieved, however polished his words. A manager who announces "my door is always open" while frowning at an interruption teaches employees to stay away. In a job interview, a limp handshake, slouching, checking a mobile phone or dressing carelessly can end the candidate's chances before qualifications are discussed. In cross-cultural settings the risks multiply: gestures, eye contact and personal distance that are normal in one culture can be rude in another, and a speaker ignorant of this can offend an entire delegation without saying a wrong word. Contradiction between channels is the deepest danger: the moment an audience detects that the body is contradicting the words, it stops trusting both. The ideal is congruence — body, face and voice all telling the same story as the words — supported by preparation: rehearsing before a mirror or camera,

learning the audience's cultural norms, dressing one level above the expected standard, arriving early, and consciously relaxing the body before speaking.

Table 1: Factors of effective speaking, their failure, and the ideal standard

Factor	Breakdown / misuse	Ideal standard
Choice of words	Ambiguous, technical or wrong words; meaning reversed or lost	Simple, exact, audience-appropriate vocabulary
Organisation	Rambling, no sequence; audience stops following	Clear opening, logical points, definite conclusion
Voice: volume, pace, tone	Too soft, shouting, rushing or monotone; boredom or distrust	Audible, varied, moderate pace with deliberate pauses
Facial expression & eye contact	Expression contradicts words; avoided eye contact reads as dishonesty	Expression matches message; steady, distributed eye contact
Gestures & posture	Fidgeting, crossed arms, slouching; nervousness and defensiveness	Natural illustrative gestures; upright, relaxed posture
Appearance, space & time	Careless dress, crowding the listener, lateness	Neat dress, respectful distance, strict punctuality

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Conclusion

To conclude, effective speaking rests on verbal factors — well-chosen words, sound organisation and a controlled, expressive voice — and on non-verbal factors — facial expression, eye contact, gestures, posture, distance, appearance and punctuality. The two channels are judged together, and a serious breakdown in any one of them can be fatal: it can make a true message unbelievable, a good proposal unintelligible, or a competent speaker appear dishonest, weak or rude. The ideal for the business speaker is therefore disciplined preparation on both channels at once, so that words, voice and body reinforce a single clear meaning and the audience is left free to judge the message itself rather than the manner of its delivery.

Question 3: The Listening Process and the Practice of Active Listening (20 Marks)

Question: Effective listening requires purposeful engagement; it is an active process. Identify the major steps involved in the listening process and discuss the measures that might be adopted to ensure we are able to effectively engage in "active" listening during our discussions.

Introduction

Of all the communication skills, listening is the most used and the least taught. Studies of managerial work consistently show that listening occupies the largest share of communication time, yet most people listen at a low level of efficiency: they hear the speaker's words while their attention drifts to their own replies, their phones and their prejudices. Hearing is a physical act — sound reaching the ear. Listening is a mental and purposeful act — receiving, understanding, evaluating and responding to a message. Because it demands effort and engagement, listening is properly described as an active process. This answer identifies the major steps of the listening process and then discusses, step by step and in general, the measures by which a person can practise genuine active listening in business discussions.

The Major Steps in the Listening Process

The listening process is generally described in five steps. (1) Receiving (hearing): the listener takes in the speaker's words and also observes the accompanying non-verbal signals — tone, expression and gestures. Receiving requires physical readiness: functioning hearing, a reasonably quiet environment and attention directed at the speaker rather than at competing

stimuli. (2) Understanding (interpreting): the listener decodes the symbols, connects them with what he already knows, and grasps not only the facts but the speaker's intent and feeling. At this step the listener may silently restate the point in his own words to test whether he has truly understood. (3) Remembering: the understood message is stored so that it can be recalled later in the discussion or after it. Remembering is aided by identifying the speaker's main points and their structure instead of trying to retain every word. (4) Evaluating: the listener judges the message — separating fact from opinion, weighing evidence, detecting exaggeration, emotion and bias, and deciding how far the message is acceptable. Evaluation must follow understanding; judging before the speaker has finished is the commonest cause of listening failure. (5) Responding (feedback): the listener gives the speaker verbal and non-verbal feedback — nodding, asking questions, paraphrasing, agreeing or respectfully disagreeing. Feedback completes the loop, confirms to the speaker that he has been heard, and allows misunderstandings to be corrected immediately.

Table 1: The five steps of the listening process and the listener's task at each step

Step	What happens	Listener's key task
1. Receiving	Words and non-verbal signals reach the listener	Give full attention; remove distractions
2. Understanding	Meaning, intent and feeling are interpreted	Restate silently; connect with prior knowledge
3. Remembering	Main points are stored for later use	Note the structure and key points, not every word
4. Evaluating	Facts, evidence and bias are weighed	Judge after hearing fully; separate fact from opinion
5. Responding	Feedback is given to the speaker	Question, paraphrase and confirm understanding

Measures for Effective Active Listening

Active listening is the deliberate practice that strengthens every one of these steps. Its measures can be grouped under preparation, behaviour during the discussion, and verbal techniques. As preparation, the listener should remove physical barriers and distractions: silence the mobile phone, close unrelated files, choose a quiet seat, and face the speaker. He should also prepare mentally — knowing the subject of the meeting in advance, and consciously setting aside prior opinions about the speaker. A listener who has already decided that a colleague is always wrong will hear everything through that filter; active listening begins with a decision to hear the message on its merits.

In behaviour, the active listener gives visible, continuous attention. He maintains natural eye contact, sits in an open and slightly forward-leaning posture, nods at appropriate points and avoids distracting mannerisms such as checking the time or shuffling papers. He does not interrupt. Interruption is the single most destructive listening habit in business discussions: it stops the speaker's thought, signals that the listener values his own words more, and often provokes defensiveness that hardens the disagreement. The active listener lets the speaker complete each thought, tolerates short silences — which often precede the speaker's most important points — and controls his own emotions when the message is unwelcome, since an angry reaction teaches speakers to withhold bad news in future, to the organisation's cost.

In verbal technique, three practices are central. The first is questioning: open, clarifying questions (“Could you explain how this figure was calculated?”) that expand understanding without trapping the speaker. The second is paraphrasing: restating the speaker's point in one's

own words ("So, if I understand correctly, the delay is in raw material supply, not in production…") which both verifies understanding and assures the speaker that he has been genuinely heard. The third is summarising: at natural intervals, drawing the threads together ("So far we agree on the budget and the timeline; the open point is staffing"), which organises remembering and moves the discussion forward. Alongside these, the active listener takes brief notes of decisions, figures and commitments, delays evaluation until the speaker has finished, empathises — listening for feelings and concerns as well as facts, especially in grievance, appraisal and customer-complaint situations — and watches the speaker's non-verbal signals, since a hesitant tone or avoided glance often carries the real message behind the official words.

Barriers That Active Listening Must Overcome

These measures are necessary because listening faces constant barriers: environmental noise and interruptions; the listener's prejudices and assumptions; the speed gap between speech (roughly 125–150 words a minute) and thought (several times faster), which tempts the mind to wander; emotional reactions to particular words; and the habit of preparing one's reply instead of listening, known as rehearsing. None of these barriers disappears by itself. They are overcome only by the deliberate disciplines described above, practised until they become habit. Organisations can support them by training, by keeping meetings focused and reasonably short, by circulating agendas in advance so that listeners come prepared, and by leaders modelling the behaviour — a senior manager who listens fully before responding gives the whole office permission to do the same.

Conclusion

In conclusion, listening is a five-step active process — receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating and responding — and it fails when any step is skipped or performed lazily. Active listening is the set of disciplines that keeps all five steps working: preparing the setting and the mind, giving visible and uninterrupted attention, controlling emotion, questioning, paraphrasing and summarising, noting what matters, and judging only after understanding. In business discussions these habits pay for themselves many times over: they prevent errors born of misunderstanding, surface problems while they are still small, make colleagues and customers feel respected, and produce decisions that participants have genuinely heard, understood and therefore actually carry out.

Question 4: Business Letters versus Personal Letters, with a Model Complaint Letter (20 Marks)

Question: Business letters differ in form and purpose from personal letters. Discuss the importance of business letters for an organization and how they are different from personal ones. Afterwards, draft a formal letter for any ONE of the following situations: (a) Write a complaint letter to your office equipment supplier, informing them that the conference table you have received for your company is worn out, with scratches. Mention your receipt/order number and the date of the purchase. (b) Write a request letter to your manager, explaining that the task you have been assigned, which is due next Monday, will require more time; make sure to inform them of the progress that has been made, provide reasons for the delay, and propose an extended due date.

Introduction

The letter is the oldest formal instrument of business communication, and despite email and instant messaging it has not lost its place. Organisations still confirm orders, appoint staff, claim payments, record agreements and address customers and authorities through letters, because a letter is deliberate, dignified and permanent in a way that a chat message is not. At the same time, a business letter is a very different document from the personal letter written to a friend or relative: the two differ in purpose, tone, structure, language and legal significance. This answer first explains why business letters remain important for an organisation, then sets out the differences between business and personal letters, and finally drafts a formal complaint letter for the first of the two given situations.

The Importance of Business Letters for an Organisation

Business letters serve an organisation in at least seven ways. First, they create a permanent written record. A letter can be filed, retrieved years later and produced as evidence of what was promised, ordered or agreed; in disputes and in court, the written letter carries a weight that a remembered conversation cannot. Second, letters are a channel of external relations: they reach customers, suppliers, banks, government departments and the public, often providing the first — and sometimes the only — impression those parties form of the firm. A well-written letter advertises the firm's competence and courtesy before its product is even examined. Third, letters perform the core transactions of business: enquiries, quotations, orders, confirmations, reminders for payment, complaints, adjustments, appointments, references and resignations are all conventionally handled by letter. Fourth, they are

economical and wide-reaching: one standard letter can address hundreds of customers at low cost, and a letter crosses distances and time zones without requiring both parties to be present together. Fifth, letters allow considered communication: unlike speech, a letter can be drafted, checked for figures and tone, and approved before it is sent, which reduces error in sensitive matters. Sixth, letters carry legal and formal authority: they bear the letterhead, reference numbers, dates and signatures that make commitments attributable and enforceable. Seventh, internally and externally, letters build goodwill: a courteous adjustment letter can retain a customer whom a defective product might have lost, and a prompt letter of thanks or apology strengthens relationships that advertisements cannot buy.

How Business Letters Differ from Personal Letters

Business and personal letters differ systematically. In purpose, a business letter pursues an organisational objective — to inform, persuade, request, record or resolve — whereas a personal letter maintains a private relationship and shares news and feelings. In tone, the business letter is formal, courteous and impersonal; it avoids familiarity, slang and emotional outbursts even when complaining. The personal letter is informal and expressive, and its warmth is its virtue. In structure, the business letter follows a fixed format: letterhead, date, reference number, inside address, salutation, subject line, a body organised into introduction, details and action/closing paragraphs, a complimentary close, signature, designation and enclosures. The personal letter has a loose structure — address and date, an affectionate salutation, free-flowing paragraphs and an informal closing — and no subject or reference. In language, business writing is precise, concise and factual, with exact figures, dates and terms,

because others will act on it; personal writing may be rambling, humorous and incomplete without harm. In significance, a business letter can bind the organisation legally and financially and is filed as a record; a personal letter binds no one and is kept, if at all, for sentiment. Finally, the writer's identity differs: the business writer writes as the representative of an organisation, in the organisation's voice, even when using "I"; the personal writer writes purely as an individual.

Table 1: Business letters and personal letters compared

Point of difference	Business letter	Personal letter
Purpose	Organisational: inform, request, record, persuade, resolve	Private: maintain relations, share news and feelings
Tone	Formal, courteous, impersonal	Informal, warm, expressive
Structure	Fixed format: letterhead, reference, subject, organised body, formal close	Loose: date, familiar salutation, free paragraphs, informal close
Language	Precise, concise, factual; exact dates and figures	Free, conversational; detail optional
Record & legal value	Filed as record; can bind the organisation and be used as evidence	No legal value; kept for sentiment
Writer's identity	Writes as representative of the organisation	Writes as a private individual

Model Letter: Complaint to an Office Equipment Supplier (Situation a)

The following is a formal complaint letter for the first situation given in the question. Names, the supplier and the order details are the particulars required by the situation itself; a student should substitute the particulars of his or her own chosen example in the same format.

Bright Office Interiors (Pvt.) Ltd. — Office Equipment & Furniture Suppliers [Supplier's address on the letterhead of the sender as below]

From: Administration Department, Sunrise Textiles (Pvt.) Ltd., 14 Industrial Estate Road, Lahore.

Date: 12 October 2026

Ref. No.: ST/ADMN/2026/118

To: The Sales Manager, Bright Office Interiors (Pvt.) Ltd., 22 Main Boulevard, Gulberg, Lahore.

Subject: Complaint Regarding Defective Conference Table Supplied Against Order No. BOI-4521 — Receipt No. 8834, Dated 5 October 2026

Dear Sir/Madam,

We refer to our Order No. BOI-4521, placed with your firm on 28 September 2026, for one conference table for our boardroom. The table was delivered to our office on 5 October 2026 against your Receipt / Invoice No. 8834 of the same date, and the full payment was made at the time of delivery.

On unpacking and inspection, we regret to inform you that the conference table received is not in the condition promised. The polish is worn out at several places, the surface bears visible scratches along both sides, and one edge shows clear signs of previous use. The item supplied appears to be a used or display piece rather than the new table shown to us in your showroom and described in your quotation.

You will appreciate that a conference table occupies the most visible place in a company's office and is used for meetings with clients; a worn and scratched table is unacceptable to us and reflects poorly on your firm's quality standards as well. We therefore request you to replace the table with a new, defect-free piece of the same model within seven days of the receipt of this letter, and to arrange collection of the defective table at your own cost. In case replacement is not possible within this period, we shall expect a full refund of the amount paid against Receipt No. 8834.

We have valued our business relations with your firm and hope this complaint will be settled promptly and amicably. An early reply confirming the replacement date will be appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

(Signature)

Ahmed Raza

Administration Manager, Sunrise Textiles (Pvt.) Ltd.

Encl.: Copy of Receipt No. 8834

Note on the letter's construction: the letter states the facts first (order number, receipt number and date of purchase, as the question requires), then describes the defect in specific, verifiable terms (worn polish, scratches, signs of previous use), then states its effect and the exact remedy requested with a reasonable time limit, and closes courteously — firm on the claim, polite in tone. That combination, evidence plus courtesy plus a definite request, is what makes a complaint letter effective rather than merely angry.

Conclusion

To conclude, business letters remain important because they record, transact, represent and bind an organisation in ways no informal channel can replace, and they differ from personal letters in purpose, tone, structure, language, legal value and the writer's representative identity. The model complaint letter above applies those principles: it is formal in format, exact in particulars — order number, receipt number and date — specific about the defect in the conference table received, clear about the remedy sought, and courteous throughout, which is precisely the standard a business letter is expected to meet.

Question 5: The Role of the Meeting Chair and the Risks of a Careless Chair (20 Marks)

Question: Examine the role of the meeting chair in making sure the discussion remains on track and everything goes smoothly. Discuss the potential problems that might arise, both in terms of

conflict management, favoritism, and decision manipulation, and in terms of time consumption and wastage, if the chair is not careful with regard to his / her role.

Introduction

A meeting is one of the most expensive forms of business communication: it gathers several salaried people in one room for an hour or more, and its value depends entirely on what that gathered time produces. The person most responsible for converting meeting time into decisions is the chair (chairperson). The chair is not merely the senior person present or a ceremonial opener; he or she is the meeting's planner, traffic controller, referee, summariser and guardian of fairness. When the chair performs this role well, discussion stays on the agenda, every view is heard, conflicts are resolved and the meeting ends with clear decisions and assigned actions. When the chair is careless, the same meeting degenerates into digression, domination, manipulation and waste. This answer examines the chair's role in keeping a meeting on track, and then discusses the problems — in conflict management, favouritism and decision manipulation, and in time consumption and wastage — that follow when the chair neglects that role.

The Role of the Chair in Keeping Discussion on Track

The chair's work begins before the meeting. He or she settles the purpose of the meeting, approves the agenda and its order, ensures that papers and figures are circulated in advance so that members arrive prepared, and confirms that the right people — those who can inform and decide — are invited. Without this preparation, even skilled chairing struggles, because members meet to discover facts they should already have read.

During the meeting, the chair opens by stating the purpose, the agenda and the time available, and then steers item by item. Steering has several parts. The chair introduces each item briefly, invites contributions in an orderly way, and gives every member — including the quiet ones — a genuine chance to speak, while politely limiting those who repeat themselves or dominate. He keeps the discussion relevant: when talk drifts to matters not on the agenda or not yet due, he acknowledges the point, parks it for a proper occasion, and returns the meeting to the item in hand. He clarifies confusion by asking for definitions, figures and summaries, and he periodically summarises what has been agreed so far, so the meeting can feel its own progress. Where disagreement sharpens, he separates the issue from the persons, invites the opposing members to state each other's concerns fairly, looks for the common interest beneath the positions, and, if necessary, defers the item with a clear task and date rather than letting it poison the rest of the agenda. As each item concludes, he states the decision reached, who is responsible for acting on it, and by when; at the end he reviews all decisions and actions, confirms the minutes will be circulated, and closes on time.

Problems When the Chair Is Careless: Conflict, Favouritism and Manipulation

If the chair does not actively manage conflict, a meeting's disagreements turn personal. Members interrupt and talk over one another, old departmental rivalries enter disguised as agenda items, and the loudest rather than the best argument wins. Unmanaged conflict leaves residue: members who feel attacked or humiliated in a meeting withdraw cooperation afterwards, form camps, and carry the quarrel into corridors and subsequent meetings, so one

badly chaired session damages teamwork long after it ends. Worse, a chair who takes sides in the conflict himself converts a disagreement about work into a grievance about authority.

Favouritism is the second failure. A careless or biased chair recognises some members repeatedly, invites the opinions of allies first and last, allows favoured members to overrun their time while cutting others short, and summarises the discussion in terms that flatter his preferred position. The consequences are corrosive. Members who perceive favouritism stop contributing honestly — silence in a meeting is rarely agreement; it is often surrender — and decisions lose legitimacy because the staff who must implement them believe they were pre-decided by a clique. Over time the organisation loses both the information held by its quieter members and their trust in the fairness of management.

Decision manipulation is the most serious abuse of the chair's power. Because the chair controls the agenda, the order of items, the wording of summaries and often the drafting of minutes, a manipulative chair can bury an unwelcome item at the end when members are tired, frame a question so that only one answer seems respectable ("Surely we all agree that…"), call a vote when opponents are absent, declare a "consensus" that was never tested, or record in the minutes a firmer decision than the meeting actually made. Each of these tricks produces decisions that are formally valid and practically rotten: they are resisted in implementation, reopened in later meetings, and they teach members that the meeting is theatre rather than the real place of decision — after which real decisions migrate to informal channels and the formal system decays.

Problems of Time Consumption and Wastage

The second family of problems is waste. A careless chair starts late — thereby punishing the punctual and rewarding the late — allows items to expand without limit, permits the same arguments to be repeated because no summary ever closes them, entertains digressions and anecdotes, and lets one long item consume the time of five short ones. Meetings then overrun, end without decisions, and spawn the most expensive sentence in business: “Let us meet again next week to decide.” The costs multiply quietly. Multiply the hourly cost of ten participants by a wasted hour and by the number of such meetings in a month, and the figure is substantial; add the opportunity cost of work not done, the frustration of staff whose evenings are consumed, and the growing cynicism that leads members to arrive unprepared (since nothing is ever decided anyway), and a vicious circle of useless meetings is established. Poor time discipline also corrupts decision quality directly: tired members rushing at the end of an overlong meeting approve important items carelessly just to escape, while genuinely urgent items are squeezed out by trivial ones discussed at leisure at the start.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the chair is the meeting's steering mechanism: preparing the agenda and papers, stating purpose and time, guiding item-by-item discussion, drawing out all members, managing disagreement, summarising progress and closing with recorded decisions and owners. A chair careless in this role exposes the organisation to two sets of harms. In human terms, unmanaged conflict, visible favouritism and manipulation of decisions destroy trust, silence honest contribution and produce decisions that fail in implementation. In resource terms, late starts,

digressions and indecision convert the salaries of everyone present into waste and multiply meetings instead of concluding business. The remedy lies in treating chairing as a skill: prepare, be visibly impartial, protect the quiet and restrain the dominant, summarise and record faithfully, and guard the meeting's time as strictly as its money – because in a meeting, time is money, spent in public, by the hour.

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