

How to Write a Complaint

Step 1: Considering a Complaint

We know that making the decision to file a complaint or report may not have been easy. It is normal to feel nervous or anxious about submitting a complaint or report and this is especially true if you are coming forward about someone you know or when you have experienced direct harm. Below are some things to keep in mind when thinking about submitting a complaint or report.

Remember that there are [a number of resources on campus](#) that can help to provide you with support. Also, if you are a student you can contact [Student Wellness Services](#) and, if you are an employee, you can reach out to the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#).

What is a Complaint or Report?

A complaint or report are written versions of what you are telling the university about what happened. By writing a complaint or report, you are indicating that you are willing to be contacted by a someone from the university who will ask questions to better understand what happened.

Is there a time limit to submit a Complaint or Report?

There is no set time limit to submit a complaint or report. Generally, it is best to do it as soon as you are able.

Safety Concerns

If you have immediate safety concerns related to what happened, you should contact either [Queen's Campus Security](#) at 613-533-6111 or [Kingston Police](#) at 911.

If you have more general concerns for your safety because you are considering submitting submission, speak first to [a campus resource](#). Even if what you have to say is difficult, or you feel embarrassed or scared, it is always best to share as much information as you can when you talk to someone about your concerns.

Preparation

Creating an outline of key events before trying to draft your submission may also be helpful. Think about the important pieces of information that you want to communicate. Sometimes it is difficult to determine what is relevant or important to include at the beginning stages. If you were unable to recall or don't include some details in your initial submission, write them down so that you can share them with later, if needed.

Corroborating Information

When writing your submission, try to stay away from making assumptions or speculating. Whenever possible, consult other sources (e.g. calendar, text messages, social media, etc.) to

help you to include specific times, dates, and details, and attach that supporting information to your submission.

Other Witnesses

In general, it is best for someone else involved in investigating your submission to collect statements directly from other witnesses. Please do not do this yourself. If you have concerns about who may be contacted or how that will happen, discuss your concerns with the contact person who reaches out to you about your submission. Speaking to other witnesses has the potential to compromise the integrity of the investigation.

You should provide the names and contact information for any other individuals who may have information about the incident in your submission, but if you don't have them at the time, you will be given an opportunity to do this later if your submission is referred for investigation.

Procedural Fairness

Remember that respondents – the person or people you are saying have breached the Harassment and Discrimination Policy – have the right to review the allegations being made in order to be able to properly respond. This is a key element of procedural fairness. For questions or concerns about procedural fairness, talk to your contact person or reach out to the University Ombudsperson at ombuds@queensu.ca.

Impact of Trauma

As trauma-informed support staff, we recognize that considering submitting a complaint can be difficult after a distressing or traumatic experience. Seeking guidance from personal supports and resources on campus is always recommended. Support persons can help you to process your experience and organize the details that you do recall so you can include them in your submission.

Step 2: Writing the Incident Description

Speaking to Facts

It is important to structure the majority of your submission on the facts and your direct observations or experience. We understand that your memory of events may not be perfect. That is okay! Do your best. Gaps in memory are common, particularly when events have been unexpected and/or upsetting.

To the best of your ability, walk through what occurred and what you experienced in a chronological order, describing the sequence of events in the order that they happened. Sometimes this can be difficult to do for particularly distressing events. Try writing down what you remember most about the situation, read it through, and fill in any missing pieces as best you can recall. Focus on relaying the most important parts about what happened.

How much information is required?

Your submission must include enough specific information to show that the policy has been violated. This threshold must be met for the report to be referred to one of the intake units to be investigated.

Do your best to answer the following questions:

- **What happened?** Describe what you directly observed (i.e. saw, heard). Include specific quotes or exact statements in quotations marks, even if using profane language or epithets.
- **Who was involved?** If you do not know exactly who was involved, further investigation may be required before a submission can be accepted. Provide as much detail as you can like how you know them, what contact you have had, or where they are known to be.
- **When did it happen?** Provide the date(s) and time(s). If you can't recall specifics, check other sources to confirm (e.g., calendar, text messages, social media, etc.). Did the incident occur during a specific event or activity?
- **Where did it occur?** Include the building name and room number, if applicable. For incidents that took place off-campus or online, be as specific as possible by including descriptive detail such as the street address or social media platform where the incident occurred.
- **Who else was there?** List all individuals who may have more information about what happened.
- **What actions have already been taken?** This may include actions taken by yourself or others.

Details and Quotes

Using direct quotes can be helpful when describing your experience. It is okay to use simple language, profanity, epithets, or other words that were used during the incident when it is a direct quote of what a person said or did. Use adjectives sparingly. It is better to focus on describing exactly what you heard or saw. Details that may not seem relevant could be helpful so include as much information as you can.

Things to Avoid

Do not use jargon or short forms. Similarly, avoid using general terms like I, him, her, or they. This can make it difficult to follow your synopsis. Instead, use full names when you first mention an individual, followed by first name, last name, or initials thereafter. Nicknames may be helpful in a narrative if referencing a particular individual, however, they should always be introduced in connection with the person's full name, when possible.

Supplementary Documentation

There is a place on the submission form for you to upload any additional documentation that you may have, such as video, pictures, screenshots, texts, and/or social media posts. Alternatively, make a note that pictures and/or video exist and suggest how they can be

obtained if not from yourself.

Documentation should show the date/timestamp and not be altered any way prior to submission. Describe how the listed documentation relates to the submission. Retain the originals until the matter is resolved or you are directed otherwise.

Speaking to Impacts

Please know that you do not have to comment on the emotional, psychological, and other impacts that the incident may have had on you, but that you are welcome to do so if you wish. You should only include personal information that you are comfortable sharing. For example, you may wish to reference seeking medical treatment or a negative impact on your professional or academic success.

Step 3: Finalizing the Complaint

If you have a concern for the safety of a witness (e.g., high risk of retaliation or further harm) and wish to suggest that their name is redacted in any information provided to the Respondent (depending on the level of disclosure required), let the individual who contacts you about your submission know.

Once you have prepared an initial draft, consider asking someone you trust to read it over for you, as long as they are not someone who is, or could be, a witness. That person can give you some feedback and help to identify any places where a bit more information may be needed.

When you are ready to proceed with submitting your complaint or report, you can click on the appropriate icon on the [Complaints and Investigations](#) webpage on the [Vice-Principal \(Culture, Equity, and Inclusion\)](#) website.