

Complaining: Sometimes Good, But Sometimes Bad.

Complaining to a friend about something can often become a part of everyday conversation. Perhaps it's about a teacher's style, or about the pay at a job, or about the food in the school cafeteria, or about someone you both know.

Researchers have studied the reason why complaining is so common, what benefits it might have, and the problems it can cause the complainer. Also, the researchers looked at ways that we can learn to complain more effectively.

Complaining can actually become a pattern among friends, classmates and co-workers. For example, Allie had a part-time job as a waitress that she enjoyed after classes. The restaurant was supposed to close at 9 p.m., but recently the manager was letting customers enter later than that. This meant that the staff (waiters, waitresses and cooks) often couldn't leave until 10 or 10:30 p.m. or later. This became the most common topic of conversation among the staff members as they were leaving and later in text messages. Soon they were not only complaining to each other about the late closing time, but also about other things they didn't like about the manager.

Often complaining to other people is a way of building social connections. That seemed to be happening among the staff. However, one time, during a text exchange, one of the waiters, Ryan pointed out that the manager had made some good improvements to the menu. Allie and the others did not want to hear that. They wanted Ryan to agree with them that the manager was not good. After that, they stopped including Ryan in the text messages.

For staff members like these, complaining has some benefits for a short time. They might experience some emotional relief by sharing complaints. They can feel that they have a good reason to be upset since others also are angry.

However, it can have some negative effects over time. For example, Allie never said anything rude to the manager, but she stopped being friendly toward him. This wasn't a good idea. At the end of the school year when she was planning to return home for the summer, it was difficult for her to ask the manager for a letter of recommendation.

A psychology professor suggests that it's fine to tell others about things that we feel are unfair. However, it's important to include someone who will help us look at the situation from a different point of view. For example, imagine that Nikos is complaining to his friends because his Computer Science instructor, Prof. Simpson, expects too much from her students, which causes Nikos to feel a lot of pressure. Nikos' friend, Dan, says, "I understand what you are saying. Yes, Prof. Simpson can cause stress for some students. Maybe you could talk to her about the pressure you are feeling." We can see from that situation that, as a good friend, Dan kindly listens to Niko's complaint, but then helps him see how he has the ability to possibly make the problem better.

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Comprehension Exercise

Directions: Write T (true) or F (false) next to each sentence.

- 1. According to the article, complaining is common.
- 2. Complaining has no benefits for the complainer.
- 3. The restaurant staff did not want customers to enter after 9 p.m.
- 4. The staff complained to the manager in text messages.
- 5. Allie was happy that Ryan told them about the manager's menu improvement.
- 6. A good friend will try to help us understand the situation.

Paraphrasing Exercise

Directions: Imagine that you have this conversation with a friend.

You: I just read this interesting article.
Friend: Oh yeah. What did it say?

Write what you would tell your friend. Include as many details as you can.

After you finish writing a first draft, you can re-read the article and revise your draft. However, don't look at the article while you are writing. You can use some of these **key words** in your paraphrase.

Key Words

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• teacher's style, pay, food• more effectively• Allie the waitress• social connections• text message• Ryan said the manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• some emotional relief• Allie's letter of recommendation• different point of view• Nikos' professor• Niko's friend Dan
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Reflection Exercise

Directions: Write a reflection about the article. Try to write a paragraph with several sentences. In your reflection, your first sentence can be one of these:

- *I found some interesting/important information in this article.*
- *After reading this, I now would like to (learn more about /read more research about /...)*
- *There is some information in this article that I could apply to my life.*
- *I agree / disagree with the author about something.*
- *This article reminded me of (me/ my family/my friend).*
- *I was surprised by something in this article.*

