

# 5 Things You Should **Stop Writing** to Customers

You are using at least one—if not more—of these, so here’s what you should be writing instead.

---

*Leslie O’Flahavan*

---

I’m going to give you a (friendly) scolding about some ingrained customer service writing habits you need to break, along with some bad customer service wording you should stop using right now. But don’t worry; I won’t scold you the entire time. I’ve also got some up-to-date, honest alternatives, so you can freshen your writing style.

## **1. Stop writing, “We regret any inconvenience this may have caused ...”**

Let’s say you work in customer care for ABC Airlines, and a customer—Susan—emails you to complain that the flight attendant moved her bag from one overhead bin to another. Because of this, another passenger mistakenly took Susan’s bag when getting off the plane. Now Susan has to use precious time during her vacation to track down her lost bag.

A typical email response to Susan from ABC Airlines might start like this: “Thank you for writing to us about your lost bag. We regret any inconvenience this may have caused. We have created a lost baggage claim report for you: Claim Number 1122334 ...”

Stop right there! Don’t write, “We regret any inconvenience this may have caused ...” First, “may have” sounds antagonistic. Clearly, this event did cause inconvenience; there’s no “may have” about it. Second, “any” is generic. ABC Airlines knows full well what happened. ABC Airlines knows what kind of inconvenience is involved when a passenger has to track a lost bag. Third, we would never say this to a customer in person. If you would never say something to a customer face-to-face, don’t write it.





### **Just Stop It!**

If you are using any of these phrases, it's time to learn a better way.

- We regret any inconvenience this may have caused ...
- Our records indicate ...
- Please do not hesitate to contact us ...
- Your feedback will be shared with the appropriate department ...
- Please do not reply to this message as the mailbox is not monitored...



If Susan were complaining about her lost bag to an ABC Airlines representative at the airport, that employee would never look Susan in the eye and say, “We regret any inconvenience this may have caused ...” so ABC Airlines should avoid this wording in its emails.

What should you write instead? One reliable strategy is to name the inconvenience and admit that it happened. Here’s a revised version of the ABC Airlines response to Susan: “Thank you for letting us know about your lost bag. We’re really sorry about the inconvenience our flight attendant inadvertently caused when she moved your bag. To make this situation easier, we have created a lost baggage claim report for you: Claim Number 1122334 ...”

## 2. Stop writing, “Our records indicate ...”

You might be wondering, “What could possibly be wrong with writing, ‘Our records indicate?’” One minor problem with this phrase is that the wording is very formal. If we apply the face-to-face test, we can probably conclude that we would not say, “Our records indicate ...” to a customer who’s in our office or shop. However, there’s a more important problem with this wording. When you write, “Our records indicate ...” you squander the opportunity to reassure customers that you’ve taken action on their behalf.

For example, let’s say you work for an automobile manufacturer in the extended care warranty division. A customer—Fred—emails you to complain that the resale value of his 2014 Velocity Four sedan is lower because your dealership installed the wrong replacement steering wheel when he had the car serviced.

You conduct thorough research into his complaint. When you reply, you write this sentence: “Our records indicate that the proper replacement steering wheel was installed in your vehicle by the Velocity Dealership in

If you would never say something to a **customer face-to-face**, don’t write it.



Friendlyville, Maryland, in accordance with the Velocity New Car Limited Warranty ...

Nope! Don’t write, “Our records indicate ...” anymore. Instead, use wording that reminds the customer that you reviewed his records, you took initiative, and you are sharing accurate, current information in your response. Write the sentence in active voice to give yourself credit and authority.

Here’s a revised version of Velocity’s response to Fred: “I reviewed your car’s warranty repair record, and I can confirm that the proper replacement steering wheel was installed in your vehicle by Velocity Dealership Friendlyville, Maryland ...

## 3. Stop writing, “Please do not hesitate to contact us ...”

I know, I know. Now you’re thinking, “OMG! What

could possibly be wrong with writing that?” Certainly, I do agree that this isn’t the worst wording you could ever use with your customers. But seriously, do your customers ever hesitate to contact you? I didn’t think so.

Let’s imagine you work for Custom Products, Inc., a company that stitches logos onto gift items. A customer—Anne—emails you to ask how much it would cost to have her company’s logo stitched onto a barbecue apron. Your answer is kind of elaborate because the pricing is complex. So, at the end of your email, you write, “Please do not hesitate to contact us with further questions. You can reach us by phone at 1-800-123-1234 or online at [www.customproducts.com/CusServ...](http://www.customproducts.com/CusServ...)”

Eh. That wording is OK, but not great. Instead of writing, “Please do not hesitate to contact us,” make a specific offer of help. Your writing will sound more sincere.

Here’s a revised version of Custom Products’ response to Anne, “Please contact us if you have any questions about this apron order. We’re glad to help. You can reach us by phone at 1-800-123-1234 or online at [www.custom-](http://www.custom-)

products.com/CusServ ...”

**4. Stop writing, “Your feedback will be shared with the appropriate department ...”**

I know. You use this wording often and for good reasons. Sometimes, all a customer wants from us is to be assured that we have heard their complaints. Sometimes, you use this wording because you can’t fix a customer’s problem, and all you can offer is the assurance that you’ve heard their complaint. So we use “Your feedback will be shared with the appropriate department” a lot.

So what’s wrong with it? First, it’s unintentionally kind of funny. Is there an inappropriate department you could share the customer’s feedback with? Second, it can sound like you’re “sharing” the customer’s feedback with the “circular file.” Because the wording is so vague, it can come off sounding a bit like you may be deleting the customer’s feedback instead of sharing it with anyone at all.

What’s a better way to write this? Mention the department by name. So, let’s say a customer—Charles—goes to your company’s Facebook page and praises one of your employees this way: “I have to thank the janitor at your theater in Friendlyville, Maryland. I took my granddaughter to see the magic show on January 30, and she left her favorite teddy bear on her seat. We were already nearly a block away from the theater when your janitor came running after us with the bear in his hand ...”

Instead of assuring Charles that you’ll share his feedback with the “appropriate department,” you should write, “Thank you for taking time to let us know that our staff member found your granddaughter’s teddy bear and gave it back to her. We will share your feedback with the manager of our custodial team ...” This wording is more authentic. You sound like a real person, not a form letter.

**5. Stop writing, “Please do not reply to this message as the mailbox is not monitored.”**

## Write the sentence in active voice to give yourself credit and authority.



You may not use this exact wording, but if you use any wording in your emails that tells your customers how not to reply, be sure you are also telling your customers how to reply.

Ideally, customers who want to reply to you will just be able to click “reply,” to make that happen. It’s only natural. But if customers receive your company’s customer service emails from an “unmonitored” address, make sure they know how to reach you.

At the very least, write, “If you reply, please use our CustomerCare@abccompany.com email address or call us at 800-111-2222. Do not reply to this Admin@abccompany.com email address.”

Remember, customer service email isn’t one-way communication. But if you

send emails with “Please do not reply” wording, you’re implying that you think it is.

It’s time for you and your frontline agents to break these bad customer service writing habits. Don’t worry; it won’t be as difficult as quitting smoking or exercising regularly. Update your templates and your team’s attitude about writing to customers. Choose honest, personal wording, and you’ll connect with your customers and demonstrate that you care. **CRM**



**Leslie O’Flahavan** has helped thousands learn to write well for online readers. She has delivered customized writing courses for customer service agents, social-media managers and support desk staff. She helps contact centers train agents to write excellent emails to customers and measure their quality.

Recently, she overhauled the customer service writing for a global airline’s contact centers. She is the co-author of *Clear, Correct, Concise E-Mail: A Writing Workbook for Customer Service Agents*.