
Writing Grievances: Three Easy Steps

The key to writing a grievance is to keep it simple. Your local may have a particular form or format for stewards to use to write grievances—if so, use it. But whether you write the grievance on a prepared form or on a blank sheet of paper, almost every grievance contains just three key elements:

- What happened (what did management do or not do to cause the grievance)?
- Why is it a grievance?
- What does the union want management to do to solve the problem?

These three questions can be answered using just three short sentences:

First Sentence: What happened? What did management do (or fail to do) to cause the grievance, and when and/or where did they do it?

“On or about May 1, 2020, management unjustly laid off Billy Brown and all other affected employees.”

Useful phrases: “On or about,” “Beginning on or about,” and “and all other affected employees”

Second Sentence: Why is it a grievance? What part of the contract (or law, policy, past practice, etc.) did management violate?

“This violates Article IV, Section 9, and all other relevant articles of the contract, management policies, and federal, state, and municipal law.”

Useful phrases: “all other relevant contract articles, management policies, and federal, state and municipal law.”

Third Sentence: What do you want? What remedy is the union seeking? What do you want management to do to fix the situation?

“The Union demands that Mr. Brown and all other affected employees be made whole in every way, including but not limited to recall to his job classification, full back pay for all wages and benefits lost, and any other appropriate relief.”

Useful phrases: “be made whole in every way,” “including, but not limited to,” and “and any other appropriate relief.”

Note: These phrases do not mean that an arbitrator or management will search out all specific benefits that management denied the grievant. It is still the responsibility of the steward – verbally or in writing – to eventually, prior to arbitration, list remedies not included in the original written grievance.