

2.6. Scripted responses to unreasonable demands

Statement or conduct	Possible responses
<p>Call me back immediately/I'll call back in an hour if I don't hear back from you by then</p> <p>or</p> <p>I want this fixed now.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perhaps no-one has taken the time to explain to you our process for dealing with concerns such as yours. Let me. • I appreciate that you want this dealt with right away. But I'm sure that you can also understand that I do have several other matters that I have to deal with in addition to yours and which were brought to my attention first. • Other than in extraordinary circumstances we deal with matters on a first come, first served basis, and as you can imagine there are files that came in before yours. I'll be in contact with you in [number] days/weeks or sooner if I need more information from you. • Most people who raise concerns with us think that their matter is the most important one and want us to deal with it right away or ahead of other complaints. That's not possible in practice. • It's clear this is important to you and you want it handled a certain way, but there is a process that I must follow to make sure that it's dealt with appropriately and fairly for everyone involved. • We are dealing with your matter in the way we consider to be appropriate. It's unfortunate that you don't see things the same way. • I know you feel your matter is urgent. I've assessed it and have decided I should call the officer/organisation concerned. I'll be able to do this sometime this week/I'll need some time to do this and then to receive a response from them. How about you call me in [number] days/weeks and hopefully I'll have some information for you then. • Ultimately, if you are unhappy with the way we are handling your matter you are free to raise it with another organisation.
<p>You've contacted the person/organisation I'm having problems with</p> <p>or</p> <p>I told you not to contact them. They're liars.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm aware of your views of this person. I find it helpful to contact the person most involved in the matter first, unless I consider it inappropriate. If I'm not satisfied with their response, I will go further up the line until I'm satisfied. • You have given us your side of the story. We have also given [the other party] involved the opportunity to put their side of the story. • In the interest of fairness, I need to hear how the other party sees the issue. I'm sure you can appreciate that I need to get both sides of the story if the matter is to be resolved. • I can understand that you're concerned about that. It is usually the case that it is fair and relevant to get versions from both sides of a complaint. You've presented your side and we need to get their side too. • If the complaint is about the conduct of a member of staff, we would make inquiries at a higher level.

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<p>You should have interviewed me/ contacted me/ allowed me to give you more information before you made your decision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I have carefully considered the information you sent us and I have made my decision based on that. If you have any further information that is relevant to this case, you can write to us and let us know that information.</i> • <i>Yes, that's correct. The information you provided was enough for me to consider the matter and make a decision.</i> • <i>I have assessed all the material – your submission as well as the documents I requested from [the other party]. If I had concluded that an investigation was required, I would have contacted you. In the end, my decision is that there appears to be no evidence that something went wrong.</i> • <i>I think the organisation's reply adequately addressed your concerns. If you are dissatisfied with it, we can talk about it now. [Discuss – point out any review option if the person is still dissatisfied.]</i>
<p>You haven't answered every issue I raised with you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We decided that the central issues you raised with us were ... and these will be the focus of our response to you/our investigation.</i> • <i>We've considered all the information you have supplied to us, but we don't intend to respond to every point you've raised.</i> • <i>Our organisation can look at whether. ... In our letter to you we addressed ... issues. We didn't look at ... because</i> • <i>Given the number of concerns raised with us, we try our best to distribute our resources as fairly as possible across all of them. To do this we focus our attention and resources on the central/more substantial issues raised with us. In your case, we decided that the central issues were ... and we have responded/will respond to them accordingly.</i> • <i>There is no legal obligation on us to respond to every point you have raised with us.</i> • <i>We're satisfied that we've dealt with your matter adequately and will not be responding to the issues you're now raising/the other issues you've raised.</i>
<p>I want to speak to your supervisor/ manager.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I'm in a position to respond to your concerns and to help you, without the need to get another case officer involved.</i> • <i>From what you've said it seems you're raising an issue that I can help you with. All we have to do is</i> • <i>Why don't you tell me what your concern is so I can get a better sense of which officer/supervisor would be most suited to help you with it?</i> • <i>If you're looking to dispute my decision, you should put your concerns in writing. My supervisor doesn't have the detailed knowledge of your case to discuss it with you now.</i> • <i>If you wish to make a complaint about me, the policy of this organisation is that you must put it in writing.</i> • <i>If you would like to have ... done by today, then I'm the person who is available to help you with it. So it's up to you what you want to do.</i> • <i>I'm authorised to deal with this issue and would be happy for us to work together to find a solution that's appropriate for everyone.</i> • <i>My supervisor has reviewed your file and agrees with my decision [if this is indeed the case].</i>

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<p><i>I want to speak with/meet with the director/CEO.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>For practical reasons the director/CEO doesn't generally meet or speak directly with people raising concerns with our organisation, but they have given me a delegation to deal with such concerns on their behalf.</i> • <i>I'm authorised to act on the director's behalf. You can speak to me now and we can see how we go.</i> • <i>Unfortunately, the director/CEO isn't able to speak with you, but I'm happy to discuss this with you and try to find a solution if you wish/but here's what I can do</i> • <i>I'm sure you can appreciate that the director/CEO, as head of the organisation, is a very busy person. That is why they have delegated authority to their staff to deal with matters like yours.</i> • <i>I understand your frustration/that you're angry/that you disagree with me on this issue and you would like to speak with the director/CEO about it. However, I can't meet that request. What I can do is</i> • <i>I understand that you disagree with me on this issue, but I'm unable to arrange a meeting with the director/CEO for you. The usual procedure in this office is for issues of concern to be raised in writing [apply to suit circumstances of your particular organisation].</i> • <i>If it's necessary, I can arrange a meeting with the officer dealing with your matter. Would you like me to do this for you now?</i> • <i>I've already spoken with you at length. A face-to-face meeting won't change the advice I've given you. You can send us additional information in writing and we'll then decide if another meeting is necessary.</i>
<p><i>I want to come and meet with you [when such a meeting is not necessary].</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I can see that you really want to come in/discuss this in greater detail, but I don't think that a meeting/this is necessary right now, because</i> • <i>I don't think a meeting would help. If you have additional documents, you can send them to me with a covering letter explaining how they relate to the central issues you have raised. If I need to, I'll call to discuss them with you. I believe this is a much better use of our time.</i> • <i>If I need more information, I'll contact you. Otherwise, the summary of issues you've provided is adequate.</i> • <i>I don't have any new information to give you about progress in dealing with your matter. I'll be in touch with you when I do.</i> • <i>There are no new developments in your matter. However, you can call me after [date] if you'd like to check in with me.</i> • <i>Can you please send me copies of these documents? I'll review them to decide if a meeting is necessary/would be useful.</i> • <i>It is generally better for us to look at the documents first, before we decide whether a meeting with you would be useful. In the end, we often have to rely on documentary evidence anyway. Say-so evidence isn't enough.</i>

Statement or conduct	Possible responses
<p>Emotional manipulation.</p> <p>If you don't do [x] then I'll do [y]</p> <p>or</p> <p>I've had such a hard time. I've just lost all my money and my wife has left me ...</p> <p>or</p> <p>You're my last hope. If you don't help me I don't know what I'll do.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>That would certainly be a difficult thing to deal with. Unfortunately I can't help you with it. Why don't we focus on what I can help you with, which is</i> • <i>You're right. It is hard to have to worry about these things. Let me explain what I think your options are</i> • <i>I understand that you really want our organisation to solve this problem for you. As I've already explained to you, we can't.</i> • <i>I understand that this issue is really important to you and that you've spent a significant amount of time trying to Unfortunately, this doesn't change the fact that</i> • <i>I can only imagine how distressing this process has been for you and I'm sorry that the outcome of your issue/matter couldn't be more positive</i> • <i>I'm aware that this problem has cost you a lot of money/caused a lot of stress for you and your family and in your position I would feel upset too. From an organisational standpoint though we aren't able to do anything to help you.</i> • <i>I agree that pursuing an issue of concern for ... years without a satisfactory outcome would be devastating. However, I need to be upfront in letting you know that I don't believe that our office/organisation will be able to achieve the outcome that you're looking for either.</i> • <i>I recognise that you've had a difficult time and I don't want to add to this by giving you false hope that we can help you to</i> • <i>I can't imagine how hard it would be for you to deal with that. It certainly wouldn't be easy. But for me to be able to deal with your matter as quickly and effectively as possible, I need you to focus on telling me about</i> • <i>Unfortunately, I can't respond to that. It is clearly a difficult situation to have to deal with. I can help you with ... if we can focus on that</i> • <i>No I'm sorry, I'm not qualified to help you with that. All I can do is</i> • <i>I apologise, but I'm not the person to speak to about you're feelings on this – though I'm sure they are valid. I can help you with your matter if you want to focus on that for a moment.</i>
<p>Well, I didn't really expect you to do anything anyway</p> <p>or</p> <p>I knew you wouldn't want to help me</p> <p>or</p> <p>I'm a taxpayer you know.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I'm sorry you feel that way. If you'd like, I can take a few minutes to discuss our role.</i> • <i>I'm sorry you're disappointed with the outcome of my assessment. I've explained the reasons for my decision in my letter. You may care to read through it again.</i> • <i>It appears in this case you're right [explain reasons for not doing anything].</i> • <i>I've considered the issue(s) you raised and made inquiries. I know my actions haven't resulted in the outcome you were hoping for.</i> • <i>We've fully assessed the issues you raised and we have not found evidence to show ... acted wrongly/unlawfully/corruptly.</i> • <i>When did you start thinking that we wouldn't do anything about your issue. I imagine it wouldn't have been when you brought it to our attention.</i>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I'm not sure what else you were expecting in this situation. When we spoke ... I explained to you that</i> • <i>It's unfortunate that you feel this way, because a lot of time was spent making inquiries into/investigating and responding to the questions/ issues you raised.</i> • <i>We've satisfied ourselves that this outcome it is the most appropriate one in the circumstances.</i> • <i>I'm sure you can appreciate that I'm a taxpayer too and pay my taxes just like you do. So how about we focus on what I can help you with</i>
<p>You're racist/sexist. You wouldn't treat me like this if I was/ wasn't ...</p> <p>or</p> <p>I'm not stupid you know</p> <p>or</p> <p>Your organisation isn't interested in helping the little guys/people like me.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Your race/gender/social status doesn't affect how I treat you/why I did that. We deal with lots of people who are</i> • <i>Your race/gender/social status doesn't affect what I think or do. We deal with people from all walks of life.</i> • <i>Your race/gender/social status has played no part in the decision I've made.</i> • <i>I haven't said anything about your race/gender/social status because it simply isn't relevant to ... and it's unclear to me why you would raise such issues.</i> • <i>When did you start thinking that you were being treated differently based on your race/gender/social status?</i> • <i>When did you start thinking that we'd allow your race/gender/social status to influence our behaviour?</i> • <i>I'm sorry you got that impression.</i> • <i>My own son/daughter would have received the same outcome from this organisation/agency if they had brought your issue to us.</i>
<p>Asking personal questions that cross your personal boundaries – for example questions about your marital status, where you live, your kids etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I don't consider this to be relevant to the issue of What I do need information on is</i> • <i>I don't need information about that right now. If I do, I'll let you know. What I need you to tell me about however is</i> • <i>My organisation doesn't allow me to discuss my personal life with people whose concerns I am responsible for dealing with. So why don't we get back to....</i> • <i>[Mr/Ms/name] I have a limited amount of time to talk to you/meet with you and there is specific information that I need from you before our time runs out. So tell me about ... [regain control of the conversation].</i> • <i>The information that you're giving me is making me uncomfortable and I don't believe that it relates in any way to the questions I'm asking you. I need you to focus on these issues/questions [restate them].</i> • <i>I'll have to end this call if we can't keep to the issues.</i> • <i>I find this information inappropriate and I've asked that you stop telling me about it, because it doesn't relate to the immediate issue that I'm dealing with. If you continue to talk to me like this, I'll end this call.</i> • <i>I provided you with the information you require and, if you have no new questions, I'll have to end the call here to deal with other people who are waiting.</i>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I'll have to hang up now, because we are not getting the things we need to get done. I'll call you back in [number of minutes/hours/days/next week]</i> • <i>I'll have to end the call here, but I'll put my questions in writing for you and send them through Australia Post. You can read them, answer them, and send them back to me either by email or in the mail.</i> • <i>I've told you that I would hang up if you continued this behaviour. Goodbye.</i>
Wanting to talk about their complaint outside of office hours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I'm not able to comment on your file right now. You can call the office during normal business hours and I can discuss your matter with you then.</i> • <i>I can't comment on your file without having it in front of me.</i>
Why wasn't I told about this before [when they were told]?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If you recall, we talked about this on [date] and I told you then that This has not changed and I do not see any reason to discuss it again now. If you have other concerns I suggest you put them in writing.</i> • <i>I sent you a letter/email on [day/date] that explains our position on this in detail. I don't have time to discuss it again right now, but I suggest that you take time to read that letter/email again. If you still have specific questions that you want answered, I'll set aside [minutes] for you on [day/date] to discuss them. Do you need me to send you another copy of that email/letter?</i> • <i>A lot of time was spent making inquiries into/investigating and responding to the issues that you're raising with me now. I'd appreciate it if you could take the time to go over the letter/email I sent to you again. If you still have specific questions after reading it, you may call me back.</i> • <i>I don't think this conversation is productive for either of us because we keep on coming back to the same issue</i> • <i>It seems you want me to say something that I can't. I've tried to explain several times how we reached the conclusion we have. Because I don't think this conversation is productive for either of us, I'll have to end our discussion here. You can put your concerns in writing if you wish and we'll decide whether or not further action is needed by our office.</i>
<p>I have a right to see/access those documents</p> <p>or</p> <p>This is urgent and can't wait until tomorrow. Give me [person's] direct/home line.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I don't have authority to give this information to you. You can put your request in writing and the appropriate senior officer/manager will decide whether it will be given to you.</i> • <i>I can't give you this information, because</i> • <i>We rarely disclose this type of information, except in extremely rare cases where ... and where there are clear and substantial reasons for doing so.</i> • <i>We consider requests for information on a case-by-case basis, so you'll need to put your request in writing and clearly explain why this information should be disclosed to you. We'll provide you with a response shortly after that.</i> • <i>Our usual practice is not to disclose the information you've asked for because</i>

Part two

<i>Statement or conduct</i>	<i>Possible responses</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There is an expectation by the people/organisations that interact with our office/organisation that this information won't be disclosed, except in exceptional circumstances. Your case isn't one of these exceptions.</i> • <i>You always have the option of making an application for disclosure under the [relevant access to information legislation]. You can find information about making an application on the [relevant organisation's] website.</i> • <i>I understand that you think this is an urgent matter, but I can't call ... at home and I can't provide you with the person's home phone number/personal contact details. What I can do is arrange for you to talk to someone else who is available right now and who might be able to respond to some of your concerns.</i>
<p><i>That's not what I'm complaining about. You've got it all wrong.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We agreed that the central issues you were raising were ... and these will be the focus of our response to you/our investigation.</i> • <i>We prefer that you wait for us to complete our investigations/inquiries before raising additional issues, as things often can and do change as our investigations/inquiries progress.</i> • <i>I understand that you've several concerns that you want to raise about However, we've decided to limit our inquiries/investigation to the following issues</i> • <i>Our organisation can look at whether In our letter to you we addressed those issues. We won't be looking at ... because</i> • <i>By changing your issues of concern, this affects our ability to resolve them. Please give us time to complete our inquiries/investigation/etc.</i> • <i>I can't deal with your matter properly while you're changing the issues you want us to deal with/adding new issues of concern. You'll have to decide whether you want to withdraw your complaint while you figure out what you want us to look at or let us move forward with what we have and the issues we have identified to date. What's happening now simply isn't working.</i> • <i>Given the many complaints we receive, we try our best to distribute our resources as fairly as possible across all of them. To do this we focus our attention and resources on the central issues/more substantial issues raised in these complaints. In your case, we agreed that the central issues were We'll not be looking at anything else, unless there are clear reasons for doing so.</i>
<p><i>That [outcome] isn't good enough. It's not what I wanted.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It's clear that you aren't satisfied with the outcome that we've achieved for you. Having considered the matter carefully, we are satisfied with it and have decided not to take any further action.</i> • <i>The outcome you're asking for isn't very different from the one we've already achieved for you. We won't spend more time and resources pursuing this issue.</i> • <i>To make sure that we distribute our resources fairly and evenly across all people seeking our services/raising concerns with us, we must think about whether there is a practical purpose in pursuing a different outcome in your case. Our view is that the outcome you're now seeking is not very different from what we've already achieved, and it therefore would not be practical or fair for us to spend any more time and resources on it.</i>

Statement or conduct	Possible responses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If you recall, on ... [date] we discussed the types of outcomes we would be aiming for. We decided that we would try to. ... This is what we've achieved and I don't see any practical purpose in pursuing ...</i> • <i>You're welcome to write to us and explain why you think this outcome is the wrong one/inappropriate/unsatisfactory. If we agree with you, we'll notify you accordingly. Otherwise we'll read and file your correspondence without acknowledgement.</i>
They/you owe me a refund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It seems to me that you're hoping we can do... I have to tell you right now that this will not be possible/is unlikely because</i> • <i>What you're asking for isn't possible/realistic/appropriate in the circumstances. Perhaps we can think about other possible options/outcomes like [give example] which are more likely to happen.</i> • <i>I accept that you want to see ... happen. I have taken the view that this isn't an appropriate solution/isn't likely to happen because I therefore, suggest that we start thinking about other more appropriate/likely outcomes such as</i> • <i>I understand ... is what you'd like to see happen in this case, but we don't consider this to be an appropriate outcome because We think ... is more appropriate and more likely.</i> • <i>Sometimes people have a different view on the same issue. You and I clearly have a different view on ... As I've explained, we think that the more appropriate/more likely outcome in this situation is</i> • <i>I understand that you're quite angry about what has happened, but we can't make a decision based on your emotions alone. We can only act on the facts, which must also be supported by evidence. So the sooner we can focus on the facts and the evidence, the sooner we can resolve this issue.</i> • <i>I don't want to give you false hope by telling you that ... might happen when it's quite clear that it won't. I suggest that we think about ... as possible solutions so that you're not disappointed later on.</i> • <i>Our system for dealing with concerns raised by dissatisfied members of the public/customers/service recipients isn't designed to provide vindication/retribution/vengeance. The kinds of outcomes that we can normally achieve are In your case it is possible that ... might happen.</i> • <i>It's unlikely that you will get the compensation you're looking for.</i>
He/she/you should be fired.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I accept that you believe ... should be sacked over this. We, however, view things differently.</i> • <i>You are entitled to your opinion.</i> • <i>No-one will be fired over this issue.</i>