Hello, and welcome to *How to…* The BBC Learning English phrase book for everyday situations…

My name’s William Kremer. Now, it’s often said that we English people hate making complaints – but, just for you, I’m going to make a programme about making complaints. This edition of *How To* will look in detail at the language of spoken complaints.

Earlier on, I spoke to my colleague Catherine, who told me about a time she’d made a complaint a couple of years ago. The incident happened at her brother’s wedding, which was being held in a hotel. Now, Catherine arrived at the hotel one hour before the wedding but to her surprise, the hotel told her that she had to pay £10 extra for checking in early. What did Catherine say?

‘How can you invite people to come to your hotel for a wedding and then charge them to get into their room one hour before the wedding?’ And the woman said, ‘I’m sorry that’s policy’ and I said ‘Well that’s ridiculous!’ and ended up talking to the manager and telling the manager that I was very surprised at their policy and that it was unreasonable to charge people who were already paying a lot of money and -

I can see that you’re still quite angry about this, Catherine.
Catherine: Well the memory’s coming back to me! Anyway, so in the end, sorry –

William: Do you remember, do you remember what words you used with the manager?

Catherine: Erm… I think, if you, if you be the manager I can probably kind of remember it…

William: Okay, okay, okay. Let’s imagine then that I am the manager.

Catherine: Okay.

William: Erm, and you’re at the front desk…

Catherine: Yeah…

William: …and… I come up and you’ve asked to see me…

Catherine: Yeah…

William: …and I say something like: ‘Well hello madam. Is everything okay?’

Catherine: Well no actually it isn’t. I’ve been erm, I’ve booked a hotel room, my brother’s wedding is at two o’clock, I’m here at one o’clock, I want to check in and they’re telling me that I have to pay £10 for checking in early and I think that’s absolutely ridiculous. So I’d like you to erm not charge me £10 and let me get into my room.

William: Er… well, I’m afraid that we have our rules and regulations and our policy, I’m very sorry to hear that you’re unhappy, but I’m afraid our policy is that if you
arrive before a certain time then we have to charge for that room – cos obviously normally that room might be occupied by another guest…

**Catherine:** I really think that you should erm… change your policy for this circumstance because it’s really unreasonable and erm unfair and I think that’s just not reasonable to charge people this kind of money…

**William:** I’d love to help you…So what did he, no, what did he say, because I’m guessing now.

**Catherine:** He said that kind of thing, he said exactly what you’re saying, he was polite and courteous and said ‘That is policy; we’re not going to change it’

**STING**

**William:** Now, don’t worry if you missed some of that. We’re going to listen again to what Catherine said, and look more closely at some of the language that she used.

**MUSIC**

How did Catherine react when the hotel told her she’d have to pay extra for checking in early?

**Catherine:** And the woman said, ‘I’m sorry that’s policy’ and I said ‘Well that’s ridiculous!’

**Elena:** That’s ridiculous!
William: This is a very common way of showing that you think something is silly or unfair. It’s a strong expression, but you can make it even stronger by using a very common adverb…

Catherine: and I think that’s absolutely ridiculous!

William: Now at this point, Catherine asked to speak to the manager, probably by saying something like…

Elena: Can I speak to the manager please?

William: Catherine made her position very clear to the manager:

Catherine: I think, I really think that you should erm… change your policy for this circumstance because it’s really unreasonable and erm unfair and I think that’s just not reasonable to charge people this kind of money…

Elena: It’s just not fair to charge people this kind of money!

Matt: It’s simply not reasonable to charge people this kind of money!

William: If something is reasonable it makes sense and it’s fair. But what’s the opposite of ‘reasonable’?

Catherine: It’s really unreasonable and erm unfair…

Elena: That’s really unreasonable!

William: Notice that Catherine told the manager what she wanted him to do:
Catherine: So I’d like you to not charge me £10 and let me get into my room.

William: When you’re making a complaint, don’t forget to tell people exactly what you want them to do!

END MUSIC

William: But before we finish, I just want to highlight two quite subtle words that you can use to show you disagree with something. Catherine used both these words when the manager asked her if everything was all right:

Catherine: Well no actually it isn’t.

William: ‘Well’ and ‘actually’ are used in lots of different ways in different situations. But here, Catherine is using them to signal that she disagrees with the manager. You can find out more about how to use these words on the How To webpage on BBC Learning English dot com.

PREFADE

Well, I’m sure you’ll be pleased to learn that in the end the hotel didn’t charge Catherine £10 for checking in early. Goodbye!

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