

SUBMITTING AN ETHICAL & EFFECTIVE COMPLAINT

University experience can help students learn and grow as individuals and citizens of the globalized world. Sometimes, things do go wrong in universities, that is why it is important for students to be able to resolve conflicts and use official complaint procedures, if necessary. You have probably heard about the rules of making complaints in the working world, where you are encouraged to first try to resolve a problem with the help of your boss, before going to their superiors.

Universities are no different and have protocols for registering dissatisfaction with processes, procedures, and behaviour. Following the established steps for different types of complaints will ensure you act ethically and effectively. How often did you think that others treated you unfairly? Believe it or not, other people might have thought the same about your behaviour at times. Before expressing your dissatisfaction, it could be wise to reflect on the situation and analyze your behaviour alongside that of the other person involved. Ryerson University [Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) is a good document to guide your thinking. The exception to this rule includes harassment, discrimination, or other illegal types of behaviour, when you have the right act fast.

Sexual Harrassment and Discrimination

If you experienced sexual harassment and discrimination, contact [Consent Comes First, The Office of Sexual Violence Support and Education](#), which offers support to members of the Ryerson community affected by sexual violence. Additionally, [Human Rights Services](#) works with Ryerson community members on issues of human rights and prevention of discrimination.

Academic Complaints: about a course or instructor

Step 1: Talk to the Instructor

The best strategy to address the problem is at its source. If possible, talk to your instructor about the issue. Hopefully, the situation could be resolved at this stage, and you will be able to continue enjoying your academic journey uninterrupted.

- ❑ Be polite and courteous, e.g. “Dear Professor X, [student number, course and section] I have been wondering if it is possible to review my grade for the assignment Y”. Make sure you have valid reasons to raise the issue. Please refer to the Academic Success Centre’s [Tips to Communicate Efficiently with your Professor\(s\)](#).

Step 2: Talk to the Program Director or Chair

If the issue is not resolved or you are uncomfortable talking to your instructor about the problem, then your next step will be to talk to the Program Director/Chair for the program in which you are currently enrolled (i.e. Accounting and Finance, Business Technology Management). The Program Director/Chair may be able to discuss the issue with you in a confidential manner or investigate on your behalf. If you are not sure who is your Program Director/Chair, contact the administrative assistant in the [Dean’s Office](#) who will share the name of the Director or Chair.

- ❑ When talking to the Program Director or Chair, it is wise to prepare sufficient evidence about the issue. Another suggestion is to draft the script of key points you would like to make, so that you remember all the concerns you might have.

Step 3: Follow up with the Dean’s Office, if necessary

If the matter is not resolved at the Program Office level, it is appropriate to follow up with the administrative assistant Dean’s Office of the School by emailing trsmdean@ryerson.ca

- ❑ You can prepare a brief email explaining the issue, mention how steps 1 and 2 were not sufficient to resolve the situation, and describe what kind of solution you are looking for.
- ❑ You may be invited to speak with the Associate Dean, Students who can provide you with guidance on how to proceed with your concern.

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Non-Academic Complaints: about staff member's actions or administrative procedures

Step 1: Talk to the staff member

Raise your concern with the staff member in question, whenever it is possible. It is appropriate in some cases to take Step 2 if you are not comfortable discussing the matter with the staff member.

- ❑ If you are dissatisfied with the actions of a staff member or an administrative process, bring up the issue directly with the staff member. Do not forget to stay polite.

Step 2: Contact the Dean's Office

If the issue remains unresolved after you have discussed it with the staff member involved, you can go to the next level. If the staff member is in TRSM, contact the administrative assistant in the [Dean's Office](#).

- ❑ If you decide to raise the issue with the Dean's Office, you can explain your query in a polite email. The best way to start an email to a university staff/faculty member you have not met or talked before is "Dear Ms. X or Dear Professor Y". Do not use "Hello Prof" or "Hi".

Step 3: Follow up with the Vice-Provost, Students

If the staff member in question is working in any other Ryerson University School or Department, it is appropriate to follow up with the Vice-Provost, Students.

- ❑ The Office of the Vice-Provost, Students is responsible for student engagement and success and can be reached via [phone or email](#).

Additionally, Ryerson Students' Union has [Advocacy Coordinators](#), who can help with advice on how to appeal grades, standing or academic misconduct.

Reference

This document was adapted from the Complaints section of the FAQs on the website of the [Office of the Ombudsperson](#) at Ryerson University.