

[Click here to return to the site.](#) Use File | Print to print this page!

Investigation of a complaint or grievance

excerpted from the Steward's Handbook

As a Steward, it is your job to listen to the problem, decide on its merits and investigate it in order to prepare your case.

As we have discussed, not all problems brought to you can be addressed under the grievance procedure. There may be no basis for the member's complaint/grievance. It may be a complaint/grievance against another worker or it may be an appeal, it may be a matter which is covered within other statutes. If it is a matter dealing with employment insurance (formerly unemployment insurance) or worker's compensation, refer the member to the PSAC Regional Office. It may be a matter that should be brought to the attention of the Union-Management Consultation Committee or even a problem which could best be solved by referring the member to the appropriate community agency, a PSAC committee or to the union counsellor. Whatever the problem however, it is your job to listen, investigate and decide on the appropriate route to use to solve the problem at hand.

Gathering the Facts.

When you are approached with an alleged grievance, problem or complaint you should always fill out a **Steward Fact Sheet** and write down all the pertinent information right away. This form is available through your Component, the Local and the Regional Offices. Make sure that you have a good supply on hand in order to deal expeditiously with the investigation.

The Steward Fact Sheet is a really an important tool for you to use. The purpose of the Steward Fact Sheet is to assist the Steward in collecting and recording all the relevant facts relating to a complaint, a grievance, or a problem clearly, completely and accurately. Make sure that the grievor writes down the full story her/himself, sign and date it. Memory often recedes with time and this statement will serve to remember the facts before the hearing.

It is also the document which contains the information you will need if a member complains that s/he has not been fairly represented. It may be decided not to initiate or pursue a grievance. This can occur at any step or level of the process. It is important that you use the Steward Fact Sheet to document the reasons for not processing a grievance. The member has the right to know the reasons and to challenge the negative decision to the next level of the union. Information can be provided to the Local Executive, the Component or the PSAC Regional Office.

This process provides a safety net to correct honest mistakes as well as an insurance against arbitrariness, discrimination or bad faith. Members that are made aware of the union internal appeal mechanism have no grounds to launch complaints of failure to represent fairly against the Steward.

The importance of having a complete file must be emphasized. Grievances can only be won on facts and some have been lost due to lack of documented facts.

By the time a member comes to you with a complaint, you should already be thoroughly familiar with the Fact Sheet, having read it and studied it in detail. Remember the Steward Fact Sheet is for union use only.

When interviewing the member who has the grievance/complaint:

1. Be open and honest about the process. Make sure that the member is fully aware of the process and various steps and time limits of the procedure.
2. Listen carefully to the member's statement
3. Write down the information and points to be made and events in chronological order.
4. Ask questions for clarification or additional information/documentation
5. Distinguish between facts and opinion
6. Determine which *facts* are relevant to the matter under discussion
7. Note management and union records you will want to check, as well as addresses and telephone numbers
8. Note people you will want to interview, including potential witnesses
9. Check and recheck the collective agreement.