

# General Union

**Sore? Annoyed? Fuming?  
Enraged? Exasperated?  
Cross? Indignant?  
Riled? Irate?  
Provoked?  
Displeased?  
Outraged?**

**Or maybe something is just wrong.**

**Don't bang your  
head against the wall!**

## File a Grievance!

[www.GeneralUnion.org](http://www.GeneralUnion.org)

## What's a grievance

Anyone can have a problem at work, and the union may be able to help you deal with it. Basically, we consider a grievance any issue which affects an individual union member. We evaluate our ability to solve the problem based on the individual merits of each case. The best place to start is to talk to a workplace leader or someone in the union office.. We'll discuss what we can and cannot do and whether submitting a grievance to your employer is the best course of action, because sometimes it isn't. We'll advise you on your best course of action which could even start with is advising you on how to take the first steps as an individual.



## What is the history behind the union and grievances?

As you may know, the General Union represents workers in many different workplaces. In some workplaces we may have many members and in some just a few, but because of the law the union has the right to ask companies for legal negotiations (called collective bargaining) even in workplaces where we have just one member.

Because of this, through the years the union has been called upon to deal with many problems both big and small. What we found was that while company directors, personnel managers, and presidents often had a grasp of the big picture, sometimes they were not able to deal with issues which affect individuals. This may be because upper management are often not in the workplace and not familiar with conditions there.

So we often ended up dealing with individual problems in the same forum as we discussed issues that affect all the workers, such as wages, holidays, and insurance with management people who had no idea about the members' individual working situations. You can imagine that individual problems (what we'll call grievances from now on) were not being dealt with in the most

efficient manner.

Under the Trade Union Law a company is obligated to meet in collective bargaining when asked by a union, but this legal right often didn't help when we were dealing with grievances. So we had to think of a new process, one which still kept a company legally obligated, but which dealt with the person in the company best able to understand it and in a forum which was not collective bargaining.



## The birth of the grievance procedure

So we found a way around our conundrum. We submitted demands for a grievance procedure. If the company agreed, both parties would sign a legally binding document (a collective agreement), which spelled out the company and the union's obligations and rights in dealing with a grievance.

## Our procedure works basically the same at all workplaces

1. A member, whether newly joined or longstanding, comes to the union and we do a consultation over the issue.
2. If the issue warrants the filing of a formal grievance, the union will write up the problem, as described by the member. The union representatives will then define the basis of the grievance and suggest a solution before giving it to the company management.
3. Upon receipt of the grievance the employer then has 10 days in which to investigate the issue with the relevant parties and to submit a reply to the union.
4. Many issues are resolved at this point. Of course, occasionally an issue requires protracted negotiations but since there are so many different scenarios we will just cover the basics of the agreement in this leaflet.

## Does the GU have a good track record?

Yes, we do. Usually, in workplaces where we have undertaken grievance procedures, the union has a long history with the employer and may also have a history of dispute. We find that smart employers do not want small, individual problems to sour their relationship with the union. But it's more than our relationship with employers or their legal obligations to answer grievances, it's about the union's power in a workplace. Weak union presence—less likely to solve problems. Strong active union—more likely to resolve grievances.

---

## So, no grievance procedure means you can't solve individual problems?

Not so. In workplaces where there is no grievance procedure the union will still submit grievances. However, the employer has no legal obligation to respond and we have no legal recourse if they don't respond. Nevertheless we still find that employers do answer grievances and solve individual problems. Luckily, our union is not based in only a few obscure workplaces. The union's power is well known and this is what gets employers to respond even when they are not legally obligated.

