

What happened?

The explanation of what happened should be short and sweet. Here's an example:

On December 20, 1997 Maria Sanchez was discharged without just cause.

In general it is better to save your arguments and evidence for the grievance meeting — otherwise you are just letting management know ahead of time how to shoot down your case. (Although some grievance panels prefer that more information be included in the actual grievance.)

Cases involving contract interpretation, complicated pay problems and other issues may require more explanation. But the same principle is applied: keep it simple. Here's an example:

On or about July 7 through July 14 the employer violated overtime and other pay provisions by failing to pay freezer department employees as set out in the contract.

The phrase "on or about" covers you in case evidence arises later showing that the violation took place on additional dates.

ON A CONTINUING BASIS (GRIEVANCES)

Why Is It a grievance?

The same principle applies: keep it as short as possible. When it is a clear-cut contract violation, state that the action violated a certain section of the contract.

The employer's discharge of Sanchez violated Articles IV and VII of the contract, and any other articles that apply.

ALWAYS use the catch-all phrase "and any other articles that apply." This covers you if later you find that the action violated other sections or if you are not sure which sections apply.

What is the remedy?

How should the employer correct the situation? What remedy are you asking for? In some cases this may be simple, in others more involved. Always use the catch-all phrase "made whole in every way." Sample discharge remedy:

That Sanchez be made whole in every way, including immediate reinstatement, full back pay with interest, benefits and no discipline on her record.

Sample Pay Dispute remedy:

That all employees affected be made whole in every way, including full pay at their appropriate rates for all time not paid correctly.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS REMEDY?

WHAT IS FUTURE DESIRED?

Nothing is worse than losing a grievance that is a sure winner. Mistakes made at any step of the procedure can hurt your case. One of the first steps — the writing of the grievance — is the foundation for your case. Make mistakes here and they could come back to haunt you later on.

Writing an effective grievance does not mean that the spelling and grammar have to be perfect, so don't be intimidated. What you need to be concerned about is being clear about what the issue is and what you want done.

These are common mistakes:

- **Kitchen sink method.** A number of different issues or incidents are tossed together, making it difficult to focus on one key problem.
- **Venting.** The written grievance holds forth on how bad management is, but fails to get to the point of the grievance.
- **Don't know what we want method.** The grievance tells us what happened but fails to include a remedy — what do we want management to do about it?

Many other variations exist. Any one of them can hurt your case down the road, whether the grievance goes to arbitration or a joint panel.