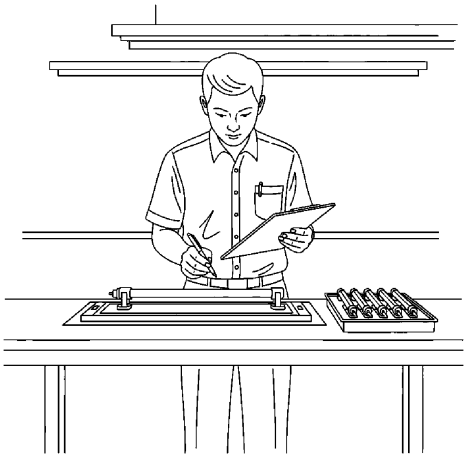
SPECIFIC-CASE

WORKSHEET 8 OF 9

Major Customer Complaint About a Batch Shipped 3 Weeks Ago

Scenario: a significant customer contacts you about a quality problem with a shipment from three weeks ago. By this point the batch is partially sold through or used. The window for straightforward product replacement has closed. The relationship and the next order are at risk.



Complementary worksheet for
Quality Control Systems

SECTION 1

What This Is For

A complaint about a batch shipped three weeks ago is a different problem than a complaint about last week's delivery. The product is already distributed, partially used, and potentially returned to the customer's own buyers. The IQC and production records for that batch are 21 days old. The customer's patience for investigation is already thin from the delay between shipment and complaint. And the next order — which may be worth several times the value of the disputed batch — is now contingent on how the next five days go.

This worksheet does not try to slow down the response. It runs two tracks in parallel: the customer track (acknowledge, assess exposure, propose remedy within 48 hours) and the investigation track (pull the three-week-old records, identify whether the defect is traceable, open the RCA). Both tracks have separate deadlines. Neither waits for the other.

SECTION 2

Benefits

What you get when you actually run this worksheet on a real situation:

- Separates the customer remedy timeline from the RCA timeline — so the customer gets an acknowledgment and a concrete remedy proposal within 48 hours, not after the investigation is complete.
- Step 3 (pull batch records) surfaces the most important finding in many of these cases: whether the business can produce IQC and IPQC records for a specific batch on demand. If it cannot, that traceability gap is a system failure independent of whether the product was actually defective.
- Step 5 (assess remaining stock) limits the financial exposure before additional defective units reach more customers and generate more complaints.
- Step 7's dual action framing gives the customer something concrete on two levels: what you will do for them now, and what you will change in the process. The second part rebuilds confidence in the relationship even when the first part is imperfect.
- Step 9's 30-day effectiveness check provides the documentation that proves the corrective action worked — the record that a corporate buyer's quality audit will ask for.

SECTION 3

Framework To Use

Two-Track Parallel Response

Customer relationship track and process investigation track run simultaneously — neither waits for the other, and both have their own deadlines.

Two-Track Timeline

Track	Day 1	Day 2	Days 3–5	Day 30
Customer track	Acknowledge complaint; collect specific details	Assess stock exposure; draft remedy proposal	Communicate dual action to customer (remedy + process commitment)	Effectiveness verification report to customer if requested
Investigation track	Identify batch number; pull IQC and IPQC records	Review internal records for quality flags on that batch	Open RCA; identify root cause or traceability gap; open CAPA	Verify same defect type has not recurred in subsequent batches

SECTION 4

How To Use

Follow these steps in order. Each one builds on the previous.

1. Fill Step 1 (acknowledge) the day the complaint arrives, before you have done anything else. Acknowledgment is not investigation. It is relationship maintenance. A customer who waits 48 hours for acknowledgment has already drawn their own conclusions.

2. Step 2 requires the specific batch or lot number. Get it from the customer in the acknowledgment call or email — ask for any code, date, or label on the packaging. Without a batch reference, the investigation cannot start with records; it starts with assumptions.

3. Step 3 is the critical test: can your batch records be retrieved within one business day? Set a timer. If you cannot pull NCR, IPQC, and final inspection records for a specific batch shipped three weeks ago within one business day, record that failure in Step 3's finding column. It is a system gap that needs its own CAPA.

4. Step 4: look for quality flags on that batch — any NCR noted, any disposition decision, any IPQC hold. If the batch was shipped with a known flag and no customer communication, document that finding carefully before communicating to the customer.

5. Step 5: contact your warehouse and the customer to establish where remaining units from the same batch are. Assess whether a proactive recall or hold is warranted before more units are used or sold through.

6. Step 7 is the customer-facing communication point. Deliver it in writing — email or formal letter — not only verbally. The communication contains two parts: what you will do for the customer now (replacement, credit, discount), and what process action you are implementing by what date. Do not include the root cause in this communication unless it is already verified.

7. Steps 8 and 9 are internal. Step 9's 30-day check should be entered as a calendar event on the day Step 7 is communicated.

SECTION 5

Example Use

A leather goods manufacturer ships a batch of 240 handmade wallets to a corporate gift buyer. Three weeks after delivery, the buyer contacts them: stitching is unraveling on approximately 20% of the units, which have already been distributed to end recipients as gifts.

Day 1 (complaint received): Acknowledgment email sent within 3 hours. Request for batch reference number included. Customer responds with invoice number from the shipment — this maps to production batch LW-0414 in the workshop's job log.

Day 1 (investigation starts): Workshop production log for batch LW-0414 pulled. This batch was produced during a week when the usual stitching lead was on leave and a junior craftsperson completed 60% of the units. Final inspection sign-off exists but no specific stitching tension measurement was recorded — the final inspection relied on visual assessment only. IQC for thread lot used: logged as received, no tensile test. Two potential issues identified: operator substitution and unverified thread lot.

Day 2 (exposure assessment): 240 units shipped. Customer reports approximately 48 units (20%) showing stitching failure. All units were distributed as corporate gifts — no physical return is practical. Stock from the same thread lot: 3 additional reels in inventory, placed on hold pending tensile test.

Day 2 (financial exposure): replacement value of 48 units at $23 manufacturing cost each = $1,104. Customer has requested a credit note for the full batch value ($240 × $38 retail = $9,120) rather than unit replacement. Negotiation needed.

Day 3 (customer communication): written dual-action proposal. Customer track: credit note for 48 defective units ($1,824 at retail) plus a priority production slot for a replacement batch at no charge within 10 business days. Process track: written commitment to implement stitching tension verification at IPQC (quantified specification, not visual only) by a stated date. Root cause described as "under investigation, related to operator training and thread lot verification" — not stated as confirmed.

Thread lot tensile test conducted: passes specification. Thread lot cleared from hold. Root cause narrows to operator training gap during the substitution period.

CAPA: (1) stitching tension spec added to IPQC checklist with a calibrated gauge tool; (2) operator substitution procedure updated to require QC lead sign-off on the first 10 units from any substitute craftsperson.

Day 30 check: subsequent four batches show zero stitching failures in final inspection. CAPA marked effective.

SECTION 6

The Worksheet

Tear this out, copy it onto a fresh sheet, or fill it in directly.

Major Customer Complaint About a Batch Shipped 3 Weeks Ago

Scenario: a significant customer contacts you about a quality problem with a shipment from three weeks ago. By this point the batch is partially sold through or used. The window for straightforward product replacement has closed. The relationship and the next order are at risk.

RESPONSE STEP	ACTION REQUIRED	DEADLINE	STATUS

SECTION 6 (CONTINUED)

Reflection Prompts

After filling in the worksheet on the previous page, work through these.

1. Nine response steps: (1) Acknowledge receipt to the customer within 24 hours — do not wait for the investigation to begin. (2) Identify the exact lot or batch number from the complaint and any shipping documents. (3) Pull the NCR, IPQC, and final inspection records for that batch from three weeks ago. (4) Determine: were there any quality flags on this batch internally? If yes, document them. If no, that is itself a finding. (5) Assess remaining stock from the same batch — in transit, at the customer, in your warehouse. (6) Determine the financial exposure: replacement, return shipping, customer's downstream losses if applicable. (7) Propose a dual action to the customer: immediate remedy (replacement, refund, credit) AND process action to prevent recurrence. Both communicated at the same time. (8) Initiate RCA on the batch, independent of the customer communication timeline. (9) Schedule a 30-day effectiveness check — whether the same defect type appears in the next three batches.

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2. On step 3: if batch records do not exist or cannot be retrieved within one business day, that is the most important finding from this event, separate from the customer complaint itself. Record traceability failure is a system gap that requires its own CAPA regardless of how the customer complaint resolves.

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3. On step 7: never promise the customer a root cause before completing the RCA. You can promise a process action. 'We are investigating and will implement corrective action by [date]' is accurate. 'The problem was X' before you have verified X is a statement that may need to be retracted, which damages trust more than the original complaint.

SECTION 7

Tips and Traps

TIPS

- Separate the remedy proposal from the root cause explanation in all customer communications. The remedy can be communicated on day 2 or 3. The root cause belongs in the formal investigation closure document, not in the initial response.
- Test your batch record retrieval before a complaint forces you to. Pick a random batch number from six months ago and try to pull its complete IQC + IPQC + final inspection records within 30 minutes. The result tells you more about your traceability system than any audit.
- When assessing financial exposure in step 6, include the value of the next purchase order at risk. A $500 dispute handled poorly can cost a $12,000 annual account. The exposure is not just the defective units.
- If the batch had an internal quality flag that was overridden or not acted upon, disclose this proactively in the investigation closure document — to management, at minimum, and to the customer if contractually required. Concealing a known quality flag is a trust-ending event when discovered.

TRAPS

- Waiting for the RCA to complete before communicating with the customer. The customer relationship operates on a different timeline than the investigation. Silence from the supplier during an open complaint reads as either incompetence or indifference.
- Promising a root cause that has not yet been verified. 'It was the thread lot' stated in the day 3 email, later retracted when tensile tests pass, creates more damage to the relationship than the original complaint.
- Treating the traceability gap (step 3) as secondary to the customer complaint. The traceability gap is the bigger long-term problem. Without traceable records, every future complaint of this type will be just as difficult to investigate.
- Closing the CAPA after implementing the corrective action without the step 9 verification. Corrective action plus verification is one unit — stopping at implementation produces a CAPA log that looks complete but contains no evidence that anything actually improved.

SECTION 8

Appendixes

Appendix A — Customer Communication Template (Day 1–2)

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Subject: Your complaint reference [date] – acknowledged

Dear [Name],

Thank you for contacting us about the quality issue with your
[product] delivery from [approximate date].

We have logged your complaint and are investigating immediately.
We will provide a full response including a proposed resolution
by [date, max 3 business days from today].

If you need to reach us directly on this matter:
[Contact name and direct number or email]

We understand the disruption this has caused and take this
matter seriously.

– [Name / Title]

Do not include a root cause statement in this communication.
Do not promise a resolution type you have not yet confirmed.
Do not make this email longer than it needs to be.
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Appendix B — Batch Record Retrieval Checklist

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Given a batch number, can you retrieve within 1 business day:

[ ] IQC receiving log for the primary material lots used
[ ] IPQC records for each shift that produced this batch
[ ] Final inspection sign-off with inspector name and date
[ ] Shipping document (delivery note or invoice) with date
[ ] Any NCR or quality flag raised for this batch

If any box is unchecked: that is the traceability gap.
Open a CAPA for the unchecked item independently of this complaint.
Do not wait for the complaint to resolve before starting the CAPA.
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CONFIRMATION

WHERE THIS WORKSHEET COMES FROM

Quality Control Systems

Consistent Quality Is the Result of a System, Not Inspection

by Ibrahim Anwar

This worksheet is one of nine in the *Quality Control Systems* companion worksheet pack. The full pack is grouped into three categories: high-volume worksheets you can run weekly, niche-search worksheets for rare but high-value situations, and specific-case worksheets that walk you through a single concrete scenario.

Every framework, decision filter, and figure used in these worksheets is drawn from the chapters of the source book. The book sets the diagnosis, the worksheets give you the form to act on it.

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