

CONSUMER WRITING — ORIGINALS

1. Home improvements and repairs can pose many difficult problems and complaints for consumers. The general guidelines and cautions contained in this pamphlet can assist consumers and should be considered when dealing with home contractors.
2. The appearance of an ad in recognized media outlets — such as your local paper or radio station — does not guarantee the legitimacy of the company behind the ad.
3. Of particular importance to those seeking opportunities for fraud, seniors are much more likely to have developed chronic ailments. Not surprisingly then, seniors are particularly concerned about their health. This concern creates a large vulnerability to quack, miracle cure, hospital fraud, aging cure and other medical fraud of all kind.
4. The Dispute Resolution service investigates and mediates consumer-business disputes through informal mediation. The goal of this service is to provide third party assistance in solving disputes through mutually agreeable resolutions. The mediation is conducted through telephone/mail contacts, and informal hearings held in the office.

CONSUMER WRITING — SUGGESTED REWRITES

1. Follow these tips to get an honest deal from a home contractor.
[or replace paragraph with a title, such as]
Choosing an Honest and Qualified Home Contractor
2. Do not assume that a company is trustworthy just because it advertises on radio or in the newspaper.
3. If you have health concerns, then you are a prime target for con artists. They will try to sell you quack medicines, miracle cures, anti-aging treatments, and other useless products. They may take advantage of you to rip off your hospital, doctor, or health insurance company.
4. If you have a complaint against a business, we can look into it. We will collect information from you and the business by mail or phone, and sometimes we will meet with you both in our office. Our goal is to find a fair solution to your complaint.

The original consumer writing samples are from materials provided by members of the National Association for Consumer Agency Administrators (NACAA). I prepared the suggested rewrites for plain language seminars in 2000 and 2002.

Original of one panel from a brochure entitled “The Somerset County Division of Consumer Affairs”

About the Division

The Somerset County Division of Consumer Affairs was established in May 1973. It was the first county Consumer Affairs Office in New Jersey.

The Consumer Affairs Office is a free service, funded by the County of Somerset. Consumer Affairs evaluates, investigates and mediates consumer complaints. In March 1976, legislation was written, which authorizes county departments to enforce the “Consumer Fraud Act” and the regulations that supplement the act.

The New Jersey Consumer Fraud Act (N.J.S.A. 56:8-1 to 56:8-20) prohibits fraud, deceit or misrepresentation in the sale or advertisement of merchandise. The consumer regulations outline specific violations and carry the full force of the law.

If you have a question about your consumer rights, you can contact the Office for advice.

Rewrite of the brochure panel

The Consumer Affairs Office

We can help you!

Do you have a complaint about a product or service?

Have you been tricked by an ad or a salesperson?

Has a business cheated you?

As a consumer, you have rights that are protected by law. The Consumer Affairs Office can answer any question you have about these rights. We also can give you tips on how to protect yourself as a consumer.

If you feel you have been treated unfairly by a business, we will look into your complaint, **free of charge**. We will help solve the problem and make sure the laws protecting you are enforced.

Comments on this Rewrite

- The brochure is really about an Office, not a Division (both names are used in the original, but consumers will know it as an Office).
- The revision tells the consumer what is most important: how the consumer can be served by the Consumer Affairs Office.
- The historical information about the Office is relatively unimportant and takes up valuable space. What's important is for consumers to know they have rights protected by law; they don't really need to know the name of the law giving them that protection, where to find it in the statutes, or when it was enacted.
- We don't need to keep repeating Somerset because the name will be on the cover and the back. Also the brochure will be handed out in Somerset.

Comparison of Original and Rewrite

	<u>Original</u>	<u>Rewrite</u>
Word count	120	99
Average sentence length	15	12.25
Number of 3+ syllable words	28	9
Readability score (FOG)	16.7	8.5

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