



ESL Podcast 748 – Writing a Letter of Inquiry

GLOSSARY

laid off – fired; told that one no longer has a job

* Hundreds of people were laid off and then the company decided to close the factory.

to pound the pavement – to spend a lot of time walking along streets, especially going to many homes and businesses

* This year, the school's fundraiser involves asking the students to pound the pavement and try to sell magazines to their neighbors.

to turn up – to appear; to suddenly show up or be present

* Ozzie thought he had lost his dog, but one night, it turned up on his front porch.

to take the bull by the horns – to do something without hesitation, especially when it appears challenging or difficult

* Kenji isn't scared of anything! He always takes the bull by the horns and does whatever needs to be done.

inquiry – a question; the act of asking about something or whether something exists

* Some publishers want authors to send in a letter of inquiry before sending in a complete book manuscript.

job opening – a vacant position; an opportunity to work somewhere; a role that a company is trying to fill by hiring someone for a position

* More than 300 people have applied for the job opening, and we just posted it last week!

personnel officer – a person whose job is to hire and train employees and handle other aspects of staffing for a business or organization

* The personnel officer keeps files and records on everyone's job performance.

qualification – a trait, characteristic, knowledge, education, or experience that a company is looking for while hiring someone for a job; something that makes an individual seem like a good person to hire for a particular position

* Here's a job description for a graphic designer, but the listed qualifications include three software programs I've never used before.

extensive – covering many topics or a long period of time; thorough; broad

* The New York Times published an extensive review of the play.



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to enclose – to put something inside something else, especially to put another document in an envelope with a letter

* Please send us the completed form and enclose a copy of your driver's license and a \$25 check.

résumé – a 1- or 2-page document summarizing one's professional experience, education, and skills, used mostly when one is applying for a job

* What should I put at the top of the résumé? My professional experience or my education and leadership positions?

consulting – related to projects where an expert or a company is paid to provide a specific service over a defined period of time, but not hired as additional staff

* The students wrote a business plan for a local nonprofit organization as a consulting project in one of their MBA courses.

consideration – thought; time spent thinking about something, especially while making a decision about someone's proposal or request

* Please put your proposal in writing and send it to the managing director for her consideration.

to hesitate – to delay or to wait to do something, usually because one doubts whether it is appropriate or a good idea

* This is a great business opportunity! If you hesitate, someone else might take advantage of it first.

legwork – work that involves a lot of traveling, especially if the work is difficult or boring

* Benny put in a lot of legwork, hanging posters of his missing cat all over town.

to have no intention of – to not plan to do something

* Christopher broke up with Molly, but she has no intention of staying home and crying about it.

to twiddle (one's) thumbs – to hold one's hands together while moving one's thumbs in small circles around each other; an expression meaning to waste time by doing things that are not important

* How can you sit here just twiddling your thumbs when there's so much work to be done?



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does he mean when he says, “I decided to take the bull by the horns”?
 - a) He decided to take action.
 - b) He decided to stop complaining.
 - c) He decided to go to the rodeo.
 2. What will he put in the envelope with the letter?
 - a) A description of his qualifications.
 - b) A professional photo of himself.
 - c) A check.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to enclose

The verb “to enclose,” in this podcast, means to put something inside something else, especially to put another document in an envelope with a letter: “Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want us to return your documents to you.” The verb “to enclose” also means to put a wall or a fence around something to separate an area from another area: “They want to enclose their patio so that they can have a warm sunroom to enjoy in the wintertime.” Or, “Jack gets really nervous whenever he’s in an enclosed area, because he doesn’t like to be in small spaces.” Finally, an “enclosure” is the area inside of such a wall or fence: “How many sheep can you keep in this enclosure?”

consideration

In this podcast, the word “consideration” means time spent thinking about something, especially while making a decision about someone’s proposal or request: “We gave your proposal a lot of consideration, but we’ve decided it isn’t the right decision for us at this time.” The phrase “to take (something) into consideration” means to include something in one’s decision or to think about something: “The committee is trying to take everyone’s opinion into consideration.” The word “consideration” can refer to one’s ability to understand how other people must think or feel about a particular situation: “Show some consideration for your young cousin’s feelings and stop telling scary stories!”



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CULTURE NOTE

What Personnel Officers Do

A personnel officer is a “human resources” (related to staffing an organization or business) “generalist” (someone who knows a little bit about many things, but is not an expert in one particular area). Most personnel officers are “tasked with” (responsible for) many different types of “HR” (human resources) issues.

A personnel officer may help a business determine what “staffing levels” (how many employees) it needs to have. The personnel officer may help the business maximize the “productivity” (how much work can be done with a certain amount of resources) of its workers. If the personnel officer “determines” (decides; realizes) that additional staff members are needed, he or she may help to write the “job description” (detailed information about what a job involves and what type of employee is needed) and “post” (advertise) the “vacancy” (job opening).

The personnel officer may “cull” (review and choose the best ones) the applications, calling the “top tier” (the group of the best applicants) for phone interviews before inviting them “in” (to the office) for a face-to-face interview with the “hiring manager” (the person who will select and work with the new employee). The personnel officer might help the hiring manager develop a list of questions for the interview. The personnel officer may also “be present” (be in the same room) during the interview.

Once a candidate has been selected, the personnel officer may “draft” (write) the letter of invitation and process the candidate’s paperwork for employment. The personnel officer may also be responsible for providing the “new-employee orientation” (sessions or tours helping the new employee learn about the organization and where things are) and some “initial” (early) training.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – a



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 748: Writing a Letter of Inquiry.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 748. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Go to eslpod.com today – not tomorrow, today – and become a member of ESL Podcast. Why? Well, you'll be able to download our Learning Guide and your English will get better much faster than if you don't download our Learning Guide.

This episode is about writing a letter of inquiry. That is, you're asking a question; you're trying to get information. That's normally what an "inquiry" is. In this case, really, it is a letter asking for a job. Let's get started.

[start of story]

I was laid off from my job three months ago. Since then, I've been pounding the pavement looking for another job. So far, nothing has turned up, so I decided to take the bull by the horns and deliver inquiry letters to every company that might have a job opening.

...

Dear Ms. Smith (or the name of their personnel officer):

I am writing to inquire about any job openings you may have for someone with my experience and qualifications. I worked for six years as a software engineer for McQ Corp. and I have extensive training and experience related to software development.

I have enclosed a copy of my résumé. I would appreciate an opportunity to speak with you regarding any openings you may have or any consulting work your company requires.

Thank you for your consideration, and please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Steve Woz

...



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I'm planning to personally deliver each letter, with the hope of talking with someone in the company. It is going to take a lot of time and legwork, but I have no intention of sitting home and twiddling my thumbs while I wait for my next job!

[end of story]

Our story begins when I say, "I was laid off from my job three months ago." "To be laid (laid) off" means to lose your job, to be fired, to say I'm sorry, you no longer work here. "Since then (since that time), I've been pounding the pavement looking for another job." "To pound (pound) the pavement (pavement)" is an expression that means to spend a lot of time walking along the streets, especially going to different businesses or different houses. "Pavement" is another word for street, and "to pound" usually means to hit something hard, like with a tool called a "hammer." But here, you are hitting the ground with your feet; you're pounding the pavement. It's a general expression meaning to work very hard, to be looking in many different places either because you're trying to sell something or because, in this case, you need a job.

I say that so far, nothing has turned up. "To turn up" is a two-word – say it with me – phrasal verb meaning to appear suddenly, to suddenly be present. But, I'm saying that nothing has turned up, meaning I still don't have a job, "so I decided to take the bull by the horns and deliver inquiry letters to every company that might have a job opening." The expression "to take the bull (bull) by the horns (horns)" means to do something without hesitation, even when it looks difficult or challenging, to try to take direct control over something. You feel your life is out of control; you need to make a strong, bold decision. You're going to take the bull by the horns; you're going to actually do it, whatever that is, even when it seems difficult. "Inquiry letters" are letters that you send to a company, asking them something; often, it's asking for a job. An "inquiry" is another word for a question. A "job opening" is when a company is trying to find someone to work for them. We might also call it a "vacant position," but "job opening" is more common. You might ask someone, "Does your company have any openings?" That is, are they looking for people to hire – to work there.

Then we get to the actual letter that I write. I begin by saying, "Dear Ms. Smith," or whatever the name of the personnel officer is. "Personnel" is a word related to the employees of a company. An "officer" would be someone who's a boss, someone who's in charge. So, a "personnel officer" is the person who is the boss of the department that hires people, that goes out and finds people for the company and gets them to work there. Sometimes we call it the "personnel office," sometimes it's called the "human resources office."



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My letter begins by saying, “I am writing to inquire (to ask) about any job openings you may have for someone with my experience and qualifications.” Your “qualifications” are the things you know, your education, your experience, perhaps something about you as a worker that make you qualified or fit for a job. You are able to do it. So, you talk about your qualifications, the things that show or demonstrate that you will be able to do this job. I say that I worked for six years as a “software engineer,” someone who makes software programs, for McQ Corp. and I have extensive training and experience related to software development. When you have “extensive” training, you have a lot of it, something that would cover a long period of time and perhaps a lot of knowledge about that area. I don’t have a little bit of training; I have extensive training.

I say then, “I have enclosed a copy of my résumé.” “To enclose” (enclose) means to put one thing inside of something else. In this case, it’s a piece of paper inside an envelope. Usually this word is used in a written letter to indicate that there is something else in the envelope besides the letter that you are reading; in this case, it’s a copy of my résumé (résumé). A “résumé” gives a brief description of your experiences and qualifications: where you went to school, what kind of skills, what kind of knowledge you have, where you worked before you applied for this job. I then say, “I would appreciate an opportunity to speak with you regarding any openings you may have or any consulting work your company requires.” So, he’s saying do you have anything that is close to my qualifications or do you have any consulting work. “To consult” usually means to ask someone else their advice or opinion; “consulting” is working for companies, but just doing specific projects. You’re there for maybe a month, two months, six months; you’re not a permanent employee of the company.

I then say, “Thank you for your consideration, and please don’t hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.” “Consideration” means the time that you spent thinking about something, especially making your decision about someone’s proposal or request to do something. So, I’m thanking the person, we might say “in advance,” for taking the time to read my letter and perhaps to call me about any job openings. I say, “please don’t hesitate to contact me.” “To hesitate” means to delay or wait to do something, usually because you’re not sure if it’s a good idea that you do it. I say, “don’t hesitate to contact me.” It’s not a problem; you can call me, you can email me, and so forth. Then I sign the letter, “Sincerely, Steve Woz.”

At the end I say, “I’m planning to personally deliver each letter.” Normally, letters are delivered by the Post Office; but here I say I’m going to deliver the letter, I’m going to actually go to each of these companies, “with the hope of talking with



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someone in the company.” So he’s going to take the letter to the personnel officer, but he’s going to try also to talk to other people in the company to see if he can find out any more information about whether they have any job openings. He says, “It is going take a lot of time and legwork.” “Legwork” (one word) is another word for a lot of traveling, doing a lot of work that is difficult or boring. Sometimes we use this word even if we aren’t talking about walking or traveling or running – moving ourselves personally. Sometimes we use the word to talk about the hard, somewhat difficult research or investigation that you have to do in order to complete a project. I then say, “I have no intention of sitting home and twiddling my thumbs while I wait for my next job!” To say “you have no intention of (doing something)” means you have no plans to do that; you’re not going to do it. I say that I don’t want to be twiddling my thumbs. Your “thumbs” are the short, you can think of it, finger that you have; you have five fingers, the shortest one is the thumb. “To twiddle” (twiddle) means to hold your hands together, and “to twiddle your thumbs” means to take your thumbs and move them in small circles, one around the other. It’s an expression, however, that means to waste your time, not to do anything, instead just sit back, wait, don’t worry about it. That would be twiddling your thumbs. I say I do not want to sit around and twiddle my thumbs; I want to go out and do something, and that’s what I’m doing, trying to go to each company and deliver this letter of inquiry.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of story]

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[end of story]

We thank the person who did all of the legwork on this script, Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again here on ESL Podcast.

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