

## **English Corner**

### **Writing an enquiry letter**



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In this issue we look at writing enquiry messages in the workplace. We often send enquiry messages to obtain information required. Enquiry messages are sent to ask for information / advice / help (e.g. asking for a quotation, catalogues, solutions to solving problems, advice, etc.). You may want to ask about the possibility of funding your project / activities, or you may want to find out more about plans or details of the government's policies. Writing an effective enquiry message thus requires persuasiveness, just as in writing sales correspondence or job application letters.

#### **Content and structure**

##### **The first paragraph**

Ask the question you wish to have answered.

- I would appreciate further details about...
- (In particular), I would like to know if...
- We would like you to send us...
- Would it be possible for...?
- Could you (also) give me some idea about...?
- Could you please send me...?
- Could you tell me if...?

##### **The second paragraph**

Give some brief details about why you are writing to the person (e.g. the name of his shop was featured in the newspaper, you saw an advertisement, a friend gave you his name, etc). You should also give some background information about you, the writer.

- This company produces a large range of domestic and office appliances, and we are interested in using a number of products from your current range in the manufacture of our goods.
- My current computer system is nearly five years old, and I think it is time to change. I would like to go for something innovative and effective.
- My company is planning to modify production of this range of furniture coverings so as to comply with new regulations.

##### **The final paragraph**

End with an expression of how much you appreciate the help.



- Thank you in advance for your help (a routine enquiry)
- Thank you very much for your co-operation in this matter (if you are asking for something a little bit difficult)
- I would like to express my appreciation for your assistance in this matter (if you are asking for a lot)

### **A sample enquiry message**

Dear Technical Support Department,

I am writing this letter to ask you some technical questions about hardware support in version 5.1 of Red Hat Linux. I saw Red Hat Software's advertisement for version 5.1 of Linux in the August 1998, issue of *Linux Journal*. I was quite impressed with the capabilities as listed in the advertisement, and I would like to learn some more about the product. Before I make the decision to purchase the software, I need to be certain that it will work properly on my computer.

I have three hardware support questions that I would like you to answer. I have reviewed the technical support information at Red Hat Software's home page ([www.redhat.com](http://www.redhat.com)), but I have not been able to find answers to my questions. The three hardware-related questions that I have are as follows:

1. Does the latest release of Red Hat Linux support the Diamond Viper 330 PCI video card? This card uses the Riva chipset released by NVIDIA Corporation.
2. If Red Hat Linux does not currently have a driver for this card, is there a timetable for when the card will be supported?
3. Is there an online site for the latest list of supported hardware? This would be a great aid to me in the future, as I often upgrade my machine.

I am aware that some of the early versions of Red Hat Linux were not able to support some of Diamond Multimedia's products, and I hope that new drivers have been created in this latest software release. If the latest release of Red Hat Linux can support my video hardware, I will definitely purchase the product. I feel that the price of the product is exceptional, and the range of features is outstanding.

For your convenience, you can respond to me by e-mail. My e-mail address is [garyc@nnn.com](mailto:garyc@nnn.com). If you prefer to respond by telephone, you can reach me at (512) 000-0000. I appreciate any assistance that you are able to provide me.

Yours sincerely,

Gary Fung

From: McMurrey, D. A (2010). *Online technical writing: Contents*. Retrieved November 5, 2010 from Austin Community College (ACC), Technical Writing Certificate Program Web site: <http://www.io.com/~hcexres/textbook/acctoc.html>



### Analysis

**Background information:** The writer is asking for information on certain aspects of an operating system.

### **Introduction**

- Clear and concise
- The writer states clearly the purpose of the letter, how he heard about the product, and establishes a need for the information he is requesting (i.e. to ensure that it is compatible with the writer's computer).

**The writer's effort:** In the second paragraph, before outlining the actual questions, the writer indicates that he has attempted to look for the information through other means but has not succeeded. It is important not to ask for information that can easily be obtained from available sources.

**Incentive:** In writing enquiry messages, try to provide some indirect motivation for the recipient to respond or offer help. In this letter, the writer indicates in several places that a purchase decision depends on obtaining the information he is requesting (e.g. Before I make the decision to purchase the software, ...; if ..., I will definitely purchase the product). The writer also said some nice things about the product, which can also raise the possibility of obtaining the information required (e.g. I feel that the price of the product is exceptional, and the range of features is outstanding.).

### Quiz

Read the following enquiry message and answer the questions that follow.

Dear Sirs

*Fire Precaution Standard for Furniture Coverings*

Could you please send me the recent HK Trading Standards Report on regulations in relation to flame retardant materials used in furniture coverings? I believe this report was produced at the end of last month. The reference number is HKTS09-439/1.

My company produces fabrics used for soft furnishings, and we are planning to modify production of our range of furniture coverings so as to apply with the new regulations. The report which your Office has produced would be very useful to us in helping us adopt the most stringent standards.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours faithfully

Ranjit Singh  
Production Manager

RS/lk



**Quiz:**

1. What is the enquiry about?

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2. How is the information useful?

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**Key:**

1. The enquiry is about the recent HK Trading Standards Report on regulations relating to flame retardant materials used in furniture coverings.
2. The information is useful to the writer as the company is planning to modify the production of their range of furniture coverings to comply with the new regulations.

**References:**

Bilbow, G. (2004). *Business Writing for Hong Kong*. 3rd Edition. Hong Kong: Longman.

Mcmurrey, D. A (2010). *Online technical writing: Contents*. Retrieved November 5, 2010 from Austin Community College (ACC), Technical Writing Certificate Program Website: <http://www.io.com/~hcexres/textbook/acctoc.html>.

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