Inquiry Letter

Inquiry letters are written for the purpose of asking for something from the recipient. There are three categories of inquiry letters in which most inquiries may qualify:

1. **Status inquiries** are typically sent to request references or recommendations: Creditors, employers, universities/colleges/trade schools, and any other type of institution that may be seeking information about a person or even a company.
2. **Routine inquiries** are letters written to an individual or company for the purpose of getting specific information. Typically these types of letters are asking for information for research and are sent to specialists in the area but can be sent to inquire about grant availability or an unlisted job. (If the purpose is for an unlisted job, the letter may resemble a cover letter with a large focus on the company you are inquiring about.)
3. **Sales related inquiries** are written to a company or individual to obtain information about a product or service and may be the first step of collecting information for a report.

Inquiries can be sent as a formal business letter or as an e-mail. If you are sending the inquiry outside of your company, it is considered a formal request and you should send a letter attached to an e-mail, mailed through the postal service or other delivery service, or as a fax. Determining which mode of transmission to use and which medium—letter or e-mail—is dependent upon the audience and purpose.

The way you begin any written communication is dependent upon the customs of the recipient. In the United States, we get to the point quickly; while in other cultures, people expect that there should be some formalities of pleasantries before getting to the point. So, knowing the customs of the person you are sending the inquiry is crucial.

**Components of an inquiry:**

**Introduction:** the purpose of the introduction is to provide your audience with the basic information: who, what, and why.

- Introduce yourself and where you are from.
- State what you want from the recipient and what you are going to do with the information that he or she gives you, and why you are contacting him or her.
- Include subtle flattery (if you are seeking information from an authority) that is meant to provide your reader with assurance that you know his or her worth and that information can be a part of the why. If the purpose for the inquiry is status or sales, you would not need to provide the flattery.

**Body:** the purpose of the body is to provide the recipient with the inquiry—what you want from him or her.

- In a sales inquiry, you might include size of the product, quality, price, availability, discount rates, return rate, service terms, or any other pertinent information that will help you determine if you will recommend the product or service and the information is usually included in a report.
- If you are sending an inquiry for information, you will list no more than five questions. Note: if you are asking for specific information, make certain that the information cannot be found through other means and make sure that your questions are pertinent.
If you are inquiring about a perspective employee, be specific about the kind of information you are wanting: dependability, years known, etc. All body content whether a list or a set of questions should be bulleted.

**Conclusion:** the conclusion of all letters functions to establish good will.

- Thank the recipient for his or her time and consideration. Do not thank him or her in advance; instead, you are thanking him or her for the time he or she has spent reading the letter and considering your inquiry.
- Include any permission you may need for quoting him or her in your work (if you are seeking information).
- Offer to provide a preview of any document you create to the person to whom you are seeking information.
- Provide your contact information: address, e-mail, phone number.

**Characteristics of a professional inquiry:**

1. Write clearly and concisely—all business writing must be written clearly and concisely.
2. Express gratitude and consideration—you must thank the person for his/her time—meaning the time to read the inquiry and consider— but do not write a *thank you in advance*—that is presumptuous and can offend your reader. (When you receive the information, you will send a formal thank-you note that among expressing gratitude offers to return the favor.) You must be considerate and only ask for information that you cannot get through secondary resources and you must provide a sufficient timeline. Do not send an inquiry for information that you need the next day or even the next week or two. Finally, ask the person if you may quote him or her should he or she decide to respond.
3. Provide a route for a response such as a self-addressed, stamped envelope—SASE