

## Chatterbox #56 – Who's got mail?

### Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone! This is Harp.

Maura: And Maura.

Harp: And we're here with your Culips English Learning Podcast.

Maura: Yes. And don't forget to our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com, and there you can become a member. And if you're a member, you have transcripts for every episode, so you can follow along; you have more detailed explanations, and a quiz.

Harp: Yes. And also on the website, you can find all the older episodes and we always focus on natural, everyday English.

Maura: What's one of your favourite episodes of the past, Harp?

Harp: I think one of my favourite ones that we did recently was *Books*.

Maura: Oh yeah. That was fun. And we should do another one soon, because there's always more to say.

Harp: I know, definitely. I agree with you. What about you? What was one of your favourite ones that we did recently?

Maura: Well, of course, the episode that we recently did about how we all met and how Culips started. That was really fun, of course, because it was fun meeting everybody and fun talking about it.

Harp: Yeah. It was fun talking about the history of Culips.

Maura: Yeah. And if you haven't heard that, listen to it, because it's a good way to get to know us, too.

Harp: Yeah, definitely. And today, we're gonna do a Chatterbox, which is where we chat. We talk about current events, or cultural happenings, things in the news, sometimes we interview people.

Maura: All different kinds of things. And today, we're going to talk about mail.

Harp: Yes. We're gonna talk about mail.

Maura: Not male or female, but sending letters and packages.

- Harp: Yeah, definitely. And we'll start by talking about the idea of this episode, because it's kind of an interesting story about the news in Canada and something that happened recently here. Then we're gonna move on to traditional mail, or **snail mail**, versus e-mail. And then we're gonna share some fun stories and memories about mail.
- Maura: Good. Let's get started.
- Harp: All right. So, I started thinking of this idea because recently, in Canada, we had a postal **strike**.
- Maura: Yeah. It was probably just over a month or so ago when Canada Post, which is our public mail system, went on **strike**.
- Harp: Yes. Yeah. So, the union that represents the Canada Post workers were trying to get a new deal, the contract was finished. And there was no deal, there were some differences between the union and between Canada Post, the employer, about wages and **sick days**, and there were a couple of different issues. And...so then, the Canada Post union started doing **strikes**. But they didn't do just **walk off** and no mail was delivered, they were doing a rotating **strike**. So one day, all the workers in Montreal stopped working. The next day, all the workers in a different city stopped working, so it was a rotating **strike**. So then, after about a week of these rotating **strikes**, Canada Post, not the union, but the employer side, so the bosses, decided to lock out the union employees, which means that they couldn't do the rotating **strikes**. Canada Post locked the doors and they had to negotiate at the **bargaining table** only. So this meant that pretty much for almost two, three weeks, there was no mail being delivered in Canada.
- Maura: Right. So, during the month of June, mostly, there was a lot of delay in receiving mail. Now, some people seemed to be worried about this right away. People who do business and they send things by Canada Post knew that this was going to affect them. But other people, like myself, well, we were pretty laid back, like, "Oh, no problem, it won't really change very much," but in the end I think it did affect everybody a little bit.
- Harp: Yeah, definitely. I was the same as you. I thought, "Well, who uses traditional mail anymore?" I don't get very much mail at all. But then, as the lockout happened and there was no mail being delivered, I realized that I had wedding invitations that I was waiting for. I thought I was invited to the wedding but I didn't get the invitation. I had to send a present to my friend, and I had to go to a private company to do it because I couldn't send it through Canada Post. And I bought a ring online, I couldn't get it delivered, it took a month and a half rather than two or three days.

- Maura: Mmhhh. Just recently, actually, I got some mail and it was a notice telling me that my library card was going to expire, except the date was in two days. Because it took so long for me to get the notice that by the time I got it, it was so close.
- Harp: Aw, no.
- Maura: And any small thing that you don't really think about might come through the mail and so it might have been delayed. So, it was a pretty big deal, in Canada anyways. If you weren't in Canada, you might not have heard about it.
- Harp: Yeah. So now, there's a back-to-work order. The government has voted to have a back-to-work order, so all the workers are back to work, but they're still bargaining to get a new contract. But we're slowly starting to get our mail.
- Maura: And it's a good thing, because I'm sure they're **backed up** now, that the postal workers who went back to work have so much mail to deal with because of that.
- Harp: It's crazy. I think in Montreal there were 40 million pieces of mail waiting to be delivered.
- Maura: Wow. Luckily it's over.
- Harp: Yes, definitely. So that's where I got the idea for this episode, because before the **strike** I never really thought about mail that much.
- Maura: Yup. That's true.
- Harp: So let's move on to the next topic.
- Maura: Sure, let's go.
- Harp: Next, we're gonna talk about traditional mail, which is through Canada Post, versus e-mail. What kind of mail do you still get through the traditional way? What do you get through **snail mail**?
- Maura: To be honest, not very much. I get the occasional postcard from a friend and I get a lot of **bills** and **junk mail**. But with some of my friends from high school, we have a letter-writing circle. So there are about five of us and we all write letters together. So at one time, I receive letters from all my friends and then I write a letter from me and I send it to my next friend, who gets all of the letters, including her old letter. She gets rid of that one, puts a new one in, and sends it on to the next friend.
- Harp: So every person gets five letters in one envelope?

- Maura: Yup.
- Harp: Their old one and all four of yours, the new ones.
- Maura: Exactly.
- Harp: That's very fun. I love that idea.
- Maura: It is fun, except some of us also talk by e-mail or Facebook or other types of messages, so sometimes when I get the letter, it's out of date.
- Harp: New things have happened?
- Maura: Exactly. But you know, it's still fun to read anyways, even if I know what happened. It's still fun to see an actual letter and it's fun to get something in the mail that's not a **bill**.
- Harp: That is so much fun. I love that idea because I love getting mail like that.
- Maura: Do you send letters very often?
- Harp: I don't anymore.
- Maura: Because that's my **rule of thumb**: If you wanna receive mail, you have to send mail.
- Harp: Yeah, that's true. But, you know, I sent a lot of letters and cards when I was living overseas. No one ever sent me anything, so I gave up.
- Maura: But you're right, it is fun and it's something that would be nice to keep around.
- Harp: Definitely. But it's interesting; you still get **bills** through traditional mail?
- Maura: Yeah, some of my **bills** I still get paper copies of in the mail. Yeah.
- Harp: Oh, that's interesting. Yeah, I don't get any. I do electronic banking, so I get all my **bills** e-mailed to me and I pay them online. I never even get the paper copy of them.
- Maura: That's a good trend, because it's good for the environment.
- Harp: Yeah, exactly.

- Maura: And I think more and more people are going **paperless**. Because they don't really need it, they can check online. To pay a **bill** by putting a cheque in an envelope and sending it to them seems almost archaic. But e-mail is good for many things, like paying **bills**, but it's also good for keeping in contact with your friends, because you get the information so much faster.
- Harp: Yup. My mom is adorable. She sends me and my two sisters an e-mail every day. Just a little one. Sometimes it just says, "Hi girls, I love you, Mom." Or sometimes it'll tell us a little story about what they're doing in Edmonton or what's going on in their life. It's really nice. Almost every single day I get an e-mail from my mom.
- Maura: Oh, that is sweet. But I do find that e-mails are different from letters. The feeling that you get isn't quite the same.
- Harp: No, for sure. Let's maybe move on to the next topic.
- Maura: OK, sure.
- Harp: Which is memories of mail.
- Maura: Memories of mail. What is one of your best memories of mail, Harp?
- Harp: Um, well, I remember, when I was young, my grandparents lived in India, and we obviously lived in Canada. And my grandparents would write us letters, or write my mom letters, or write my dad letters. And they would always come in these green, I can't say envelope, because it was an envelope letter. You opened the envelope and the letter was like a page from the envelope.
- Maura: OK. So they had a page and then they folded it up in a certain way so that it was actually the envelope itself.
- Harp: Yeah, exactly.
- Maura: Oh, that's pretty cool.
- Harp: Yup. So, I remember just when we would receive these letters, often they were written in Punjabi, so it would take me a very long time to read them, but I remember my mom would always make us sit down and write letters back to our grandparents because calling internationally was so expensive that that was the only way that we got news from them and that they got news back.
- Maura: It's really crazy how fast things have changed, because now there are different calling cards and plans and Skype, so you can talk to people in India or so many different countries and it's not very expensive.

- Harp: Yeah, no. It's so easy to call. Now my parents call any relatives that are in India, but **back in the day**, you had to write letters, so I remember the little green envelope coming to the house. It was fun.
- Maura: Wow. It's really hard to imagine.
- Harp: Yup. What about you? What's a memory that you have with mail?
- Maura: Well, mine's kinda funny because it's a mix between technology and traditional mail. I remember that I was 17 years old and chat rooms and chatting online was brand new, so when you went online, you always chatted with people you didn't know. You never met the same person twice, really. And so, people were always going on and just saying "Hi. How old are you? Where do you live? What do you do?" And one day, I started chatting with a guy from England, who was the same age and we decided to exchange actual addresses and become **pen pals**.
- Harp: So you had a **pen pal** in England?
- Maura: Yeah. And it's funny, because we met online and then for about a year we wrote letters back and forth and we shared pictures and stuff too. And then I took a trip to England with my dad and I got to meet my **pen pal**.
- Harp: That is so much fun.
- Maura: I know. It could have been crazy, because you never know when you meet someone online, but he turned out to be a really great guy.
- Harp: That's so cool.
- Maura: Yeah. So we continued to be **pen pals**, I think for another year or two after that, and he came to Canada too. We had lost contact but, of course, I searched his name on Facebook and I found him.
- Harp: That's so much fun. So you met him on the Internet, and then you guys become **pen pals** and used traditional **snail mail**. Then you met in real life and then now you met again, years later, using Facebook.
- Maura: Yup. It's pretty cool.
- Harp: That's a very cool story.
- Maura: Yeah, it was fun. And it's always fun to meet people from different places and exchange with them and get to know people. I like that.

- Harp: Yeah. I had **pen pals** when I was young but they were always living somewhere far and I never wrote to them for a long time. I never met any of my **pen pals**. That's very cool.
- Maura: Yeah, yeah, it was fun.
- Harp: Anything else to say about letters?
- Maura: Well, one thing is that I still have a lot of letters from my past.
- Harp: Ha, me too. I've kept almost all of them.
- Maura: Yeah. I have a really hard time throwing them out, because there's something about letters that are so personal and usually people are expressing something about how they really feel. So, I just feel like they're really a memory and a treasure, and I feel bad about getting rid of them.
- Harp: I know. I have boxes at my parents' house that I've kept old letters in.
- Maura: I feel like I'm planning for the future because, you know, now you look at a letter from 50 years ago, and it seems so interesting, so 50 years from now, people will look back at my letters and be intrigued. Maybe.
- Harp: Maybe, but mine were probably just like, "Today was a nice day and I went for a walk and I played with my friends." So maybe not.
- Maura: Yeah, but you never know. I bet people might find that interesting.
- Harp: Yeah. It's too bad we don't write letters anymore. I love that you still do it with your friends.
- Maura: Yeah. It is fun. One kind of mail that people do tend to still write is postcards. If people are travelling, they'll still send postcards to each other. And I love getting postcards, too.
- Harp: Yeah, exactly. So a postcard is, when you go to a place, you can even, in Montreal, buy a postcard, or if you go to Japan, you can buy a postcard, and it has a picture of the place that you're at. And on the back of it, you write just a short message, so everyone who sees it can see the message. It's not like a letter in an envelope, but it always has a picture of a place and then you write a little message and you mail it to the person.
- Maura: Yup. I definitely have a lot of old postcards too. Again, planning for the future.
- Harp: No, definitely. And I actually sent a lot of postcards, when I was travelling, to my parents. And they kept them all for me, and I made a little scrapbook of them.

- Maura: Oh, that's very cool. All right, well, you know, I think I'm gonna go write a letter now.
- Harp: That's a good idea.
- Maura: Maybe to you, Harp.
- Harp: That would be so much fun. I would love if you did that.
- Maura: So, we talked about mail this episode, and hopefully in another five years, mail will still be around, but you never know.
- Harp: Nope, definitely. So we started today talking about the postal **strike** that happened in Canada recently.
- Maura: And then we talked about regular mail versus e-mail.
- Harp: And then we told you some stories about our memories with mail.
- Maura: Mmhmm. Do you still get mail? Is mail still popular where you live? Let us know.
- Harp: Did you ever have a **pen pal**?
- Maura: Yeah. We hope you enjoyed this episode and we'll be coming to you soon with another one.
- Harp: Definitely. Make sure you go to the website, Culips.com. C-U-L-I-P-S.com.
- Maura: And we'll talk to you soon. Bye!
- Harp: Bye everyone!

## Detailed Explanation

### Snail mail

Mail is envelopes and other small packages that are sent through a delivery system that delivers these items to the address listed. Every country has their own system and most are controlled by the government. Canada's public (government-run) mail system is called Canada Post.

The government-controlled public system of mail is also often referred to by the slang term **snail mail**. There are two reasons for this name. The first is that traditional mail is slow and so are snails. There are much faster ways than traditional mail to exchange information now. A snail is also slow, as it moves around by pulling itself along the ground. The second reason it's called **snail mail** is because the words rhyme! It just sounds cute.

**Snail mail** can also be written as *s-mail*, a play on words with *e-mail*.

When someone receives an envelope or package through the country's postal service, the expression is *to receive something in the mail*. Here's an example:

Brice: Guess what I got in the mail today? A package from my friend in China!

Nancy: Ah, nice! I never get stuff in the mail anymore.

Also remember that mail is an uncountable, or noncount, noun, meaning that the word *mail* cannot be plural. If you want to count, you can say *a piece of mail*, just like we do in this episode, or talk about *letters*, *packages*, and *parcels*.

### A strike

**A strike** is when people who work at a certain place decide as a group not to go to work because of poor working conditions. This happens when a group of employees is deciding on a new work contract with different conditions and benefits. This was the case with Canada Post.

You can also use the verb **to strike** or say **to go on strike**.

There are a few other meanings and uses of the word **strike**, like *to hit*.

### Sick days

**Sick days** are the days that you do not go to work because of sickness, but you still get paid as you normally would. Different employers in Canada provide different numbers of **sick days** for their employees. Some organizations don't provide any **sick days**; if you can't come in to work because you're sick, then you just don't get paid for that day.

In Canada and the United States, many people use their **sick days** when they're not actually sick. There are a variety of conditions around **sick days**, and sometimes they need to be used within a year. Employees do not usually have to provide proof, like a doctor's note, that they were sick until they miss numerous days of work.

#### To walk off

**To walk off** can have slightly different meanings depending on the situation. In this episode, Harp says that the Canadian postal workers didn't just walk off. In this case, **to walk off** is to walk away from something, which for the Canadian postal workers was their jobs.

Here are a couple more examples with **to walk off**.

Kim: I was asking Joe about his sister and he just **walked off**. He didn't even say goodbye.

Sam: He must still be mad at you.

Matthew: I'm sorry, but I will **walk off** the site tomorrow if they don't provide us with the right equipment.

Ron: That's understandable. It's a matter of worker safety to have the right gear.

#### The bargaining table

**The bargaining table** is not a specific place. When people talk about a **bargaining table**, they mean that there will be people bargaining and trying to come to a deal. The expression **bargaining table** is another way of saying that bargaining and negotiating is happening. It's possible (though not necessary) that there's an actual table there, but it's not a special table for bargaining.

In this episode, Harp says that Canada Post negotiated at **the bargaining table**. You can imagine people discussing the working conditions for Canada Post employees.

Here's another example with the expression **the bargaining table**:

Ted: They've been at **the bargaining table** all day.

Shauna: I hope they'll be able to come to an agreement soon.

#### To be backed up

**To be backed up** means to have a lot of work to do, work that should already have been completed. This expression is most often used at a job, not about work to do at home.

Maura says that she's sure the postal workers are **backed up**. This means that they have a lot of work to do and a lot of mail to deliver that would normally have been delivered already. Of course, the reason for this is because they were on strike and the mail was not being delivered.

Here's another example with *to be backed up*:

Sandy: I'm so tired. We've been so **backed up** at work lately.

Chelsea: Oh, really. Why's that?

**To be backed up** has more than one meaning, depending on the context. A person can also **back up** the files on their computer. This means that they create a copy of their files, so that if something happens to their computer, they'll still be able to access their files.

### Junk mail and bills

We get all kinds of different things in the mail. Some of the less pleasant things we get in the mail are **junk mail** and **bills**. A **bill** is a document that shows the amount that is owed to a company, like a credit card company or phone company. **Junk mail** is mail that you don't want and usually didn't ask to receive. It's usually advertisements, which might be sent to you by your bank or other organizations that have your mailing address.

In Canada, advertisements in the form of flyers or pamphlets might also be delivered to your home. These do not usually come through the mail, but are delivered by private companies or local businesses. Some people enjoy seeing the special prices from stores in the area. People who are not interested in receiving these advertisements may put a note or small sign on their mailbox, such as "No flyers please," that shows they do not wish to receive the advertisements.

**Junk mail** that is received by e-mail can also be called **junk mail**, or spam.

### A rule of thumb

**A rule of thumb** is a general rule that a person may follow that is not necessary based on any scientific proof. This rule can be applied to many different things and the results are not always what one might think they should be.

In this episode, Maura says that her **rule of thumb** is that in order to receive mail, you have to send mail. Of course, this is not the case in every single situation, but something Maura believes is usually true.

There are **rules of thumb** that are personal to an individual and others that are more widely believed. There are **rules of thumb** about all different kinds of subjects, from money, to health, to mail! Here's a little list of some widely believed **rules of thumb**:

If you want to receive mail, you should send mail.

Crossing your arms makes you look less open to meeting people.

"I" before "E," except after "C." (This rule applies to the spelling of words such as *friend*, *yield*, and *ceiling*, but doesn't work for words like *weird* or *agencies*.)

The origin of the expression **rule of thumb** is unclear, but it seems to have some connection to the thumb as a use for some rule or measurement. It is a very old expression, first recorded in the 1600s.

One more thing about the word *thumb*: be careful of the pronunciation. Whenever a word ends with *mb* in English, the *b* is not pronounced, and the end sound is just the *m*.

### Paperless

**Paperless** is a new English adjective. According to some dictionaries, it's not even a word yet! **Paperless** describes the movement toward using less paper, especially at the workplace. In some offices, employees are encouraged only to print documents when it's completely necessary. People are also going **paperless** at home, like we say in this episode, by not receiving bills or other unnecessary documentation on paper when they can access them online instead.

The reason for this trend is the environment, as well as convenience. More and more people in Canada are becoming aware of how much we waste, and using less paper will help us waste less, plus, when all your bills are available online, you don't have to waste space in your home storing the paper copies.

### Back in the day

**Back in the day** is a very general expression that refers to some time in the not very recent past. Deciding what is the recent past is an individual choice. This expression almost always refers to a significantly different time in a person's life or in history. When something is said to have happened **back in the day**, it usually means that things are very different today.

For a person who's 25 years old, **back in the day** might mean when they were a kid or a baby. For a person who's 50 years old, **back in the day** might refer to when they were 30. **Back in the day** is usually associated with happy or good times. Although the expression uses the singular word *day*, it does not simply refer to one day, but a period of time.

Harp says that **back in the day**, she used to receive letters from her grandparents in India. This means that in Harp's childhood, when people wrote letters more often, she received letters from her grandparents.

Here's another example with the expression ***back in the day***:

Donna: **Back in the day**, we used to play outside all evening.

Kevin: It was great, wasn't it? It's not like that anymore. Kids are always inside.

Another popular expression, *back in the good old days*, is used in the same way as ***back in the day***.

### Pen pals

**Pen pals** are people who write letters to each other, who live in different cities, countries, or even continents. Having a **pen pal** tends to be more popular with younger people, but some older people also have **pen pals**. Some people know their **pen pals** well and had actually met them in person before they started writing. Other **pen pals** have never met in person and may never plan to meet.

**Pen pals** are people whose relationship has formed by exchanging letters. If someone has a friend they've known for 15 years and then the friend moves away and they exchange letters, that's not really a **pen pal**. The purpose of having a **pen pal** is varied. Some people might want a **pen pal** simply for friendship and other use **pen pals** to practice another language.

Nowadays, having **pen pals** that exchange letters through traditional mail is less common. Some people may use the term **pen pal** to talk about exchanging e-mail with people they have never met. Having **pen pals** is less popular now than it was in the past.

**Pen pal** is made up of two words: *pen*, which represents the writing, and *pal*, which is another word for *friend*.

**Quiz****1. What is *snail mail*?**

- a) a form of e-mail
- b) traditional mail
- c) mail sent through private courier companies
- d) text messages

**2. Lauren: When our bosses didn't give us what we thought was fair, the union said we could \_\_\_\_\_.**

**Please fill in the blank.**

- a) walk it off
- b) send mail
- c) strike a key
- d) go on strike

**3. What is the name of the place that represents people negotiating and bargaining?**

- a) the bargaining table
- b) the contract table
- c) the serious table
- d) the table of bargaining

**4. Which of the following could NOT be backed up?**

- a) mail
- b) work
- c) swimming
- d) computer files

**5. What is Maura's rule of thumb in this episode?**

- a) She has a pen pal.
- b) You have send mail in order to receive it.
- c) People love mail.
- d) Some people don't like junk mail.

6. Which of the following is NOT true about *paperless*?

- a) It's an old term.
- b) It's a new trend for businesses.
- c) It means that people are printing less on paper.
- d) It's good for the environment.

7. Hilary: \_\_\_\_\_, people used to develop film from their camera and they never really knew how the picture would turn out beforehand.

Please fill in the blank with the appropriate expression.

- a) Back in the day
- b) Yesterday
- c) Some day
- d) In the day

8. What do you call a person who you exchange letters with often?

- a) a pen friend
- b) a pen pal
- c) a pen writer
- d) a writing pal

## **Answers**

1.b    2.d    3.a    4.c    5.b    6.a    7.a    8.b