Sending Mail in the United States

There are several options for sending mail in the US. The one that's right for you depends on what and where you're sending, how quickly you'd like your item delivered, and what services you'd like included. If you just need to send some documents and don't need fast delivery or any other services, you can use a standard First-Class letter with stamps. If you'd like faster delivery, tracking, and insurance, you can use Priority Mail, which is more expensive. If you'd like the fastest possible delivery, you can use Priority Mail Express, which is more expensive than either option.

Envelope Sizing

The size of envelope you should use depends on what you're sending and who you're sending it to. For example, the California Department of Public Health will accept documents folded to fit in a standard envelope, while the US Department of State will not. Be sure to check the policies of the organization you're sending to in order to ensure that your documents will be accepted.

Addressing your envelope

Refer to the Addressing an Envelope page.

Postage Stamps

A **postage stamp** is a small paper adhesive that shows you've paid for USPS mail delivery services. Unless you're using Priority Mail, any letter or package you send must have the correct amount of stamps based on its weight, size, and delivery speed.

- **Where to get stamps**: You can purchase stamps at any post office, some grocery stores, or online through the USPS website.
- **How much postage you need**: A standard letter (up to 1 ounce) requires one First-Class stamp. For heavier or larger mail, you'll need additional postage. As of the time of writing, stamps cost $0.73 each. If you're unsure how many stamps you need, use the USPS

postage calculator or ask at a post office.

Priority Mail

Priority Mail is ideal for items that need faster delivery than standard First-Class mail, or if you want tracking or insurance. It typically takes 1-3 business days for delivery.

- **Flat Rate**: If your item fits in a Flat Rate Envelope or Box and weighs less than 70 lbs, you can ship it anywhere in the U.S. at a fixed price ($9.85 for a Flat Rate Envelope as of the time of writing). If your item doesn't fit in flat rate packaging, the cost is based on the weight and destination of the item.
- **Priority Mail Express**: For faster deliveries, Priority Mail Express provides overnight delivery to most U.S. addresses. If your item doesn't arrive on time, you can get your money back. It's the fastest USPS option but costs more than standard Priority Mail.
- **Tracking**: Both standard Priority Mail and Priority Mail Express come with tracking, allowing you to monitor the package's progress. When you mail a priority mail item, the USPS will provide a receipt with your tracking number.
- **Insurance**: Both standard Priority Mail and Priority Mail Express come with insurance up to $100, with the option to add more insurance for a fee.

Priority mail envelopes and boxes are available for free on the USPS website or at any post office. You only have to pay upon mailing the item.

Business Reply Mail

Sometimes, when companies send you mail, they include a **Business Reply Mail** envelope. This is a special mail class which allows you to respond to the company by mail for free.

You can tell if you got one of these envelopes because they'll say "BUSINESS REPLY MAIL" with the business's permit number, and have a "NO POSTAGE NECESSARY IF MAILED IN THE UNITED STATES" indicia where the stamp would usually go.

Using these envelopes is as simple as putting the response inside, sealing them, and mailing them as you would any other letter. There's no need to affix any stamps or pay for anything.

How to mail the item

Once you've finished preparing your item, it's time to mail it.

- If you're mailing a standard-sized envelope with a stamp, you can drop it in any blue USPS collection box or hand it directly to a postal worker in any post office.
- If you're using priority mail, you must give your item directly to a postal worker and pay the delivery fee. The postal worker will provide a receipt with your tracking number.

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