



PRIMER ON USPS
RULES AND REGULATIONS:
or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Mail!

Rapid Press/USPS Mailing Guidelines

The following documentation will help you prepare your mailpiece according to USPS regulations. We want you to save time and money by getting your design right the first time, every time. The information below will help you narrow down the proper size, shape, and orientation for your desired category of mail.

There are three main categories of USPS commercial mail: **Letters**, **Flats**, and **Parcels**. There are also subcategories within each main mailing category. Letters and Flats can both mail out as Marketing Mail (formerly "Standard Mail") (with a 2-9 day delivery window) or First-Class Mail (with a 1-5 day delivery window). Parcels will mail out as either First-Class Mail or Priority Mail depending on the nature of the parcel.

If you are a certified non-profit organization, you have the option to send mail at an even cheaper rate than Marketing Mail (but with the same 2-9 day delivery window). You must register as a non-profit mailer with the USPS before you can get those rates. If you are interested in Non-Profit Mail, please contact your CSR for more information.

There is estimated pricing data for each type and class of mail at the end of this document. It is current as of January 2026.

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Rules for Letter-Sized Mail

Within letter-sized mail, there are three main subcategories: **Postcards**, **Letters**, **Folded Self Mailers**, and **Booklets**. Each has their own rules and specifications that pertain to it. Letter-size mail cannot contain excessively rigid objects and must be able to easily bend around an 11" drum during postal processing. There are special rules for mailing CDs and DVDs through the mail, so contact your CSR if you are interested in mailing out a CD or a DVD (or any other rigid item).

Postcards

Postcards are a unique category within letter-sized mail. Many people use the term "postcard" to mean any single sheet of card stock that they mail out. To the USPS, a "postcard" is a small, letter-sized piece of a specific size. They can qualify for reduced postage rates when going out as first-class mail. This means you can get your mail in your recipient's hands more quickly than sending it out at standard rates, but in a more economical fashion. First-Class postage costs on a "postcard"-sized letter will typically run between \$0.420 - \$0.462 each (so they're cheaper than regular letters).

Physical Standards for Automated Postcards

- Not less than 5" long, 3.5" high, and 0.007" thick
- Not more than 4.25" high, 6" long, or 0.009" thick
- Maintains an aspect ratio (of length divided by width) of between 1.3 to 2.5
- No more than 3oz in weight

Letter-size mail

Letters are a broad definition that the USPS applies to a category of mail. They can be a single card or an enveloped packet of materials. If your mailpiece is a bifold/trifold/oblong folded piece, the USPS terms it a "*Folded Self Mailer*" (or FSM). If your folded piece has staples in it, then the USPS terms it a "*Booklet*". There are additional rules that apply to FSMs and Booklets. Postage costs for letters vary based on the weight and class of mail selected.

Physical Standards for Automated Letters (single card or enveloped packet)

- Not less than 5" long, 3.5" high, and 0.007" thick
- Not more than 11.5" long, 6.125" high, or 0.25" thick
- Maintains an aspect ratio (of length divided by width) of between 1.3 to 2.5
- No more than 3.5oz in weight

Folded-Self Mailers (FSMs)

Folded Self-Mailers are created when one or more unbound sheets of paper are folded together and sealed (with tabs or glue, not staples) to make a letter-size mailpiece. FSMs have slightly smaller maximum sizes than a normal letter. Common examples of FSMs are bifold and trifold mailers with an address panel as the “back” of the piece. Postage costs for FSMs vary based on the weight of the piece and class of mail selected.

Physical Standards for Automated FSMs (folded mailpiece with no staples)

- Not less than 5” long, 3.5” high, and 0.007” thick
- Not more than 10.5” long, 6” high, and 0.25” thick
- Maintains an aspect ratio (of length divided by width) of between 1.3 to 2.5
- No more than 3oz in weight
- Will require 2 or 3 1” or 1.5” tabs to keep the FSM closed

Booklets

Booklets must have a bound edge (the “spine” of the piece). Sheets that are fastened with at least two staples in the manufacturing fold (saddle stitched), perfect bound, pressed-glued, or joined together by another binding method that produces a spine where pages are attached together are considered booklets. Booklets are open on three sides before sealing, similar in design to a book. Postage costs for Booklets vary based on the weight of the piece and class of mail selected.

Physical Standards for Automated Booklets (folded mailpiece with staples)

- Not less than 5” long, 3.5” high, or 0.009” thick
- Not more than 10.5” long, 6” high, or 0.25” thick
- Maintains an aspect ratio (of length divided by width) of between 1.3 to 2.5
- No more than 3oz. in weight
- Will require 3 or more 1.5” tabs to keep the Booklet closed

Rules for Flat-Sized Mail

Flats are larger and often thicker than letter-sized mail. Examples of flats can be stuffed 9x12 envelopes, an 8.5x11 magazine, or an oversized 10x8 postcard. Flats are based on one or more dimensions being larger than a letter. Therefore, a 10" long by 8" high postcard would qualify as a flat (since the 8" height is larger than a letter but less than the maximum size allowed for a flat). Flats also cannot contain rigid objects and must be able to bend at least 5" from the middle of the piece in both directions without damaging the mailpiece. Flats can be mailed out as First-Class or Marketing Mail. Postage costs for Flats are based on the weight of the piece and the class of mail selected.

Physical Standard for Automated Flats

- Must be more than 11.5" long or more than 6.125" high or more than 0.25" thick
- Cannot be more than 15" long or more than 12" high or more than 0.75" thick
- Must be at least 5" high
- Must be at least 6" long
- Must be uniform in thickness. Any bumps or protrusions in the mailpiece cannot cause more than 0.25" variance in thickness.
- For bound or folded pieces, the edge perpendicular to the bound or folded edge may not exceed 12"
- Cannot weigh more than 13oz. for First-Class Mail
- Cannot weigh more than 16oz. for Marketing Mail

Rules for Parcels

Parcels are large, rigid boxes or other very thick/large mailpieces. Anything that isn't a Letter or a Flat is most likely a parcel. The costs for parcels varies based primarily on the weight and size of the parcel.

Physical Standards for Machinable Parcels (standard)

- Must be no less than 6" long, 3" high, 0.25" thick, and 6oz. in weight
- If a parcel is exactly 0.25" thick, it must be at least 3.5" high
- Cannot be more than 27" long, 17" high, 17" thick, or 25 pounds in weight

Physical Standards for Machinable Parcels (lightweight)

- Parcels that weigh less than 6oz. but more than 3.5oz
 - Mailpiece must be rectangular and able to maintain its integrity during mail processing
 - Must be at least 1.5" thick and no more than 3" thick
 - Must be at least 6" long and no more than 7" long
 - Must be at least 3.5" high and no more than 5" high
- Parcels that weigh less than 6oz. but at least 5oz.
 - Must be more than 0.75" thick and no more than 6" thick
 - Must be at least 6" long and no more than 12" long
 - Must be at least 3.5" high and no more than 9" high

Barcode placement on your mailpiece

In order to qualify for automated postage rates, Rapid Press will have to apply a barcode to your mailpiece. The USPS's Intelligent Mail Barcode (IMB) is a fixed size and length and we require certain minimum clearances on the mailpiece in order to inkjet or print it. The IMB is roughly 3" long and 0.15" tall. We cannot adjust the size of the barcode.

Barcode Placement for a Letter-Size Piece

The address block and barcode for a letter-size mailpiece must be applied within a specific area of the mailpiece (typically in the lower right-hand side, on the same side as the return address and indicia). An area that is 4" wide and 2" tall will accommodate the barcode and address block. See **Appendix A** for a template showing you the clear zones for barcode placement on a letter-size piece.

Barcode Placement for a #10 Window Envelope

The address block and barcode for a letter being inserted into a #10 window envelope will be positioned in the upper left-hand corner. We need an area that is 5.625" wide by 1.125" tall (and beginning 2.125" from the top edge of the letter) in order to accommodate a window envelope. See **Appendix B** for a template showing the proper placement of an address block on a #10 window envelope.

Barcode Placement on a Flat-Size Piece

The address block and barcode for a flat-sized mailpiece can be placed anywhere on the address side of the mailpiece, at least 1/8" away from any edge. We require a clear zone that is 4" wide and 2" tall for applying the barcode and address block on a flat. We can apply a mailing label to the piece if you do not wish to add a knockout window, or if the piece is not conducive to inkjet due to coating/stock selection.

Every Door Direct Mail

Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) is a class of mail designed to be delivered to every mailstop on a particular carrier route. EDDM is an effective way to target specific neighborhoods/zip codes/streets/etc, without the hassle of purchasing a mailing list or having a client database. Contact your CSR for more information about Every Door Direct Mail and see if it would suit your marketing needs.

An EDDM considered as a "flat" by the USPS (which just means that it is taller or longer than a normal "letter-size" piece). Minimum/maximum sizes and necessary clear zones are listed below. The recommended sizes will print the most economically on our digital press. You may select a different size if you would like, but the two listed sizes will get you the most bang for your buck.

Minimum Sizes:

- Must be more than 11-1/2" long OR
- More than 6-1/8" high OR
- More than 1/4" thick (we cannot print on anything that thick, but you could send a thick packet of inserts/coupons/etc in an envelope)

Maximum Sizes:

- Cannot be more than 15" long
- Cannot be more than 12" high
- Cannot be more than 3/4" thick

Rapid Press Recommended Sizes:

- 5-3/4" x 11-3/4" (fits 3-out)
- 6-3/16" x 9" (fits 4-out)

Required Clear Zones for Address Block & Indicia for EDDM:

- ADDRESS BLOCK: 3" x 1" knocked-out panel
 - Recommended to place this on the right-hand side of the piece (top, bottom, or middle)
- INDICIA: 1-1/2" x 1-1/2" knocked-out panel
 - MUST be placed in the upper right corner of the mailpiece (leave 1/4" clearance from the edge of the mailpiece to the indicia knockout)

Selecting The Right Class of Mail

We suggest you weigh two things when considering what class of mail to use: urgency and need. If it's a general marketing or informational piece without a hard timeframe or with plenty of lead time you're probably safe to go Standard. If it's extremely time-sensitive/critical or contains sensitive PII we suggest First-Class. If you are a registered (with the USPS) non-profit organization then you can also qualify for Non-Profit rates.

The pricing given below pertains to **letter-size** pieces and is based on the high/low average. The "denser" your mailing list is the lower your per piece rate will likely be. A tightly-clustered list going to a few zip codes will likely net a lower per piece cost than the same number of pieces mailing to a wider area. For pricing on flats, please see page 11 of this document.

First-Class Mail (1-5 days, \$0.6395/piece average, 500 piece min. qty for best rates)

First-Class mail is typically delivered within 1-5 business days and will cost between \$0.593 - \$0.686 per piece. Undeliverable pieces will be automatically forwarded to return address on mailpiece. There are a few things are required to be sent via First-Class (handwritten or typewritten material, bills/statements of account or invoices, credit cards, personal correspondence, personalized business correspondence, all matter sealed or otherwise closed against inspection). If you have at least 500 pieces you can send First-Class mail as "presorted" and get the best-possible postage rate, but 200 pieces is otherwise the minimum quantity. First-class mail is handled first at USPS processing facilities aside from Priority mail.

Standard/Marketing Mail (2-9 days, \$0.397/piece average, 200 piece min. qty.)

Standard mail is typically delivered within 2-9 business days and will cost between \$0.355 - \$0.439 per piece. Undeliverable pieces will be destroyed unless the mail is marked with "Return Service Requested" or a similar endorsement (there will be a per piece charge for mail returned in this manner). You only need 200 pieces to qualify for Standard mail rates. Standard mail has a lower processing priority than First-Class.

Non-Profit Mail (2-9 days, \$0.203/piece average, 200 piece min. qty.)

Non-Profit mail is essentially a cheaper version of Standard mail for organizations that are registered as non-profit entities with the USPS. *Note that this is specific to the USPS and is separate from qualifying as a non-profit with the IRS/etc.* Non-Profit mail is typically delivered within 2-9 business days and will cost between \$0.161 - \$0.245 per piece. Undeliverable pieces will be destroyed unless the mail is marked with "Return Service Requested" or a similar endorsement (there will be a per piece charge for mail returned in this manner). You only need 200 pieces to qualify for Non-Profit mail rates. Non-Profit mail has a lower processing priority than Standard.

Quick-Reference Guide

Class	Average Price Per Piece	Delivery Timeframe
First-Class	\$0.6395	1-5 days
Standard	\$0.3970	2-9 days
Non-Profit	\$0.2030	2-9 days

Automated Postage Estimates By Class And Type of Mail

Current as of January 2026

The actual cost of a mailing is determined by the density of the mailing list. A large number of pieces mailing to a small area will generate a cheaper per-piece price than the same number of pieces being distributed across a wider area. The prices below are estimates based on average pricing data by the USPS. In order to accurately determine a true postage cost we would need to process your actual mailing list.

Postcards

First-Class Mail - Between \$0.420 - \$0.462 each

Letters (First-Class Mail)

3.5oz or less - Between \$0.593 - \$0.686 each

3.5oz or more – Cannot go as First-Class, must go Priority Mail

Letters (Marketing Mail, formerly “Standard Mail”)

3.5oz or less – Between \$0.355 - \$0.439 each

3.5oz or more – Subject to additional costs, contact your CSR

Letters (Non-Profit Mail)

3.5oz or less - Between \$0.161 - \$0.239 each

3.5oz or more – Contact your CSR or mailing representative

Flats (First-Class Mail)

1oz or less – Between \$0.970 - \$1.520 each

1.01 oz - 2oz – Between \$1.240 - \$1.790 each

2.01oz - 3oz – Between \$1.510 - \$2.060 each

3.01 oz or greater – Contact your CSR or mailing representative

Flats (Marketing Mail, formerly “Standard Mail”)

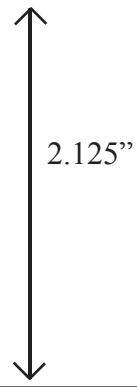
4oz or less – Between \$0.732 - \$1.185 each

More than 4oz – Contact your CSR or mailing representative

Flats (Non-Profit Mail)

4oz or less – Between \$0.465 - \$0.918 each

More than 4oz – Contact your CSR or mailing representative



RAPID PRESS #10 WINDOW CLEAR ZONE

(5.625'' x 1.125'')

Appendix B: Barcode Placement on a #10 Window Envelope