

- ☒ Packages weighing less than 6 oz. or more than 35 lb.
- ☒ Books or printed materials weighing more than 25 lb.
- ☒ If the package is a can, a roll, a tube, or a wooden or metal box.

See DMM 101.3.3 and 101.7.2 for other characteristics. There are no content restrictions on Parcel Post, but packages may be subject to inspection. Read the Parcel Post section of the DMM at [pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/153.htm](http://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/153.htm) for more information.

## Bound Printed Matter

Bound Printed Matter is significantly cheaper than First Class Rate. Alas, as of September 2008, Bound Printed Matter is no longer available for individual use. You can no longer apply stamps or printed postage to send single packages by BPM. You have to have a permit to use BPM; because of the permit fees, it's really only worth it if you regularly send a large number of mailings.

Bound Printed Matter is for items including editorial, advertising, or promotional material that are securely bound (ex: staples) and printed (ex: photocopied or offset printed). The only way you can use BPM is:

- ☒ Apply for a mailing permit and pay application (\$180) and annual (\$180) fees.
- ☒ Pay a deposit into your permit account. (Postage costs are deducted each time you make mailings.) Or you will have to pay for postage each time you drop off mailings.
- ☒ Prepare an imprint for your mailings to use, like the one shown here.
- ☒ Mail something using your permit at least once every 2 years, or your permit will be revoked.



You can either send mail nonpresorted or presorted. Presorted is cheaper, but you have to mail at least 300 pieces at a time, and there are a lot of rules about how the mail has to be prepared. Nonpresorted can be used for individual mailings, but it costs more (though still less than First Class). BPM rates vary according to zone. For more information, including a rate chart, read the BPM section of the DMM at [pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/360\\_cover.htm](http://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/360_cover.htm) (Flats) or [pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/460\\_cover.htm](http://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/460_cover.htm) (Packages).

## Other Tips

Any mail weighing more than 13 oz. and using stamps must be handed to a clerk at a Post Office retail counter. This applies to First Class, Media Mail, or Parcel Post. If you are using metered or PC-printed postage, this rule does not apply.

If the Post Office in your town doesn't have the stamps you need, consider buying your stamps online. At [shop.usps.com](http://shop.usps.com), you can buy any stamp denomination currently available, and they'll mail them to you (via Priority Mail) for just \$1.

Have a PayPal account? Use it to print postage for any mail class (including Media Mail). Log in, then go to [https://www.paypal.com/us/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=\\_ship-now](https://www.paypal.com/us/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_ship-now).

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# The Zinester's Guide to U.S. Mail

The shape-based U.S. postal rate scheme is certainly more confusing and cumbersome than the old system... but with little more than a ruler and a scale, you can still Do It Yourself. In this guide, we'll break down the various options zine publishers can use for mailing within the U.S.

All information in this guide was obtained from the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM), accessed at [pe.usps.gov/text/dmm300/dmm300\\_landing.htm](http://pe.usps.gov/text/dmm300/dmm300_landing.htm) in September 2008. Throughout the text we have included citations to specific sections of the DMM, which you can refer to for more information (or use if you're challenged by postal clerks).

Because of space constraints, we haven't included the postal rate chart in this guide; however, you can find a postal rate chart (containing First Class U.S. and International rates) on the back page of the latest **Zine World** or download it at [www.undergroundpress.org/zine-resources](http://www.undergroundpress.org/zine-resources).

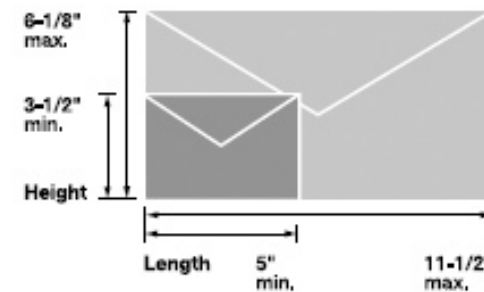
## First Class Mail

Rates for First Class Mail are based not only on an envelope's weight but also its size, as detailed below. (Note: As of May 2008, shaped-based pricing, and the rules in this section, also apply to First Class International Mail.)

### Letters: Size Requirements

Letters must be between 5 and 11.5 inches long and between 3.5 and 6-1/8 inches high and no more than .25 inches thick. Letters can weigh no more than 3.5 oz. Envelopes must be rectangular.

This means any envelope within this size range can be mailed at Letter Rate (unless it has nonmachinable characteristics; see below). Half-size or digest zines (weighing less than 3.5 oz.) can be mailed in a 6 x 9 envelope at this rate, but a 6.5 x 9.5 envelope would have to be mailed at the more expensive Large Envelope rate.



### Nonmachinable Criteria for Letters

If a Letter is deemed nonmachinable, you have to pay a 20¢ surcharge in addition to the postage rate. Nonmachinable characteristics include:

- ☒ If the aspect ratio (length divided by height) is less than 1.3 or more than 2.5. (For example, an envelope that is square or is very long and very short.)
- ☒ If it has clasps, strings, or other closure devices. (Tape over clasps, seal them under

the envelope's flap, or tear them off to avoid this problem.)

If it is enclosed in plastic material.

If it contains items (such as loose coins or buttons) that cause the thickness to be uneven. (Such items should be taped or wrapped in paper, to prevent them from shifting and to help make the envelope evenly thick.)

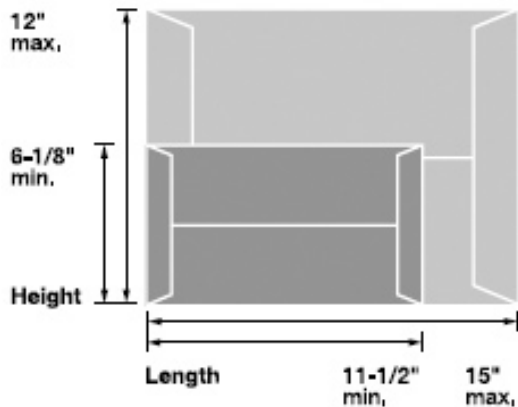
If it is too rigid. (It should be bendable to about 1 inch; see below.)

If the delivery address is parallel to the shorter side of the envelope.

See DMM 101.1.2 for other characteristics.

## Large Envelopes (aka Flats): Size Requirements

Flats are more than 11.5 inches long, or more than 6-1/8 inches high, or more than



1/4 inch thick. Flats cannot be more than 15 inches long, or more than 12 inches high, or more than 3/4 inch thick. In other words, an envelope smaller than 11.5 inches long is still considered a Flat if it is more than 6-1/8 inches high or more than 1/4 inch thick (such as a heavy Letter-size envelope or a 6.5 x 9.5 envelope). Generally, envelopes that are too big for Letter rate by any dimension fall into the Large Envelope category.

Flats that are rigid, non-rectangular, not uniformly thick, or exceeding the above maximum dimensions must be mailed at Package rate, which is much more expensive.

## Rigidity and Thickness

To test the flexibility of your Flat, USPS offers these guidelines:

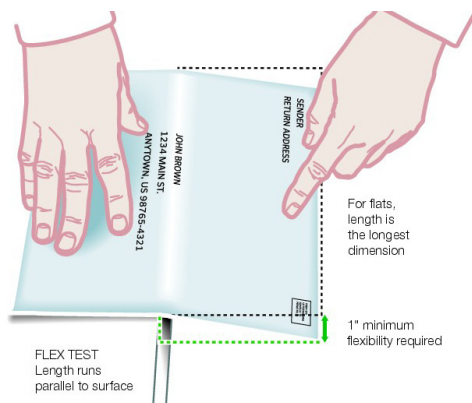
1. Place the envelope on a flat surface, with the longer side parallel to the edge, so that it is only resting halfway on the surface.

2. Press down on the envelope at a point 1 inch from the outer edge, in the center of the length. (See illustration.)

3. The piece must bend at least 1 inch vertically without being damaged.

4. If the envelope contains a rigid insert, you must also test the flexibility along the shorter side, in the same manner as described above. Flats less than 10 inches long must bend at least 1 inch in this direction, too. For Flats 10 inches or longer, the shorter side must bend at least 2 inches.

A variance of more than 1/4 inch in thickness will make your Flat considered nonuniform. If your zine has a spiral binding or the envelope has any bumps, protrusions, or other irregularities, you



should try to wrap the item in paper or bubble wrap to make it uniform. Nonpaper contents (think buttons) must be secured to prevent shifting within the envelope. (DMM 101.2.4)

## Other Mailing Options (U.S. Only)

For envelopes weighing above 10 oz., Priority Mail is not your only option. It is more economical to mail them using Media Mail or Parcel Post. The delivery may not be quite as speedy – average delivery is 2-9 days – but it will be cheaper, especially as the package gets heavier. If using one of these options, be sure to write MEDIA MAIL or PARCEL POST in the postage area, either below or to the left of the stamps.

### Media Mail

USPS says only these items may be mailed using Media Mail:

Books of at least 8 printed pages.

Cannot contain advertising (display or classified ads).

Films

Printed music

Test materials

Sound or video recordings

Playscripts and manuscripts

Printed educational reference charts for training

Loose-leaf pages containing medical information for doctors, hospitals, or students

Computer-readable media

As you can see, it's debatable whether zines fall into this category – especially if they contain advertising. Media Mail is subject to postal inspection, and the Post Office has gotten stricter about its use. Let's just say we've rarely heard of a zinester who has had problems using it.

Media Mail cannot be personal correspondence, but it can include an invoice or a "personal message or greeting" (DMM 173.4.4 & 4.5). Any method of postage can be used, and Media Mail postage can be purchased at a USPS retail counter, making it easy to use. Media Mail rates are based on the weight of the package, regardless of destination. For more information (including a rate chart), read the Media Mail section of the DMM at [pe.usps.gov/text/dmm300/173.htm](http://pe.usps.gov/text/dmm300/173.htm).

### Parcel Post

Parcel Post varies by weight and zone. (Zones are determined by the proximity of the delivery zip code to your zip code.) The simple way to use Parcel Post is: Go to [postcalc.usps.gov](http://postcalc.usps.gov) and use the postal calculator to determine your postage, or go to a Post Office.

The complex way is to figure it out for yourself. There are two price categories for Parcel Post: Intra-BMC is for mail sent to a zip code in the same BMC (bulk mail center) or ASF (auxiliary service facility) service area you're in; Inter-BMC is mail sent to a different service area. See DMM 153.1.1 to determine your service area. Go to [postcalc.usps.gov/Zonecharts/](http://postcalc.usps.gov/Zonecharts/) and you can get a printable list of zones based on your zip code. Once you have the zones (and your package's weight), use DMM 153.1.9 or 153.1.12 to determine the postage.

Some packages may be subject to a nonmachinable surcharge (\$3.70 for Inter-BMC or \$2.73 for Intra-BMC). Nonmachinable criteria include:

Packages smaller than 6 inches long, 3 inches high, or 1/4 inch thick.

Packages more than 34 inches long, 17 inches wide, or 17 inches high.