

# US Postal Laws & Regulations

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Rates, fees



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**Sec. 322. First-Class Postage.**—That on mailable matter of the first class, except postal cards and drop letters, postage shall be prepaid at the rate of three cents for each half ounce or fraction thereof; postal cards shall be transmitted through the mails at a postage charge of one cent each, including the cost of manufacture; and drop letters shall be mailed at the rate of two cents per half ounce or fraction thereof, including delivery at letter-carrier offices, and one cent for each half ounce or fraction thereof where free delivery by carrier is not established. The Postmaster-General may, however, provide, by regulation, for transmitting unpaid and duly certified letters of soldiers, sailors, and marines in the service of the United States to their destination, to be paid on delivery. (Act of March 3, 1879, § 9, 20 Stats., 358.)

And upon all matter of the first class, as defined by chapter one hundred and eighty of the laws of Congress approved March third, eighteen hundred and seventy-nine, entitled "An act making appropriations for the service of the Post-Office Department for the fiscal year ending June thirtieth, eighteen hundred and eighty, and for other purposes," and by that act declared subject to postage at the rate of three cents for each half ounce or fraction thereof, postage shall be charged, on and after the first day of October, A. D. eighteen hundred and eighty-three, at the rate of two cents for each half ounce or fraction thereof; and all acts, so far as they fix a different rate of postage than herein provided upon such first-class matter, are, to that extent, hereby repealed. (Act of March 3, 1883, 22 Stats., 455.)

That upon all matter of the first class, as defined by chapter one hundred and eighty of the laws of Congress approved March third, eighteen hundred and seventy-nine, entitled, "An act making appropriations for the service of the Post-Office Department for the fiscal year ending June thirtieth, eighteen hundred and eighty, and for other purposes," and by that act declared subject to postage at the rate of three cents for each half ounce or fraction thereof and reduced by the act of March third, eighteen hundred and eighty-three, to two cents for each half ounce or fraction thereof, postage shall be charged, on and after the first day of July, eighteen hundred and eighty-five, at the rate of two cents for each ounce or fraction thereof; and drop letters shall be mailed at the rate of two cents per ounce or fraction thereof, including delivery at letter-carrier offices, and one cent for each ounce or fraction thereof where free delivery by carrier is not established. (Act of March 3, 1885, 23 Stats., 386.)

**Sec. 323. Soldiers', Sailors', and Marines' Letters.**—Letters written by officers, commissioned or non-commissioned, and privates in the military, naval, or marine service of the United States, to be transmitted unpaid

must be plainly marked "Soldier's Letter," "Sailor's Letter," or Marine's Letter," as the case may be, and signed thereunder with his name and official designation by a field or staff officer, post or detachment commander to whose command the soldier belongs, or by a surgeon or chaplain at a hospital where he may be; and in the navy and marine service, by the officer in command of the vessel, or surgeon on board, or officer commanding a naval hospital or detachment on shore. Letters so certified will be forwarded charged with postage due at single rates only, to be collected on delivery.

**Sec. 324. Postal Cards** cannot be issued by private parties. Cards, other than those issued by the Department, containing any writing, are subject to letter postage; but if they contain only printed matter, so as to constitute a circular, but one cent is required on each.

No printing or writing other than the address is allowable upon the address side, nor may anything except an address label be pasted or attached to any postal card. The words "to be called for," or any proper description of the person or place addressed, may be written thereon as part of the address. Any other writing, mark, or seal placed on the address side, or the splitting of the card and writing on the inside, renders it unmailable, except at letter rates. A postal card once delivered cannot be remailed as such.

Postal cards are first-class matter, and may be forwarded on request, and they should be returned to the writer from the office of address when unclaimed; but no request for such return should be placed on the address side.

Postmasters must treat postal cards as sealed letters, and refrain from reading the messages written thereon, except in order to return the cards to the writer when unclaimed, and except that their contents may be read if they appear to be unmailable because they contain obscene matter or relate to lotteries. (See sections 379 and 380.)

**Sec. 325. Addresses, how made.**—And addresses upon postal cards and unsealed circulars may be either written, printed, or affixed thereto at the option of the sender. (Act of July 12, 1876, from § 15, 19 Stats., 82.)

**Sec. 326. Drop Letters.**— \* \* \* But in large cities and adjacent districts of dense population, having two or more post-offices within a distance of three miles of each other, any letter mailed at one of such offices and addressed to a locality within the delivery of another of such offices, which shall have been inadvertently prepaid at the drop or local-letter rate of postage only, may be forwarded to its destination through the proper office, charged with the amount of the deficient postage, to be collected on delivery. (R. S., § 3937, second sentence.)

A "drop letter" is one addressed for delivery to a person within the

NEW YORK, ———, 188—.

Office of ———,  
 The ——— Weekly,  
 37 Park Row. P. O. box 4295.

————— to the ——— Weekly, Dr.

—————, subscription, in advance.

Received payment for the ——— Weekly from ——— to ———.

See section 338, paragraph 10.

A bill may include the names of more than one publication, and their terms of subscription, provided they are all published by the same individual or company, or sent by the same news agent, and may include any period of subscription or any number of shipments to a news agent.

**Sec. 358. Detention of Matter and Collection of Proper Rate.**—When a postmaster at the office of mailing has good reason to believe that a publisher or news agent has deposited matter for mailing at the second-class rate which should be charged with a higher rate, he must detain the suspected matter, notify the publisher or news agent at once of the detention, and report the fact forthwith to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General.

Money collected from publishers upon third-class matter illegally mailed as second class should be converted into ordinary stamps, which should be affixed to a sheet of paper, canceled, and at once mailed to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General, with report of the facts. The stamps so used will be accounted for as sold, and at fourth-class offices also as canceled.

When a publication known by a postmaster to be third-class matter arrives at his post-office, without evidence of having been prepaid by stamps affixed, he will rate up the package at the third-class rate, to be collected, and report the facts as above. If in doubt he may withhold delivery, and forward a copy with his report.

As to second-class matter entitled to be mailed free, see section 421.

As to regulations for wrapping and examination, see sections 376, 377.

#### THIRD-CLASS MATTER.

**Sec. 359. Third-Class Matter Defined and Rate.**—That mail matter of the third class shall embrace books, transient newspapers, and periodicals, circulars, and other matter wholly in print (not included in section twelve), [section 343], proof sheets, corrected proof sheets, and manuscript copy accompanying the same, and postage shall be paid at the rate of one cent for each two ounces or fractional part thereof, and shall fully



be prepaid by postage stamps affixed to said matter. Printed matter other than books received in the mails from foreign countries under the provisions of postal treaties or conventions shall be free of customs duty, and books which are admitted to the international mails exchanged under the provisions of the Universal Postal Union Convention may, when subject to customs duty, be delivered to addresses in the United States under such regulations for the collection of duties as may be agreed upon by the Secretary of the Treasury and the Postmaster-General. (Act of March 3, 1879, § 17, 20 Stats., 359.)

NOTE.—The act of June 9, 1884, quoted as section 351, took transient newspapers and periodicals out of this class, making them second class at a special rate, one cent for each four ounces or fraction thereof.

For regulation relating to collection of customs on mail matter see section 621.

**Sec. 360. Circulars.**—That the term “circular” is defined to be a printed letter, which, according to internal evidence, is being sent in identical terms to several persons. A circular shall not lose its character as such, when the date and the name of the addressee and of the sender shall be written therein, nor by the correction of mere typographical errors in writing. (Act of March 3, 1879, § 18, 20 Stats., 360.)

Respecting the address of a circular, see section 325.

**Sec. 361. Rules as to Circulars.**—The following additional rules will be observed in determining whether matter comes within the definition of a circular:

1. The date, if written, must be the date of the circular, and not the date on which something is acknowledged therein to have been received.
2. Price lists in circulars cannot be changed by writing, except to correct what was originally written by mistake.
3. A printed receipt with the name of the sender or receptor written therein is not a circular, but first-class matter.
4. A printed letter of inquiry, with the name of the person or subject inquired about, written therein by hand, type writer, or addressing machine, is not a circular.
5. A number may be used in a circular in place of an address, as in an assessment card.

**Sec. 362. Bulk Packages for Separate Distribution.**—When circulars, handbills, advertising sheets, or any other printed matter of the third class are sent by mail in bulk from one post-office to another, to be distributed through the boxes or general delivery of the post-office of address, or by letter carriers, the bulk package must not exceed four pounds in weight, and must be fully prepaid at the rate of one cent for each two ounces or fraction thereof, and the proper drop rate at the post-office of destination must be affixed in stamps by the sender to each

but they should be put up in such manner as to certainly avoid risk of the package breaking or cracking, or the flour being scattered in the mails, and if this be not done the sample should be excluded.

12. Articles of fourth-class matter must be so wrapped that their contents may be easily and thoroughly examined by postmasters, both with reference to the safety of the mails and postal employes, and to the exclusion of matter chargeable as of the first class.

**Sec. 371. Permissible Additions.**—Upon any package of matter of the fourth class the sender may write or print his own name and address, preceded by the word “from,” and there may also be written or printed the number and names of the articles inclosed; and the sender thereof may write or print upon or attach to any such articles by tag or label a mark, number, name, or letter, for purpose of identification. (Act of March 3, 1879, § 22, 20 Stats., 360.)

**Sec. 372. Regulations for Examination, &c.**—Postmasters will carefully examine packages before mailing, to ascertain that no matter chargeable as of the first class is included, and that the requirements of the foregoing statute are complied with. It is permissible to send articles of merchandise in the mails, which contain printed matter giving descriptions, directions for use, or other information respecting the articles, as part of the original packages or labels done up for sale; but upon the face or surface of the package for mailing no other writing, printing, or marks than those authorized by the statute can be placed without subjecting the matter to first-class rates, as provided in section three hundred and seventy-five.

Postmasters at the offices of address are required to examine such packages and collect first-class rates whenever the statute has been violated, and will report to the Sixth Auditor all cases in which the penalty has been incurred, under section three hundred and seventy-five, giving the name of the sender, if known, addressee, office, and date of mailing, and a description of the package and of the matter inclosed or concealed therein, and a statement of the disposition made thereof. When not delivered to addressee on payment of first-class rates the package will be retained by the postmaster to be used as evidence, and he should be able to establish its identity. If the penalty is voluntarily paid, it will be disposed of as prescribed by section three hundred and six.

**Sec. 373. Fourth-Class Postage.**—That all matter of the fourth class shall be subject to examination and to a postage charge at the rate of one cent an ounce or fraction thereof, to be prepaid by stamps affixed. (Act of March 3, 1879, § 21, 20 Stats., 360.)



**Sec. 399. The Rates and Payment of Postage.**—The rates of postage for the conveyance of postal articles throughout the entire extent of all Postal Union countries, including delivery at the residence of the addressee, where free-delivery service exists, are as follows:

1. For letters, five cents for each half ounce or fraction thereof if prepaid, and double that rate for each half ounce or fraction thereof if not prepaid.

2. For postal cards, two cents each; and for postal cards with paid reply, two cents on each part.

3. For printed matter of every kind, commercial papers, and samples of merchandise the rate is one cent for each weight of two ounces or fraction thereof; but at least five cents must be paid on each packet of commercial papers, and at least two cents on each packet of samples of merchandise.

Letters will be forwarded without prepayment of any rate; other articles will only be forwarded if prepaid in part; and in all cases of insufficient prepayment, double the amount of the deficiency will be collected of the addressee.

Prepayment can be made only by affixing stamps valid in the country of origin; in the United States, the domestic stamps provided by the Department.

All mailable matter will be reforwarded without extra charge within the limits of the Union, and the deficient postage, if any, collected at the office of delivery. Matter erroneously or incompletely addressed and returned to the sender for correction will not be reforwarded except upon payment of postage therefor anew.

*Compound packages.*—Printed matter, commercial papers, and samples may be sent in one packet, if each article does not exceed the respective limitations in weight and size applicable to it, and the weight of the whole packet does not exceed four pounds six ounces; but the minimum postage will be five cents if the packet contains any commercial papers, and two cents if it contains only printed matter and samples.

**Sec. 400. Recall or Change of Address.**—The sender may cause an article to be withdrawn by the Department from the mails and returned, or may cause the address to be changed before delivery to the addressee, but at his cost of postage on the request if sent by mail, and of ordinary telegraph rates if the request be telegraphed.

In the United States the sender must apply therefor to the Superintendent of Foreign Mails through the office of mailing.

**Sec. 401. Unmailable Matter.**—Articles are unmailable in the international mails between the Postal Union countries in the following cases:

1. All articles, except letters, which are not prepaid, at least in part.
  2. Postal cards not conforming to section three hundred and ninety-four.
  3. Printed matter, commercial papers, and samples of merchandise, which contain any letter or manuscript note having the character of an actual and personal correspondence.
  4. Printed matter, commercial papers, and samples of merchandise which are not made up in packets in such manner as to admit of their being easily examined.
  5. Matter printed by special processes mentioned in section three hundred and ninety-six, when not presented as therein directed.
  6. Samples of merchandise which have a merchantable value, or which exceed the prescribed weight or size.
  7. Packets of commercial papers and prints of all kinds which exceed the prescribed weight or size.
  8. All articles of a nature likely to soil or injure the mails.
- Besides the foregoing, it is forbidden to the public to send by mail—
1. Letters or packets containing pieces of money.
  2. Any packets whatever containing articles liable to customs duty.
  3. Gold or silver bullion, precious stones, jewelry, or other precious articles to or through the mails of any country whose legislation prohibits their being placed in the mails or forwarded.

## MAILS WITH CANADA.

Sec. 402. Classification and Rates of Postage.—Mail matter exchanged with Canada is divided into four classes, corresponding with the classification of domestic matter, but limited in character, as follows:

1. Letters and postal cards.
2. Newspapers and periodicals, from the office of publication as well as from private parties.
3. Magazines, pamphlets, books, maps, plans, engravings, drawings, photographs, lithographs, sheets of music, &c.
4. Patterns and samples of merchandise, including grains and seeds, but not exceeding the weight of eight ounces, and never closed against inspection, but always so wrapped or inclosed that they may be readily and thoroughly examined by postmasters. Samples of liquids, packed as required in section three hundred and seventy are also admissible.

Prepayment of postage is in all cases obligatory; to be paid in domestic stamps and at the domestic postage rates of the country of origin, except that the postage on each pattern or sample shall be ten cents.

## MAILS WITH MEXICO.

**Sec. 403. Classification and Rates of Postage.**—Except as provided in the next section, articles of mail matter for Mexico are classified and admitted to the mails at the same rates of postage and in all respects according to domestic regulations of the United States, and mails from Mexico will be received and delivered as domestic mails, except as otherwise specially provided in these regulations.

Articles other than letters in their usual and ordinary form must never be closed against inspection, but must be so wrapped or inclosed that they may be readily and thoroughly examined by postmasters or customs officers.

Full prepayment of postage is required in both countries upon correspondence of all kinds, except letters, upon which prepayment of at least one full rate is compulsory. Such prepayment will be made in the domestic stamps of the country of origin.

Should any correspondence addressed to a Mexican office be tendered for mailing at a post-office in the United States, obviously with the intention to evade the higher rates of postage applicable in Mexico, it must be refused unless payment be made of such higher rates, it being designed to prevent persons whose correspondence belongs to the Mexican mails from availing themselves of the rates of postage of the United States. Postmasters on the Mexican border, and at offices near that country, are especially enjoined to carefully observe this provision.

**Sec. 404. Unmailable Matter.**—All articles which are not wrapped or inclosed as provided in the preceding section; all publications which violate the copyright laws of the country of destination; packets, except single volumes of printed books, which exceed four pounds six ounces in weight; liquids, poisons, explosive or inflammable substances, fatty substances, those which easily liquefy, live or dead animals, not dried, insects and reptiles, confections, pastes, fruits and vegetables and jelly liable to decomposition, substances which exhale a bad odor, lottery tickets or circulars, obscene or immoral articles, and other articles that are in any way liable to damage the mails or injure persons engaged in handling them, are unmailable.

**Sec. 405. Return of Correspondence.**—Fully prepaid letters which bear requests by senders for their return in case of their non-delivery by a certain date or within a specified time, must be reciprocally returned without charge directly to the dispatching exchange office, at the expiration of the period for their retention indicated in the requests.

Fully prepaid letters bearing on the covers the business card, names, addresses of the senders, or designation of places to which they may be

returned, as a post-office box, street and number, &c., without requests for their return in case of non-delivery within a specified time, must be returned without charge directly to the dispatching exchange office at the expiration of thirty days from the date of their receipt at the office of destination.

The sender of any article of mail matter may cause its return, or a change of its address, in the manner prescribed in section four hundred.

MAILS WITH THE COLONIES OF NEW ZEALAND, NEW SOUTH WALES,  
QUEENSLAND, VICTORIA, AND TASMANIA.

**Sec. 406. Classification of Mail Matter.**—Mail matter exchanged with the colonies of New Zealand, New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, and Tasmania, is classified as follows:

1. Letters.
2. Newspapers.
3. Other articles of printed matter, patterns, and samples of merchandise.

Postal cards are not admitted, except at letter rates.

All printed matter, except newspapers, patterns, and samples of merchandise, mailed to either of said colonies will be limited as to weight and size by the laws and regulations for domestic mail matter in the United States, and are subject to the same laws and regulations in respect to their liability to be rated with letter postage when containing written matter and in all other respects.

**Sec. 407. Rates of Postage.**—The single rate of letter postage between the United States and each of said colonies is twelve cents in the United States and sixpence in each of said colonies on each letter weighing half an ounce or less, and a like rate for each additional weight of one-half ounce or fraction thereof. At least one full single rate must be prepaid on all letters, and any letter prepaid less than one such rate is unmailable; but insufficiently paid letters, on which a single rate or more has been prepaid, will be dispatched charged with the deficient postage, to be collected and retained by the country of destination.

Newspapers will be charged two cents each, irrespective of weight, and must be prepaid in all cases.

All other articles of printed matter, patterns, and samples of merchandise will be charged at the rate of four cents for each weight of four ounces or fraction of four ounces, and must be prepaid in all cases.

Prepayment will be made by affixing domestic stamps of the country of origin.



**Sec. 1044. Hours of Business.**—Post-offices will be kept open for registry business during ordinary business hours. Offices of the first class and their stations or branch offices must be kept open for the receipt and delivery of registered matter until six o'clock p. m.

**NOTE.**—As to Sundays and holidays, see sections 481 and 483.

**Sec. 1045. Limit of Fee.—No Fee on Official Matter.**—Mail matter shall be registered only on the application of the party posting the same, and the fee therefor shall not exceed twenty cents in addition to the regular postage, to be in all cases prepaid; and all such fees shall be accounted for in such manner as the Postmaster-General shall direct. But letters upon the official business of the Post-Office Department, which require registering, shall be registered free of charge and pass through the mails free of charge. (R. S., §3927.) That any letter or packet to be registered by either of the Executive Departments or Bureaus thereof, or by the Agricultural Department, or by the Public Printer, may be registered without the payment of any registry fee. (Act of July 5, 1884, 23 Stats., 158.)

**NOTE.**—The above statute applies only to matter registered by the officers therein named at the seat of government. Officers elsewhere, other than postal officers, must pay the fee when official matter is registered.

**Sec. 1046. Registration Fee.**—The fee on registered matter, domestic or foreign, is fixed at ten cents for each letter or parcel in addition to the postage, both to be fully prepaid with ordinary postage stamps affixed to the article registered. Two or more letters or parcels addressed to, or intended for, the same person cannot be tied or otherwise fastened together and registered as one.

**Sec. 1047. Registry of Letters Containing Currency for Redemption.**—Under such regulations as the Postmaster-General may prescribe, all postmasters are authorized to register in the manner prescribed by law, but without payment of any registration fee, all letters containing fractional or other currency of the United States, which shall be by them sent by mail to the Treasurer of the United States for redemption; and the postmaster at the city of Washington, in the District of Columbia, shall register, in like manner, without charge, all letters containing new currency returned for currency redeemed, which shall be received by him from the Treasurer, in sealed packages, marked with the word "register" over the official signature of the said Treasurer. (R. S., §3932.)

**Sec. 1048. Special Instructions for Registering Currency.**—Whenever letters containing currency for redemption are offered for registration, postmasters will be governed by the following instructions:

1. They must require the contents of every such letter to be exhibited