Tips and Notes for International Students:
Mailing Letters and Shipping Packages

Letters and packages can be mailed using the US Postal Service or one of several private delivery services.

US Postal Service

The delivers letters and packages and sells stamps and postal money orders. They deliver mail both domestically and internationally.

Letters weighing up to 16 ounces with the appropriate postage affixed can be deposited in the blue mailboxes located throughout the city. Mail is removed from these boxes twice daily. You can also mail letters and packages directly from the post office. International letters and packages must be mailed from the post office and must be accompanied by a customs form.

Letters and correspondence are usually sent by First Class mail within the United States. There is no need to pay extra postage for air mail, because all interstate first class mail is routinely sent by air. On the other hand, when sending mail abroad you should pay for air mail because surface mail travels by ship and is considerably slower.

Addressing Mail

When addressing mail for delivery within the United States, don't forget to include the zip code. If you don't include a zip code, delivery will be delayed. You can use a five-digit zip code if you don't have the nine-digit zip code. The zip code should be placed on the same line as the city and state, after the state, not before.

The first digit of the zip code represents one of 10 geographic regions. For example, zip codes in California begin with a 9, in Texas with a 7, in Illinois with a 6, in Pennsylvania with a 1, and Massachusetts with a 0. The next two digits indicate a mail distribution point, and the last two digits indicate a town or post office. The additional four digits in a 9-digit zip code narrow the location even further, designating a delivery sector and even a specific address.

The following is an example of how you would address a letter to a person named “John Student”. The number "12345-6789" is the nine-digit zip code. You should print the address in block letters and omit punctuation, since that makes it easier for address reading machinery to scan the address.

MR JOHN STUDENT
1234 MAIN STREET
CITY STATE 12345-6789

For more information on addressing mail and other topics, please see [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com).

If you do not know your address in the US before you leave, mail for you can be sent "General Delivery" to your name at the main post office in your destination city. It is a good idea to write "Hold for 30 Days"
on the front of the envelope. General Delivery mail will not be held for more than 30 days. You will need proof of identity, such as a passport, to pick up your mail.

**US Postal Rates**

There are four main types of mail, each with a different set of postage rates:

- **Postcards.** Postcards are cards with a maximum dimension of 4-1/4” x 6”. Postcards exceeding these dimensions are mailed at the first class letter rate of 37 cents. The maximum allowed thickness of a postcard is 0.016”. Most postcards have a picture or illustration on one side, and a place for writing a message and addressing the card on the other.

- **Letters.** The letter rate applies to letters, flats, and anything else not eligible for postcard rates. Standard letters may not be wider than 6-1/8", longer than 11-1/2", or thicker than 1/4". The smallest mailable size is 3-1/2 inches high by 5 inches long. If the envelope is nonstandard in size, there is an 11¢ surcharge.

- **Aerograms.** Aerograms are lightweight stationery that fold into a mailing envelope for correspondence with other countries. They do not permit enclosures and have a maximum dimension of 7-1/4” x 3-9/16”.

- **Parcels and Packages.** The cost of mailing a package depends on the weight of the package, the distance mailed, and the class of service. The maximum weight allowed is 70 pounds and the maximum size is 108 inches (length and girth combined). Within the United States packages can be sent by first class mail or parcel post. Parcel post is somewhat slower, but also less expensive. Packages sent by parcel post travel by surface transportation (truck or train) and arrive within 7 to 10 days. Books can also be sent by third class mail (book rate) at a significant discount, but will take much longer to arrive.

Girth is the circumference of the package (twice the sum of width and depth).

The following are some of the more frequently used postage rates. Additional information can be obtained at the post office or from the US Postal Service’s. One ounce is about 28 grams. A business-size envelope containing six sheets of 8-1/2” x 11” office paper weighs approximately one ounce.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>All Other Destinations (Airmail)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Letters</strong></td>
<td>37¢ for first ounce 23¢ for each additional ounce</td>
<td>60¢ for first ounce 40¢ for each additional ounce</td>
<td>60¢ for first ounce 72¢ for 2 ounces 95¢ for 3 ounces 19¢ for each additional ounce</td>
<td>80¢ for the first ounce 40¢ for each additional half ounce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postcards</strong></td>
<td>23¢</td>
<td>70¢</td>
<td>70¢</td>
<td>70¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aerograms</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>50¢</td>
<td>50¢</td>
<td>50¢</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Priority Mail provides flat rates for first class mail for packages. For example, a package weighing up to 2 pounds can be sent by priority mail for $3.85. (The post office also offers a flat rate envelope which costs $3.85 no matter what the weight of the material in the envelope.) Each additional pound up to a total of 5 pounds adds $1.00 in postage. After that, the postage depends on the weight and the distance. Mail
First Class and Priority Mail will deliver the letter or package within three or four days. Sometimes it is quicker (e.g., if you mail a letter from a post office to a P.O. box).

Other Postal Services

Other services offered by the post office include:

- **Express Mail.** Guarantees overnight delivery for letters and packages. The fee for a 1/2 pound envelope is $13.65.
- **Certified Mail.** This is used when you need proof of mailing. It costs $2.30 in addition to postage and other fees.
- **Return Receipt.** This is used when you need proof of delivery. Returns a postcard showing to whom the package was delivered, including their signature, date, and address (if different). The fee is $1.75 in addition to postage and other fees. If the package contains merchandise, the fee is $2.30 in addition to postage and other fees. These services are often used in combination with certified mail.
- **Insured Mail.** This insures the package against loss or damage in transit. It costs $1.30 for up to $50 of insurance coverage, $2.20 for $50.01 to $100.00, and plus 95¢ for each $100 or fraction thereof over the first $100 in insurance coverage, up to a maximum coverage of $5,000.00.
- **Registered Mail.** This service is used when sending something with a cash value, such as bonds or a bank book. It is the safest way to send valuable articles, since the postal service tracks the movement of the article and keeps a delivery record at the destination post office. You must declare the full value of the article at the time of mailing, and the fee (in addition to postage) depends on the article’s value. The article is insured for its declared value, up to a maximum insurance liability of $25,000. The fee for up to $100 in coverage is $6.20, $6.75 for up to $500, and $7.30 for up to $1,000. Each additional $1,000 of declared value costs an extra 55¢.
- **Delivery Confirmation.** This service provides a confirmation number that may be used to track packages (35¢ for priority mail and 60¢ for parcel post) through the or by calling a toll free number.
- **Restricted Delivery.** Delivers the letter only to the individual to whom it is addressed. The fee is $2.75 in addition to postage and other fees.
- **Postal Money Orders.** Postal money orders may be purchased in any amount for a fee of 80¢ in addition to the face value. Money orders can be issued in amounts up to $700. Postal money orders may be refunded if lost. Photo identification is necessary to cash a postal money order. If you need to get a copy of a paid money order, the inquiry fee is $2.75. International money orders are also available, for fees of $3.00 and $7.50 depending on the type.
- **PO Box Rental.** You can rent a post office box for receipt of mail for fees ranging from $60 to $522 a year, depending on box size.
- **Change of Address Cards.** If you will be moving, the post office will forward your first class mail free of charge (domestically only) for one year after your move. Periodicals (Second Class Mail) will be forwarded for 60 days. Third class mail is not forwarded. Parcel Post will be forwarded locally at no charge and postage-due if the new address is in a different city.
- **Hold Mail.** If you will be out of town, you can ask the post office to hold your mail at the post office until you return. If you will be away for more than 30 days, someone must come to the post office to pick up your mail once a month.
• **International Reply Coupons.** International reply coupons allow you to prepay replies from a foreign country. The coupons cost $1.05 each, and may be exchanged by the recipient for postage in his or her country.

The post office also sells envelopes, boxes, and other packing and shipping supplies.

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### Junk Mail

An unfortunate consequence of having an address is the arrival of advertising circulars and other unwanted commercial solicitations, collectively referred to as "junk mail". When retail stores and mail order companies get your address, they often sell it to a mailing list company. The mailing list companies maintain specialized mailing lists, such as lists of people who bought books through the mail. When an advertiser wants to reach such people, they rent a mailing list of people who match their criteria.

If you would like to reduce the amount of junk mail, you can write to the following address to ask to be removed from mailing lists:

**MAIL PREFERENCE SERVICE**

PO BOX 9008  
FARMINGDALE NY 11735-9008

Some of the mailing list companies use the DMA's mail preference service to filter their mailing lists. This will not eliminate all of the junk mail, but will reduce the amount of unwanted advertising mail you receive. It does not stop mail addressed to "Resident" or "Occupant". (If you want to receive junk mail, you can also use the DMA's service to add your name and address to mailing lists.)

To be removed from the mailing lists of the major credit reporting agencies, call 1-888-5-OPTOUT (1-888-567-8688).

If you receive an unwanted telephone solicitation, tell the caller "I am not interested. Please put me on your do not call list." and hang up the phone. If that doesn't work, try saying "I never buy anything over the phone. Please put me on your do not call list."

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### Other Shipping Services

In addition to the US Postal Service, there are several companies that offer shipping services for letters and packages. They are much more reliable than the US Postal Service, since they track every letter and package. They also offer guaranteed overnight delivery (early morning, morning, afternoon, and end-of-
day) and 2 or 3 day delivery. Guaranteed delivery times are by 8:00 am for early morning, by 10:30 am for morning, by 3:00 pm for afternoon, and by 5:00 pm for end-of-day.

The primary advantage of the US Postal Service is the inexpensive rates for delivering letters. Also, only the US Postal Service can deliver packages to a PO Box. The other shipping companies are only able to deliver to a street address.

The major shipping companies are:

- **Federal Express.** FedEx is the world's largest express transportation company. They are well known for delivering letters overnight, but also deliver packages with guaranteed on-time delivery. They deliver 7 days a week (with higher charges for Saturday and Sunday delivery). Sunday delivery is available only to destinations in 50 major US metropolitan areas. Available services include FedEx SameDay, FedEx Overnight (First = early morning, Priority = morning, and Standard = afternoon and end-of-day), FedEx 2Day, FedEx Express Saver (3 business days).

  Packages should weigh no more than 150 pounds (70 pounds for same-day), and may measure no more than 165 inches in length and girth combined (90 for same-day), with a maximum length of 119 inches (48 for same-day). FedEx also offers domestic freight services that can deliver larger packages of 151 to 2,200 pounds in 1, 2, or 3 days.

  For more information, call 1-800-GO-FEDEX (1-800-463-3339). For information about international shipping from the US, call 1-800-247-4747.

- **United Parcel Service.** UPS is frequently used for shipping packages because they are often less expensive than the US Postal Service, especially for heavy and bulky packages. They are the first choice for shipping by many mail order companies. They also offer guaranteed overnight delivery for letters. Available services include UPS Next Day Air, UPS 2nd Day Air, UPS 3 Day Select, UPS Ground, and UPS International.

  Packages which weigh less than 30 pounds but which measure more than 84 inches in length and girth combined are considered "oversize" and charged the 30 pound shipping weight. Packages should weigh no more than 70 pounds.

  UPS Ground takes anywhere from one business day to five business days, depending on distance. UPS provides a on their web site to estimate delivery times for UPS Ground. They guarantee day of delivery.

  For more information call 1-800-PICK-UPS (1-800-742-5877) or send email to customer.service@ups.com.

- **Airborne Express.** Airborne is the third largest and fastest-growing air express delivery service in the United States. Airborne offers overnight, next-afternoon, and second-day delivery service, as well as same-day courier service and international shipping.

  For more information, call 1-800-AIRBORNE (1-800-247-2676) or send email to cac.web@airborne.com. For information about international shipping from the US, call 1-800-ABX-INTL (1-800-229-4685).

All three companies let you track the progress of a package on their web sites using the package's tracking number.
With any of these services, including the US Postal Service, it is important to package fragile items carefully. Insurance will cover damage to the item only if there is visible damage to the outside of the box. Use the four-foot drop rule: the article should be packed so that it can survive a drop of four feet without damage. This means wrapping fragile items in bubble wrap and using Styrofoam packing "peanuts" to cushion the item within the box. Use enough packing material so that the item doesn't shift or compress the packing material in transit, or the carton may be damaged upon arrival. Paper may be used for wrapping items, but should not be used as filling around the items. If there is more than one fragile item they should be wrapped individually, so that they do not touch each other. You should have at least 2 or 3 inches of packing material around the contents of the box. This will minimize the likelihood of breakage. The carton should be made of sturdy corrugated cardboard, with no string or wrapping paper on the outside of the carton. It is best to ship appliances and electronic items in their original boxes and shipping materials. Use shipping tape, not cellophane or masking tape. Reinforced filament tape is best.

Remove any old shipping labels from the box. Include the origination and destination addresses on both the inside and outside of the box. This is in case the address on the outside of the box gets obliterated.

If you need boxes, many of the delivery services will provide shipping materials for free. If your item doesn't fit in one of the standard sized boxes, you can buy boxes from any stationery supply store such as Office Max <http://www.officemax.com/>, Office Depot <http://www.officedepot.com/>, and Staples <http://www.staples.com/>.

Peanuts, bubble wrap, and other packing materials are also available from these stores. You can also get boxes for free by speaking to the manager of the local grocery store.


Most of the information was extracted from the following website: www.edupass.com