How to Properly Address an Envelope

With emails and text messages being the more popular forms of communication these days, it isn’t uncommon for people not to know how to address an envelope properly.

Whether for business or personal reasons, it is critical to properly address an envelope before putting it in the mail to ensure it gets to the right person on time.

Continue reading for a step-by-step guide on how to address an envelope properly.

When was the U.S. postal service created?

The U.S. postal system was created on July 26, 1775, with Benjamin Franklin as the first postmaster general.

Fast forward to the present time and the U.S. has over 40,000 post offices and delivers more than 200 billion pieces of mail every year.

The postal service industry is the nation’s largest civilian employer, employing roughly 500,000 people.

A not-for-profit company, the postal service is a self-supporting business mainly funded through postage sales.

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Why is it important to properly address an envelope?

The address format on an envelope ensures your letter reaches its proper destination.

If you don’t correctly address your envelope, it may not reach the recipient (the postal service will send it back to you), take a long time to reach the recipient or – if your return address isn’t written correctly – can even get lost in the mail.

This is why it is crucial to address the envelope adequately.

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How do you write the recipient’s information?

The recipient’s name and address where the envelope is being sent are written in the center of the envelope.

To avoid possible delays, it is crucial to ensure you have the correct address and write everything on the envelope in capital letters.

On the first line, you will write the recipient’s full name. This can be the individual or company name you are sending the envelope to.

Directly below the recipient’s name on the second line, if the envelope is being sent to a company and needs to go to a specific person or department, you will want to write whose attention it is to here. You do this by writing “ATTN” followed by the person or department’s name.

On the next line, you write the recipient’s street address.

Make sure that you write the apartment number first, followed by a hyphen and then the civic number, followed by the street name.

If you mail the envelope to a post office box, write the address as PO BOX followed by the box number and then the station information.

On the third line, you write the city or town and the two-letter abbreviation for the state or province it is being sent to rather than the full state or province name.

Leave a space after the state or province and write the postal or zip code.

When writing a postal code, leave a space between the first three and last three digits. For a zip code that is nine digits long, use a hyphen to separate the fifth and sixth digits.

An example of a recipient’s information written properly on an envelope is:

JOHN JONES

MARKETING DEPT

10-123 1/2 MAIN ST NW

MONTREAL QC H32 2YZ

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How do you address an envelope when sending it to a couple?

If you a mailing an envelope to a couple instead of an individual, there are a few different ways to address this.

The most common way to address married couples is to write “and” in between their first names followed by their last name.

Traditionally, the man’s name is written first, followed by the woman’s. A more modern and still accepted method is to write the name of the person you are closest to first, followed by their significant other’s name.

When addressing an envelope to a couple who either aren’t married or have different last names, you would write out the first person’s first and last name, followed by “and” and then the second person’s first and last name.

A couple of examples of a properly addressed envelope to a couple are:

JOHN AND SUSAN ADAMS

123 BROADWAY ST W

TORONTO ON L4K M9W

and

ERIC SMITH AND JOANNE BULMER

25760 YORK ROAD SE

AKRON SD 51001-7538

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How do you add military ranking to the recipient’s address?

If one or both people you are addressing with the envelope have a military designation, adding this to the recipient’s address is important.

You can ensure your letter is adequately formal in several ways. You can either write their rank, followed by their full name, or you can write that and include the branch of the military or armed forces they are in.

If just one person has a military ranking, you should list them first, followed by their significant other. If both people have a military ranking, list both individuals' rankings in the recipient's address.

An example of a properly addressed envelope to a military member is:

COLONEL SAM JACKSON AND LISA JACKSON

64789 KING STREET

THE LAKES NV 88543-6458

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How do you address an envelope when sent to a military address?

If you are sending an envelope to someone with a military address, you need to write the recipient's information slightly differently than what was discussed above.

On the first line, you write down their rank and their first and last name.

On the second line, you write either "UNIT," "CMR" (Commercial Mail Room") or "PSC" (Postal Service Center) and its number, followed by the individual's assigned box number.

On the last line, you write either the DPO (Diplomatic Post Office), FPO (Fleet Post Office) or APO (Army Post Office), followed by the two-letter abbreviation for the state or province and then the zip code or postal code.

Below is an example of a properly addressed envelope to a military address:

SGT. COOPER ALLAN

UNIT 6537 BOX 159

APO AE 04582

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How do you address an envelope with an international destination?

If you are mailing the envelope internationally, you format the address similarly to what was previously described.

On the last line, after the postal code or zip code, you write out the country's name to which it is being sent. Ensure you write the country's name in full and do not abbreviate it.

An example of a properly formatted international address is:

JEAN PAUL

4719 KING ST

06137 ST PAUL

FRANCE

How do you write the return address?

It is essential to include your mailing address in case the letter cannot be delivered to the recipient.

If the letter cannot be delivered to the recipient, the postal company will then mail it back to the sender using the

sender’s address listed on the envelope.

You write your return address on the envelope’s upper left corner, formatted similarly to the recipient’s address.

On the first line in the top left corner, you write your full name. If you work for a company and the letter doesn’t need to come back to you specifically, you can also include the company’s name on the next address line.

Below that, you add your full address, including a suite number or apartment number, written as “APT,” followed by your street address.

Next, you include your city or town, followed by the abbreviation for your state or province and then your postal code or zip code.

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What shipping companies can you use?

Now that you know how to address your envelope properly, you should know your options for mailing it.

Below are a few of the primary postal services options you have available:

- United States Postal Service (USPS).
- UPS.
- FedEx.
- DHL Express.
- Snail Mail (such as Canada Post).

Related: FedEx, UPS and the Postal Service: Where Shipping Rates Are Headed | Entrepreneur

Accuracy is critical when addressing an envelope

Taking the time to ensure you have properly addressed your envelope can save you a big headache.

It is crucial to double-check each piece of mail you send out to ensure that you have not only formatted the envelope correctly and spelled everything right.

Following the simple steps above will help you ensure that you have a perfectly addressed envelope every time.

Check out Entrepreneur's other articles for more information on properly addressing an envelope and for more letter-writing tips.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/how-to-properly-address-an-envelope/452698