

Postal Guidelines Primer

Postal Guidelines

In this section you will find some of the most recent guidelines from the U.S. Post Office for business mailings. The U.S. Postal Service establishes and publishes in the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM) an extensive list of requirements with which business mailings must comply. These requirements determine (among other things) acceptable envelope sizes, position and sequence of address lines, graphic restrictions, and mandatory "clear zones".

While it is impossible to list all the requirements, here are a few which should prove helpful. Consult with your local Postmaster where envelopes will be mailed from, on any additional questions you may have. It will help you understand and comply with related Postal Service requirements.

Envelope Mailability Specifications

- o [Avoiding a Surcharge](#)
- o [Correct Envelope Sizing \(PDF\)](#)
- o [Window Locator Tool](#)

Barcoding Specifications

- o [Delivery Point Bar Code](#)
- o [Envelope Clear Zones](#)

Additional Information Sources and Websites

- o [Mail Piece Primer and Design Introduction](#)
- o [Postal Explorer: The USPS Specifications Search Engine](#)
- o [Federal Regulations For Designers](#)
- o [Local Postal Business Centers](#)

* Note: To ensure you are meeting the latest USPS mailing guidelines, please check their website:

<http://pe.usps.gov/text/dmm200/index.htm>

or

www.usps.com

To avoid a surcharge:

The minimum size must be 3 1/2" x 5".

The maximum size must be 6 1/8" x 11 1/2".

The maximum thickness is 1/4".

This list indicates the minimum size mailing piece which will be accepted and the dimensions which are subject to surcharge for first- or third-class pieces.

The aspect ratio of a mailing piece (the length divided by the height) should fall between 1.3 and 2.5. For example, a #10 envelope is 4 1/8 x 9 1/2. The aspect ratio is 2.3, so the envelope isn't surcharged. A 5" by 5" envelope produces an aspect ratio of 1 and therefore faces the surcharge.

Exceptions:

If the mailing piece weighs is First-Class and weighs more than one ounce, there will be no surcharge. The additional ounce does apply.

If the piece is sent third class, there will be no surcharge if it weighs 3.3 ounces or more. The piece/pound rate will apply.



Envelope Specifier Tool

The Envelope Specifier is a tool that shows the dimensions of the most common off-the-shelf commercial envelopes. It indicates window dimensions and postal barcode restrictions and requirements.

It can also be used to determine the size of the envelope needed for various sized inserts. The document to be enclosed is folded and held up under the lower left corner dotted line.

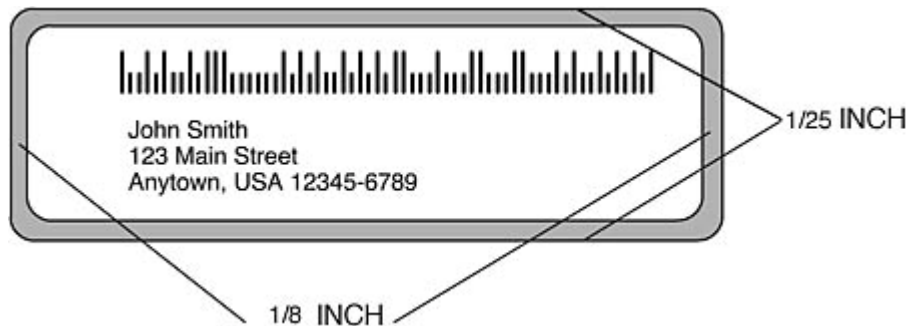
In addition, because it is a transparent plastic sheet it can be used to ensure that the mailing address will fit inside a standard window. If the address appears correctly, the document is ready to be printed and inserted into the envelope.



Barcode Requirements:

Delivery Point Bar Code:

The Post Office has recently found a way to more completely automate letter sorting in first, second and third class mail. This involves the software to transform a Zip+4 zip code into a larger barcode, called a Delivery Point Barcode (DPBC), which designates a specific city block, an apartment house, or even a particular floor in a large office building.



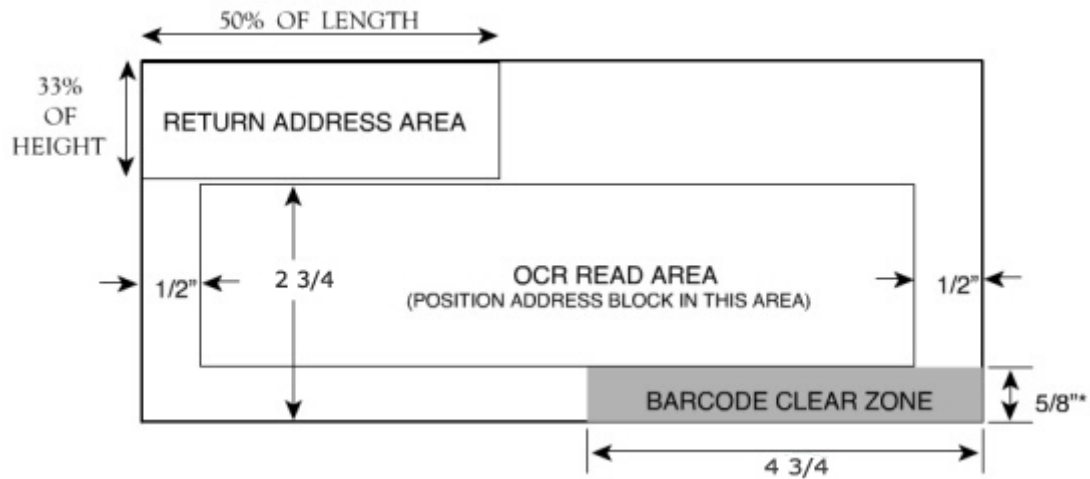
Above: What the DPBC looks like

This coding enables the automatic sorting of mail exactly to a carrier's delivery route, eliminating time consuming hand sorting by as much as 50%. This new, larger barcode is the basis for the new postal requirements for a larger "clear zone" (from 4 1/2" to 4 3/4" out from right edge in the lower right hand corner of the envelope when the mailer does not put the barcode on himself).

Mailers must develop the capability to put their own expanded barcode on those pieces of mail that they barcode themselves. Cards and letters are not eligible for the barcode rate unless they have a delivery point barcode. Flats, (basically envelopes larger than 6 1/8" by 11 1/2"), are eligible with a ZIP+4 barcode. The post office doesn't use automated equipment to sequence flats in the exact order of delivery.

Clear Zones:

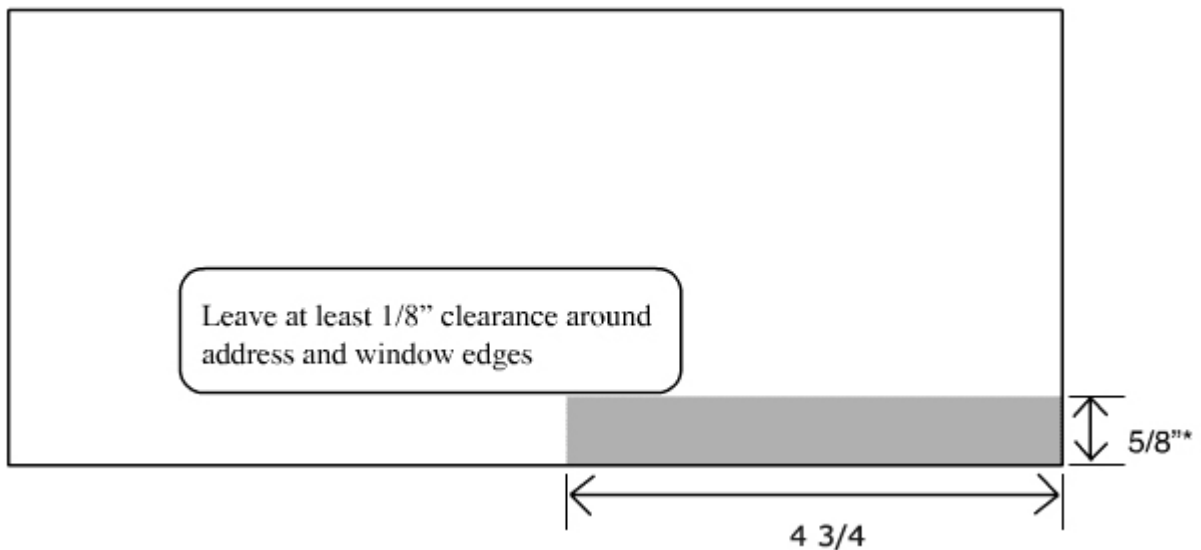
When the envelope is addressed with a name, address, and zip code, the Post Office will read the zip code with an OCR (Optical Character Reader) and print a barcode on the envelope in the lower right hand corner. This is why you must keep a "clear zone" on the lower right hand corner of the envelope (now 5/8" up from the bottom and 4 3/4" out from right edge).

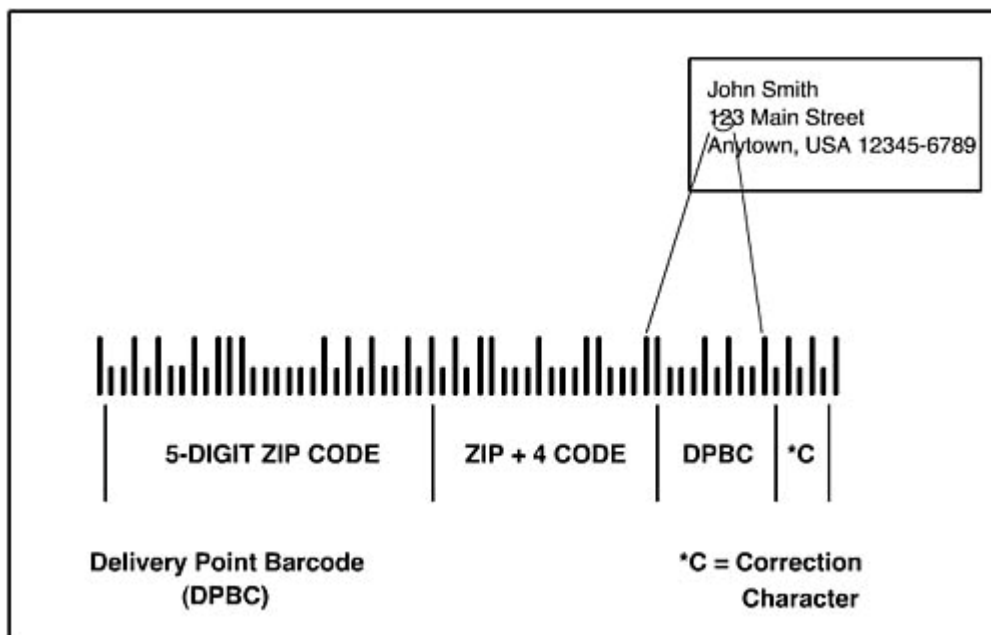


*Standard stocked window envelopes now provide 1/2" clearance. The Postal Service recommends allowing 5/8"

If the mailer has the software to print a barcode along with the name, address, and zip code, either directly above or directly below the name, address, and zip code, or showing through a window, then there is no need to maintain the "clear zone" on the lower right hand corner of the envelope since the Post Office will not be printing the barcode. Therefore, you won't have any restrictions on the graphics you can apply to your outer envelope, as long as you leave the needed clear space around the barcode itself.

Windows should not encroach, (they must not on Fast-forward mailings), on the Bar Code Clear Zone as indicated below:





Above: If a mailer is applying his own barcodes to an address block to be shown through the envelope window, care should be taken that the window is large enough so that the barcode is clear of the edge at least 1/8" left and right and 1/25" top and bottom, no matter where the piece moves inside the envelope. Therefore, some windows may need to be expanded to accommodate the new, larger barcode.

Sources For More Information:

Because there are unusual exceptions in all classes of domestic and international mail, and because regulations change, contact the U.S. Postal Business Center in your city for the most current information.

[Mail Piece Primer and Design Introduction:](#)

This informative link below will help you understand the Postal Service's mailpiece design requirements. They will help you design mail pieces that qualify for postal discounts. The link will aid printers, graphic artists, form designers, and envelope manufacturers. It is also useful for small and large businesses handling their own mailing campaigns. If you affect the design process, explore this informative link:

Website: http://pe.usps.gov/mpdesign/mpdfr_intro_all.htm

[Postal Explorer: The USPS Specifications Search Engine](#)

Looking for the latest documentation for USPS guidelines? This website will allow you to search for specific documents, specs and explanations on any issue regarding mailing.

Website: <http://pe.usps.gov>

Federal Regulations For Designers:

American Center for Design publishes "Federal Regulations for Designers" and answers questions relating to mailpiece design and automation compatible mail.

(312) 787-2018 phone, (312) 649-9518 fax

Website: [American Center for Design](#)

Local Postal Business Centers:

Postal Business Centers (PBC) are located around the country and their primary focus is to improve service and to assist in converting the mail to be conducive to automation.

Find the closest PBC by using this Zip code search tool: [Click Here](#)

Among the services offered at your local PBC:

Adding ZIP+4 codes to address files including a one time free U.S.P.S. diskette or CD coding service.

Reviewing Business Reply and Courtesy Reply mailpieces for readability and machinability.

Providing free FIM and bar code artwork for Postage-paid reply, Business Reply and Courtesy Reply Mail. Either hard-copy or pdf files are provided.

Diagnosing Business Reply and Courtesy Reply envelopes and cards for readability and machinability.

Zip+4 address lists

Printed ZIP+4 code state directories can be purchased at a nominal cost from local post offices.

Artwork

For free FIM and bar code positives for Postage-paid reply, Business Reply Mail and for Courtesy Reply Mail contact your local Postal Business Center.