A GUIDE TO PREPARING YOUR ENVELOPES FOR MAILING

First Class letters and flats, and Standard Class letters and cards must meet certain criteria to be processed by a machine the USPS calls a Multi-Line Optical Character Reader (MLOCR). Following these guidelines will allow mail to be delivered faster and continue our discounted first class rate. Please follow these guidelines when preparing your envelopes. Mail dropped off at the mailroom will be returned to the department if not addressed appropriately.

Postal Addressing Standards

When an envelope passes in front of a USPS Multi-Line Optical Character Reader system, the envelope is scanned from left to right, bottom to top. Placement of the information on the mail piece becomes important.

Follow the guidelines in the illustration below. Please limit the use of punctuation. Note that there is no punctuation used, such as a period (.) after ST, INC or MRS in the sample below.

If all Delivery Address Line information cannot be continued in the Delivery Address Line above the city, state, and ZIP Code, place secondary address information on the line immediately above the Delivery Address Line, such as a Suite (abbreviated STE) number.

Allow at least 5/8th of an inch of blank space from the bottom of your envelope (as pictured above) for USPS to add additional information, such as a barcode.

Readable Addresses

Outgoing addresses that are difficult or not able to be read by the USPS can slow down mail processing and incur higher postage charge. Please print the address using clear block letters or use the
envelope/label feature that comes with Microsoft Word to address your First Class letters, flats, cards, etc.

Please note the significant differences in type styles illustrated here.

**Type Styles**

Type sizes between 8 point and 12 point are preferred. Any type that is well spaced and easy for you to read will be easier for the machines to read. Remember, the machines read 10 full addresses every second.

**ALL CAPITAL LETTERS READ BEST**

**THIS IS MONOSPACED TYPE, WHICH IS EASIEST TO READ**

**THIS IS PROPORTIONAL TYPE, WITH VARYING SPACES BETWEEN LETTERS (LOOK AT “W” AND “I”, “W” IS WIDER)**

**These type styles are not readable:**

**THIS TYPE IS TOO SMALL**

**THIS TYPE IS TOO LARGE**

**THIS TYPE IS ITALIC**

**THIS TYPE IS TOO BOLD**

**THIS IS SCRIPT TYPE**

**These letters are condensed or touch each other**

**THIS TYPE IS HANDWRITTEN**

**THIS IS DECORATIVE TYPE**

**Avoid Mail Returning or Looping Back to Sender**

When an envelope passes in front of a Mail Reader (MLOCR) system the camera seeks a readable address anywhere in an “OCR Read Area” (see image above) and will read the most legible address within this area. If it can’t read the outgoing address (handwritten, italic, proportional type, etc.) and if your return address is within this area and can be read by the machine, it will barcode the mail to your return address since the camera cannot distinguish the difference between the intended addressee and your address. The letter will then continue through USPS system, and ultimately be delivered back to you. Re-mailing this letter will continue the loop, so long as that barcode is on the envelope.
To avoid mail looping you must make a permanent change to either your envelope design or the addressing:

- Move the return address so it is above the OCR Read Area.
- Improve the outgoing addressing to result in readable addresses by clearly printing using block letters or using a type style that can be easily read by the MLOCR.

What is a Flat (Large Envelope)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>6-1/8 inches</td>
<td>12 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>11-1/2 inches</td>
<td>15 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thickness</td>
<td>1/4 inch</td>
<td>3/4 inch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Flat is a large envelope which exceeds at least one of these dimensions.

For example, an envelope 10” long x 8” high x ¼” thick is considered a large envelope because it exceeds the minimum height dimension.

Large envelopes that are rigid, nonrectangular, or not uniformly thick pay package prices.

For large envelopes, length is the longest dimension.

Larger items would be considered packages.

What is a Letter Envelope?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>3-1/2 inches</td>
<td>6-1/8 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>5 inches</td>
<td>11-1/2 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thickness</td>
<td>0.007 inch</td>
<td>1/4 inch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Letter Envelope smaller than the minimum dimensions is not mailable.

For items larger in length, width, or thickness, see large envelopes or packages.

For envelopes, length is the dimension parallel to the address.

For letter-sized items over 3.5 ounces, large envelope prices will be applied.

Letters that meet one or more of the non-machinable characteristics below are subject to a higher mailing rate.

- It is a square letter
- It is too rigid – does not bend easily
- It has clasps, string, buttons, or similar closure devices
- It has an address parallel to the shorter dimension of the letter
- It contains items such as pens that cause the surface to be uneven
- The length divided by height is less than 1.3 or more than 2.5

**Square Envelope:** The minimum size for a square envelope is 5 inches x 5 inches

**Some Interesting and Helpful USPS Links:**
