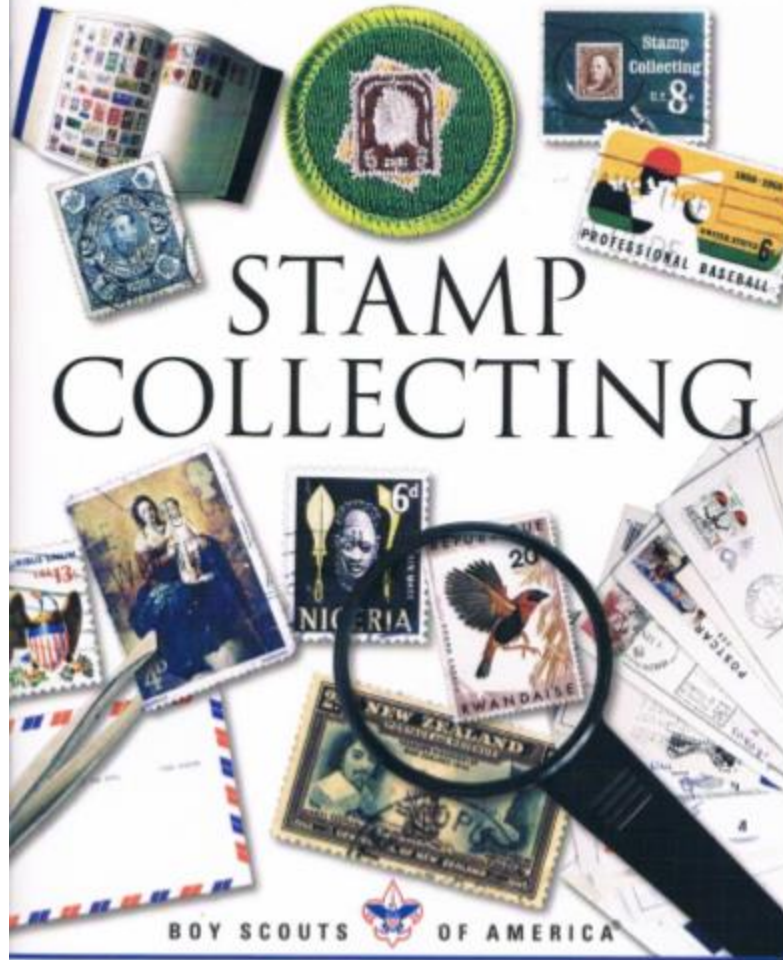


MERIT BADGE SERIES



STAMP COLLECTING

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

HOW TO USE THIS PAMPHLET

The secret to successfully earning a merit badge is for you to use both the pamphlet and the suggestions of your counselor.

Your counselor can be as important to you as a coach is to an athlete. Use all of the resources your counselor can make available to you. This may be the best chance you will have to learn about this particular subject. Make it count.

If you or your counselor feels that any information in this pamphlet is incorrect, please let us know. Please state your source of information.

Merit badge pamphlets are reprinted annually and requirements updated regularly. Your suggestions for improvement are welcome.

Send comments along with a brief statement about yourself to Boy Scout Division • Boy Scouts of America • 1325 West Walnut Hill Lane • P.O. Box 152079 • Irving, TX 75015-2079.

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This merit badge pamphlet is one in a series of more than 100 covering all kinds of hobby and career subjects. It is made available for you to buy as a service of the national and local councils, Boy Scouts of America. The costs of the development, writing, and editing of the merit badge pamphlets are paid for by the Boy Scouts of America in order to bring you the best books at a reasonable price.



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA
MERIT BADGE SERIES

STAMP COLLECTING



BOY SCOUTS  OF AMERICA®



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Requirements

1. Do the following:
 - a. Discuss how you can better understand people, places, institutions, history, and geography as a result of collecting stamps.
 - b. Briefly describe some aspects of the history, growth, and development of the United States postal system. Tell how it is different from postal systems in other countries.
2. Define topical stamp collecting. Name and describe three other types of stamp collections.
3. Show at least ONE example of each of the following:
 - a. Perforated and imperforate stamps
 - b. Mint and used stamps
 - c. Sheet, booklet, and coil stamps
 - d. Numbers on plate block, booklet, or coil, or marginal markings
 - e. Overprint and surcharge
 - f. Metered mail
 - g. Definitive, commemorative, semipostal, and airmail stamps
 - h. Cancellation and postmark
 - i. First day cover
 - j. Postal stationery (aerogramme, stamped envelope, and postal card)





4. Do the following:
 - a. Demonstrate the use of ONE standard catalog for several different stamp issues. Explain why catalog value can vary from the corresponding purchase price.
 - b. Explain the meaning of the term *condition* as used to describe a stamp. Show examples that illustrate the different factors that affect a stamp's value.
5. Demonstrate the use of at least THREE of the following stamp collector's tools:
 - a. Stamp tongs
 - b. Water and tray
 - c. Magnifiers
 - d. Hinges and stamp mounts
 - e. Perforation gauge
 - f. Glassine envelopes and cover sleeves
 - g. Watermark fluid
6. Do the following:
 - a. Show a stamp album and how to mount stamps with or without hinges. Show at least ONE page that displays several stamps.
 - b. Discuss at least THREE ways you can help to preserve stamps, covers, and albums in first-class condition.
7. Do at least TWO of the following:
 - a. Design a stamp, cancellation, or cachet.
 - b. Visit a post office, stamp club, or stamp show with an experienced collector. Explain what you saw and learned.
 - c. Write a review of an interesting article from a stamp newspaper, magazine, book, or Web site (with your parent's permission).

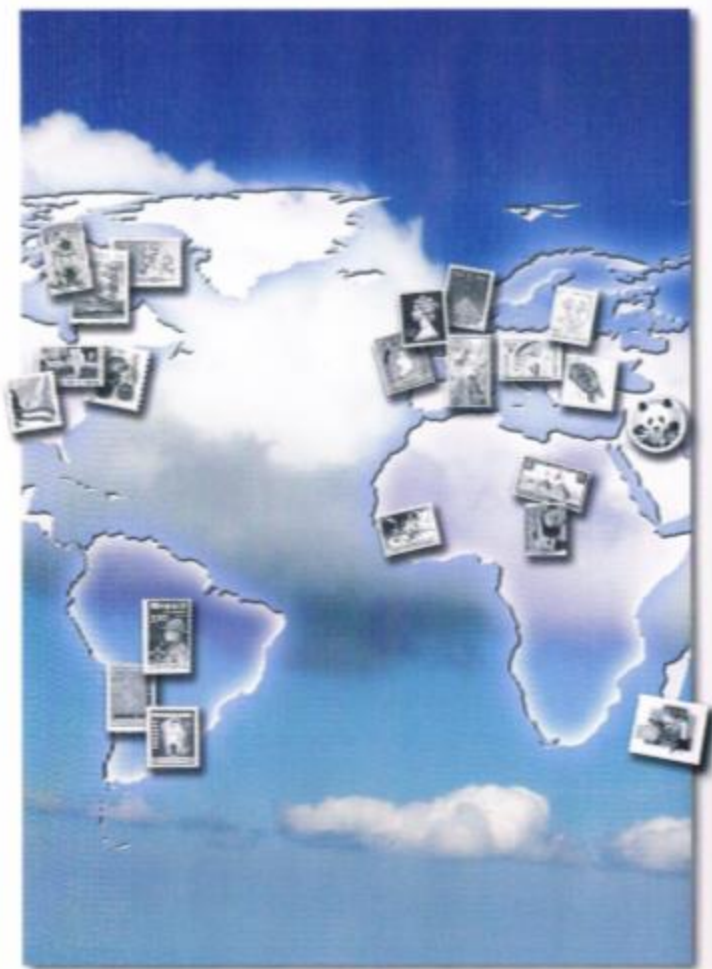
- d. Research and report on a famous stamp-related personality or the history behind a particular stamp.
 - e. Describe the steps taken to produce a stamp. Include the methods of printing, types of paper, perforation styles, and how they are gummed.
 - f. Prepare a two- to three-page display involving stamps. Using ingenuity, as well as clippings, drawings, etc., tell a story about the stamps and how they relate to history, geography, or a favorite topic of yours.
8. Mount and show, in a purchased or homemade album, ONE of the following:
 - a. A collection of 250 or more different stamps from at least 15 countries.
 - b. A collection of a stamp from each of 50 different countries, mounted on maps to show the location of each.
 - c. A collection of 100 or more different stamps from either one country or a group of closely related countries.
 - d. A collection of 75 or more different stamps on a single topic. (Some interesting topics are Scouting, birds, insects, the Olympics, sports, flowers, animals, ships, holidays, trains, famous people, space, and medicine.) Stamps may be from different countries.
 - e. A collection of postal items discovered in your mail by monitoring it over a period of 30 days. Include at least five different types listed in requirement 3.





Contents

Introduction to Stamp Collecting	9
Types of Stamp Collecting	19
The Language of Stamp Collecting	27
The Design and Production of Stamps	39
Catalogs, Equipment, and Procedures	47
Displaying Your Collection	57
Fun Projects	61
The U.S. Postal Service From Past to Present	65
Interesting Stories About Stamps	69
Stamp Collecting Resources	73



Introduction to Stamp Collecting

The world's most popular hobby, stamp collecting is enjoyed by millions throughout the world. It is known as "the hobby of kings and kids." Many lasting friendships have begun as a result of stamp collecting.

Through this hobby you can experience history, from the Pony Express to man's first landing on the moon. You can meet presidents from George Washington to Ronald Reagan. For most countries, postage stamps are like tiny windows that introduce the people of the world to the country's leaders, customs, history, products, and environment.

Many stamps honor famous people—statesmen, educators, inventors, royalty, and leaders of various movements or services. Others recognize the achievements of organizations such as Scouting, the Red Cross, or 4-H, and still others mark holidays such as Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and Easter.



Philately is the collector and study of stamps and other postal materials. A person who collects and studies stamps is called a philatelist.

Great art and artists are represented on stamps. A stamp is a masterpiece of art in miniature. Every line, every hair must be painstakingly carved on a metal die before an engraved stamp is printed.

Some philatelists collect stamps from one or a few countries—the United States or the former British Commonwealth, for example. Others collect stamps from all over the world. This type of collection is called a general collection. Some general collectors collect stamps issued during specific years or periods—from the time they were born to the present, for example, or only those issued during World War II.

Typical collectors concentrate on what is shown on the design of the stamp—outer space, historical figures, horses, dogs, flowers, trains, sports or athletes, and so on.

The way you collect and what you collect should be based upon your personal interests. Collect what you enjoy—and enjoy learning about what you collect.



Understanding People, Places, and History

Over the decades since Great Britain issued the first adhesive postage stamp, the Penny Black, in 1840, more than 700 geographical or political entities have issued stamps of their own. Today, more than 245 postal administrations around the world continue to issue stamps. There are far too many stamps for any one person to collect them all—so you need to concentrate your collection in some way.

Let's begin by looking at the many different possibilities a beginning stamp collector can pursue. In order to fulfill the requirements of this merit badge, you must choose one or two areas of concentration. You might decide to concentrate on stamps issued by the United States or stamps issued by other countries.



The Penny Black

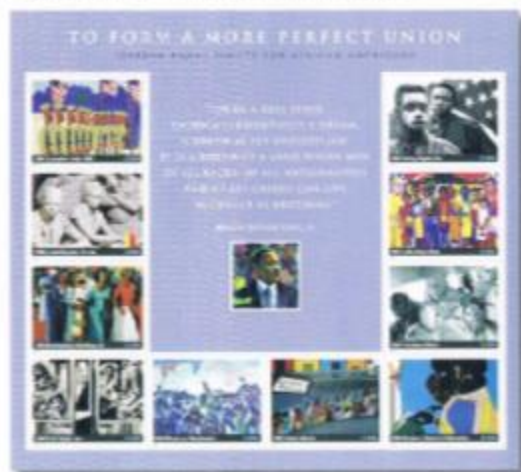


For more information about U.S. stamps, visit the U.S. Postal Service Web site (with your parent's permission) at <http://www.usps.gov>, or check out the Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps, available at many post offices and bookstores.

United States Stamps

The United States Postal Service prints 39 billion stamps per year. In 2005, the United States produced 25 new postal issues that included 106 separate designs (some issues involve numerous different stamps). Among the subjects were prominent Americans such as President Ronald Reagan, architectural works, noted American scientists, tennis star Arthur Ashe, four distinguished United States Marines, and the man behind the Muppets, Jim Henson.

Stamps also commemorated key moments of the Civil Rights movement and showcased spring flowers, constellations, architecture, airplanes and jets, sporty cars of the 1950s, and such Disney characters as Mickey Mouse, Ariel, the Mad Hatter, and Snow White. The USPS also issued the Northeast Deciduous Forest souvenir stamp sheet (with 10 separate stamp designs). This is the seventh in its "Nature of America" series that promotes appreciation of major plant and animal communities in the United States. (Meet the artist who painted the series of stamp sheets in the chapter "How Stamps Are Made.") These are typical subjects for stamps—which honor events, persons, and themes of widespread national appeal.



NORTHEAST DECIDUOUS FOREST



Northeast Deciduous Forest stamp sheet

To learn more about the stamps shown here, you can turn to a stamp catalog. Take the Northeast Deciduous Forest stamp sheet from the Nature of America series, for example. If a catalog is not available at home, your local library should have a copy of the Scott or Minkus catalogs, or the *Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps*. From the catalog we learn that these stamps were issued on March 3, 2005. The pane has 10 37-cent stamps depicting the eastern buckmoth, red-shouldered hawk, eastern red bat, white-tailed deer, black bear, long-tailed weasel, wild turkey, ovenbird, red eft (a type of salamander), and eastern chipmunk.

These stamps were printed by a process known as photogravure, in which the design of the stamp is photographed through a fine screen. The screen breaks the design up into tiny dots that are etched into a plate that holds the ink. The ink is lifted onto stamp paper when it is pressed against the plate. Other stamps are printed using lithography and offset printing techniques.

For more information on stamp printing processes, see the introduction section of the *Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue*.

Stamps From Other Countries

You may want to collect a foreign country's stamps because you are interested in learning more about that country. Countries often picture their own geographical and historical landmarks on stamps. Some picture animals or birds native to their land.

The U.S. Postal Service has strict rules about what events or people shall be shown on stamps. A living person or someone who has died less than 10 years ago (except for an American president) cannot be shown on a U.S. stamp.



Another reason people collect foreign stamps is that many countries issue stamps about current popular culture—movies, musical stars, celebrities, to name a few—that cannot be depicted on U.S. stamps. In October 2005, for example, New Zealand issued stamps depicting the giant ape and other characters from the movie "King Kong," which was filmed in that country and released in 2005. In January 2006, the Austrian Postal Service issued a stamp commemorating still-living American boxing legend Muhammad Ali. Also in January 2006, the Canada Post commemorated Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom. The image on the stamp came from a photograph of the Queen taken during her visit to Canada in 2002. None of these subjects could have appeared on a U.S. stamp.

Some countries have very little or no need for stamps in their postal system and still print stamps—especially stamps with high value—only for the income they produce. Sometimes a stamp is purchased already canceled. These stamps are called CTO, or canceled-to-order. Typically, CTOs have a very neat cancellation that just touches one corner of the stamp. When you turn the stamp over, you will find that it still has its original gum on the back.

CTO stamp



Friendships Around the World

Making friends doesn't have to happen in your own neighborhood. Make new and lasting friendships by finding a pen pal. Having a pen pal—someone you may never meet in person but whom you become friends with by exchanging letters—is a fun learning experience.

Aside from getting envelopes with interesting stamps and postmarks, you could exchange stamps and get to know someone. You might also learn about a foreign language or another culture. Imagine having a pal halfway around the world. Pretty cool.

First, get your parent's consent and assistance.

To find a pen friend, search the Web (with your parent's permission), and ask your teachers or librarian if they know of a reputable pen pal service. Some services are free; others charge a small fee. You may need to complete an application with some general information about yourself—your age, country, and hobbies, among other things. Again, be sure you have your

parent's permission and help with finding a pen pal.

Your family may want to rent a post office box so that you don't have to use your street address. Have your parent read your letter to make sure you don't give out information that should not be shared (such as your phone number and daily schedule). Also, find out how much postage the letter needs; mailing a letter to a foreign country costs more than mailing one in the United States or its territories (such as Puerto Rico and Guam).

Here are some tips when it is time to start writing.

- A neat, handwritten letter is always the most personal.
- Open and close your letter with an upbeat message ("I hope you are doing well," "I'm looking forward to hearing from you soon").
- Ask about hobbies, interests, family life, pets, and customs. You can share the same type of information and, if your parent says it is OK, exchange photos, too.
- If you receive any gifts from your pen pal, be sure to let your parent know, especially if it is a food item. Let your parent check it out.
- For safety reasons, never agree to meet your friend without your parent's knowledge and permission. And, if your pen pal ever discusses anything that makes you feel uncomfortable, tell your parent right away.

Finally, respond to your pen pal promptly—and have fun!





Plastic stamp

Most stamps are printed on paper, although sometimes, to further interest collectors, they are printed on other material, such as foil or plastic. Plastic stamps issued to satisfy collectors' interests are not used to mail letters. Sometimes called labels, they are not highly regarded by stamp collectors. Plastic stamps that are issued to meet postal needs—such as sale through postal machines, as in areas where humidity is a problem—are used to mail letters, and are of interest to collectors.

The more research you put into the stamps you choose to collect, the more you will learn and the more fun you will have. You will learn how to recognize foreign countries by the names on the stamps while learning about their history and customs.



Many of the space exploration flights by NASA have been pictured on stamps issued by other countries. Depicting events of other countries is a way to show friendship with those countries.

Identifying Stamps

Stamps from Great Britain show no identifying name (see figure 1). The names of other areas like Canada and New Zealand are plainly inscribed on the stamps in figures 2 and 3. Identifying most stamps is usually just this easy, although sometimes the foreign names of the countries may be different from their English names. For example, on the stamps in figures 4 and 5, one can easily figure out that *Polska* means Poland and that *Danmark* means Denmark.

The stamp in figure 6 shows a map of India and is obviously an Indian stamp. The stamp in figure 3 with the inscription *Magyar Posta* is more difficult, since there is no phonetic similarity between *Magyar* and its English equivalent, *Hungary*. With experience, collectors can learn to recognize the foreign-language names of such countries. Stamp identifier books are also available to help identify inscriptions on stamps.



Figure 1



Figure 5



Figure 2



Figure 6



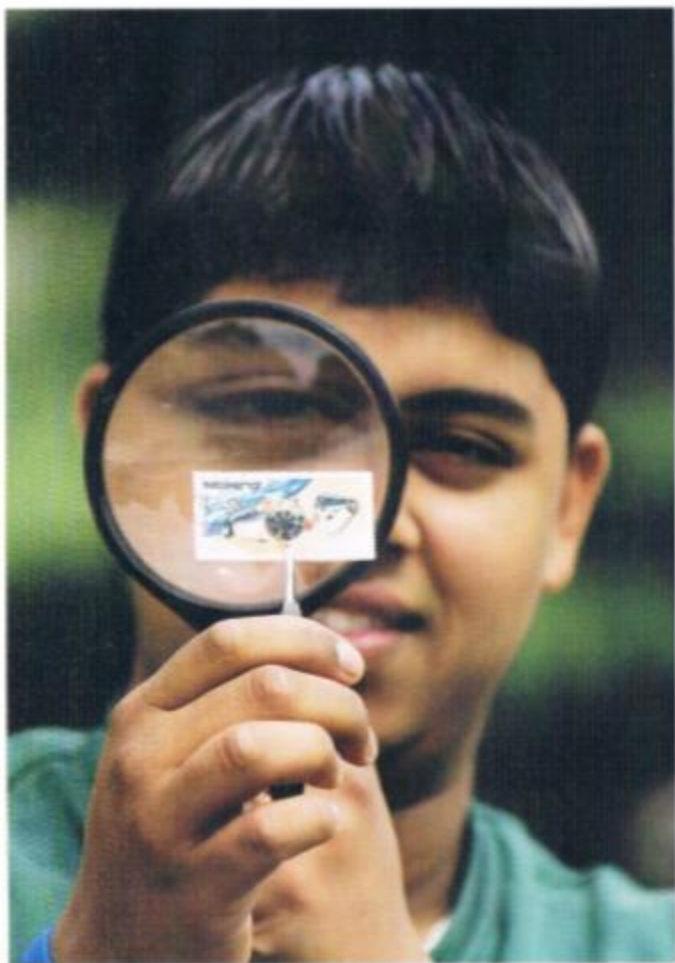
Figure 3



Figure 7



Figure 4



Types of Stamp Collecting

For many years, stamp specialists tried to collect all the stamps issued by a specific country. In spite of the great number of stamps that a country can issue and the expense associated with collecting so many, some collectors still pursue this type of collection. Stamp collecting today, though, is very flexible.

Topical Collections

Topical stamp collecting is one of the most interesting and versatile forms of the hobby. A topical collection focuses on the subject pictured on the stamp, not on the country issuing the stamp. The collector picks the focus or topic and develops it to fit personal taste.

Collectors can choose from an unlimited number of topics. For some topics, a limited number of stamps will be available, while for others, there may be hundreds to choose from. The collector should pick a topic that is neither too broad nor too narrow in scope, that fits the collector's interest, and that reflects his or her ability to obtain the stamps.

A collector interested generally in sports might focus on stamps related to the Olympics or to a favorite sport, such as track, soccer, or baseball. Some collectors focus on art, music, or religion. Others might collect birds, butterflies, insects, maps, or railroads. Topical collecting is fun because it can link two or more interests into a single hobby.



Boy Scouts sometimes collect Scouts on stamps like the ones shown here. More than 135 countries have issued stamps related to Scouting.

Another fun aspect of topical stamp collecting is the arrangement and display of the collection in albums. Collectors can creatively mount the stamps in a way that appeals to their personal taste. Some collectors use computers to design special pages for a collection, but printing by hand or typing a page can serve just as well.



Topical collecting can be fun to share with others who do not collect stamps. While a specialized collection of a single set of stamps, such as the 1938 United States presidential definitives, may interest only a limited number of advanced stamp collectors, featuring aviation, baseball players, or Disney characters on stamps appeals to many people.

Topical stamps can be obtained in several ways. The most convenient and inexpensive source is your own daily mail. Also ask friends and neighbors to save stamps on the topic of your collection. If you have a family friend who owns a business, ask him or her to save pieces of mail as well.

You may also want to buy packets of stamps on major topics at stamp shops, at stamp shows, or through advertisements in magazines such as *Boys' Life*. Stamps in packets are often inexpensive because they are fairly common. This is an excellent way to start a stamp collection without spending a lot of money. Additional stamps can be added to the basic collection as your interest in and knowledge of the collection grow.

Other Types of Collections

Most experienced collectors have more than one interest in stamps. A collector can, for example, focus on stamps of the United States while specializing in trains as a topical collection.

A variety of definitive and commemorative stamps and postal stationery can make an interesting and inexpensive type of collection. Covers—or envelopes—showing different postal rates and classes make a challenging collection. Even advertising covers used to promote different products can be collected. Without spending a cent, you can easily collect 50 to a hundred items that reflect the complexity of the modern mail system, from your family's mail.

Some collectors specialize in meter imprints and labels. These can be collected historically, going back to the many types used since the 1920s or focusing on current use alone. Some companies use interesting slogans with the postmark. Even the design of the meter imprint can be the focus of a collection.

Postmarks and cancellations can also be interesting to collect. Some people collect postmarks that have their names in them. Others seek old postmarks from towns where they live. Some collect special cancellations, such as those that picture flags or fancy designs.



A special type of stamp, such as an airmail or postage-due stamp, can be the focus of a collection. Unusual shapes—triangles, diamonds, even banana shapes—can be the basis for a very attractive collection.



The USPS made history on March 13, 1992 when it issued—for the first time ever—the triangular-shaped Pacific '97 stagecoach and clipper ship stamps.

Still other forms of collecting are based on postal history. Collectors keep the entire cover so that the postmarks and auxiliary marks will show how the envelope went through the mail. In an election year, covers mailed by political candidates can make a colorful collection. Some people specialize in covers associated with a significant historical event—a war or a presidential inauguration, for example. Advertising covers related to a special interest—envelopes from hardware stores that show tools, envelopes from zoos that show animals, etc.—can also make an enjoyable collection.



These first-day covers pay tribute to Scouting around the world.

First day covers are very popular collectibles. On the first day that a stamp is released for sale, a ceremony is held, and a special cancellation marking the release of the stamp is made available to cancel the mail. Collectors buy or prepare their own envelopes, which usually have *cachets*—pictures or words that relate to the new stamp. The envelope and the new stamp then receive the special cancellation. The USPS now allows an extended period of time after the first day to cancel and obtain these covers.

Some collectors try to get a cover for each new stamp. Others specialize in a single stamp and collect as many different cachets as possible. Contact an experienced collector or your local post office for instructions on how to obtain such cancellations. A collection of first day covers with cachets drawn by the collector can be a truly creative achievement.

A Tale of Two Collectors

Stamp collecting is for young and old alike. Brandon Heim, 13, of Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, is a typical young collector. He got started three years ago through a stamp collecting club at his school. The club's 20 members meet monthly and, once a year, travel as a group to Washington, D.C., to visit the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum as well as the headquarters of the United States Postal Service.



Brandon Heim

Like many collectors, Brandon started off by simply soaking stamps off envelopes received by family and friends. At first his collection had little focus, but soon he started seeking out stamps of U.S. presidents, the most recent of which is the Ronald Reagan stamp, issued in February 2005. Brandon also got interested in foreign stamps, buying inexpensive bags of unsorted foreign stamps. He keeps his ever-growing collection, now numbering about 8,000 stamps, in four separate albums. He now collects first day covers—envelopes or postcards specially cancelled on the day of the stamp's official release.

Brandon also keeps current in the hobby through his membership in the American Philatelic Society, a national collectors' group. "In stamp collecting, you never know what you'll find," Brandon says. "There are always new topics to learn about."

Nancy Clark, a retiree living in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, has a much bigger collection than Brandon, because she has been collecting for decades. Her collection is so big that she has a 20-by-40-foot room in her house called the "stamp room." It is lined with floor-to-ceiling shelves filled with books, catalogs, and other research materials, as well as copies of her stamps. She keeps the actual stamps in a vault at a local bank.



Nancy Clark

Her hunt for stamps and other postal collectibles takes her to at least five stamp shows a year—sometimes in other countries. Nancy also corresponds with other stamp collectors all over the world—mostly via the Internet. They ask each other's opinions about recent acquisitions by sending scans—computerized pictures—of their latest finds. "Before e-mail, it used to take a month to exchange letters with someone overseas. Now it can be done almost instantaneously," Clark says.

What is her collection worth? "I have no idea," Nancy Clark says. "My motivation isn't the money but the thrill of the hunt."

Thousands of listeners around the world tune in to Nancy Clark's weekly Internet radio program, "APS Stamp Talk." Through the program, she shares information with other collectors and, she says, "I interview all sorts of people with interesting collections." Tune in to the program online at <http://www.WSRadio.com/APSSStampTalk> or download the programs for later listening as podcasts. Be sure to get your parent's permission first.



Like Brandon, Nancy started her own stamp collection while in elementary school. She first focused on collecting boat stamps. Later, as a young adult, she broadened her collection to include sports stamps, particularly Olympic stamps. Her reputation grew. She served as president and judge for the international stamp show held at the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia, where people from around the world entered their collections in competition.

"The winning collection always tells a story," Clark says. "It's not just a group of rare stamps."



The Language of Stamp Collecting

Like many hobbies and fields of study, stamp collecting has its own language, or terminology. You will find it easier to collect stamps when you know the hobby's special terms. As your interest and knowledge of stamp collecting grow, your stamp vocabulary will grow accordingly.

The glossary below lists some of the special terms used by stamp collectors. Additional terms and definitions can be found in stamp catalogs and other reference materials available in local libraries.

aerogramme. A letter sheet made of a single sheet of lightweight paper with gummed flaps, normally used for international airmail. When folded and sealed, the message is on the inside; the outside resembles an envelope on which a stamp has been printed, and the rate is usually slightly less than the first-class air letter rate.



Aerogramme



Airmail stamp

airmail stamp. A stamp formerly issued to prepay airmail postage rates, especially for foreign or overseas mail, which were usually more expensive than surface mail. Since 1977, the United States mail has been carried by air, when appropriate, at no extra charge.

approval. A convenient method by which a dealer sends selections of stamps to the prospective buyer. From these stamps the collector chooses items to purchase and returns the balance with payment.

When purchasing stamps on approval, be sure to return all the ones you don't want to keep so that you won't be charged for them.



Blocks of stamps



block. A unit of four or more unseparated stamps. A block of four stamps is two stamps high and two stamps wide. A plate number block shows the number of the plate used to imprint the stamp.

booklet. A small sheet of stamps specially cut to be sold in booklets. A booklet can be a self-adhesive sheet designed to be folded by the customer.



Cachet

cachet. A design printed on an envelope to commemorate a special event such as the issuance of a new stamp, the president's birthday, or a stamp show.

cancellation. A marking put on a stamp by a postal authority that shows the stamp has been used and can't be reused.



Cancellation

catalog value. The value that is printed in a specific catalog indicating a price for purchasing the stamp from a dealer.

coil stamp. A stamp issued in a long, rolled strip—with the stamps connected endways or sideways—generally for use by stamp-dispensing machines.



On this strip of stamps from a coil, note the plate number near the bottom of the stamp, to the far right.

PLATE NUMBER

commemorative stamp. A stamp issued to honor an important person, place, event, or other aspect of our national culture. These stamps are usually available for sale only for a limited time at the post office.



Commemorative stamp

cover. An envelope that has been sent through the mail.

definitive stamp. A common stamp, usually small and printed in large quantities, in regular use over a period of years (until the next increase in postage rates). Also called a "regular" stamp. In contrast, commemorative stamps usually stay on sale less than a year after their issue.

error. A mistake in the production of a postage stamp that was not caught before the stamp's release to the public. These include inverted centers and mistakes in color, paper, etc.

face value. The value, or denomination, of a stamp, as it appears on the stamp.

Definitive stamp

fake. A real stamp that has been changed in some way to make it more desirable to collectors. For example, it may have been repaired or regummed.



first day cover. An envelope with a stamp affixed that has been canceled on the first official sale date of the stamp.



First day cover

hinge. A small strip of paper gummed on one side and used by collectors to put their stamps in albums or on pages. Today, collectors store mint stamps with full gum or expensive stamps in a mount or a stockbook, not hinged.

hologram. An image that looks three dimensional. Holograms have appeared on some modern stamps.

imperforate stamp. A stamp issued without perforations.

mint stamp. A stamp that was never postally used. If a mint stamp still has all its original gum intact with no disturbances (such as a hinge mark), it is classified as mint never hinged (MNH).

mount. A clear, thin plastic holder in which a stamp is placed in an album. Mounts protect stamps by reducing handling and eliminating hinge marks. Mounts are usually used for more valuable stamps.



Mint condition

overprinted stamp. A stamp that has printing applied to it after original production. Overprinting may indicate the stamp has been used in more than one country or to recognize a special event, to change a stamp's value, or for other than postal use.

packet. A container full of assorted, unsorted stamps, offering an inexpensive way to begin a stamp collection.

perforations. Small holes or slits around the perimeter of a stamp that enable one stamp to be separated from another.

philately. The collection, study, and enjoyment of postage stamps and other postal materials.

plate number block (PNB) or coil (PNC). A block or coil of stamps bearing the number of the plate used in printing.



Plate block



Overprinted stamps

postage meter stamps and labels. Meters are used by businesses and other organizations with large mailings. They can be set for varying amounts of postage, and include a form of a precanceled that may have special slogans or marks.



Postage meter stamp



Postal card

postal card. A government-produced card, usually with a stamp imprinted in the upper right-hand corner that pays the postage fee. Also called a "stamped postal card."

postcard. A privately produced card with a picture or information on one side and a space for a message and address on the other. A stamp must be affixed to pay the postage fee.

postmark. An official mark applied to mail in the postal system; usually includes the date and place of the mailing.

precanceled stamp. A stamp canceled before it is placed in the mail, usually by a mechanized printing process. Normally produced by heavy users of mail, these require a special-use permit from the postal service.



Precanceled stamps

regular or definitive stamp. A common stamp, usually small, in regular use over a period of years.

se-tenant stamps. Stamps joined together as in the original sheet but differing in design, denomination, overprint, or color. Sometimes, by combining a series of connected stamps, a picture is created (see the *Northwest: Deciduous Forest* stamp sheet in "Introduction to Stamp Collecting").



Regular, or definitive, stamp



Se-tenant stamps

self-adhesive stamp. A stamp backed with pressure-sensitive glue.

selvage. The paper margin around panes of stamps.

semipostal stamp. Postal authorities sometimes issue special stamps for which an amount is charged in addition to the regular postage. This extra fee or surcharge is designated for some special purpose that benefits special groups such as child-care and special-education agencies.

series. A number of individual stamps or sets of stamps having a common purpose or theme issued over a long period of time.

sheet. As printed, this is a complete unit consisting of four or more panes of stamps, each of which is cut apart when the stamps are sent to the post office. The size and design of the stamp affects the size of the pane and sheet.

souvenir sheet. A sheet of one or more postage stamp designs that usually has a commemorative inscription or artwork in the border.

special stamp. A stamp that may be repeated and is used for periods longer than commemoratives but shorter than definitives. Love, Christmas, and Express Mail stamps are examples.

stamped envelope. A mailable envelope on which the post office has printed or embossed a stamp.



Special stamps



Stamped envelope

tagging. The chemical marking of postal items to help prevent mail fraud and allow them to be read by mail-sorting machines.

unused stamp. A stamp that has no cancellation or other sign of use.

used (canceled) stamp. A stamp that has been canceled so that it cannot be used again.

watermark. A design sometimes pressed into stamp paper while it is being made.



Used, or canceled, stamp

Assessing a Stamp's Value

Stamps are described in terms of their "grade" and "condition," and both affect their price.

Stamp Grade Definitions

Grade has to do with how well the stamp design is centered. Condition addresses factors other than centering.



Extremely Fine. The stamp appears to be almost perfectly centered.

Very Fine. The design is very well-centered, with the four margins between 50 percent and 100 percent equal. That is, the widest margin is not more than twice the width of the narrowest margin. A stamp with the perforation barely clearing the design on any side does not qualify as Very Fine.

Fine-Very Fine. The design is well-centered. Either the vertical margins or the horizontal margins qualify as at least Very Fine (the wider margin is not more than twice the width of the narrower), while the other margins qualify as at least Fine (the perforations visibly clear the stamp design).

Fine. The perforations visibly clear the stamp design on all four sides.

Average. The perforations cut slightly into the design on one side.

Stamp Condition Definitions

Many factors, such as margins, color, and condition of the gum, are important in the valuation of the stamp. The more perfect the stamp, the higher the price. Here are some of the words used in assessing the value of a stamp:

Original Gum. Gum as applied to the stamp when it was manufactured.

Regummed. A stamp that for some reason has lost its gum and to which new gum has been applied.

No Gum. Stamps sent through the mail and removed from envelopes by soaking have no gum. Some mint stamps are issued without gum.

Never Hinged. Stamps that have never been hinged and whose gum shows no evidence of disturbance. With the development of good mounts, many collectors demand stamps that are classed as mint never hinged (MNH).

Lightly Hinged. A stamp showing a faint trace of a gum disturbance where the hinge has been removed.

Heavily Hinged. A stamp showing a hinge remnant on the back, or evidence of missing gum.

Other faults that affect the grading of stamps are missing perforations, tears, thin spots, pinholes, creases, etc. These flaws can cause a stamp to lose all or most of its value.



The Design and Production of Stamps

Many steps happen between the design of a stamp and the finished product used by consumers.

Birth of a Stamp Design

For U.S. stamps, the design process begins with the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee. Each year this group of volunteers sifts through some 50,000 ideas for new stamps submitted to the Postal Service. The committee members decide on only 25 subjects that will actually be made into stamps. Their goal is to pick stamp subjects that depict a broad range of people, places, and events that have affected our culture. Then the committee works with stamp designers, subject experts, and artists to come up with the finished designs.

The designs can be quite elaborate. Take the "Nature of America" series of U.S. stamps sheets, issued in panes of 10 each year since 1999. Together, the 10 stamps, along with additional space between the stamps, form a single natural scene full of plants and animals. The first pane depicted the Sonoran Desert in the American Southwest. The most recent pane, issued in 2006, shows a Southern Florida wetland.

All the panes in the series were painted by artist John Dawson of Hilo, Hawaii. For each pane, the committee supplies Dawson with a list of plant and animal species from which to choose. "Then I make rough sketches of the critters for them to look at," he says. Subject experts review his sketches and suggest improvements, making a beak longer here, for example, or a tail wider there.

