



Mailing Free Matter for Blind and Visually Handicapped Persons

Questions and Answers

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This pamphlet has been produced by the Consumer Advocate, U.S. Postal Service. The pamphlet is designed to answer the questions asked most often about free matter for the blind and other visually handicapped persons. The information in this pamphlet is based on 703.5.0 of the *Mailing Standards of the United States Postal Service*, Domestic Mail Manual (DMM®) and *United States Code*, title 39, sections 3403-3405.

Q: Who is eligible to mail items free of postage?

A: Persons who are blind or who cannot read or use conventionally printed matter due to a physical handicap.

Persons must be residents of the United States, including the territories and insular possessions, or American citizens domiciled abroad.

Q: What must I do to qualify to mail items free of postage?

A: You may have a competent authority certify in writing that you are unable to read conventional reading matter. A competent authority includes doctors of medicine; doctors of osteopathy; ophthalmologists; optometrists; registered nurses; therapists; and professional staff of hospitals, institutions, and public or private welfare agencies (e.g., social workers,

caseworkers, counselors, rehabilitation teachers, and superintendents). In the absence of any of these, certification may be made by professional librarians or by any person whose competence under specific circumstances is acceptable to the Library of Congress (see 36 CFR 701.10(b)(2)(i)).

A postmaster may extend the free matter privilege to you based on his or her personal knowledge of your eligibility.

Q: Where must I submit the documentation?

A: You must submit the documentation to the Post Office™ where you will make or receive postage-free mailings. You will then be considered eligible to use the free mailing privilege.

Q: Which matter may I mail free of postage?

A: Under the conditions specified below, the following matter is eligible:

1. Reading matter in Braille or 14-point or larger sightsaving type and musical scores.
2. Paper, records, tapes, and other matter for the production of reading matter, musical scores, or sound reproductions for eligible persons.
3. Equipment and parts for equipment, such as Braille writers, used for writing by eligible persons or for educational purposes.
4. Sound playback equipment specially designed or adapted for the use of visually handicapped persons.
5. Equipment or parts for equipment specifically

designed or adapted for use by visually handicapped persons, such as Braille watches, white canes, and similar equipment.

Q: Are there restrictions on this matter?

A: The matter may not contain any advertising.

Musical or other sound recordings not specifically designed for use by visually handicapped persons are not eligible for free mailing.

Matter having a required charge, rental, subscription, or other fee — unless the fee does not exceed the cost of the item — is not eligible for free mailing.

Empty shipping materials for mailing eligible matter may not be sent free and must bear the full applicable postage.

The mail is subject to inspection by the Postal Service™.

Q: Who can mail eligible matter postage-free and to whom can it be mailed?

A: Individuals, libraries, and other noncommercial organizations serving eligible persons may mail the above matter free of postage to eligible persons and to organizations serving eligible persons. Eligible persons may return matter to the mailers free of postage. Eligible persons may exchange the above matter among themselves free of postage. Libraries and other noncommercial organizations may exchange such matter among themselves free of postage.

Commercial producers of the above matter may mail such matter free of postage to an eligible person on the

additional condition that if a charge or fee is required it does not exceed the cost of the matter.

Q: What class of mail is this matter?

A: It is not considered part of any particular class of mail. However, it is treated as First-Class Mail®. It may be forwarded and if undeliverable, returned to the mailer free of charge. The matter must meet all appropriate size and weight standards.

Q: Can I mail letters free of postage?

A: An eligible person may mail unsealed letters that contain no advertising free of postage. The letters must be in raised characters (Braille), in 14-point or larger sightsaving type, or in the form of sound recordings. Handwritten, printed, or typed letters that are in a type size smaller than 14-point are

subject to the applicable rate of postage when mailed **to** or **from** an eligible person. Also subject to applicable postage are bills paid by mail by eligible persons and letters in any form when mailed **to** eligible persons from ineligible persons.

Q: Why must I mail letters unsealed?

A: You must mail letters unsealed to allow inspection by Postal Service authorities to ensure that the matter qualifies for postage-free mailing.

Q: Are extra services available for free mail for eligible persons?

A: A mailer may insure a postage-free parcel by paying only the required insurance fee.

Matter sent by all other extra services, such as Express Mail[®], Certified Mail[™], or Registered Mail[™], requires payment of postage plus the

full fees charged for the extra postal service.

Q: What must be marked on mail to show that it qualifies for mailing free of postage?

A: In the upper right corner of the address side of the envelope or parcel where the postage would normally be placed, the words “**FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND OR HANDICAPPED**” must be placed. The words may be printed, rubber stamped, or handwritten.

Q: Are special arrangements possible for delivery or pickup of free mail for eligible persons?

A: Eligibility for free mailing for the blind or other visually handicapped persons does not encompass such special arrangements. Post Offices may be able to make special arrangements depending on the local circumstances. You

should contact your local Post Office to request special arrangements. Such requests will be handled in accordance with the postal regulations concerning requests for special arrangements by handicapped persons.

Q: Is international service available for blind and other visually handicapped persons?

A: Yes, the same general rules apply, except that the items that may be mailed are limited to:

1. Books, periodicals, and other matter (including unsealed letters) impressed in Braille or other special type for the use of the blind.
2. Plates for embossing literature for the blind.
3. Disks, tapes, or wires bearing voice recordings and special paper intended solely for the use of blind

or visually handicapped persons, provided that they are sent by or addressed to an officially recognized institute for the blind.

4. Sound recordings or tapes that are mailed by blind or other visually handicapped persons.
5. Items allowable within the United States.
6. Articles weighing 15 pounds or less.

Matter may be sent by airmail or economy mail. However, **postage is free only if sent by economy mail.**

Q: What must be marked on international mail to show that it qualifies for mailing free of postage?

A: “MATTER FOR THE BLIND” must be placed in the upper-right corner. For **economy mail** accepted as matter for the blind, the

word “FREE” must be placed immediately above the words.

If mailed by an officially recognized institution for the blind, the institution’s name must appear in the address or the return address for the following items:

- a. Disks, tapes, or wires bearing voice recordings.
- b. Special paper intended solely for the use of the blind.

Q: Where can I get help if problems occur while using the procedures for free mailing for the blind and visually handicapped?

A: Most problems can be resolved at your local Post Office. You may make inquiries or express concerns by telephone, letter, or in person. If a problem cannot be resolved satisfactorily at your local Post Office, you may call

our Customer Service toll-free number at 1-800-ASK-USPS (1-800-275-8777) or write to the Consumer Advocate at the following address:

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