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Designed to send books, sound recordings and certain media items with an educational purpose, USPS Media Mail makes it more affordable for your business to mail packages that may be large or heavy. However, to take advantage of the lower prices, you'll need to make sure your shipments follow the USPS Media Mail rules. These rules include restrictions on the contents of Media Mail packages, the presence of advertising and the size and weight. USPS Media Mail is considered an economy mailing method that takes longer for your packages to reach the receiver. Generally, it takes between two and 10 days, but delays can occasionally extend this time in transit. USPS can also search your package at any time if it thinks your package contains materials not allowed with the service. Despite the slower delivery time, USPS Media Mail can save your company significantly in mailing costs. You will have the benefit of tracking your packages to make sure they reach customers. To prevent people from misusing the low-cost service to ship non-media items, the USPS has strict Media Mail qualifications that senders must follow. These include: Allowed contents: To qualify to use Media Mail, you need to send certain types of printed material, CDs, DVDs or film. The USPS requires that a book have eight pages or more and that films are 16 millimeters wide or less. Examples of other acceptable materials include educational charts, sheet music, recordings, manuscripts and binders containing loose-leaf pages related to medical studies. Banned contents: USPS Media Mail rules ban you from sending storage drives or video games in packages using the service. This applies even if a computer drive contains documents, multimedia items and e-books. USPS Media Mail requirements also restrict advertising materials. The exception is if you have a book that simply mentions related books or media items but not for the main purpose of advertising these for sale. Size and weight: USPS allows you to send Media Mail packages weighing up to 70 pounds. USPS Media Mail restrictions set 108 inches as a maximum combined girth and length for a package. Larger packages of up to 130 inches (combined girth and length) can use the Parcel Select service instead of Media Mail. Currently, USPS charges for Media Mail based solely on the weight and doesn't consider the mailing zone like it does for other services. If you buy Media Mail in person at your nearest post office, the price begins at $2.80 for a single piece weighing less than 1 pound, and the most postage you'd pay is $40 for a 70-pound package. If you qualify for commercial pricing, the rate starts at $2.10 for a single piece weighing less than 1 pound and can be as little as $39.30 for a 70-pound Media Mail shipment. USPS notes that you may have to pay a surcharge if your package weighs more than 25 pounds. Currently, USPS doesn't allow you to buy postage for Media Mail packages on its website. Instead, you'll need to head to your post office to get your shipping label if you want to go directly through USPS. However, you can purchase Media Mail online through shipping services like Stamps.com and PayPal Shipping Center. You can often qualify for the slightly lower commercial rate when buying online through these providers. Postkasten in Laos image by Digitalpress from Fotolia.com By: Erica Sweeney Updated September 26, 2017 The United States Postal Service (USPS) calls First-Class Mail the least expensive and most accessible of its services. First-Class postage entails as little as a stamp on a letter or as much as about $3 for the heaviest allowable weight. The various types of USPS First-Class Mail include cards, letters, large envelopes, packages and presorted mail. Each type has its own specific guidelines and costs (see Resources). Letters, large envelopes and packages must weigh 13 oz. or less to be sent via USPS First-Class Mail. Dimensions are limited to 108 inches in length and width. Prices for First-Class Mail are based on an item's size and weight. In 2010, these prices ranged from 28 cents for a postcard and 44 cents for a regular 1-oz. piece of mail to $3.26 for a large 13-oz. package.   The USPS estimates that First-Class deliveries take two to three days to reach their destinations.   You can add insurance, delivery confirmation or signature confirmation to any First-Class Mail for additional fees; however, First-Class Mail cannot be tracked.   When you're mailing a letter or package and want it to get to its destination quickly, Priority Mail from the United States Postal Service is an ideal service to use. USPS also offers Priority Mail Express for quicker service. Depending on the type of USPS Priority Mail service you select, the USPS mail delivery time is expected to be between one and three business days. If your letter or package doesn't need to arrive immediately and taking as long as three days for delivery is OK, then USPS Priority Mail is an efficient, affordable service for letters and packages weighing up to 70 pounds. The number of days for delivery depends on weight, distance and whether the destination is in or near a major city or a rural or isolated area. For example, mailing from a city to a close-in suburb or vice versa might only take one day. Mailing to a neighboring state would likely take two days but could take three if the destination is a rural or isolated area. Mailing across the country might also take three days. The one-to-three-day delivery window is an estimate but is not guaranteed with standard USPS Priority Mail. There are some restrictions on USPS Priority Mail, such as the maximum weight of 70 pounds and a maximum combined length and girth (thickest distance around). USPS Priority Mail service comes with numerous benefits: Tracking is included. Insurance of up to $50 is included with most shipments, and you can buy more insurance. * USPS will pick up packages from your home/office for free. There are no extra charges for rural or Saturday deliveries. Mailing envelopes (including padded envelopes) and boxes are provided for free. Flat-rate, regional and prepaid pricing is available, and Forever stamps — which carry the prevailing first-class rate forever — can be used on flat-rate packages. If your letter or package needs to arrive quicker, Priority Mail Express is another option. This is an overnight service, although mailing to certain locations such as rural and outlying areas may extend the timing to two days. You will be notified at the time of mailing if it's likely to take two days, and the one- or two-day timing is guaranteed (with a few exceptions). Priority Mail Express is significantly more expensive than standard Priority Mail, but if extra speed is important, it may be worth the price. Priority Mail Express carries most of the same benefits as standard Priority Mail, except: Included insurance increases to $100, and more can be purchased. Overnight deliveries arrive by 12 p.m. or 3 p.m. or by 10:30 a.m. for an extra fee. Delivery time is guaranteed for most major markets. Sunday and holiday deliveries may be available for an extra fee. Proof of signature is included in the price if you request it at the time of mailing. Many people believe that Priority Mail and First-Class Mail are the same thing. Although both services estimate delivery within one to three days and neither guarantee the timing, there are actually some important differences between the two, the most significant being: Cost: A First-Class letter can be mailed as cheaply as the cost of one stamp, while Priority Mail prices start several dollars higher, even for a letter. Weight: First-Class maximum weight is 13 ounces; Priority Mail's maximum is 70 pounds. Delivery: First-Class mail is delivered Monday through Saturday; Priority Mail is delivered seven days per week in most locations. Other USPS delivery services have different timing and pricing, such as: Retail Ground: This is often cheaper than Priority Mail, but delivery can take up to eight days. Insurance is available but not included in the pricing. Media Mail: Books, 16mm or narrower films, scripts, printed music, educational charts and tests, medical looseleaf pages/binders, video/sound recordings and computer-readable materials can be mailed more economically than Retail Ground, Priority Mail and First-Class Mail, with a delivery timing of two to eight days. Insurance is available but not included in the pricing. Other companies offer similar speed and pricing options. For example, United Parcel Service offers Ground, Three-Day Select and Second-Day Air shipping as well as UPS flat-rate boxes, called UPS Simple Rate. Boxes fit into one of five pricing categories depending on their size; then, you choose the speed you need. Depending on the size, weight and destination of your shipment, it could be worth looking into how quickly UPS and other companies can deliver and at what cost. COD, or Collect on Delivery, is a special option offered by the United States Postal Service for items mailed as Express Mail, Priority Mail, First-Class Mail and most of the regular parcel services. COD is not available for international shipments or for APO/FPO addresses. When you mail a package or letter COD, the postal service will collect payment for the merchandise and the shipping directly from the recipient. Prepare the package or letter for mailing. Take it to your local post office. Select a mailing option, such as Priority Mail or First-Class Mail. Choose any additional services such as Delivery Confirmation or Return Receipt. Tell the clerk you want to use COD. Provide the amount to be collected from the recipient. Pay for the shipment. The post office will reimburse you for the shipping cost, minus the collection fee, when the package is delivered. Notify the package recipient of the COD shipment. The mail carrier will collect payment in the form of a check or cash. Tips The cost of shipping something COD also includes insurance coverage of up to $1,000 if the item is lost or damaged. By Louise Balle Mailing a letter via the United States Postal Service (USPS) is simple and straightforward. Put it in the envelope, write the address, paste on a stamp and mail it off. But when you want to send commercial communications, like magazines, through the post office, you have to go through a few additional steps. Apply for Periodicals mailing permission by filling out Form 3500 (available for pickup from the post office). USPS classifies magazines under "Periodicals mail" with a discounted rate for certain volume mailings. Drop the form off at your local post office and wait for an approval notification for your new Periodicals account. Consult with your local post office representative for exact rules and regulations regarding your planned magazine mailing. Determine the amount of postage required to send each magazine so that you can estimate your total cost. Add the required amount due to your account at the post office where you applied for Periodicals mailing privileges. The rates for presorted mail, where you sort the magazines by zip code or other identifying details before dropping them off, are commonly better than non-sorted. Determine the correct place to print or label the addressee and postage information for each recipient --- usually at the bottom third of the back cover of the magazine. Keep this area of the back cover white (no graphics) when you design the magazine so that the post office can read the address clearly. Print address labels to affix to the magazine or use a postage meter machine that can print addresses directly on magazines. Your local post office representative might instruct you to include your Periodicals account code on the back of the magazines before you send them to your printer. In some cases you can have your printer shrink-wrap each magazine and place the mailing information on the wrapping instead. Bundle the magazines for delivery according to postal regulations. Bundling is organizing and securing the magazines together with rubber bands, shrink-wrap or other twine. You must pick up postage crates to hold the magazines from the post office and then drop off the full crates to the post office for mailing. So, with all of the USPS' staff and infrastructure, what actually happens when you place an outgoing letter in your mailbox or a blue community collection box? Here is a brief rundown [source: SafeCutters]:A postal carrier collects your letter and takes it to your local post office. There, all of the mail is placed on a truck and taken to a mail processing plant. At the mail processing plant, machines separate the mail by shape and size. They also orient the packages so their addresses are right side up and facing the same direction. Your letter gets its postmark, and machines print cancellation lines across postage stamps to prevent them from being reused.A unique fluorescent bar code is imprinted on the back of each piece of mail. An optical scanner scans the address, and then a bar code representing the specific address is sprayed on the front of the envelope. If the scanner can't read the address, the letter is manually sorted.Other processing machines read the bar codes and direct the letters into bins based on ZIP codes — this indicates the next processing plant in the region where the letter will ultimately be delivered. (Each post office is served by a mail processing plant.) From the bins, the letters are sorted into trays by ZIP code and flown or trucked to the next processing.At the final processing plant, sorting machines read the bar codes and sort the letters by carrier and into delivery order for that carrier.The letters are taken to the individual post offices, and the carriers load the trays into their individual vehicles for final delivery. Your letter won't be thrown out if you don't follow the guidelines, but using them can speed up delivery.Print both the delivery and return addresses on the same side of your envelope or card and make sure they're running parallel to the longest side.Capital letters are preferred. Don't use punctuation.Use at least a 10-point type and a plain font. The address should be legible at arm's length and be able to be read by a machine.Always put the attention line (e.g., "Attention: John Doe") ABOVE the delivery address. Don't put it below the city and state or in the bottom corner of your mail piece.If you can't fit the suite or apartment number on the same line as the delivery address, put it on the line ABOVE the delivery address, NOT below it.Be sure to include words like "east" and "west" if they are part of the address. These are called directionals and are VERY important to ensuring your mail piece is delivered.

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