



# UNIT-3

## Mail Services and Shipping

### Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Evaluate which postal service best suits their needs
- ✓ Understand the various different types of shipping services
- ✓ Ensure every letter and parcel reaches its destination on time and in good condition

## Unit 3

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##### **Beyond a Letter and a Stamp**

Mail is an important method of communication between a company and the outside business world. The administrative assistant usually handles the daily processing of mail. This may include sorting the mail and distributing it to the proper departments or individuals. It may also include opening the employer's mail, prioritising it, and gathering the necessary preliminary information needed to answer specific requests or solve problems.

Sending out business mail involves much more than a letter and a stamp, even when those letters are sent by the hundreds of thousands. There are larger documents and packages to be mailed, varying timetables to be met, and destinations ranging from next door to around the world. Dozens of work-saving, timesaving, money-saving strategies can help move mail more efficiently

A competent assistant should become acquainted with these profit-boosting moves, from the best physical ways to prepare the mail to the advantages of one mail service over another. He or she should also keep abreast of Royal Mail's rules and regulations and methods of moving the mail. Neither you nor the company may need all this information at present, but companies constantly change and grow. The assistant who can fulfil a company's new mailing needs—or who knows where to get the information quickly—is invaluable.

##### **Addressing for Success**

A company is judged by the way its letters are composed and spaced on the pages, and even by the manner in which its envelopes are addressed. All of this does more than simply create a good impression; it affects whether the mail is delivered in a timely fashion.

Royal Mail relies on computerized mail-processing machines optical character readers (OCRs) and bar-code sorters (BCSs) designed to increase the speed, efficiency, and accuracy of processing mail while keeping postal operating costs down. Consistently accurate delivery, faster mail turnaround, and greater profits are just some of the ways your company can benefit from this state-of-the-art system.

## The Administrative Assistant's and Secretary's Handbook

This high-speed equipment is programmed to “read” and sort up to thirty-six thousand pieces of mail per hour. That’s ten pieces every second. But if your company’s mail is not technically compatible, these sophisticated machines will not be able to sort it. Your mail will have to be sorted by hand, and the company will miss the related benefits of the equipment.

Two factors determine whether mail is considered technically compatible: (1) mail that is “machinable” or, in other words, the right size and shape to speed with ease through the equipment; and (2) mail that is electronically “readable,” or capable of being read, coded, and sorted by the equipment.

The following is a list of the most common addressing problems:

- Not enough contrast
- Script-type font used
- Address not visible through window
- Address slants
- Serif type font
- Not all capital letters
- Characters touch
- Logo behind delivery address line
- Information below delivery address line

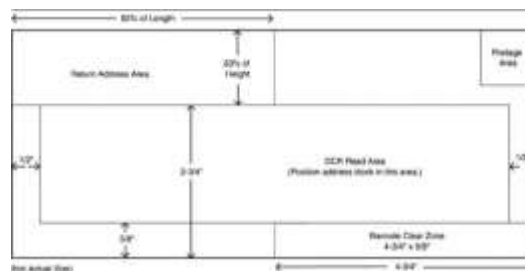


Figure 3.1

## How Your Company Can Receive the Benefits

There are a variety of issues related to successful mail delivery, such as the size of your letters, address information and location, bar-code area, the use of windowed envelopes, and print quality.

## Size

Begin by making sure that your letter mail is the proper size. The maximum size for a first class letter is 12 inches by 15 inches by  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches thick. Items of the proper size will speed through the machines without a hitch.

Envelopes or cards smaller than the minimums will not be delivered. Letter mail larger than the maximums may be mailed, but it must bypass the OCR and be processed through slower and less efficient manual or mechanized methods. It may also be subject to a surcharge even though the postage is correct for the weight.

## Address Location

The OCR looks for the address within an imaginary rectangle on each piece of mail called the OCR read area (**Figure 3.1**). Make some quick measurements of your company's envelope stationery. The OCR will not have trouble finding the delivery address if it's located within the following boundaries:

- Sides of the rectangle:  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch in from the right and left edges
- Bottom of the rectangle:  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch up from the bottom edge
- Top of the rectangle:  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches up from the bottom edge

To provide the OCR with the information needed for the finest sort, put all the lines of the address within the above area. If that is not possible, it will still help to place as many address lines in the OCR read area as you can. A WORD OF CAUTION: Make sure no portion of the return address appears in the read area.

## Foreign Addresses

Foreign mailings should have the country name printed in capital letters as the only information on the bottom line. The postal delivery zone, if any, should be included with the city, not after the country. For example:

LUIS ENSOR  
23 MAPLE CT APT 4  
ANYTOWN, CA 99887-7665  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### Non-Address Information

Extraneous (non-address) printing that appears in or near the OCR read area could cause the piece of mail to be rejected. To ensure that the equipment locates and reads only the delivery address, non-address information (advertising copy, company logos, etc.) that must appear in the read area should be positioned above the delivery address line. In other words, the space below and on either side of the delivery address line within the read area should be clear of all printing and other markings, not actually part of the address. Positioning such information as far away from the address as possible also helps.

### Bar Code Area

After reading an address, the OCR will print the appropriate bar code on the bottom of the piece of mail. Then, by reading the code, BCSs quickly route each envelope and card to its destination. But BCSs recognize only bar codes and reject mail that has some other type of printing where the bar code goes. Make sure the bar code area (see **Figure 3.1**) remains free of all markings.

### Window Envelopes

If your company uses window envelopes, be certain that the entire address is always visible, even during full movement of the insert. If part of the address is hidden, the OCR will reject the envelope and send it off for manual or mechanized processing.

### Address Characters

The OCR will read most typewritten and other machine-printed addresses (see **Figure 3.2**). It cannot read type styles such as script, italic, and highly stylized characters. It also has trouble deciphering dot-matrix print if the dots that form each character are not touching each other. Among the best typeface designs to choose from are those known as sans serif.

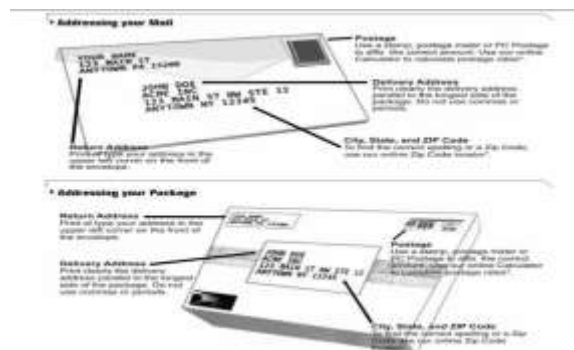


Figure 3.2

## Print Quality and Colour

Print quality is of great importance to the OCR. It quickly reads clear, sharp print but may not be able to distinguish characters that are faded, broken, or smudged. Black ink on a white background is best. Although certain colour combinations are acceptable, the OCR cannot read the address if there is not enough contrast between the ink and paper. Keep the ink as dark as possible and the background as light as possible.

## Spacing

Spacing between characters, words, and address lines is equally important. The OCR must see a clear vertical space between each character and each word, or it will not know where one ends and the next one begins. For similar reasons, it needs a clear horizontal space between each line of the address.

## Postal Automation: Encoding for Business Mailers

Even if an address is sharply imprinted and speeds through the OCR, the letter itself won't be deliverable if the information in the address is incorrect. If your company maintains its address list on computer, Royal Mail can help you here, too. Suppose your company has an in-house list of its best customers. An Online Business Account (OBA) may be able to help you streamline and simplify postal operations across the board. Head over to the official Royal Mail Online Business Account website at this address for more information: <https://www.royalmail.com/business/>

Royal Mail provides this service for your business because the benefits are mutual: for your company, more accurate and readable addresses, which provides faster sorting of mail and fewer undeliverable pieces (undeliverable Third-Class Mail is money thrown away), and for Royal Mail, more efficient moving of the mail, saving it money, which can then be passed onto customers by holding the line on rates.

To clean up your mailing list, here is what you can do with your account:

1. Standardize your address list, making sure cities match the postcodes on the list.
2. Change all characters to uppercase for increased readability by automation equipment.
3. Correct minor misspellings and add missing directions and suffixes.
4. Validate or correct each six-digit postcode.
5. Access a report on any address that cannot be coded. For example, you'll discover which address needs an apartment or suite number to be complete or which address does not exist as given.

## Packaging

Much of the mail you'll be asked to send out as an administrative assistant will consist of letters and documents. But even with a mailroom on the premises, you may have to prepare and send out the occasional package yourself.

For a package to arrive in good condition at its destination, it's important to observe four basic principles in packaging your shipments:

Use a corrugated container. These "cardboard boxes" come in a variety of strengths and weights. Primarily, there are three basic types: single-wall, double-wall, and triple-wall containers. You can tell the difference by examining the sides of the box and noticing the number of layers. Single-wall containers have two out-side liners and a wavy corrugated medium in the middle. Double-wall containers have two wavy corrugated mediums in the middle separated by a third liner. Triple-wall containers have three corrugated mediums and a total of four liners.

Select a box that is large enough to allow some room around the contents in every direction. This will protect the contents from punctures, tears, or rips on the corners or side of the box when turning in transit.

Boxes are available from many shipping supply companies, as well as mailing and packaging chain stores. Make sure that the box will support the weight of your shipment. Every box has a stamp printed on it specifying the maximum weight it will support. Double-wall and triple-wall containers are stronger than most single-wall boxes. It is not a good idea to reuse shipping containers unless they are in good shape and will not be supporting much weight. Moisture and other shipping conditions tend to lessen the strength of corrugated containers.

To see whether a box is strong enough for mailing your item, look for the manufacturer's strength certification on the bottom of the box. The first and last measurements are the most important to you. "BURSTING TEST" shows you (in pounds per square inch) how well the fibreboard can resist rupture or breaking. "GROSS WT LT" shows you (in pounds) how much weight the box can hold. Once you know the load type, weight, and size of your item, you can use **Table 3.1** to choose a box by grade if necessary.

### Maximum Weight of Box and Contents

Easy and Average Loads (pounds)	Difficult Loads (pounds)	Maximum Length Plus Girth (inches)	Box Grade
20	—	67	125
40	20	100	175
65	40	108	200
70	65	108	275
—	70	108	350
—	70	130	350

**TABLE 3.1 Box Grade Requirements**

#### Protect the contents

Use wadded-up newspaper, crumpled brown grocery bags, air bubble pack, foam peanuts, or shredded paper. Depending on the contents of the package, it may be a good idea to wrap them in plastic as well to keep the packing material from sticking to them or getting inside. The packing material should be placed on the bottom, on all four sides, and on the top to provide several inches of protection between the contents and the sides of the box.

#### Close the box securely

Most shipping companies, including Royal Mail, will not accept boxes tied with string. Nor should you use masking tape or regular cellophane tape; neither has enough strength to keep the box closed. Instead, use carton sealing tape, pressure-sensitive place tape, water-activated paper tape, or water-activated reinforced tape. In general, you should apply three strips of tape to the top and the bottom. One strip should seal the box, and the other two strips should seal the sides.

#### Use the proper labelling

Make sure you include a postcode; as an added precaution, you may want to include the addressee's telephone number. Your company's return address is also important. You never know if the recipient has moved or is out of town and cannot receive your shipment. In some cases, your shipment can be held at the destination, but there are time limits on this. It's also a good idea to pack a copy of the label with all of the identifying information inside the box so if the outside label is damaged or removed, the shipper can determine the destination by opening the box. When applying your labels to the package, always place them on the top, away from seams or box edges. Then apply several strips of clear carton sealing tape over the label to prevent it from falling off.

You should write both addresses in waterproof ink (or type them on a label), using letters that can be easily read from 30 inches away (arm's length). Ten- to 12-point type is a good size for computer-printed labels.

The address format preferred by Royal Mail uses uppercase letters and has a uniform left margin in the address block. For example:

MR. THOMAS CLARK  
117 RUSSELL DRIVE  
LONDON  
WLP 6HQ  
ENGLAND

On the outside of your parcel, you should put special markings like those listed below. They let postal employees know the nature of the parcel's contents. But do not assume that the markings in themselves will keep your parcel from getting damaged.

- Mark "Fragile" on parcels that contain breakable items.
- Mark "Perishable" on parcels that contain food or other items that can decay or spoil.
- Mark "Do Not Bend" on parcels that contain photographs, artwork, or similar items, but only if they are protected with a stiffener like fibreboard.

You should put these special markings in three places: above the address, below the postage, and on the back or bottom of your parcel. If you prefer, ask a post office window clerk to rubber stamp your parcel with these markings.

For odd-shaped or extremely fragile objects, it's best to check with the shipping service for advice on how to package the item and the best way to send it.

### **Hazardous and Illegal Items**

Except as permitted by mailing standards, it is illegal to send through the U.S. Mail any article, composition, or material that can kill or injure a person, obstruct mail service, or damage property. Harmful matter includes, but is not limited to

- All kinds of poison or matter containing poison
- All snakes, turtles, spiders, poisonous animals (except scorpions), poisonous insects, and poisonous reptiles
- All disease germs or scabs
- All explosives, flammable material, and mechanical, chemical, or other devices or compositions that can catch fire or explode

There are also legal restrictions on who may mail the following items and how they must be prepared for mailing:

- Firearms, knives, and sharp instruments
- Drugs and narcotics
- Other controlled substances as defined by British laws and regulations
- Live animals
- Locksmithing devices
- Vehicle master keys

Certain potentially harmful or dangerous articles and substances may be mailed if special packaging and labelling requirements are met. Contact your local postmaster for details, or head download Royal Mail's official PDF guide at the following address:

<https://www.royalmail.com/sites/default/files/royal-mail-prohibited-and-restricted-items-may-01-2018--23745440.pdf>

### **Forwarding First-Class and Other Mail**

UK mail can be forwarded for up to one year for an extra charge. All post offices have information about holding mail, temporary changes of address, and forwarding and return of other classes of mail. See <https://www.postoffice.co.uk/mail/redirection> for more information.

### **Other Special Mail Services**

In addition to the services already outlined, Royal Mail offers a wide variety of other options to provide customers maximum convenience and to give individual pieces of mail special handling or protection.

Any piece of mail traveling by one of these special services must be so labelled. The appropriate marking (registered, insured, certified, delivery tracking, etc.) should be placed above the delivery address and to the right of the return address.

### **Post Office Box and Caller Services**

Post office box and caller services are available at many post offices for an annual fee. Post office box delivery is a secure and private means of getting your mail any time the post office lobby is open. With post offices conveniently located near most businesses, you can get a jump on your day by picking up your company's mail at a post office box in the morning.

Caller (pickup) service, available when post office retail windows are open, is for customers who receive a large volume of mail or those who need a box number address when no boxes are available. Call your post office for more information.

## **Passport Applications**

You can apply for a passport at an extensive network of Post Office branches nationwide. Official regulations require that each applicant present two recent photographs (2 inches by 2 inches), valid identification, and a certified copy of his or her birth certificate, along with the appropriate fee when applying for a new passport. The passport fee may be paid in different ways, including in cash, by cheque, or by credit card. However, it is much faster to apply online and the overall costs are significantly lower.

## **Postal Orders**

Because you should never send cash through the mail, postal orders are a safe way to send money when cheques cannot be used. It's possible to send up to £250 by way of a secured and insured postal order, which effectively works like a cheque though with no need for a bank account.

If your postal order is lost or stolen, present your customer receipt, and the money order can be replaced. For a small fee, you can obtain a copy of a postal order for up to two years after the date it is paid.

## **Address Changes**

Before moving from one location to another, each company or individual should speak to their local post office. It's also possible to make amendments to your address online, simply by filling out the form at the following address: <https://www.royalmail.com/personal/receiving-mail/update-your-address>.

## **Click and Collect Service**

Royal Mail offers a Click and Collect service, which enables customers to collect their mail in person from their chosen branch from anywhere in the country. There are more than 10,000 Post Office branches that offer the Click and Collect service, which may be easier and more convenient than waiting around for mail to arrive at your home or business address. Full information can be found at <https://www.royalmail.com/business/services/sending/efficiency/local-collect>

## **UK Return Services - Tracked Returns**

A Tracked Returns service is available for the benefit of sellers and buyers alike. The service enables one of your company's customers to return a parcel and have the postage paid by you. Under this arrangement, the company provides the customer with instructions and a special label to attach to the parcel if it must be returned. The customer applies the label to the parcel and deposits it at a post office or in a mailbox. Unless the label is provided, the customer must pay the required postage charges.

## **Registered (Signed For) Mail**

Registered Mail service provides the mailer with a receipt and a record of the delivery of the item mailed from the post office from which it is delivered. No record is kept at the post office at which the item is mailed. Registered Mail is handled in the ordinary mail and is not covered by insurance. The matter mailed usually has no intrinsic value, with the sender wishing only to be sure that it has been sent to the correct point of receipt. If the item mailed does have intrinsic value, it should be sent via registered mail, not certified mail. Registered Mail may be sent special delivery if additional postage is paid. An additional fee is also charged if delivery is restricted to one specific recipient.

### **Insurance**

Protection against loss or damage to packages with contents valued in any amount up to £10,000 is available. The fee is based on the amount of insurance desired. Insurance can be purchased for most types of items to be posted, though there are restrictions to factor in. Further information can be found at the following address: <https://www.royalmail.com/business/services/sending/parcels-uk/next-day-delivery>

Do not over-insure your packages since the amount of insurance coverage for loss will be the actual value, minus depreciation. No payments are made for sentimental losses or for any expenses incurred as a result of the loss. For example, if you send a package containing a three-year-old computer that was originally purchased for £2,500, its actual value (due to depreciation) might only be £800. Even if you insured the computer for £2,500, if it were damaged or lost, the insurance would pay only the current value of £800.

### **Special Handling**

Special handling service is required for parcels whose unusual contents require additional care in transit and handling. Special handling is not required for parcels sent by typical First-Class and Second-Class services. Examples of contents requiring additional care and thus, special handling—include live poultry or bees. Special handling is available for certain types of mail only, including insured mail and Click and Collect mail. This service provides preferential handling to the extent practical in dispatch and transportation.

Special handling service is not necessary for sending ordinary parcels even when they contain fragile items. Breakable items will receive adequate protection if they are packed with sufficient cushioning and clearly marked “FRAGILE.” Use registered mail for valuable or irreplaceable items.

### **Information on the Internet**

A wealth of information is available at your fingertips when you visit the website of the UK Post Office at [www.royalmail.com](http://www.royalmail.com). You can look up postcodes, track your mail, get information on the latest postal rates, and find answers to frequently asked questions.

If you keep exploring, you can find postal news releases and learn about the history of the Royal Mail. You can also find helpful security tips to help ensure your letters and parcels always arrive safely at their destinations. The website is continually changing, so you should visit often for new postal information. You also have an opportunity via the website to make inquiries and request additional information.

### **Alternatives to Royal Mail**

Although documents, letters, and advertisements are most commonly shipped through Royal Mail, it is likely that your company will also use an alternative form of service. Here's a quick overview of some of the most popular alternative delivery options right now:

#### **MyHermes**

A relatively new service known as [MyHermes](#) has been getting a lot of attention as of late, primarily due to the fact that it is one of the lowest-priced postal services in the UK. To have a parcel collected from any given address and transported, it may cost in the region of £3.30 and take around three days to arrive. Nevertheless, if you actually head out to a MyHermes Parcelshop, delivery times are reduced significantly and the transaction costs 30p less. Insurance worth £25 covers the vast majority of parcels posted, though is subject to a relatively long list of exceptions - all of which can be found on the MyHermes website.

#### **Collect+**

What's interesting about the [Collect+](#) service is how your parcels are not collected from your address and nor are they transported directly to your customer. Instead, you take them personally to a designated point - typically a local shop - after which they are transported to a second designated point where the customer can collect them. The whole thing can be tracked from start to finish and it can be so much more convenience than queuing at a conventional Post Office. Prices vary significantly in accordance with the size and weight of the parcel, with standard insurance provision on every package included of £50.

#### **Parcel Force**

Despite the fact that the Royal Mail Group does own [Parcel Force](#), it's still technically an alternative to their standard postal services. Though slightly more expensive than some of the alternative options available, Parcel Force is nonetheless extremely reliable and provides free insurance coverage of £100 as standard. Plus everything is tracked from start to finish, with the option of

Saturday deliveries at an extra fee if necessary. Postal costs when using Parcel Force can be minimised by taking your parcels to the Post Office personally, but it's also possible to have them picked up from the address of your choosing if preferred.

### **iPost Parcels**

This relatively new service is also great for accessing immediate quotations online, based on the size and weight of the parcel being sent. A typical parcel in the region of 1kg can be sent and received within 2 to 3 days for little over £4. Prices are reduced by £1 for those who take their parcels directly to an iPost depot. Insurance coverage is limited to £25 as standard, but this is still quite reasonable considering the low costs of the services provided. More information can be found at the official [iPost Parcels](#) website.

### **ParcelHero**

ParcelHero is a reliable and reputable courier service that's also one of the easiest to use. The company organises convenient pickups from and deliveries to just about any location, with standard insurance coverage of £50 included on every parcel. They're not the cheapest courier service on the market, but they work exclusively with the most robust and reliable carriers in the UK and abroad. Hence, they can be counted on to get the job done on-time while ensuring your shipment arrives safely.

### **Whistl**

If you're only coming across [Whistl](#) for the first time today, it could surprise you to learn that these guys are currently handling incredible 26% of *all* UK mail. Suffice to say, they're a pretty huge and well-established postal service, specialising in door-drop leafleting and media services. For any business planning a traditional postal media campaign or mass distribution initiative of any kind, Whistl really is a force to be reckoned with and an affordable postal partner to bring on board.

### **InPost**

[InPost lockers](#) have transformed the way millions of businesses and households worldwide send and receive goods. It's simply a case of registering your shipment online, printing out the label and taking the parcel to your nearest locker. Your parcel is deposited and held safely, sent to the closest locker to the recipient and collected at their convenience. Best of all, InPost operates on a 24/7 basis and has huge coverage in the UK and abroad. Far more convenient than waiting around for couriers and a surprisingly affordable solution for small and large businesses alike.

### **UK Mail**

Formally known as Business Post, [UK Mail](#) offers a variety of postal services designed specifically for businesses. There are no contractual obligations and parcels can be both collected and delivered

as quickly as the next day. The company offers an extensive range of helpful resources and supplementary services for small and large businesses alike, designed to simplify the process of sending challenging or regular shipments of any kind to any address. They also make it quick and easy to access competitive quotations via their website.

### **UPS, DHL and FedEx**

These three major global shipping companies provide a huge range of express and economy services for business and private customers. From urgent same-day courier services to the transportation of challenging shipments worldwide, UPS, DHL and FedEx are trusted by thousands of business to help them get things done.

You'll find full information for all three at the following addresses:

- **UPS** - <https://www.ups.com/gb/en/Home.page>
- **FedEx** - <https://www.fedex.com/en-gb/home.html>
- **DHL** - <https://parcel.dhl.co.uk/>

## **Other Shipping Services**

### **Air Freight**

For special situations, such as large packages or packages that must be delivered to another city or country as quickly as possible, air freight services are available from many airlines and specialty air freight companies. Some have special offices at the airport for same-day shipments. These shipments must usually be dropped off at the freight office and picked up at the destination freight office. The fees are much higher than other next-day air and two-day air shipments.

### **Trucking Freight**

For large shipments and heavy or bulky packages, there are many trucking companies that specialise in hauling freight. These companies will load the shipment at your place of business, transport it to the destination, and unload it for a fee that is usually quite competitive. Depending on what you are shipping and where it is going, truck shipping can take anything from one day to several weeks.

### **Courier Services**

If you need to ship a package to an address within a matter of hours, your best bet is a courier service. These companies operate in most large towns and cities and provide pick-up and delivery services 24/7. The prices for these services vary depending on the distance travelled and the weight and size of the package. Most of the time, the charge is paid in advance by the sender. Courier services are protected/insured against theft or damage. For documents and other small items,

many taxi companies also provide a courier-type service. Check online for courier services or taxi services in your area.

**Further Reading:**

