



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

Computer technology has transformed the way businesses communicate with the outside world. Nevertheless, organizations worldwide continue to rely on conventional mail and shipping services. A variety of everyday mailing and shipping duties will typically fall within the responsibilities of the administrative assistant. Posting letters, parcels and important documents needn't be complex, but is nonetheless a responsibility that needs to be taken seriously and handled with care.

Sending important business mail is about more than simply throwing a stamp on an envelope and placing the letter in a post box. Various factors need to be considered, including postage timetables, postage costs, insurance and the countless different postage options available for parcels and letters alike. An effective mail and shipping strategy can save a business time and money.

Hence, it is the responsibility of the administrative assistant to take a proactive approach to everyday mail and shipping. Along with keeping on top of their own duties and workload, the administrative assistant should ensure they understand all rules and regulations set out by their country's main postal service - i.e. the UK's Royal Mail. Employers count on administrative assistants to handle mail and shipping on their behalf in a professional, punctual and reliable manner at all times.

Addressing for Success

It's important to remember that every letter you post says a lot about you and the business you represent. Even the way you print and position the address on the envelope or parcel has an impact on the individual or business receiving it. Clarity and neatness should therefore be prioritised.

In addition, it's important to remember that Royal Mail uses computerized processing machines - optical character readers (OCRs) and bar-code sorters (BCSs) - to boost the speed and efficiency of its processes. If the addresses you print on your letters and parcels are not clear, complete and perfectly legible, it may be difficult or even impossible for these automated systems to read them. As a result, the risk of delayed or misplaced post is increased.

Size

If you are posting standard letters, you need to think carefully about the size of the envelope. In the United Kingdom, the maximum size for a first class letter is 12 inches by 15 inches by $\frac{3}{4}$ inches thick. Stick within these limitations for first class post and your letters will be processed quickly and efficiently.

Where letters are larger than the accepted maximum sizes, they may still be posted, though could require the recipient to pay an additional charge. Alternatively, they may be returned to the sender, or simply held at the sorting office if there's no return address. The same also applies to the maximum permitted weight of the letters and packages you send, which you will need to check before sending anything nonstandard.

Address Location

Optical character readers are programmed to scan letters in a specific area on the front of the envelope, as depicted in Figure 3.1. As a rule of thumb, you must acknowledge that the address on the envelope may be difficult for the system to automatically read, if it doesn't appear within the boundaries outlined below:

- 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

OCR technology is becoming more sophisticated all the time and now has the capacity to read addresses that are not necessarily *flawlessly* clear, along with those that may breach these boundaries to a degree. Nevertheless, it still makes sense to follow all of these best practices, in order to ensure your mail arrives at the correct address in a timely manner.

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

Along with providing insufficient information for your letter to reach its intended destination, there's also such a thing as including too *much* information. Any non-address information you include on the envelope or packaging should be positioned as far away from the address area as possible. Examples of which could include company logos, marketing text and general extraneous information - all of which could be read by the optical character reader and interfere with its identification of the address. Use the address area on the envelope exclusively for the address.

Bar Code Area

When the optical character reader has successfully read and interpreted an address, a barcode will then be printed towards the bottom of the envelope. This will assist the journey of the piece of mail on its way to reaching the recipient. Once again, it's therefore a good idea to ensure as little extraneous information as possible is printed within the barcode area.

Window Envelopes

Window envelopes provide the clearest possible indication of where the address should be printed. Nevertheless, it's important to ensure that every letter of the address is clearly visible. Any part of the address hidden outside the confines of the window could lead to the piece of mail being rejected.

Address Characters

Optical character readers can identify most standard printed and typewritten characters with impressive accuracy. However, some systems may struggle to correctly identify script, italic, and highly stylized characters. It may also be more difficult to correctly identify letters printed faintly or inconsistently, where a printer's ink may be running low, for example. Among the best typeface designs to choose from are those known as sans serif.

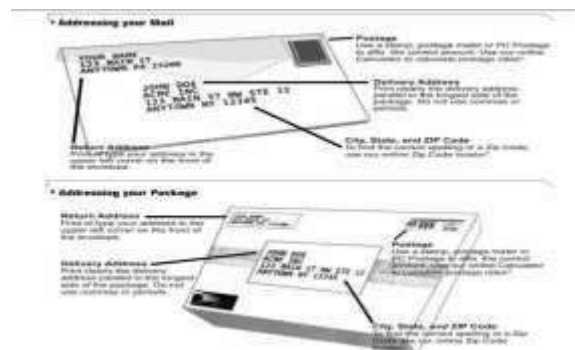


Figure 3.2

Print Quality and Colour

Once again, it's important to ensure that the quality of the printed address is sufficient to be read by the OCR. This includes making sure the printer has enough ink, choosing an appropriate colour and ensuring the final result isn't in any way faded, smudged or generally inconsistent. As a rule of thumb, sticking with classic black text on a white background is the best way to go. The more unusual the colour - paper and ink alike - the more difficult it becomes for the system to read it correctly.

Spacing

The same also applies to spacing between address lines, words and characters. If there is not a clear space between each word and character, the system will be unable to determine where one ends and the next begins. Try to avoid bunching words and characters together too closely, even if the address you need to print is comparatively long and complex.

Postal Automation: Encoding for Business Mailers

Of course, all of the above is inconsequential if you don't indicate the correct address on the piece of mail in the first place. If you have an extensive address list and post a lot of letters on a regular basis, you could benefit from a certain level of automation. By opening an online business account - available via many national and international postage services worldwide - it may be possible to simplify and streamline some of your most important mailing requirements. Head over to the official Royal Mail Online Business Account website at this address for more information: <https://www.royalmail.com/business/>

This service is made available by Royal Mail because it offers mutual benefits for all parties involved. A business account makes it quicker and easier for the customer to send mail, simplifies identification and sorting processes for Royal Mail and ensures the recipient receives every letter and parcel in a timely and consistent manner. Depending on how much mail you post, you could also save significant sums of money with a business account.

Detailed below are a few ways you can clean up your mail list at work with a business 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

Preparing and sending letters can be relatively easy - packages tend to be a slightly different story. As an administrative assistant, most of your mailing duties will involve letters of a standard size. Nevertheless, you will also be required to post nonstandard packages and parcels from time to time.

In order to ensure every package arrives at its destination in good condition, there are four primary packaging principles that should be followed:

1. Use a quality corrugated container

Roughly translated, you'll want to use a container of an appropriate strength and weight to suit the requirements of the shipment. There are three basic types of corrugated cardboard boxes - single-wall, double-wall, and triple-wall containers. Each of the three providing a different level of strength and protection for the contents inside.

It's important to ensure that whatever is inside the package, you leave a decent amount of space between the contents and the sides of the packaging. This is to reduce the chance of damage in the event that the outer packaging is torn, punctured, dented or generally compromised during transit.

Depending on the shipping company you work with, they may provide their own boxes that are already approved for postage at a certain rate. You may also need to think about the requirements of whatever it is you are posting. For example, does it need to be posted in flawlessly waterproof packaging? You may choose to reuse cardboard boxes for mailing as part of your office's recycling program. But before doing so, you will need to assess whether or not the box in question is strong and durable enough to transport its contents safely.

Checking whether a box is strong enough to safely post an item is often as simple as examining the strength certification indicated by the manufacturer, typically printed on the bottom. "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

The extent to which you protect the contents within the packaging is up to you, though should be considered carefully in accordance with the nature and fragility of the contents. It may be possible to use screwed up or shredded paper to protect the contents, or you may choose to go with packing peanuts, polystyrene or bubble wrap. You have to expect that at some point during the journey, the box may be dropped, flipped upside down or be exposed to some kind of impact. You therefore need to ensure that the contents are protected to the top, the bottom and all four sides.

Close the box securely

These days, the vast majority of shipping companies will refuse packages that are not securely closed. Always use a strong and durable type of pressure-sensitive tape, using several layers where necessary to ensure the package is appropriately sealed. It may also be possible to seal the package using a special type of glue, but closing boxes using tape is the easiest and most common method.

Use the proper labelling

Particularly when posting anything of value, it's worth including additional information on the package, such as the recipient's telephone number and a full return address. There are various reasons why a package may not successfully arrive at its intended destination, so you need to ensure it doesn't simply disappear into thin air. If you intend to print the address label and stick it to the package before sending, ensure it is affixed using several layers of tape to prevent it falling off.

Always use waterproof ink if writing directly on a package, using letters that can be easily read from 30 inches away (arm's length). 10- 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

It may also be appropriate to include additional markings and instructions on the parcel, which should be printed as boldly and prominently as possible. Examples of which include the following - none of which necessarily guarantee they will be heeded by those handling your parcels:

- 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.

If you choose to include any of these additional markings, they should be positioned on the back or bottom of your parcel, below the postage stamp or above the address. You can write/print them yourself, or ask the clerk at post office to stamp them on to the parcel on your behalf.

If you are posting anything particularly fragile or unusual, contact Royal Mail for their advice, or speak to a clerk at your local post office.

Hazardous and Illegal Items

Every country has its own extensive list of illegal and prohibited items, which cannot be sent by normal post. As a rule of thumb, it is typically illegal to send anything that has the potential to cause injury, damage to property or an obstruction to the services provided by royal mail.

A few examples of which include the following:

- ❓ All kinds of poison or matter containing poison
- ❓ All snakes, turtles, spiders, poisonous animals, 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 several classifications of items that may in some instances be posted, though are subject to heavy restrictions, such as:

- ❓ 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 = 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 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. If you have a post office located close to your office, you may find it convenient to use a post office box to collect your mail in person each morning.

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.

Should your postal order go missing during transit or be taken without your authorisation, you simply need to take your receipt to the post office and it will be replaced. Copies of postal orders can be requested up to two years after the original date of payment.

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 any 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. A clear record is kept of the movement of the piece of mail, from the moment it is posted to the moment it arrives. A registered letter or parcel cannot be delivered until the recipient signs for it. This makes it difficult for registered post to simply 'go missing' and is therefore a popular choice when posting important or valuable items. However, there are some items that cannot be sent by registered mail, or are not covered with any kind of insurance in the event that they are lost or damaged. Speak to your local post office for more information.

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 required. 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. 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 may be necessary when posting parcels and packages with unusual or particularly fragile contents. Contact your local post office directly to discuss

Further Information Online

A vast amount of information is available at your fingertips when you visit the website of the UK Post Office at 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 wish to do so, you can also find the latest postal news, or 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 in the UK 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 should 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: