



# Mailing Free Matter for Blind And Visually Handicapped Persons

## Questions and Answers



This pamphlet has been produced by the Consumer Advocate, U.S. Postal Service. It is designed to answer the most often asked questions about free matter for the blind and other visually handicapped persons. The information contained in this publication is based on E040 of the *Domestic Mail Manual* and *United States Code*, title 39, sections 3403–3405.



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**Q:** Who may qualify to mail items free of postage?

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

Other handicaps that can prevent normal reading include disabling paralysis, muscle or nerve deterioration affecting coordination and control, and confinement in iron lungs or other mechanical devices. Among the causes of such conditions are cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, arthritis, infantile paralysis, myasthenia gravis, and diplegia.



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**Q:** What must a person do to be eligible to mail items free of postage?

**A:** The person must have a competent authority certify in writing that he or she is unable to read conventional reading material. A competent authority includes a licensed medical doctor, ophthalmologist, optometrist, registered nurse, or professional staff member of a hospital or other institution or agency. The statement is to be submitted to the post office where postage-free mailings will be made or received by the blind or visually handicapped person. The person is then considered eligible to use the free mailing privilege.

**Q:** Which material may be mailed free of postage?

**A:** Under the conditions specified below, the following material is eligible:

1. Books, magazines, musical scores, and other reading matter, or pages or parts thereof, in raised characters (*Braille*), large print, or recorded form.
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 used for writing by eligible persons or for educational purposes.

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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 material?

**A:** The material 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.

The mail is subject to inspection by the Postal Service.



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

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

Commercial producers of the above material may mail such material free of postage to an eligible person on the additional condition that whatever charge, fee, or rental required does not exceed the cost of the material.

**Q:** Can letters be mailed free of postage?

**A:** Letters in raised characters (*Braille*), in 14-point or larger sightsaving type, or in the form of sound recordings may be mailed free of postage **from** an eligible person. Handwritten or typewritten letters, however, 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

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eligible persons and letters in any form when mailed **to** eligible persons from ineligible persons.

**Q:** Why must letters be mailed unsealed?

**A:** To allow inspection by postal authorities to ensure that the materials qualify for mailing free of postage.

**Q:** Are special services available for free mail for eligible persons?

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



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All matter sent by all special services, such as Express Mail, certified mail, or registered mail, requires payment of postage plus the full fees charged for the special postal services.

**Q:** What must be marked on mail to show that it is qualified 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. Customers should contact their 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.



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

**A:** Yes, the same general rules apply, except that the articles 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. Discs, 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.



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**Q:** Where might an individual turn for help if problems occur while using the procedures for free mailing for the blind and handicapped?

**A:** Most problems can be resolved at your local post office. Customers may make inquiries or express concerns by telephone or letter, in person, or by using our convenient consumer service cards. These postage-paid cards are available at all post offices. If a problem cannot be resolved satisfactorily at your local post office, you may write to:

CONSUMER ADVOCATE  
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE  
475 L'ENFANT PLZ SW RM 5821  
WASHINGTON DC 20260-2200



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