

A Practical Guide



to Postal Services



The Consumer Council

Sending Letters & Parcels

Residential Consumers

For many of us, sending letters and parcels means making a trip to the post box or post office.

The majority of residential consumers use Royal Mail to send letters and parcels. In the parcel market however, competition is growing and provides consumers with a range of choices, including:

1. Parcel Collection - parcel companies which operate in NI will pick up items from your premises and deliver to the designated address.
2. Parcel Drop-off - rather than have your parcel collected, you can drop off your parcel at a local convenience store that is registered with the delivery company, or use designated parcel lockers.
3. Online Discounter/Middlemen - companies which purchase postage slots in bulk from parcel operators and sells them through a comparison website to the public.

Business Consumers

Many small businesses use the same postal services as residential consumers, by buying stamps and sending mail through Royal Mail's post boxes or Post Office Limited's branch network.

For some businesses with high letter and parcel volumes, a number of options do exist which could reduce their postage overheads. These can include bulk mail services, alternative postal operators, franking machines or hybrid mail companies. For further details, see our contacts section.

By following the checklist below, consumers can not only save time and money, but ensure their mail arrives on time and they are entitled to adequate redress, if things go wrong.

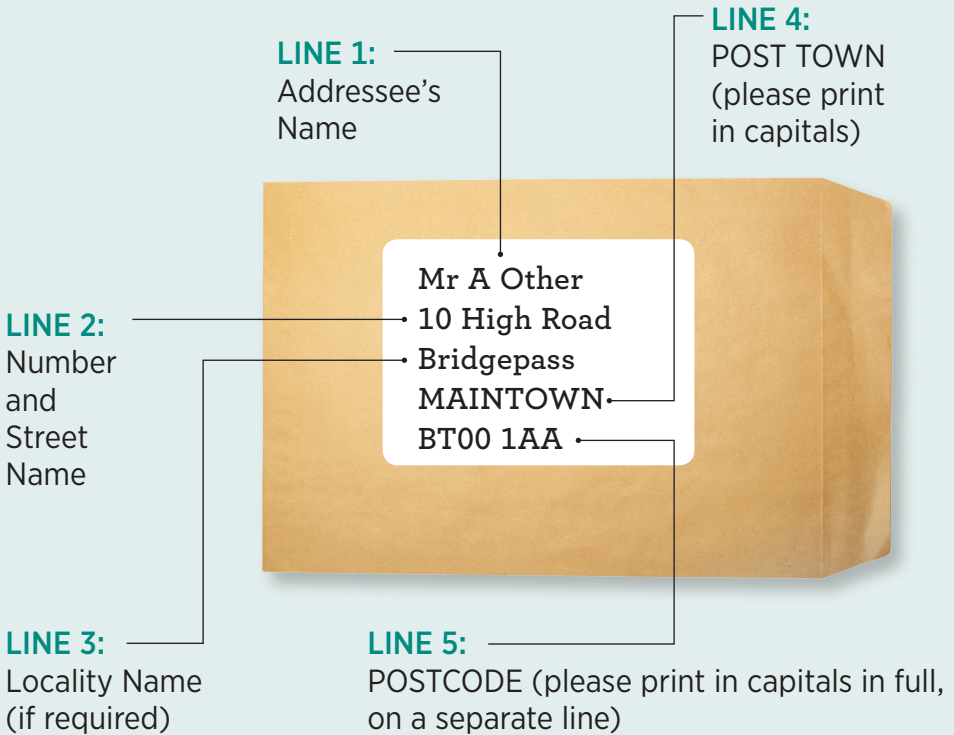


Mail Checklist

- ✓ Check the recipient's address and make sure it is clearly labelled
- ✓ Consider the size and type of envelope you need
- ✓ Always check if you can send the contents of your mail item through the postal network or if any restrictions or prohibitions apply
- ✓ Ensure items are adequately wrapped
- ✓ Check the size and weight of your item
- ✓ Always include a return address
- ✓ Choose your parcel speed and cover you need
- ✓ Pay the correct postage
- ✓ Proof of posting
- ✓ Consider where to take your mail for posting

1. Check the recipient's address and make sure it is clearly labelled

Include the house number or name, street name and postcode on a separate line. You can use Royal Mail's address finder at www.royalmail.com/postcode-finder



TOP TIP

Avoid using very small or square envelopes to send cards and letters.

DID YOU KNOW?



Poor packaging voids postal insurance and compensation claims - so make sure your parcel is well wrapped.

2. Consider the size and type of envelope you need

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When sending greeting cards or correspondence using dark coloured or red envelopes, use a white label to display the address.

3. Always check if you can send the contents of your mail item through the postal network or if any restrictions or prohibitions apply

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When sending valuable items to the UK or international destinations, you are responsible for checking whether or not the contents of your mail item are restricted or permitted to be transported through the mail network. If in any doubt, check with the postal company you are using or if using Royal Mail check at any Post Office branch or Royal Mail website.

Many everyday items, such as aerosols, nail varnish and perfumes are considered dangerous goods under transport legislation.

4. Ensure items are adequately wrapped

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This is particularly important for sending parcels with fragile contents. Choose a strong but lightweight box or container. Don't forget about extra padding like bubble wrap.

5. Check the size and weight of your item

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The amount you pay depends on the size and weight of the item you're posting. If using an online service, be sure to measure and weigh your parcel accurately to avoid surcharges.



6. Always include a return address

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Put this on the back of the parcel or envelope. If for whatever reason the item cannot be delivered, it will be returned to you.

7. Choose your parcel delivery speed and cover you need

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Choosing the right postal product can not only save you money, but it can ensure your item arrives on time and if any problems occur you can receive compensation.

Consider:

- Is your letter time sensitive?
- Do you require additional cover or insurance?
- Is it important to have your item tracked?
- Do you require proof of delivery?



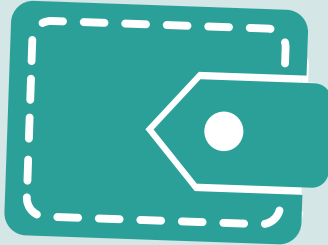
How to save money when posting?

Shop around for a cheaper tariff, perhaps using comparison sites.

Consider posting non-urgent items by an economy service, such as second class.

Safely reduce the size of your mail items by reducing the packaging or folding your item.

Be careful if the item is fragile, not to compromise its protective packaging.



TOP TIP

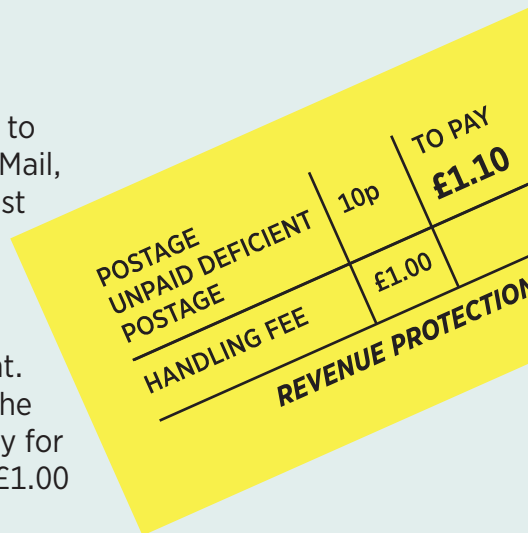
If sending cash or vouchers, check if the service you select will provide compensation in the event of loss or delay.

8. Pay the correct postage

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Choose which method you would like to pay for your postage – If using Royal Mail, this can be through stamps, at the post office counter or online.

Alongside the type of postal product you choose, the cost of sending items will also depend on its size and weight. If you don't pay the correct postage the intended recipient will be asked to pay for the shortfall and an additional fee of £1.00 before the item is delivered.



**DID YOU
KNOW?**



You must complete & attach any customs declarations when sending items outside of the EU.



Post Office Ltd.
Your Receipt

10 High Road
Bridgepass
MAINTOWN
BT00 1AA

Date and Time:	18/03/2014 14:01
Session Prefix:	5-1808389
Dest: UK (E.U.)	
Quantity:	1
Weight:	0.020 Kg
Special D by 1	£500 £4.95
Total Cost	£4.95

9. Proof of posting

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Ask at the counter for proof of posting when posting your items at your local post office or parcel drop-off point.

This is your proof that you sent the item and is required to receive compensation if your item is lost, damaged or delayed. Without this the postal operator may not pay compensation.

Ensure your proof of posting is date stamped and contains the destination of your postal item.



10. Consider where to take your mail for posting

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If using Royal Mail, customers can take their item to any post office branch in Northern Ireland or post at any postbox.

When using a Post Box, it is important to note the time of last collection, which should be clearly displayed, as this will inform you if you have missed today's collection.

Some alternative parcel operators offer collection at your premises or drop-off at convenience stores. For business consumers or large volume users, the postal operator will usually offer a collection service.



Complaints

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A quick two-step guide to complaining.

Step 1 - Complain to the postal operator. Most companies will acknowledge your complaint and attempt to resolve your issues.

Step 2 - If you remain unhappy with the outcome and the postal operator is registered with the UK Independent Postal Redress scheme, you can refer the matter to them for free. See their website www.postrs.org.uk or 020 7520 3766 for more details.

The Consumer Council represents postal consumers, providing independent advice and guidance on postal service complaints. If you need advice or require extra assistance, you can contact us on 0800 121 6022 or complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk

Contacts

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Please note that this is not an exhaustive list, and inclusion on this list does not imply a recommendation from the Consumer Council.

For domestic consumers:

Parcel Collection

Royal Mail	www.royalmail.com , phone 03457 740 740 or tweet @RoyalMail
Post Office	www.postoffice.co.uk , phone 03457 22 33 44
Parcelforce	www.parcelforce.com
Nightline	www.nightline.ie
Yodel	www.yodeldirect.co.uk
TNT express	www.tntdirect.co.uk
DHL	www.dhl.co.uk
UPS	www.ups.com

Parcel drop off

Collect+	www.collectplus.co.uk
myHermes	www.myhermes.co.uk
Mailboxes etc	www.mbe.co.uk

Online brokers

NI Parcels	www.niparcel.com
My parcel delivery	www.myparceldelivery.com
Parcel2go	www.parcel2go.com

For business consumers:

Businesses may also use the domestic parcel companies listed.

Postal Operators

Royal Mail	www.royalmail.com
Whistl	www.whistl.co.uk
Postal Group	www.postalgroup.com
Fastway	www.fastway.ie
DPD	www.dpd.co.uk



The Consumer Council



Complaints line: 0800 121 6022



Tele/Textphone: 028 9067 2488



Fax: 028 9065 7701



E-mail: info@consumercouncil.org.uk
complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk



Website: www.consumercouncil.org.uk



Consumer Council Northern Ireland



ConsumerCouncil

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