

NLS Network Library Manual

3. Laws

3.2 Postal Regulations

1. Overview. This section contains the current postal regulations as they apply to the Library of Congress program for providing reading materials to blind and physically handicapped individuals.

Standards governing matter that can be mailed free of postage for the use of eligible individuals are set forth in Section 703.5 of the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM)

http://pe.usps.gov/text/dmm300/dmm300_landing.htm
(<http://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/703.htm#wp1113979>).

Copies are maintained at all post offices. The standards are based upon federal statute, specifically sections 3403–3405 of Title 39, United States Code.

The NLS Office of the Director has assigned the head of the Network Services Section to act as liaison between NLS and the United States Postal Service (USPS). In response to requests from the network, the liaison provides information concerning the scope and restrictions of free-matter postal regulations and, as much as possible, helps to resolve free-matter mailing difficulties as they arise.

Free mailing is a privilege. Network librarians and eligible individuals gain the greatest benefits under these regulations when they comply. The following will help network librarians apply these regulations in their daily interactions with readers and postal officials.

2. Eligibility. It is not necessary for a blind or physically handicapped person to be registered with a network library or any other federal or state agency to take advantage of free-mailing privileges. The USPS may require individuals claiming entitlement to the free-matter privilege to furnish evidence of eligibility consistent with those in DMM Sections 703.5.1.3 or 703.5.1.4, or verify by other means that the recipients are eligible to receive free matter.

Libraries; organizations; agencies; schools; commercial firms; sighted, nondisabled volunteers; and other individuals may mail braille, large-print, or recorded reading materials for use by blind or physically handicapped persons. All conditions of the regulations must be met, i.e., the material contains no advertising. Packages must be wrapped so that they can easily be examined by postal authorities. Envelopes and flats may be sealed with the understanding that, if necessary, they will be opened and inspected by the post office (DMM 703.5.2.2.c).

3. Acceptable Matter. Books, magazines, music scores, and other reading matter in braille, large-print, and recorded format, as well as certain equipment can be mailed postage free when such material is being mailed specifically for the use of a blind or physically handicapped person. This includes mailing to agencies or organizations serving blind or physically handicapped persons when such materials are for the use of the latter.

For the purposes of free matter, large print comprises upper- and lower-case characters 14 printer's points or

greater, or about 4.5 millimeters from top of ascenders to bottom of descenders in lower-case letters. The entire document, except for the address itself, must be in large print whenever printed words are used. Postal officials interpret the phrase in the regulations “14-point or larger sight-saving type” to include only printed or typed characters. Handwriting or hand printing is unacceptable, no matter how large the letters or how dark the ink.

Commercial and noncommercial music or other sound recordings that may be usable by people who are blind or have handicaps, but are not specifically designed for their use, cannot be mailed postage free.

Correspondence. Letters qualify for free mailing if they meet specific conditions:

- The sender must be a blind or other qualified handicapped individual.
- The letter must be unsealed.
- The letter must be in braille, in 14-point type, or in sound-recorded format. Letters prepared in handwriting or with conventional-sized print must bear postage at the applicable rate.

Postage must be prepaid when mailing letters in the following categories:

- No provision is made for letters prepared in any form by sighted, nondisabled individuals, including volunteers, to be mailed to a blind or physically handicapped individual without proper postage. A library cannot send a braille, large-print, or sound-recorded letter to one of its patrons without paying postage.
- No letter, regardless of format, may be enclosed in a mailing container for braille or recorded books or in a mailing container for sound reproducers for recorded books.
- Bills paid by mail, such as rent, utility, or payments on credit accounts, must bear the required postage.

Library-Related Material. Library-related information such as circulars, newsletters, catalogs, and bibliographies intended for blind and physically handicapped readers can be mailed postage free to such readers provided the material meets the postal criteria regarding format, i.e., large-print, braille, or audio format. These materials need not be part of the Library of Congress program. Postage is required for newsletters, bibliographies, and the like mailed to sighted, nondisabled addressees.

Surveys and order forms in braille, large-print, or recorded format may be mailed to blind or other physically handicapped persons postage free, and returned by the recipients postage free, providing that the contents of the

material applies equally to all to whom it is sent and is neither directed to, nor requires a response from specific individuals.

Handicapped persons must be given the opportunity to indicate their choices or selections on surveys and order forms by using checkmarks or some such similar device. If surveys and order forms contain open-ended questions that require completion by handwriting, they may not be returned to the library postage free. The USPS will allow eligible individuals to add, in any form, their name and address to large-print and braille order forms and to return the order forms as free matter. Any messages added to order forms in handwriting disqualify the piece as free matter. USPS Customer Support Ruling PS-108 explains this provision. Visit the USPS Postal Explorer at <http://pe.usps.gov/>, select “Customer Support Rulings” and search the term “blind” to retrieve all customer support rulings pertaining to this service.

Volunteer-Produced Materials. Conventionally printed music scores, books, magazines, and other reading material in a print size smaller than 14-point type cannot be mailed postage free, either by handicapped individuals or by organizations, even though the intent is to transcribe or record such matter for the use of blind and handicapped persons.

Postage must be paid when mailing volunteer-produced reading material to commercial firms for binding or duplication.

Shipments of supplies from manufacturers to be used in assembling braille books (e.g., notebook binders, plastic 19-inch spines, and book backs) do not qualify for free mailing.

Sighted, nondisabled volunteer transcribers and typists may mail braille, recorded, or large-print books, magazines, or pages thereof postage free, to eligible, disabled individuals for their use or to an agency or organization serving blind and physically handicapped persons. As previously indicated, printed material mailed with the intent of transcription may not be mailed free.

Equipment. Braillewriters, typewriters, educational or other materials or devices, or parts thereof, can be mailed postage free if such matter is used for writing by or is specifically designed or adapted for the use of a blind or physically impaired person. Included in such equipment are sound playback equipment, braille watches, white canes, computer disks that are used for braille books, and typewriters especially designed or modified for blind or handicapped users.

Commercially available equipment that is accessible to members of the sighted, nondisabled public must be specially modified for the use of handicapped persons; otherwise it will not qualify for free mailing.

Pickups. The USPS has no obligation to pick up parcels from blind or physically handicapped persons or from the libraries and organizations that serve such persons. It is

sometimes possible, however, to make informal arrangements with local postal officials for mail to be picked up, particularly in hardship cases.

4. Inquiries and Complaints

Patron Complaints. Patrons may need assistance to resolve free-matter postal problems that arise from time to time. These problems may vary widely but are generally related to verification of materials to be mailed free, pickup and delivery, or the eligibility requirements for taking advantage of the free-mailing privilege. In the case of patron inquiry, patrons should first be referred to local postal officials for assistance.

If a positive resolution of a postal problem cannot be reached, patrons should be referred to:

Consumer Advocate
U.S. Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW
Washington, DC 20260-2200

The consumer advocate represents the interests of individual consumers, responding to consumer needs and concerns. Complaints and concerns regarding services provided by the USPS may be addressed by calling the toll-free customer service number 1-800-ASK-USPS (1-800-275-8777). If you wish to contact the USPS by e-mail, please visit www.usps.com and select "Customer Service" from the bottom of the web page. Select "Send Us an E-mail." Select the appropriate topic from the drop-down

box: “Information,” “Problem,” “Suggestion,” or “Compliment.” The contact options change depending on which topic is selected. If “Problem” is selected, choose one of the five tabs identifying the area of the problem. Then select the appropriate item from the drop-down box and any subsequent drop-down boxes. Enter your query in the box marked “Additional Information.” A form for your address will display. Complete the required fields and submit your request. You may print a copy of your request if you like and then submit your e-mail for response.

Reporting Lost Mail. If mail is known to have failed to arrive at its intended destination within a reasonable length of time or has arrived with the contents damaged or missing, librarians or others who mailed the material should complete PS Form 1000 “Domestic or International Claim” (http://www.usps.com/forms/_pdf/ps1000.pdf). No policy has been set regarding the reasonable length of time that must lapse after a free-matter mailing before completing a PS Form 1000. Inquiry should be made as soon as possible after discovery of mail loss, damage, or missing contents.

[Network Services Section](#)

Last updated 04 2010

comments to nlswebmaster@loc.gov