



Envelopes Play an Important Role

“Begin with the end in mind.”

Stephen Covey /
The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

This happens all too often... a project is conceived, designed, and printed before any thought goes into how it will be mailed. When this happens, typically an envelope is selected that doesn't fit correctly. When we say begin with the end in mind, we're suggesting that early in the planning process some thought should be given to how the project will be distributed; specifically, what type and size envelope will be used.

If you intend to mail your brochure, invitation, thank-you card, or other material, it is a good idea to size the piece to fit in a standard envelope. Although it is possible to have envelopes custom-manufactured in a special size, the process is expensive and not feasible for fewer than 10,000 envelopes.

Envelopes are made for many purposes, so it is useful to categorize them according to use.

Commercial envelopes are used for business purposes such as correspondence, direct mail, and invoicing/payment. Commercial envelopes are typically made of 24# basis weight paper in either fine writing or white book/offset grades in these popular sizes:

- **#10**, measuring 4.125 x 9.5: an 8.5 x 11 sheet (such as a sheet of letterhead or a brochure) that is tri-folded fits perfectly into a #10.
- **#9**, measuring 3.875 x 8.625: (slightly smaller than a #10): also holds a tri-folded 8.5 x 11 sheet, and will also fit into a #10. Often used as a reply or remittance envelope.
- **6 3/4**, measuring 3.625 x 6.75: fits into a #10, so can also be used for reply or remittance. Also holds a smaller statement.

These three sizes are all available with a standard window (placement in lower left corner) and with inside tint for security. The most common sealing method is glue that needs to be moistened.



Large envelopes are used for mailing bulkier material, booklets, or multiple sheets where folding is undesirable. There are two styles of large envelopes: catalog and booklet. A catalog envelope has the flap located on the shorter side, while a booklet envelope has the flap on the longer side. Large envelopes are typically made of 24# or 28# stock, either white wove or manila. The most popular sizes are:

- **6x9**: holds 8.5 x 11 sheets folded in half.
- **9x12**: holds 8.5 x 11 sheets without folding.
- **10x13**: holds 8.5 x 11 sheets without folding but has more capacity than 9x12.

Common sealing methods are glue, peel-and-seal, metal fasteners, and button & string.

Specialty envelopes are used for social correspondence and invitations. A good rule of thumb when choosing the size of a specialty envelope is to have at least .25 inch more in height and width than the insert. The most popular specialty envelopes are:

- **Baronial**: typically available in white or off-white stock. This envelope has diagonal seams and a pointed flap and can be used with a panel card or fold-over card of coordinating size. Used for formal announcements, invitations, greeting cards, and some personal stationery. The most popular sizes are:

- o #4: 3.625" x 4.625"
- o #5 ½: 4.375" x 5.625"
- o #6: 5" x 6"
- o #7 or Lee: 5.25" x 7.25"

Each size of baronial envelope will fit into the next largest size. Because of the pointed flap, baronial envelopes usually cannot be sealed by machine.

- **Announcement:** also called A-style, these have side seams and square, deep flaps and are available in more kinds of stock than a baronial. Used for invitations and personal stationery, the most popular sizes are:
 - o A-2: 4.325" x 5.75"
 - o A-6: 4.75" x 6.5"
 - o A-7: 5.25" x 7.25"

Each size of announcement envelope will fit into the next largest size.

It is easier to understand envelope construction if you first look at an envelope as a blank, or simply in its unfolded form. Although some envelopes may require unique construction, the majority consist of four basic parts:

- The flap
- The face (this is the solid side of the envelope, opposite the seams)
- The side seams (or wings)
- The bottom seam

The side seams and the bottom seam fold together to form the back of the envelope. When fully formed, the envelope consists of three basic sections: flap, face, and back. Envelope lengths and heights are dimensions that help the manufacturer determine which envelope machine should be used to produce the envelope.

Modern envelopes offer a variety of sealing methods:

- *Moisture activated* (also known as “lick and stick”) has a gum applied to the flap. Envelope manufacturers have developed moisture activated envelopes that perform particularly well when sealed by machine.
- *Press and seal* has two flaps, each with a strip of latex that adheres when pressed together.
- *Peel and seal* has a paper strip over the latex for protection. Remove the strip and press the flap to seal.
- *Metal fasteners* are common on large catalog or booklet envelopes, particularly those made of manila stock.

- *String and button*, a metal or paper button with a string that wraps around the button, are common on an envelope that will be opened and closed frequently.
- *Tamper-evident* has a perforated strip on the top flap; once opened, it cannot be resealed.

Amazingly, it wasn't until the development of adequate machinery in the twentieth century that mass production of the envelopes we use today even became a possibility. Despite the development of machines to highly automate modern envelope manufacturing, the steps in the process are the same as in the 1840s; create envelope blanks from sheets of paper, affix glue and adhesive, and fold.

Envelope blanks are cut from large sheets of paper with a steel die, akin to the way a cookie cutter cuts dough. The size and shape of the blank varies depending on the size and type of envelope being manufactured. If needed, windows are cut and transparent material glued into place. Glue is applied to the seams of the envelope, and moisture activated glue is applied to the flap. The final step is folding the blanks to form the envelope.

The large sheets of paper from which envelope blanks are cut can be printed prior to die cutting on either the outside or inside of the finished envelope. Outside printing is often decorative, while a tint on the inside provides a “no-peek” safety feature.

Envelopes can present some unique printing challenges. Here are two to consider when deciding how the envelope will be designed:

- When printing an envelope, a bleed is any printed element that extends beyond the edge. A full bleed means the printed elements extend beyond all four edges. Since it is not practical to print right to the edge of an envelope, typically the image needs to be printed first and then converted into an envelope. This may not add much expense if a large number of envelopes are being printed, but can add quite a bit as a percentage on short runs.
- Because the thickness of envelopes may vary due to how they are folded and glued, this may present a printing challenge due to the unevenness.

Envelopes still play an important role in business communications and transactions as well as direct mail marketing. We can help guide you through the choice of envelopes for various purposes to help you find the perfect application. To discuss options, call 513-248-2121 for an appointment.

worlds

a vocabulary of the graphic arts

#10 envelope: Standard size envelope often used for business correspondence. Sometimes called a commercial or official style envelope.

Announcement envelopes: a style of specialty envelope with a straight flap used for invitations and personal stationery. Also known as A-style.

Aspect ratio: the length of an envelope divided by the width. Used by the USPS to determine whether an envelope shape is rectangular. Rectangular envelopes are eligible for the best postage rates.

Baronial envelope: a style of specialty envelope with a pointed flap used for invitations and personal stationery.

Blanks: a flat sheet of paper cut to the proper size and shape to be converted into an envelope.

Booklet envelope: envelope with the flap on the long side.

Catalog envelope: envelope with the flap on the short side.

Commercial envelope: a category of envelopes used for business correspondence, direct mail, and invoicing/payment.

Converting: making an envelope from an envelope blank cut from a flat sheet of paper.

Franking: affixing postage to an envelope.

Lettersheet: illustrated sheets of paper that could be sealed and sent through the mail with no envelope.

Mulready: illustrated postal lettersheets and envelopes used briefly in Britain in 1840. Named for the artist, William Mulready.

Peel and seal: a type of envelope closure method.

Penny Black: the first British adhesive postage stamp. Printed using the Jacob Perkins printing process to deter counterfeiting and forgery.

Postal wrapper: a precursor to the envelope, introduced in 1840 in Britain. Sold as a sheet of 12 printed in a diamond pattern, requiring the user to cut them out, fold, and affix a seal.

Press and seal: a type of envelope closure method.

T H E I D E A

Storing Envelopes

Like all paper products, envelopes perform best if stored correctly. Here are recommendations to prolong the shelf life of your envelopes:

- Store envelopes in dry, well-ventilated areas. Humidity can affect the glue on the flap, causing it to prematurely react. This can result in blocking where the flap sticks to the envelope. Ideal storage conditions are temperatures of 65-85 degrees and 35-65 percent relative humidity.

- Place boxes and cartons on a shelf or raised surface to prevent moisture from the floor getting into the boxes.
- Keep boxes and cartons closed to guard against damage from moisture.
- Store envelopes tightly packed and resting on the side, not lying flat.

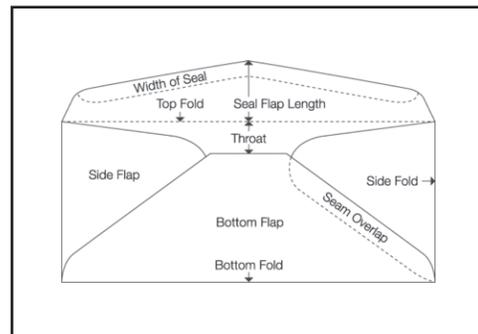
The Anatomy of an Envelope

The anatomy of an envelope illustrates why heavy ink coverage in certain locations on the envelope may show a faint line. The drawing shows that envelopes have two areas – the seam overlap on the left and right – where there are two plies of paper. And since envelopes are printed with the flaps closed, that adds an additional ply where the flap covers the seam overlap.

Envelopes printed on an offset press contact a blanket – a spongy material wrapped around the press cylinder. The sponginess of the blanket provides some give, allowing the inked blanket to adapt to a paper surface that might not be entirely even. But when the blanket encounters two or three plies of paper, it can't adapt enough. The result is an uneven ink lay-down in those areas.

Normally this isn't apparent. But if the art design of the envelope calls for a heavy solid in one of these multi-ply areas, the ink coverage may be compromised.

If you require an envelope with heavy ink coverage in an area, please call us to see if it would be best to have the envelopes printed prior to converting (the process of making an envelope from a flat sheet).



Q.

I'm planning a traditional direct mail campaign. Will the envelope size affect the postage rate?

A.

This is an excellent question to ask now, in the planning stage. The answer is yes. Envelope size does affect postage.

The United States Postal Service (USPS) divides mail into four basic categories: cards, letters, large envelopes, and packages. Envelopes are usually in the letter or large envelope category. (Mailing services, and the USPS, call large envelopes flats.)

The best postage rate for presorted bulk mail (either first class or standard mail), is for letter-sized mail. In this category the envelope must be rectangular in shape – that is, the length must be greater than the width, and the address

block must be parallel with the length. The envelope dimensions can range from 5 to 11.5 inches in length and 3.5 x 6.125 inches in width provided the aspect ratio – the length divided by the height – is between 1.3 and 2.5. Finally, the envelope with all its contents cannot exceed ¼ inch in thickness and must be flexible enough to make the turns in USPS high speed mail processing equipment. (There is an easy test for this that we can explain if needed.)

Of course you are free to design and use any size and shape of envelope you feel is needed for a direct mail campaign. Just be aware that postage costs for non-standard envelopes – including those in dark colors – may be very high.

questions and answers