

HOT TIPS

Computers are a time-saving and fun way to write up a collection. By encouraging children to put their technology skills to use, stamp collecting will become even more appealing.



etc., should only be mentioned if they have special relevance to the theme. However, if a stamp exists in more than one perforation, then you might put the perforation measurement under the particular stamp, even in a thematic collection, to show awareness that more than one perforation exists.

More hints about how to write up your collection, especially for competition, are available from the NYSC.

The other leaflets in this series are-
'How to Start Your Stamp Club'
'Developing Your Stamp Club'
'Safeguarding Your Members'
'Need More Help with Your Club?'

Let's get
**STAMP
ACTIVE**



understanding the basics of stamp collecting



The Terminology of Stamp Collecting

Stamp Collecting has its own terminology which can seem baffling at first. Not all will be relevant to the young collector. Here are a few of the terms which are most frequently encountered.

Album

A good place to keep stamps is within a stamp album. These are available from large stationers and stamp dealers. There are many types available and your choice will depend on your pocket. You can find albums which are 'fast bound' (that is the pages are stapled together like a book), or 'loose leaf' so that you can easily add or remove pages.

Some albums have country names printed at the top of the pages. While these are fine when a youngster is starting to collect, they can soon prove restrictive. Some pages remain blank because no stamps are found from the particular country; others are overflowing because that country's stamps are plentiful.

Often the young collector wants to develop the collection in a particular way, even concentrating on stamps which tell a particular story or relate to a certain theme. In such cases albums with pages blank at the top are best. These will still have a fine grid pattern printed on the page to help arrange the stamps neatly.

If the cost of an album is too much, you can use blank paper. It is best to use good quality A4 paper which is strong. White or cream is preferable, although other pastel shades can be used - darker colours will detract from the stamps.

Only mount the stamps on one side of the paper, using small paper 'hinges'. Place each sheet in a transparent plastic protector and keep them in a binder. Inexpensive binders and protectors are available from most stationers and stamp dealers.

Before actually mounting the stamps on an album page, many collectors like to assemble their stamps in a stockbook. These books have pages with pockets into which the stamps can easily be slipped. They are ideal to help young collectors see what stamps they have, where

Watermark

A design incorporated into the paper during manufacture. The watermark can usually be seen by holding the paper up to a strong light, and looking through the paper. At one time many stamps had watermarks as a security measure, but today this is far less so. There are many gadgets available to help see the watermark, but generally youngsters are not really interested in an aspect of a stamp which cannot be seen readily.

However an easy and cheap method of seeing the watermark is to use a black watermark detector tray in which the stamp is placed face down so that the watermark can be seen.

What are Stamps?

There is sometimes some confusion as to what is a stamp. For our purposes we are referring to the adhesive postage stamps issued by and freely available from a recognised Post Office. Unfortunately there are items produced which purport to be adhesive postage stamps but which have not been produced by a legitimate Post Office.

The best advice is to check in a stamp catalogue. Be careful to search all possible parts of the catalogue and beware if it is a new issue which has not yet appeared in the catalogue.

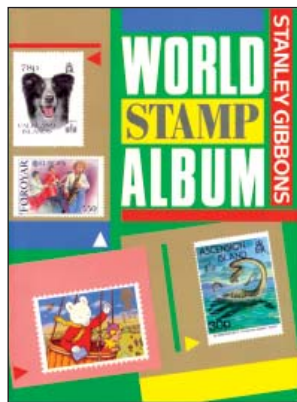
Sometimes countries issue stamps aimed solely at the collector, and for which there is no legitimate postal need. The editors of the catalogues often relegate such issues to the back of the catalogue, to a section called 'Appendix', so that collectors realise the status of such stamps.

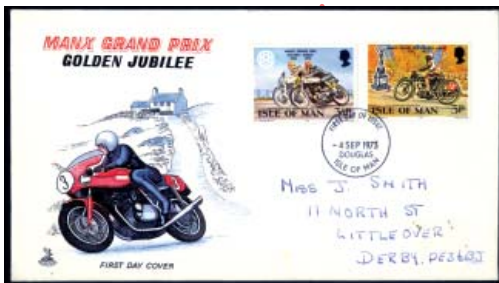
Writing Up

This is a short description of the material shown on the album page. It should be neat, brief and relevant to the type of collection.

If the collection is based on one country, then the information will be very much what appears in a stamp catalogue (date of issue, purpose, any special features, etc.).

If the collection is thematic, the information should be relevant to the theme. Details such as shade, perforation,





A popular item with collectors is the 'first day cover'. This example from Isle of Man shows how many of the 'special issues' today have a thematic connection.

First Day Cover

A first day cover is a specially designed envelope to which is affixed a set of stamps which are cancelled on the first day that they were issued.

The design of the envelope and the cancellation should link with the theme of the stamps.

If a you receive a first day cover through the post, never rip it open (this applies to all envelopes). If you need to open it to check the contents, do so very carefully - steaming is a good idea, but again, take care.

If you are sending a first day cover to yourself, affix the stamps neatly and do not seal the envelope. Also write the address neatly and leave plenty of space for the stamps and the cancellation.

This term also applies to envelopes sent on the first day of a new postage rate. In general, modern first day covers are not highly valued by experienced collectors. However they are a relatively inexpensive way for a young collector to learn about the hobby.

When mounting a cover, postcard or stamp booklet on a page, it is best to use photo corners with transparent fronts. If you do not wish to show the entire cover, mount the cover on the back of the page and carefully cut a 'window' in the page so that only that part of the cover showing the stamps and cancellation shows.

Floating (see below, under 'Gum')

Gum

The adhesive on the back of the stamp. At one time it was common to moisten the back of a stamp to affix it to the envelope; increasingly stamps are self-adhesive so that the stamp will adhere to the envelope after the backing paper is peeled off.

There are special terms to describe the degree of gum on a stamp -

Unmounted mint - this refers to a stamp which has all its gum intact and has never been affixed to an envelope or to a page.

Mint (or Mounted Mint) - as above, but the gum is not intact - possibly because a stamp hinge has been attached to the stamp.

Used - a stamp that has been put on the mail and passed through the postal system. It will therefore have a postmark or cancellation. (Note: at one time, 'unmounted mint' was referred to simply as 'mint', and 'mint' and 'mounted mint' were described as 'unused'.)

Floating or Soaking

This is a way of removing stamps from envelopes by placing them face up in a small bowl of water. They will float on the surface and after a short while the stamp will come away from the envelope - do not force this, it will happen naturally. Once separated, the stamp can be dried between pieces of blotting paper. It is often a good idea to put a book on top of the blotting paper as this will keep the stamp flat.

Kiloware

Many people collect the stamps from their everyday mail, often donating them to a favourite charity. These stamps, described as being 'on paper', are sold in bulk usually by weight. You will be amazed at how many stamps you can get when you buy a kilogram. Such stamps sold in bulk are known as 'kiloware', and are very useful for clubs, providing stamps for your members to use for several meetings.

Meter Mark

Most large companies do not use postage stamps but instead have a 'franking' system for their mail. A machine prints directly onto the envelope, or a label which can be affixed to the envelope, an indication that the postage has been paid. These are called 'meter marks'. Often they have a design which fits in with a thematic collection, and thus they can be included.

Mint (see Gum)

Perforations

These are the tiny holes around the stamp that enable you to separate one stamp from another with ease. The size of the holes can vary, and many stamp collectors like to check the size of the perforation holes (it often happens that two stamps, which might have identical designs, can vary in the size of the perforations).

The size of the perforation is taken as the number of holes (or teeth) in 2 centimetres. So if you see a stamp

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Ask anyone saving stamps for you to ensure that they leave a good margin of envelope around the stamp when they cut it out- especially to avoid damaging the perforations.

Better still, ask friends to keep the entire envelope. That way you can check for interesting postmarks before cutting out the stamp.

Some stamps have ink that easily runs. To prevent the ink from running, place the piece of envelope face up on a damp sponge. It will take a little longer than soaking, but it's a safer method.

Most modern self-adhesive stamps have a layer of normal gum between the stamp and self-adhesive material. This means you should be able to soak them in the normal way. However, if you have difficulty it is better that you keep the stamp still attached to a piece of the envelope. Cut the envelope neatly, leaving a small border around the stamp.



Stamp Mounts

These are plastic pockets in which a stamp is held. They have a clear front and often a black backing. The stamp is placed between the two layers. The back is gummed to affix to the album page. Mounts have the advantage that the stamp is not spoiled by having a hinge attached, but they are far more expensive than hinges. Also they need to be cut carefully to be just very slightly larger than the stamp they are holding (leave about 1mm around the perforations of the stamp). When cutting the mount to size and shape, be very careful not to damage the stamp.

Stockbook (see Album)

Thematics

Traditionally stamps were collected based on the country of issue. This is still feasible - usually such collections are arranged in chronological order of the issue of the stamps. The aim is to complete the sets of stamps as issued.

Thematics is collecting stamps based on a particular subject, for example space, or bicycles. The stamps can come from any country, and you can include postcards, booklets, covers, postmarks and meter marks. Because there is almost a limitless range of subjects, or themes, many of which will link with other hobbies or interests (such as football, cars, animals, flowers, etc.), thematics is a very popular way of collecting with youngsters.

In a thematic collection it is a good idea to try to tell a story, not simply to amass a quantity of stamps on the subject. For example, if you were collecting animals, you might include the life cycle, habitat, food and location - thus thematic collecting is particularly educational.

Thinned or Torn (see Condition)

Tweezers

These are special tongs used to handle stamps. It is best to use stamp tweezers in preference to other types which may have sharp edges, rather than rounded ones. There is always some grease or dirt on your fingers, so the use of tweezers is highly recommended to avoid damaging the stamps.

Used (see Gum)

there are gaps and what duplicates they might swap for other stamps.

Approvals

Often a popular way for young collectors to acquire stamps, approvals are small books containing sets of stamps with each set being individually priced.

Club members can sometimes make up their own approval book for circulation among the other members. Having selected the required set (or sets) and paid for the stamps retained, the approvals book is passed to another collector to make their choice.

Young collectors who request Approvals from a commercial outlet must inform their parents/guardian before proceeding. The dealer producing the Approvals book has to cover the costs of individually mounting all the stamps, while the onus is on the young collector to return the unwanted stamps.

Booklets

A convenient way of buying stamps is in booklets. Often the pages of a booklet are interesting, especially for a thematic collector. Equally the cover is frequently of a special design, again interesting in a thematic collection. If using the cover of a booklet, it is best to put in the entire booklet and not just the cover on its own.



Cancellations

A cancellation is a postal marking that is applied to a stamp to prevent it being used again. Always make sure that the cancellation of a stamp is neat and clean - it should not obliterate too much of the stamp design, unless of course the cancellation is of a design which is applicable to the collection (eg; if you collect birds on stamps the cancellation might show a bird - in such cases remember to include the entire postal marking in your collection and not just the stamp).

Many confuse cancellations with postmarks. A postmark is any marking applied by a Post Office during the transmission of a letter. Types of postmark are numerous and include 'instructional' markings such as 'More To Pay' or 'Gone Away'. A cancellation is a postmark, but a postmark is not necessarily a cancellation.

Never forget stamp booklets - the covers can be ideal for a thematic collection. If possible, try to put the complete booklet in the collection.



A 'Christmas' cancellation, with a Christmas stamp, makes an ideal combination to include in a thematic collection - naturally on the theme of Christmas.



Cancelled to Order

It has long been the practice of some countries to 'print' cancellations on stamps, so that these can be sold to young collectors (often in packets) at under face value. Sometimes such stamps are fine for beginners, and are an inexpensive way of building up the initial collection. However their continued use should be discouraged.

Catalogues

Essentially these are price lists but have the advantage of listing and usually illustrating all the items. There are catalogues not only for stamps, but also for first day covers (particularly those of Great Britain, Channel Islands and Isle of Man) and postcards.

Stamp catalogues take many forms, from a highly specialised work in volumes covering the stamps of Great Britain, to a more simple single volume of Great Britain stamps in which all are illustrated in colour.

Another useful catalogue is 'Stamps of the World', which lists the stamps from around the world in simplified form.

There are also a growing number of catalogues that feature a particular theme, such as birds, fish, animals and so on.

Cinderella

There are many items that look like stamps but which are not postage stamps as such. Those which have been used for revenue purposes are the most common type. Although not commonly used now, one example is the 2d stamp which had to be affixed to all cheques and receipts which were then signed over the stamp.

Some stamps played a dual role; for either postage or revenue. If the stamp is fairly common you should only include a postally used example in a stamp collection-stamps with signatures should generally be avoided.

If you want to know whether you have a postage stamp, check to see if it is listed in a stamp catalogue. If not, it is either a recently issued stamps or, more likely, it will be a 'cinderella'. Some cinderella stamps can have a place in a collection, but care is needed as to whether they are really appropriate.

Postcards

Postcards usually have a picture on one side and address panel and space for a brief message on the reverse. Generally they are not included in stamp collections, but are often included in postal history collections and occasionally in thematic collections. Sometimes a stamp with a linked design is affixed to the picture side of the card (the cancellation can also be of the same theme). These are called 'maximum cards' because they have maximum interest in that the postcard picture, the stamp and the postmark are all linked.



Postmarks (see Cancellations)

Se-tenant

Often stamps of different designs or different denominations are issued joined together. Such stamps are called 'se-tenant'. They are best kept like this and not separated individual stamps.



Occasionally one finds a stamp joined to another, but one is upside down in relation to the other. A pair such as this is known as 'tête-bêche'. These should never be separated as they are more valuable and prized by collectors in this format.

When stamps of two different designs are issued together, they are known as 'se-tenant'. You should not separate them into single stamps.

Special Issues

The name now given by Royal Mail to commemorative stamps.



Stamp Booklets (see Booklets)

Stamp Hinges

These are tiny pieces of opaque paper with gum on one side which are used to attach stamps to album pages. One part of the hinge is affixed to the back of the stamp (near the top, just under the perforations) with the other portion is affixed to the album page. Use only a little moisture on the gum of the hinge - that will ensure minimum damage to the stamp and/or the album page.