

# Ways To Collect

If you are a beginner in stamp collecting, it is probably too soon to narrow your ideas of what you want to collect. First you will need to look at a lot of stamps to determine what is most interesting to you. Others of you who have been collecting for a while may be ready to think about specializing. In either case, don't rush the process. Take time instead to consider some of the ways other people collect stamps.



**Worldwide:** In the past, many collectors collected stamps from all the stamp-issuing entities in the world. In 2008 there were 278 postal issuing entities according to the Scott Catalogue and over 4,500 stamps and souvenir sheets issued worldwide. This is far too many stamps for one person to collect, although there are collectors who try.

**By Country:** Many people collect stamps from their own country, the country their ancestors came from, the country where they once spent a memorable vacation, or a country whose stamps just look interesting. Collecting choices may also reflect your future interests, such as a place you're planning to visit someday. Or you may collect stamps from a country just because you like the sound of the nation's name.

You don't have to confine yourself to one country. Many people collect all the nations that were part of the British Commonwealth, all the countries of South America, or some other grouping. Such collectors usually arrange their stamps in order according to what country they came from rather than the color of the stamp, the date it was issued, or the subject of the picture on the stamp. Within each country, the stamps usually are arranged by date.

**By Topic:** In this kind of collection, you don't sort your stamps by country but rather by what is pictured on them. If you collect birds on stamps, you would put all the stamps picturing parrots together in one place and all the eagles in another, regardless of what nation issued the stamp or when it was issued.



**By Period:** Some people collect stamps according to when they were issued. One common time period is 1840-1940. Others might collect only the stamps issued the year they were born, or only the period between World War I and World War II. Usually the stamps then are subdivided by issuing country.

**By Type:** Other people decide to collect only airmail stamps or only stamps issued as booklets. This category may appeal to you if you are interested in stamps used to pay special services such as special delivery or postage due. We will discuss some of the types of stamps in another lesson.

**Single Stamps:** One particular stamp may interest a collector more than any other. Some people have spent decades collecting and researching a particular stamp or series of stamps. They look at the variations among different copies of the stamp as well as how the stamp was used. One man claims to have more than half a million copies of "his" stamp, and he says he is still learning more about it after thirty years of studying this one issue. Most people, however, do not begin stamp collecting with such a narrow specialty.



**Other Traits:** Some hobbyists prefer to sort stamps by shape, color, or another way that they find interesting or logical. Don't be afraid to be creative.

**Mint or Used or Both:** Most people eventually come to prefer either mint stamps -- stamps that have never been used and look the way they did when they were sold at the post office -- or used ones. Collectors who prefer mint stamps say they enjoy the design as the stamp designer intended it and that cancellations interfere with their enjoyment of the beauty of their stamps. Those who prefer used stamps say they like the fact that the stamps have served their intended purpose of carrying the mail. In addition, collectors of used stamps do not have to worry about preserving the gum and can use inexpensive stamp hinges instead of more costly mounts to attach their stamps to album pages. (We will look at storage options a little later.) Most stamps cost more mint than used, but there are exceptions. Sometimes the cancellations themselves are of interest. Since you have no one to please but yourself, the choice to collect mint, used, or a mixture of mint and used stamps is your decision alone.



Maybe you have a stamp that looks used but really isn't. Typically it will have a very neat cancellation that just touches one corner of the stamp. When you turn it over, you will usually find that the stamp has gum on the back. Chances are that this stamp is "canceled-to-order," also called "CTO." Some countries sell their stamps inexpensively in large numbers to dealers who make up packets of all-different stamps to sell to beginners. Because the issuing nation does not want to sell mint stamps for less than face value (since such stamps eventually might be used to mail a letter), the issuing nation cancels whole sheets of these stamps before selling them. Sometimes ordinary canceling devices are used, and sometimes the "cancel" is put on with a printing press. CTO stamps are usually very inexpensive. Some people refuse to collect them. Others enjoy having a stamp where the design is clearly visible at a cost much lower than what a mint stamp of the same design will sell for. Collect CTOs if you enjoy them, and avoid them if you do not.