Stamp Collecting Fun: A Beginner’s Guide to Stamp Collecting
Why Collect Stamps?

- Colorful images
- Real-life stories
- Variety of topics: art, science, math, history, literature, geography…
Most Important Reason

Stamp Collecting (philately) Is FUN!
What to Collect?

- Topics
- Country
- Colors
- Numbers
- Shapes
- Types
What is a postage stamp?

- Prepays a service AND
- Issued or approved by government or postal service
First Stamps

Penny Black and Penny Red
First U.S. Stamps

1847: Washington and Franklin
Elements of Postage

1. Country name
2. Denomination
3. Topic
4. Perforations
5. Circular postmark
6. Cancellation
7. Color of stamp
Commemorative Stamps

- Important person, place, or event
- Limited quantity
- Available less than 1 year
Definitive Stamps

- “Postal workhorse”
- Printed in large quantities
- Remain on sale for indefinite time
Special Stamps

- Supplemental issues
- Love & Holidays
- Semipostals, like Breast Cancer and American Heroes stamps
Special Purpose

- Particular use: Express, Priority, Official mail, Air mail.
- In past, postage due, special delivery.
Souvenir Sheets

- Mini-sheet
- One or more stamps
- Commemorative inscription or artwork
Cinderellas / Labels

- Fantasy: nonexistent authorities
- Bogus: entity exists but did not issue
- Facsimiles: imitations
- Exhibition seals, local revenues, poster stamps
Revenue Stamps

- Permit
- Documentary
- Excise Tax
- Transfer Tax
Precancels

- Cancellations applied before affixed to mail
- City-State
- Local and Bureau issues
Types of Covers

- First day
- Event
- Cachet
Other Types of Covers

- Free frank
- Postal stationery
- Stampless covers
Other Cancellations

- Fancy
- Slogan
- Meter
- Pictorials
Unusual Terms

- Mint (Unused) vs. Used
- Perf vs. Imperf
- Singles vs. Multiples
- Tete-beche
- Se-tenant
Stamp Formats

- Booklet
- Coil
- Sheets
- Stationery
Cool Tools

- Magnifier
- Tongs
- Hinges
- Perf Gauge
Magic Marks

- Watermarks — Ireland, Italy, U.S.
- Microprinting
- Hidden images
- Phosphorescent ink
Stamp Catalogs

Scott
Michel
Stanley Gibbons
Zumstein
Yvert
Catalog Listing

- Scott no.
- Illustration no.
- Country
- Denomination
- Year of Issue
- Mint/Used values
Stamp condition

- Fine – Very Fine
- Very Fine
- Extremely Fine
- Fine – Very Fine
- Very Fine
- Extremely Fine
Stamp condition

Descriptions of stamp grades

Stamp collectors and stamp dealers use grading terms to describe the centering of the printed design on collectible postage stamps. Grading is not an exact science, and these examples provide approximate descriptions only. Very early issues may be graded higher than similarly centered stamps from a more recent era. For issues that are rarely found well-centered, a grading may be qualified as appropriate for the specific issue. The images shown in this chart were computer-altered by digitally manipulating the image of a single stamp.

**Extremely Fine (XF):**
The design of the stamp is perfectly or almost perfectly centered within the boundaries of the outer edge. The designs of very early perforated stamps are completely clear of the perforations and appear balanced.

**Fine (F):** The grade of Fine applies to stamps that are noticeably off-center in two directions. The design may be very close to the perforations on modern issues, or touching the perforations or outer edges on very early issues.

**Very Fine (VF):** The design on the VF stamp may be slightly off-center on one side, but overall the stamp presents a well-balanced appearance. Values provided in the Scott catalog apply to stamps with a grade of Very Fine.

**Average (Avg.):** Perforations may begin to cut into the outer edge of the design on a stamp with the grade of average. Classic stamps with more narrow margins around the design may have perforations touching on two sides.

**Fine-Very Fine (F-VF):** The design is visibly off-center on a stamp with a grade of F-VF. The shift may be moderate in one direction, or less so on two sides. The design remains clear of perforations on modern issues.

**Fair:** A stamp with the grade of fair will have perforations that cut substantially into the design on at least one side and that show significant imbalance in the overall appearance of the stamp. The grading may deeply affect value.
# Gum Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gum Categories:</th>
<th>MINT N.H.</th>
<th>ORIGINAL GUM (O.G.)</th>
<th>NO GUM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commonly Used Symbol:</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>(★)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1900 Issues (Pre-1881 for U.S.)</td>
<td>Very fine pre-1900 stamps in these categories trade at a premium over Scott value</td>
<td>Scott Value for “Unused”</td>
<td>Scott “No Gum” listings for selected unused classic stamps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 1900 to breakpoints for listings of never-hinged stamps</td>
<td>Scott “Never Hinged” listings for selected unused stamps</td>
<td>Scott Value for “Unused” (Actual value will be affected by the degree of hinging of the full o.g.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From breakpoints noted for many countries</td>
<td>Scott Value for “Unused”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Begin with Basics

Album:
- 3-ring binder
- archival paper
- stock pages

Learn how to preserve and care for your collection.
It's Like Magic, an article to help in removing self-adhesives.

Soaking

- Water
- Paper towels
- Wax paper
- Pitcher
- Bowls
Where to Find Stamps

- Your mailbox,
- Friends, businesses, institutions,
- Dealers,
- APS StampStore and Sales Division,
- Stamp shows, local clubs,
- Post office and postal administrations,
- Pen pals.
100 Match Factory Place
Bellefonte, PA 16823
814-933-3803
www.stamps.org

Learn more about stamp collecting by taking *Basic Stamp Collecting*, an online course offered by the American Philatelic Society.
Visit http://www.stampcampus.org