

What should be listed in a U.S. Postal Stationery Catalog?

This may seem like a simple question but I have come to learn over the past year or two that the answer is difficult. First, we need to recognize that the two UPSS envelope catalogs (for the 19th and 20th century) have not been entirely consistent in listing criteria, either within each catalog or, especially, between the two catalogs. Secondly, we need to recognize that each catalog is a product of the editor and editorial committee and will vary somewhat with the expertise and interest of that group. Thirdly, the catalog should reflect the collecting interests of philatelists and these change over time, for example working dies and 1904 recuts are generally less popular than previously, envelope usages have become more popular.

The box represents a listing of criteria used for assigning catalog numbers in the UPSS postal stationery envelope catalogs. This general framework is the criteria used loosely in the past and being used to assign future numbers and clean up listings from the previous catalog. I will be quick to say that there are a number exceptions to the criteria in the current catalogs but, for the most part, we will not renumber existing items.

Just to give some examples of difficulty in applying the criteria:

- The width of the “6” in airmail die AM4 is a working die difference which would not normally be given different catalog numbers but collector interest has caused these to receive major catalog numbers in both Scott and our catalog.
- The criteria for assigning knife numbers has not been consistent which then affects major number listings; knives 28, 29, and 30 as well as knives 36, 37, and 38 are very similar, resulting from simply different machinist’s construction of the knife die and each group of 3 probably should have been combined into a single knife. Knives 57 and 78 have early and late forms that perhaps would have been assigned different numbers previously. Some are arguing that knives 106 and 116 should be combined into one, due to similarity of shape. The issue with the latter is whether or not the two knives represent a change in production practices.
- Tagging differences have been a subject of much discussion. Some collectors are not interested and think none should be listed but others are very interested in tagging and want many varieties listed. Clearly items that occur as both untagged and tagged should be listed separately, also items that are design tagged (tagging in ink for printing stamp) versus those that have a tagging bar should be listed separately since they represent a clear change in envelope manufacture process. However, should items be listed separately if tagging is a bar (rectangular) versus a block (square)? Should envelopes be listed separately if the tagging bar is to the right versus left of the stamp? (This obviously represents a change in manufacturing practices.) What about the tagging bars represented by green in the 25¢ Space Station pictured; are these two tagging bars different? (If the tagging bar is a different size, does this represent enough change in manufacturing practice to rate a new number?)
- When do color shades get listed? Clearly some are well recognized and need to be listed (again, due to collector interest). However many of the regular issues in the early part of the last century and earlier have several shades (because inks were made manually and different batches ended up in varying shades) that are not currently listed – we will probably not add any color shades to previous listings.

I think that you can see that deciding what is a separate listing is not as easy as one might first think. The good news is that we have a very active and knowledgeable committee working on the catalog. There will be many changes but all will be well considered. In fact we have gone back to the rule Thorp used for his listings - that all new items have to be verified by two experts before a new item can be listed. We are also very aware that delisting items can negatively affect their value and will be very cautious about doing that. However, clear and consistent criteria should be followed for future listings.

I invite discussion on the criteria and thought about where changes should be made. Please address to me and perhaps comments can be carried in letters to the editor of this journal.



Catalog listing criteria

1. Major numbers (e.g. 1234 or 1234A) given to items:
 - a. With different dies (master die only, working dies and recuts listed in back of catalogs or elsewhere)
 - b. With different knives
 - c. The same knife with or without a window receives different major numbers.
 - d. With different major paper types (discernable by contract)
 - e. With major color differences, representing a change in envelope manufacture
 - f. With major tagging type differences (e.g. design versus bar tagging)
 - g. Water activated gum versus pressure sensitive adhesive
 - h. With different printing on the back done during envelope production
 - i. With or without Nesbitt cross
 - ii. Different recycle logo
 - iii. Different message printed on back of envelope (e.g. official mail envelopes)
2. Minor numbers (e.g. 1234a) are assigned for lesser differences and given to items such as:
 - a. Open ended envelopes
 - b. Envelopes produced with ungummed flaps
 - c. Official mail envelopes with corner card printed during manufacture versus not
 - d. Significant color shades not reflecting contract differences
 - e. Non-contract paper differences, e.g. paper thickness, fluorescent versus not
 - f. Tagging bar size/location differences
 - g. Errors of production, e.g. missing colors, missing tagging, double impressions
 - i. Missing colors is intended to include single or multiple missing colors (including albinos of modern material) and missing tagging
 - ii. Note that missing colors prior to 1965 are not listed due to lack listing information, likelihood that most issues occurs as an albino, and have minimal value (generally about \$5)
 - iii. We hope to list double impressions of stamps in a future edition after a definition can be developed and list of items built
3. Precancelled and Penalty envelopes listings (consistent in both UPSS & Thorp) are:
 - a. An envelope known only with a precancel or penalty overprint is noted and priced in the catalog.
 - b. If the basic item is a premium envelope and the precancel or penalty overprint is common, the precancel or penalty price is listed in the remarks column to warn collectors that less should be paid for the precancel or penalty overprint. The precancel or penalty overprint price given is for the commonest/cheapest item.
 - c. An envelope known as a regular envelope and as a precancel or penalty of approximately equal value is not noted in the listing.

In all cases listings may vary slightly if the variation give clarity or adds information.