



ESL Podcast 274 – Buying Stamps at the Post Office

GLOSSARY

stamp – a small piece of paper that is put on an envelope so that it can be sent through the mail

* When they sent the wedding invitations, they used stamps with pink hearts and white roses.

denomination – the amount of money that a piece of paper is worth; the value of a bill, certificate, or stamp

* Please take \$200 out of the bank account in these denominations: 1 at \$50, 2 at \$20, 6 at \$10, 7 at \$5, and 15 at \$1.

Priority Mail – a fast mail service offered by the U.S. Postal Service

* Priority Mail is faster than regular mail, but it is also more expensive.

rate – cost per piece; the amount of money that one must pay for a service

* The rate for a telephone call to India is \$0.08 per minute.

first-class – standard mail service with the U.S. Postal Service; high-quality; good service or the best service

* First-class seats on the train are bigger and more comfortable than other seats.

domestic – within one country; not international

* Domestic flights leave from gates 1-29, and international flights leave from gates 30-50.

book – a piece of paper that is covered in stamps and is folded several times so that it lies flat

* There are only two stamps left in this book. Can you please go to the post office this afternoon to buy another one?

roll – a long, thin piece of paper or film that is rolled in a circle or curled to make a tube shape

* Javier likes to take pictures, so he took ten rolls of film when he went to Alaska.

envelope – a folded piece of paper that one puts a letter into and then closes with glue so that it can be mailed

* Be sure to put your address in the upper left-hand corner of the envelope, and the stamp should be in the upper right-hand corner of the envelope.



ESL Podcast 274 – Buying Stamps at the Post Office

delivery – the process of taking a letter or package to the person or business it is being sent to

* This Chinese restaurant offers free delivery for orders of \$35 or more.

Express Mail – a very fast mail service offered by the U.S. Postal Service that delivers letters and packages in one or two days

* Ford wanted to send the book as quickly as possible, so he paid extra for Express Mail service.

postcard – a rectangular piece of paper with a photograph on one side and room to write a message and an address on the other side so that it can be mailed

* I received a postcard from my parents with a beautiful picture of Rehoboth Beach, where they're spending their vacation.

curious – wanting to know something; eager to ask questions about something

* Gustavo is curious about everything. I think he asked the tour guide more than 20 questions this morning!

design – the way that something is made or decorated; the way that something looks

* Millie chose to make curtains out of fabric with a geometric design.

commemorative – remembering an important event; in remembrance of something important that happened in the past

* The United States made commemorative coins for the country's 200th anniversary.

standard – normal; basic; regular; not special

* Standard Internet service costs \$29.99 per month, but you can pay more to have a faster speed or a special email address.



ESL Podcast 274 – Buying Stamps at the Post Office

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. How much does Tamika's book of stamps cost?
 - a) \$0.41
 - b) \$0.20
 - c) \$8.20
2. The least expensive way to send a letter that doesn't need to arrive for seven days should be sent using which mail service?
 - a) First class.
 - b) Priority Mail.
 - c) Express Mail.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

stamp

The word "stamp," in this podcast, means a small piece of paper that is put on an envelope so that it can be sent through the mail: "Have you seen the new stamps with pictures of great sports players?" A "stamp" is also a piece of plastic that is dipped into ink (a colored liquid) and then pushed against a piece of paper so that the design is put on the paper: "In many countries, the doctor's stamp must be on the prescription to make it legal." The verb "to stamp" means to push the stamp against the piece of paper: "Please stamp the date on the envelopes when you receive them." The verb "to stamp (one's) foot" means to put one's foot down on the floor very hard so that it makes a loud noise: "The child was very angry, yelling and stamping his feet to get his parents' attention."

roll

In this podcast, the word "roll" means a long, thin piece of paper or film that is rolled in a circle or curled: "Many people put a roll of stamps inside a small plastic box so that they can take out one stamp at a time." A "roll" can also be a small, round piece of bread for one person: "Do you want butter or jam for your roll?" The verb "to roll" means to move by turning over and over: "The ball rolled down the hill." The verb "to roll" can also mean to make something move by turning over and over: "Can you please roll the ball over here?" The verb "to roll over" means to turn one's body while lying down so that one is resting on another side: "Gertie wakes up whenever her husband rolls over in bed."



ESL Podcast 274 – Buying Stamps at the Post Office

CULTURE NOTE

The United States Postal Service (USPS) is the standard mail service when Americans want to send a letter. However, people can choose to use other mail services when they need faster or other types of service. People often use these other services when they want to send a package. Some popular non-governmental mail services include UPS (United Parcel Service), FedEx (Federal Express), and DHL.

All of these companies offer different types of services with different “delivery times” (the amount of time needed to deliver something). “Ground service” is usually the slowest and least expensive way to send a package. Things are sent by cars, trucks, busses, and trains, but not by airplanes. The companies also have “express services” that may have delivery times of two or three days, and “overnight” services where packages arrive the next morning or afternoon.

Many of these private companies also offer “pick-up services,” meaning that they send people to one’s home or office building to “pick up” (get) the package. In contrast, if you want to send something using USPS, you have to go to the post office and wait in line to send it, or drop the letter or package into a “mailbox” (a large container outside where letters and packages are put so that USPS workers can get them once or twice a day and take them to the post office).

Many companies have “account numbers” with these private companies. They write their account numbers onto the “mailing slip” (the piece of paper that shows who a package is from, who it should be sent to, and how quickly it needs to arrive) and then they receive a bill once a month so that they can pay for all of the things they sent during that month.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – a



ESL Podcast 274 – Buying Stamps at the Post Office

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 274: Buying Stamps at the Post Office.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 274. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at eslpod.com and take a look at our premium courses. These are additional courses that you may be interested in. You can also download a Learning Guide for this episode on our website.

This episode is called "Buying Stamps at the Post Office." Let's go!

[start of story]

Clerk: Can I help you?

Tamika: I'd like to buy some stamps.

Clerk: In what denomination?

Tamika: I'm not sure. I need them for sending regular letters and for Priority Mail.

Clerk: The current rate for sending a first-class letter is 41 cents. With first-class service, your letter will get there in three to seven days for domestic mail.

Tamika: For the first-class stamps, how many come in a book or a roll?

Clerk: There are 20 in a book and 100 in a roll. To send a Priority Mail envelope, you can get \$4.05 stamps, and delivery is usually in two to three days. How many would you like of each?

Tamika: I'll take one book of the stamps and four Priority Mail stamps. Can I buy stamps to send an Express Mail envelope, too?

Clerk: You can. Those are \$14.40 each.

Tamika: Could you add one of those, too? And how much is it to send a postcard? I don't need any stamps for those today, but I'm just curious.



ESL Podcast 274 – Buying Stamps at the Post Office

Clerk: It's 24 cents to send a postcard. Okay, that's a book of 41-cent stamps, four Priority Mail stamps, and one Express Mail stamp. Anything else?

Tamika: Could I pick the design of the first-class stamps?

Clerk: Yes. You can choose from these commemorative ones or the standard flag design.

Tamika: I'll take the commemorative ones.

Clerk: Your total comes to \$38.80.

Tamika: Here's \$40.

Clerk: Here's your change and your stamps. Have a nice day.

Tamika: Thanks. You, too.

[end of story]

Our dialogue is between Tamika and the person who works at the Post Office, who we would call a “clerk” (clerk). The clerk says to Tamika, “Can I help you,” and Tamika says, “I'd like to buy some stamps.” A “stamp” is a little piece of paper that you stick on, or put on, an envelope or a package or a postcard, that allows you to send that letter or package through the national and international mail system. Every country has its own mail system – its own stamps.

The clerk asks Tamika, “In what denomination?” “Denomination” (denomination) refers to the amount of money that a paper – a piece of paper – is worth. Stamps come in different denominations; they have different money values that we put on them. Also, we use this term “denomination” for money – regular money – pieces of paper have different denominations: \$1, \$5, \$10, and so forth. So, it's the value of a stamp or a bill or some other piece of paper.

Tamika says she's not sure what denomination she needs. She tells the clerk “I need them for sending regular letters and for Priority Mail.” In the U.S., we have a special service called “Priority Mail.” Priority Mail is a little bit faster service, but still part of the normally slow government Postal Service that we have, that almost every country has, I think. Everyone likes to complain about how slow the mail is, and Americans are no different. They complain all the time!



ESL Podcast 274 – Buying Stamps at the Post Office

Priority Mail is supposed to be faster, and you more money for it. Normally, the package or letter will arrive in two or three days if you send it Priority Mail. Or, it will never arrive at all, either one!

The clerk says, “The current rate for sending a first-class letter is 41 cents.” The “rate” (rate) is how much it costs per letter or per piece; it's the price, in other words. So, the price for sending a first-class letter is 41 cents. “First-class” is the normal, regular type of mail that you send. It's the standard mail service – it's not the fastest; it's not the slowest. The term “first-class,” when we use it another situations, usually means very high quality or the best.

The clerk says that “With first-class service, your letter will get there in three to seven days for domestic mail.” “Domestic” (domestic) in this case refers to within one country, not international. It's the opposite of international, which would be between countries. We use that term “domestic” for mail; we also use it for airline flights: “Are you taking a domestic flight,” or trip, “or an international flight.” Domestic would be within the United States, if you are in the United States of course, and international would be from the U.S. to another country.

Tamika says, “For the first-class stamps, how many come in a book or a roll?” The expression “how many come in” means how many are there. When I buy that, how many will I get? She's asking about the quantity – the number of stamps that she will get in either a book or a roll (roll).

In the U.S., you can buy stamps in what's called a “book,” which is a piece of paper that has many different stamps, and the stamps are folded up several times. A “roll of stamps” is when you have a long, thin piece of paper that is rolled up in a circle, and you can also buy stamps that are in that form. It's the same stamp; it's not a different kind of stamp, it's just a different way of buying the stamp. You can have them all in one long piece of paper that is rolled up into a circle, or you can buy them on a flat sheet that is folded up. “Roll” has a couple of different meanings in English; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

The clerk says that there are 20 stamps in a book and 100 stamps in a roll. “To send a Priority Mail envelope,” he says, “you can get \$4.05 stamps, and delivery is usually in two to three days. An “envelope” (envelope) is the piece of paper that you put a letter in; it's the container that holds the letter. Usually, you write the address on the front of the envelope and put the stamp in the corner of the envelope.



ESL Podcast 274 – Buying Stamps at the Post Office

Priority Mail stamps cost a little more than \$4, and delivery is usually in two to three days “delivery” (delivery) means the process of taking the letter or the package to the person. So, delivery is getting the letter or the package to the person that you want.

Tamika says, “I’ll take one book of the stamps,” meaning the first-class stamps, “and four Priority Mail stamps.” She then asks, “Can I buy stamps to send an Express Mail envelope, too?” “Express Mail” is the fastest service you can buy through the government Post Office in the United States. Usually, your letter will get there the next day. It costs more money, of course. It costs about \$14.40 if you want the letter to arrive the next day.

You can also send your letters and packages through private companies that are usually more reliable. They usually have better service than the government Post Office. But you can also send an, what we would call, “overnight letter,” meaning a letter that will be delivered the next day through the U.S. Postal Service.

Tamika asks how much it is – how much it costs – to send a postcard (postcard – one word). A “postcard” is a rectangular piece of paper, with usually a photograph on one side, and on the other side there is room to write a short message. You can buy postcards of famous places – pictures of famous places. People often do this when they are on vacation. You can send me a postcard next time you’re on a good vacation!

Tamika says, “I don’t need any postcard stamps today, but I’m just curious.” “To be curious” (curious) means you want to know something; you are interested in something.

The clerk tells Tamika that the postcard stamps are 24 cents. Tamika asks if she can pick the design of her first-class stamps. The “design” (design) is the way that they look; the way something appears. The U.S., like many countries, sells many different kinds of stamps with different pictures on them, and sometimes you can choose which one you want if you go to the Post Office.

The clerk says, “You can choose from these commemorative ones or the standard flag design.” A “commemorative stamp” is a stamp that remembers an important event or an important person. Many stamps will have famous people on them. Usually in the U.S., the rule is that you have to be dead before you can be put on a stamp. So you will, for example, not be able to buy the Jeff McQuillan stamp, I hope, for many, many years!



ESL Podcast 274 – Buying Stamps at the Post Office

The “standard flag design” is the normal, most popular currently, stamp design that we have. When we say something is “standard,” we mean it's normal; it's regular; it's not special. And right now, if you buy a stamp in the U.S. for a first-class letter, most of them have the American flag on the stamp.

Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

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ESL Podcast 274 – Buying Stamps at the Post Office

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Tamika: Thanks. You, too.

[end of story]

The script for this podcast was written by Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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