



RETURN TO SENDER

Looks alone won't get these envelopes where they need to go.

Use the following makeover tips at right (courtesy of the US Postal Service) to achieve maximum mail satisfaction.

Envelopes

J. Spence Holman

Who writes letters anymore? The mail is great for magazines (the ones you don't borrow or read online, anyway), but it has been mostly relegated to the sad duty of delivering bills, credit card solicitations, and court orders. But it's a happier story when you receive that killer invitation to the local motorcycle fundraiser, get a birthday check from Grandma, or find your Radio Orphan Annie decoder pin in the mailbox. None of this would be possible without the humble envelope.

THE BASICS The envelope as we know it appeared around the seventeenth century. It has since evolved from a piece of paper cut and folded around a message to a piece of paper cut into a standard size, folded, and glued around a message. Paying attention to this standard is what ensures that your message gets where you want it to go.

If you ever have specific questions about your mail, the United States Postal Service's Web site, www.usps.com, is an exhaustive resource for all things sendable.

SIZE AND SHAPE Envelopes come in many sizes and shapes, but this doesn't mean that you should use all of them, or that the post office will mail them. In fact, with the exception of some emergency holiday situations, standard sizes should meet most of your needs.

The Postal Service officially defines a letter as being from 5 to 11 1/2 inches long by 3 1/2 to 6 1/8 inches high, no more than 1/4 inch thick, and one ounce or less. Anything bigger will require extra postage.

Regular envelopes that fit within these parameters can be found just about anywhere, and they are divided into series. Commercial envelopes are demarcated by numbers. One of the most common is the Number 10, which measures 9 1/2 by 4 1/8 inches, and easily fits a folded 8 1/2 by 11 inch piece of paper.

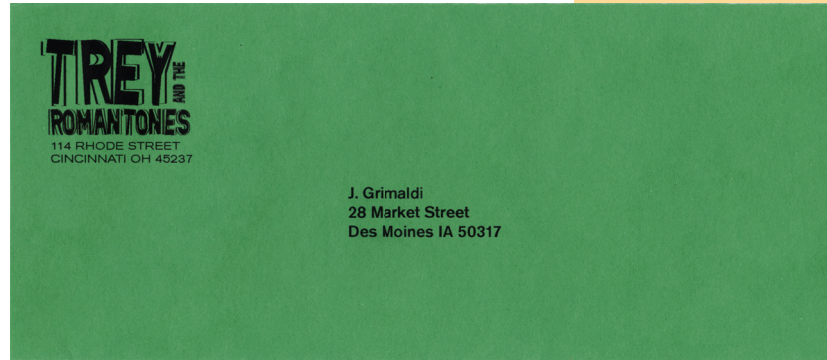
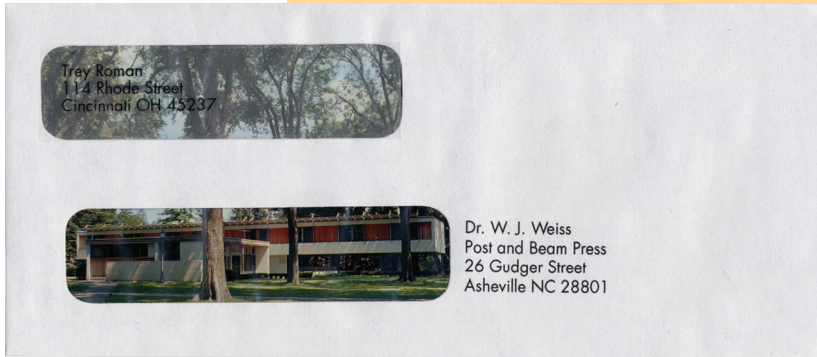
The Baronial (or Bar) series is typically used for invitations and cards, and comes with a pointed flap. The A series (A for announcement), which has a square flap, comes in similar sizes and is used in similar situations.

ENVELOPE BASICS

- The recipient's and the sender's return address should be parallel to the longest side of the envelope.
- Use either a P.O. Box or a street address, but not both.
- Keep the bottom right of the envelope clear, as the Postal Service applies a 5/8-inch-tall bar code there.
- Fifteen sheets of folded paper in an envelope equals approximately 1/4 inch.
- One ounce is around four sheets of paper in a Number 10 envelope
- Envelopes with rounded corners will get caught in the mail sorting machines.
- Square envelopes require extra postage because the sorting machines cannot determine which way the address reads.

THE WINDOW

Give your letter a chance to see the world, and don't let the address hog the view. Fill the window with something interesting (instead of boring text), and give your friend a sneak preview of what's inside.

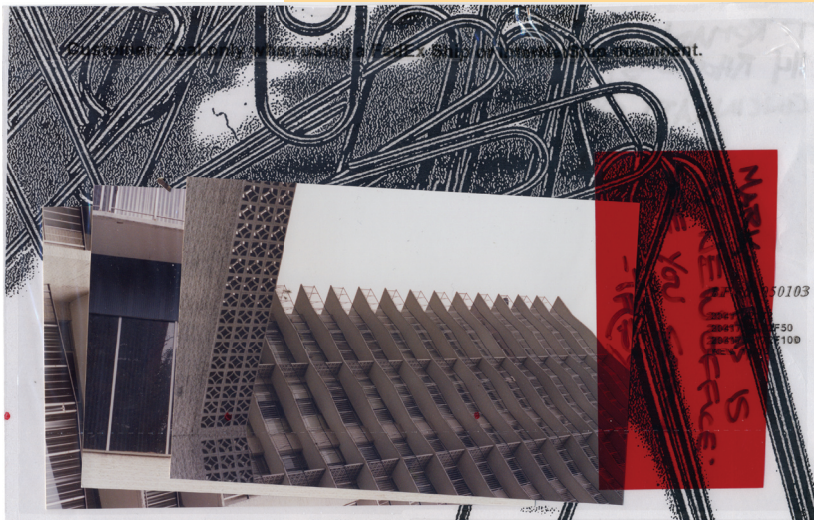


THE NONVELOPE

This is great for flyers, newsletters, and other bulk mailings that do not require any formality. Fold your paper into thirds, add an address, and mail. Use tape or a sticker—not a staple—to hold the paper together so that it does not run afoul of the postal sorting machines.

IN THE CLEAR

Grab a plastic pouch from your parcel carrier of choice, and attach it to an interesting backing. Address whichever side you choose, and remember that due to its size, this envelope will require extra postage.



Envelope design: J. Spence Holman

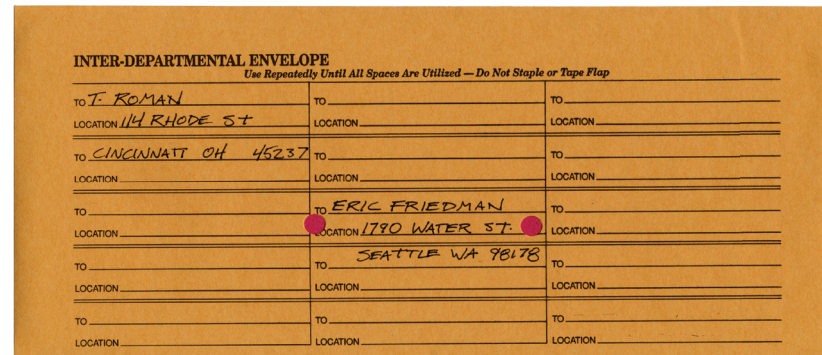
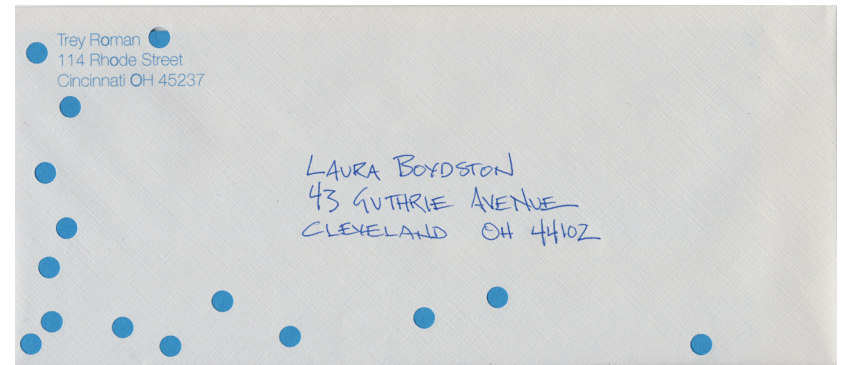


THE DECONSTRUCT

No one ever said your envelope had to be made of regular white paper. Take apart an envelope of any size and trace it onto interesting paper (Remember that the inside should be as interesting as the outside). Cut it out, fold it, and glue it together.

THE KNOCKOUT

Take scissors, an X-acto knife, or your trusty hole punch and make your own window pattern. Reveal a little or a lot. Are these holes in a construction fence, or just some interesting Swiss cheese? Be careful: too much perforation and your letter might not get past the doorstep.



THE READYMADE

Some envelopes are born interesting. Repurpose these for your own mailing pleasure.