235   Mail Preparation

Overview

1.0   General Definition of Terms

1.1   Definition of Presort Process

Presort is the process by which a mailer prepares mail so that it is sorted to at least the finest extent required by the standards for the price claimed. Generally, presort is performed sequentially, from the lowest (finest) level to the highest level, to those destinations specified by standard and is completed at each level before the next level is prepared. Not all presort levels are applicable in all situations.

1.2   Definition of Mailings

Mailings are defined as:

a.   General. A mailing is a group of pieces within the same class of mail and the same processing category that may be sorted together and/or presented under a single minimum volume mailing requirement under the applicable standards. Generally, types of mail that follow different flows through the postal processing system (e.g., automation and nonautomation) and mail for each separate class and subclass must be prepared as a separate mailing. Other specific standards may define whether separate mailings may be combined, palletized, reported, or deposited together.

b.   [7-13-25] The types of First-Class Mail listed below must not be part of the same mailing despite being in the same processing category:

1.   Automation price and any other type of mail.

2.   Presorted price and any other type of mail.

3.   Single-piece price and any other type of mail.

4.   Machinable and nonmachinable pieces.

5.   [4-7-25] USPS Connect Local Mail and any other type of mail.

1.3   Terms for Presort Levels

1.3.1 Letters and Cards
Terms used for presort levels are defined as follows:

a. *5-digit:* the delivery address on all pieces includes the same 5-digit ZIP Code.

b. *5-digit scheme (trays) for automation letters:* the ZIP Code in the delivery address on all pieces is one of the 5-digit ZIP Code areas processed by the USPS as one scheme, as shown in labeling list L012.

c. *3-digit:* the ZIP Code in the delivery address on all pieces begins with the same three digits (see L002, Column A).

d. *Unique 3-digit:* the ZIP Code in the delivery address on all pieces begins with the same three digits, and that the 3-digit prefix is so identified in L002, Column A.
    [4-7-25]

e. *Origin/optional entry 3-digit(s)*: the ZIP Code in the delivery address on all pieces begins with one of the 3-digit prefixes processed at the sectional center facility (SCF)/local processing center (LPC) in whose service area the mail is verified or entered. Subject to standard, a separation is required for each such 3-digit area regardless of the mail volume.

f. *Origin/optional entry SCF*: the separation includes bundles for one or more 3-digit areas served by the same sectional center facility (SCF)/local processing center (LPC) (see L002, Column C, or L005) in whose service area the mail is verified or entered. Subject to standard, this separation is required regardless of the mail volume.

g. [4-7-25] *ADC/AADC:* all pieces are addressed for delivery in the service area of the same area distribution center (ADC) or automated area distribution center (AADC). (see L004 or L005.)

h. *Origin/optional entry AADC:* the ZIP Code in the delivery address on all pieces begins with one of the 3-digit prefixes processed at the AADC in whose service area the mail is verified/entered.

i. *Mixed [ADC, AADC, etc.]:* the pieces are for delivery in the service area of more than one ADC, AADC, etc.

j. *Residual pieces/bundles/sacks* contain material remaining after completion of a presort sequence. Residual mail lacks the volume set by standard to require or allow bundle preparation to a particular destination, and usually does not qualify for a presort price. Residual mail is also referred to as *nonqualifying* or *working* mail.

1.3.2 Flats

Terms used for presort levels are defined as follows:

a. *5-digit*: The delivery address on all pieces includes the same 5-digit ZIP Code.

b. [7-13-25] *5-digit scheme (for automation flats:* The ZIP Code in the delivery address on all pieces is one of the 5-digit ZIP Code areas processed by the USPS as one scheme, as shown in labeling list L012.

c. *3-digit*: The ZIP Code in the delivery address on all pieces begins with the same three digits (see L002, Column A).

d. [7-13-25] *3-digit scheme for automation flats:* The Zip Code in the delivery address on all pieces is one of the 3-digit ZIP Code areas processed by the USPS as one scheme, as shown in labeling list L008.

e. *Origin/optional entry 3-digit(s)*: The ZIP Code in the delivery address on all pieces begins with one of the 3-digit prefixes processed at the sectional center facility (SCF)/local processing center (LPC) in whose service area the mail is verified or entered. Subject to standard, a separation is required for each such 3-digit area regardless of the mail volume.

f. *ADC*: All pieces are addressed for delivery in the service area of the same area distribution center (ADC)/regional processing and distribution center (RPDC) (see L004).

g. [4-7-25] *Mixed ADC*: The pieces are for delivery in the service area of more than one ADC.

1.4 Preparation Definitions and Instructions

For purposes of preparing mail:

a. *Pieces* refers to individually addressed mailpieces. This definition also applies when *pieces* is used in eligibility standards. Quantities indicated for optional or required sortations always refer to pieces unless specifically excepted.

b. A *full letter tray* is one in which faced, upright pieces fill the length of the tray between 85% and 100% full.

c. A *full flat tray* is one that is physically full. Although a specific minimum volume is required (at least a single stack of mail lying flat on the bottom of the tray and filling the tray to the bottom of the handholds) before a tray may or must be prepared to the corresponding presort destination, trays must be filled with additional available pieces (up to the reasonable capacity of the tray) when standards require preparation of full trays.

d. A *less-than-full* letter tray is one that contains mail for the same destination regardless of quantity or whether a full tray was previously prepared for that destination. Less-than-full trays may be prepared only if permitted by the standards for the price claimed.

e. [7-13-25] A 5-digit scheme sort for automation letters and flats yields 5-digit scheme trays for those 5-digit ZIP Codes identified in labeling list L012 and 5-digit trays for other areas. Overflow trays may be prepared only if permitted by the standards for the price claimed.

f. A *5-digit scheme sort for automation letters* yields 5-digit scheme trays for those 5-digit ZIP Codes identified in labeling list L012 and 5-digit trays for other areas. The 5-digit ZIP Codes in each scheme are treated as one presort destination subject to a minimum volume, with no further separation by 5-digit ZIP Code required. Trays prepared for a 5-digit scheme destination that contain pieces for only one of the schemed 5-digit ZIP Codes are considered 5-digit scheme sorted. When standards require 5-digit/scheme sorting, mailers must prepare all possible 5-digit scheme trays, then prepare all possible 5-digit trays. [4-7-25]

g. [4-7-25] An *origin 3-digit* tray contains all mail (regardless of quantity) for a 3-digit ZIP Code area processed by the SCF/LPC in whose service area the mail is verified. If more than one 3-digit area is served, as shown in L005, a separate tray must be prepared for each. The following also apply:

   1. A tray may be prepared for each 3-digit area served by the SCF/LPC/plant where mail is entered (if that differs from the SCF/LPC/plant serving the Post Office where the mail is verified).

   2. In all cases, only one less-than-full tray may be prepared for each 3-digit area.

h. An *origin AADC* tray contains all mail (regardless of quantity) for an AADC ZIP Code area processed by the AADC or SCF/LPC in whose service area the mail is verified or entered. Only one less-than-full tray may be prepared for each AADC area.

i. The *required at [quantity]* instruction (e.g., "required at 10 pieces") means that the particular unit *must* be prepared for the corresponding presort level whenever the specified quantity of mail is reached or exceeded. Bundles and containers may contain more than the specified *required at* quantity up to the applicable maximum physical size. Subject to applicable price eligibility standards, smaller quantities may be prepared only if permitted. Where specified by standard, required preparation applies only if the mailer chooses to qualify for the corresponding price.

j. The *optional at [quantity]* instruction means that the particular unit *may* be prepared for the corresponding presort level whenever the specified quantity of mail is reached or exceeded. Bundles or containers may contain more than the specified *optional at* quantity up to the applicable maximum physical size. Smaller quantities may be prepared only if permitted by applicable price eligibility standards. Standards for quantities with which preparation is optional are often followed by standards for larger quantities with which preparation is required.

k. *Entry [facility]* (or *origin [facility]*) refers to the USPS mail-processing facility that serves the Post Office where the mailer entered the mail. If the Post Office where the mail is entered is not the one serving the mailer's location, the Post Office of entry determines the *entry* facility. *Entry SCF/LPC* includes both single-3-digit and multi-3-digit SCFs.

l. The *group pieces* instruction means the pieces are to be sorted together as if to be bundled but not actually secured into a bundle. Bundle labels and other bundle identification methods may be used for unsecured groups of pieces as permitted by standard.

m. *A bundle* is a group of addressed pieces secured together as a unit. Bundle preparation is described in 2.0.

n. A *"logical" presort destination* represents the total number of pieces that are eligible for a specific presort level based on the required sortation, but which might not be contained in a single bundle or in a single container due to applicable preparation requirements or the size of the individual pieces.

[7-13-25]

1.5 Optional Containerization
Mailers may prepare pallets or other USPS-approved containers as described in 705.8.10.2 or according to local customer/supplier agreements.

2.0 Bundles
A *bundle* is a group of addressed pieces, for a presort destination, secured together as a unit. See 203.4.0 for bundling standards.

3.0 Letter Trays
See 203.5.0 for tray preparation standards.

4.0 Tray Labels
Tray labels are subject to the standards in 203.5.0.

5.0 Preparing Nonautomation Machinable Letters

5.1 Basic Standards

5.1.1 All Mailpieces
Each Presorted First-Class Mail mailing must meet the applicable standards in 233 and in 235; All pieces must be in the same processing category, subject to 5.2, and must be sorted together and prepared under 5.2, or 5.3. Letter-size pieces (including card-size pieces) must be prepared in letter trays.

5.1.2 Single-Piece Price Pieces Presented With Presort Mailings
Regardless of postage payment method, mailers may present single-piece price First-Class Mail with pieces claimed at automation or presort prices and report all pieces on the same postage statement. The following standards apply:

    a. The mailer must prepare the single-piece price pieces in separate trays from the automation and presort pieces. Mailers must label the trays under 204.3.0 using CIN code 260 on trays of single-piece letters. Label trays as follows:

        1. Line 1: Use L201; for mail originating in ZIP Code areas in Column A, use "MXD" followed by city, state, and 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in Column C (use "MXD" instead of "OMX" in the destination line and ignore Column B).

        2. Line 2: Use the human-readable content line corresponding to content identifier number 260 (see Exhibit 204.3.2.4).

        3. Line 3: Office of mailing or mailer information.

    b. The single-piece price pieces must bear no price marking or be marked "First-Class" or, if not affixed with full single-piece price postage, "Single-Piece" (or "SNGLP"). See 202.3.0.

    c. The mailer must affix additional postage to the single-piece price pieces to yield the correct amount on each piece, or (if prepared with a corrective price marking) the mailer must pay all additional postage at the time of mailing.

5.1.3 Marking

Subject to 202.3.0, all pieces must be marked "Presorted" (or "PRSRT") and "First-Class Mail."

5.2 Machinable Preparation

5.2.1 Machinable Bundling

Machinable pieces are not bundled, except for (see 2.0):

    a. Card-size pieces less than 7 inches long.

    b. All pieces in a less-than-full origin tray.

    c. All pieces in a less-than-full mixed AADC tray.

5.2.2 Traying and Labeling

Preparation sequence, tray size, and labeling:

a. AADC origin trays required, with pieces grouped by 3-digit ZIP Code prefix; no minimum piece requirement; one less-than-full tray permitted; labeling:

   1. [4-7-25] Line 1: L005.

   2. Line 2: "FCM LTR AADC MACH."

b. AADC (required); full trays (no overflow), with pieces grouped by 3-digit ZIP Code prefix; labeling:

   1. [4-7-25] Line 1: L005.

   2. Line 2: "FCM LTR AADC MACH."

c. Mixed AADC (required); no minimum, with pieces grouped by AADC; labeling:

   1. Line 1: Use L201; for mail originating in ZIP Code areas in Column A, use "MXD" followed by city, state, and 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in Column C (use "MXD" instead of "OMX" in the destination line and ignore Column B).

   2. Line 2: "FCM LTR MACH WKG."

5.3 Nonmachinable Preparation

5.3.1 Nonmachinable Bundling

Except as provided in 203.4.4, bundling is required before traying. A bundle must be prepared when the quantity of addressed pieces for a required presort level reaches a minimum of 10 pieces. Smaller volumes are not permitted except for mixed ADC bundles. Preparation sequence, bundle size, and labeling:

a. 5-digit (required); 10-piece minimum; red Label 5 or optional endorsement line (OEL); labeling not required for pieces in full 5-digit trays.

b. 3-digit (required); 10-piece minimum; green Label 3 or OEL.

c. Mixed ADC (required); no minimum; tan Label X or OEL.

5.3.2 Traying and Labeling

Preparation sequence, tray size, and labeling:

a. 5-digit (required); full trays (no overflow); labeling:

   1. Line 1: city, state, and 5-digit ZIP Code on mail (see 203.5.11, for overseas military mail).

   2. Line 2: "FCM LTR 5D MANUAL."

b. 3-digit (required); full trays (no overflow), except for one less-than-full tray for each origin 3-digit(s); labeling:

   1. Line 1: L002, Column A.

   2. Line 2: "FCM LTR 3D MANUAL."

c. Mixed ADC (required); no minimum; labeling:

1. Line 1: Use L201; for mail originating in ZIP Code areas in Column A, use "MXD" followed by city, state, and 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in Column C. (Use "MXD" instead of "OMX" in the destination line and ignore Column B.)

2. Line 2: "FCM LTR MANUAL WKG."

6.0   Preparing Automation Letters

6.1   Basic Standards

Mailers must prepare letter-size automation price First-Class Mail under 6.0. Bundle and tray preparation are subject to 235. Use barcoded tray labels under 4.0 and 204.3.0.

6.2   Mailings

The requirements for mailings are as follows:

a. General. All pieces in a mailing must meet the standards in 201.3.0, and must be sorted together to the finest extent required for the price claimed except under 6.2c. The definitions of a mailing and permissible combinations are in 1.0.

b. First-Class Mail. A single automation price First-Class Mail mailing may include pieces prepared at 5-digit, AADC, and mixed AADC prices.

c. Regardless of the method of postage payment, pieces of single-piece price First-Class Mail may be presented with and reported on the same postage statement as pieces claimed at automation or presort prices if the single-piece price pieces are physically separated from other pieces; bear no price marking, or are marked only "First-Class," or (if not affixed with full single-piece price postage) are marked "Single-Piece" or "SNGLP" under 202.3.0, in addition to any other marking; and either have additional postage affixed to yield the correct amount on each piece or (if prepared with a corrective price marking) have all additional postage paid at the time of mailing.

6.3   Marking

All automation price pieces must be marked under 202.3.0, and 202.4.0. Pieces claimed at an automation price must bear the appropriate class marking and, except as provided in 202.3.0, and 202.4.0, "AUTO." Pieces not claimed at an automation price must not bear "AUTO" unless single-piece price postage is affixed or the corrective single-piece price marking ("SNGLP" or "Single-Piece") is applied.

6.4   General Preparation

Grouping, bundling, and labeling are not generally required or permitted. However, bundling is required in any mailing consisting entirely of card-size pieces less than 7 inches long, and for pieces in overflow and less-than-full trays. Grouping is required under 6.5.

6.5 **Tray Preparation**

Instead of preparing overflow trays with fewer than 150 pieces, mailers may include these pieces in an existing qualified tray of at least 150 or more pieces at the next tray level. (For example, if a mailer has 30 overflow 5-digit pieces for ZIP Code 20260, these pieces may be added to an existing qualified AADC tray for the correct destination (ZIP Code prefix 202) and the overflow 5-digit pieces will still qualify for the 5-digit price.) Mailers must note these trays on standardized documentation (see 203.3.2). Pieces that are placed in the next tray level must be grouped by destination and placed in the front or back of that tray. Mailers may use this option selectively for AADC ZIP Codes. This option does not apply to origin/entry trays. Preparation sequence, tray size, and Line 1 labeling:

a. 5-digit/scheme: optional, but required for 5-digit price (150-piece minimum); overflow allowed. Make 5-digit scheme trays first, then 5-digit trays; see 1.4f.

   1. For 5-digit scheme trays, use destination shown in labeling list L012.

   2. For 5-digit trays, use city, state, and 5-digit ZIP Code destination on pieces (see 203.5.11 for overseas military mail).

b. [4-7-25] AADC: optional, but required for AADC price (150-piece minimum except no minimum for origin entry AADC); overflow allowed; group pieces by 3-digit ZIP Code. For Line 1, use L005, Column B.

c. Mixed AADC: required (no minimum); group pieces by AADC when overflow pieces from AADC trays are placed in mixed AADC trays. For Line 1 use L201; for mail originating in ZIP Code areas in Column A, use "MXD" followed by city, state, and 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in Column C (use "MXD" instead of "OMX" in the destination line and ignore Column B).

6.6 **Tray Line 2**

Line 2: "FCM LTR" and:

a. 5-digit scheme: "BC 5D SCHEME."

b. 5-digit: "5D BC."

c. AADC: "AADC BC."

d. Mixed AADC: "BC WKG."

6.7 **Presentation**

Upon presentation of letter-size automation price First-Class Mail mailings to USPS for verification, mailers must present all mixed AADC trays together, and such trays must either be adjacent to one another, or side by side, and must be placed as the top layer(s) on any given container. Containerization instructions for First-Class Mail letters and cards may be established by local USPS managers.

7.0 Preparation of Nonautomation Flats

7.1 Basic Standards

Each Presorted First-Class Mail mailing must be prepared under 7.0 and 233.3.0. All pieces must be in the flat-size processing category. Flat-size pieces must be prepared in flat trays. All pieces must be marked "Presorted" and "First-Class."

7.2 Single-Piece Price Pieces Presented With Presort Mailings

Regardless of the method of postage payment, pieces of single-piece price First-Class Mail may be presented with and reported on the same postage statement as pieces claimed at automation or presort prices if the single-piece price pieces are physically separated from other pieces; bear no price marking, or are marked only "First-Class," or (if not affixed with full single-piece price postage) are marked "Single-Piece" or "SNGLP" under 202.3.0, in addition to any other marking; and either have additional postage affixed to yield the correct amount on each piece or (if prepared with a corrective price marking) have all additional postage paid at the time of mailing. Mailers must label the trays under 204.3.0 using CIN code 282 on single-piece trays. Label the trays as follows:

a. Line 1: Use L201; for mail originating in ZIP Code areas in Column A, use "MXD" followed by city, state, and 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in Column C (use "MXD" instead of "OMX" in the destination line and ignore Column B).

b. Line 2: Use the human-readable content line corresponding to content identifier number 282 (see Exhibit 204.3.2.4).

c. Line 3: Office of mailing or mailer information.

7.3 Nonautomation Pieces

[7-13-25] Nonautomation flats must use the preparation sequence and tray labeling in . Bundling is not permitted.
[7-13-25]

7.4 Traying and Labeling

Preparation sequence, tray size, and labeling:

a. [7-13-25] 5-digit (optional); full tray or 50 piece minimum; (no overflow); labeling:

    1. Line 1: city, state, and 5-digit ZIP Code on mail (see 203.5.11 for overseas military mail).

    2. Line 2: "FCM FLTS 5D NON BC."

b. [7-13-25] 3-digit (optional); full tray or 50 piece minimum; (no overflow), except for one less-than-full tray for each origin 3-digit(s); labeling:

    1. Line 1: L002, Column A.

    2. Line 2: "FCM FLTS 3D NON BC."

c. [7-13-25] ADC (optional); full tray or 50 piece minimum (no overflow); labeling:

    1. Line 1: L004, Column B.

     2.   Line 2: "FCM FLTS ADC NON BC."

  d.   Mixed ADC (required); no minimum; labeling:

     1.   Line 1: Use L201; for mail originating in ZIP Code areas in Column A, use "MXD" followed by city, state, and 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in Column C (use "MXD" instead of "OMX" in the destination line and ignore Column B).

     2.   Line 2: "FCM FLTS NON BC WKG."

[7-13-25]

8.0   Preparation of Automation Flats

8.1   Basic Standards

Automation First-Class Mail must be prepared under 8.0 and meet the eligibility standards for the price claimed; trays must bear the appropriate barcoded container labels under 204.3.0. Flat-size pieces must be prepared in flat trays.

8.2   Mailings

8.2.1   Automation Pieces

All pieces in a mailing must be sorted together to the finest extent required. First-Class Mail mailings may include pieces prepared at automation 5-digit, 3-digit, ADC, and mixed ADC prices. The definitions of a mailing and permissible combinations are in 1.2.

8.2.2   Single-Piece

Regardless of the method of postage payment, single-piece First-Class Mail may be presented with and reported on the same postage statement as pieces claimed at automation or presort prices if the single pieces are physically separated from other pieces; bear no price marking, or are marked only "First-Class," or (if not affixed with full single-piece postage) are marked "Single-Piece" or "SNGLP" under 202.3.0, in addition to any other marking; and either have additional postage affixed to yield the correct amount on each piece or (if prepared with a corrective price marking) have all additional postage paid at the time of mailing.

8.3   Marking

All automation pieces must be marked under 202. Pieces claimed at an automation price must bear the appropriate class marking. Pieces not claimed at an automation price must not bear "AUTO" unless single-piece postage is affixed or a corrective single-piece marking ("single-piece" or "SNGLP") is applied.

8.4   General Preparation

[7-13-25] Automation flats must use the preparation sequence and tray labeling in 8.5. Bundling is not permitted.
[7-13-25]

8.5 **Traying and Labeling**

[7-13-25] Tray size, preparation sequence, and Line 1 labeling:

a. [7-13-25] *5-digit/scheme*: optional, but required for 5-digit price (full tray or 50-piece minimum); one less-than-full or overflow tray allowed; see for scheme; labeling:

1. [7-13-25] Line 1: city, state, and 5-digit ZIP Code on mail (see 204.3.0, for overseas military mail).

2. [7-13-25] Line 2: "FCM FLTS 5D BC" or "FCM FLTS BC 5D SCHEME"

b. [7-13-25] *3-digit/scheme*: optional, but required for 3-digit price (full tray or 50-piece minimum); one less-than-full or overflow tray allowed; labeling:

1. Line 1: L002, Column A.

2. Line 2: "FCM FLTS 3D BC."

c. [7-13-25] *Origin 3-digit*: required for each 3-digit ZIP Code served by the SCF/LPC of the origin (verification) office; no minimum; labeling:

1. Line 1: L002, Column A.

2. Line 2: "FCM FLTS 3D BC."

d. [7-13-25] *ADC*: optional, but required for ADC price (full tray or 50-piece minimum); one less-than-full or overflow tray allowed; group pieces by 3-digit ZIP Code prefix; labeling:

1. Line 1: L004, Column B.

2. Line 2: "FCM FLTS ADC BC."

[7-13-25] Exception: Pieces are not required to be grouped by 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in ADC trays if the mailing is prepared using an MLOCR/barcode sorter, and standardized documentation is submitted.

e. [7-13-25] *Mixed ADC* (required); no minimum for price eligibility. Group pieces by ADC. labeling:

1. Line 1: Use L201; for mail originating in ZIP Code areas in Column A, use "MXD" followed by city, state, and 3-digit ZIP Code prefix in Column C. (Use "MXD" instead of "OMX" in the destination line and ignore Column B).

2. Line 2: "FCM FLTS BC WKG." .

[7-13-25] Mailers using a MLOCR/barcode sorter and submitting standardized documentation need not group pieces by ADC.
[7-13-25]

8.6 **5-Digit Scheme Tray Preparation**

[7-13-25] Pieces meeting the automation-compatibility criteria in 201.4.0, may be prepared in 5-digit scheme bundles for those 5-digit ZIP Code combinations identified in L007. These bundles must meet the additional standards in 1.4e.
[7-13-25][4-7-25]

9.0   Preparing USPS Connect Local Mail
[4-7-25]

9.1   Sorting USPS Connect Local Mail
[4-7-25] USPS Connect Local Mail pieces have no sorting requirements.
[4-7-25]

9.2   USPS-Provided USPS Connect Local Mail Flat-Rate Packaging
[4-7-25] USPS Connect Local Mail envelopes that USPS provides must be used only for USPS Connect Local Mail-priced pieces.
[4-7-25]

9.3   Sealing USPS Connect Local Mail Flat-Rate Packaging
[4-7-25] The container flap must close within the normal folds of a sealed USPS Connect Local Flat-Mail-Rate envelope. Tape may be applied to the flaps and seams to reinforce the container, provided that the container's design is not enlarged by opening the sides, and the container is not reconstructed in any way.