

A Postcard Primer

You've probably received hundreds, if not thousands, of postcards over the course of your life. So laying one out should be a snap. Right? Not so fast. The Post Office naturally has a few rules you'll need to follow first.

Size Matters

Many people are surprised to learn that not all postcards mail at the postcard rate. Size and aspect ratio determine how much it will cost to send your postcard from point A to point B.

First, let's look at the extremes. The minimum size for a postcard is 3.5" x 5". The maximum size for a postcard is 6.125" x 11".

Within that range (in most cases) there are two categories of postage: postcard rate and letter rate. The maximum size for a postcard that mails at the postcard rate is 4.25" x 6". Postcards larger than 4.25" x 6" mail at the letter rate.

But that's not all. A postcard must also have an aspect ratio between 1.3 and 2.5 or it will be bumped out of both the postcard and letter rate categories. To determine the aspect ratio of your postcard, divide the length (the long side) by the height (the short side).

Example: A 6 x 9 postcard has an aspect ratio of 1.5 ($9 \div 6 = 1.5$).

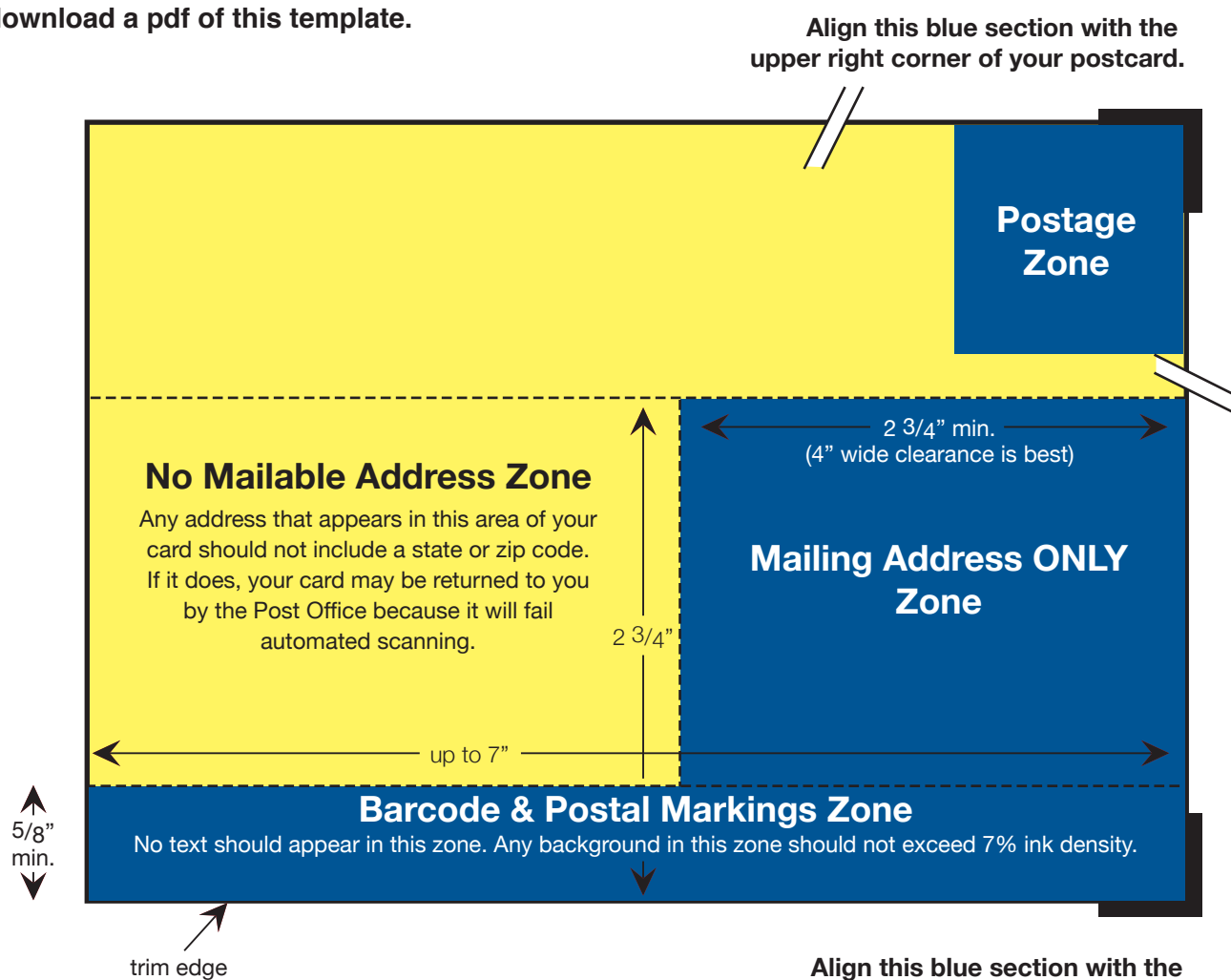
Does this mean you can't mail that very cool 5" square postcard you just designed? No, you can still mail it. However, because it has an aspect ratio of 1, you will be charged Flat rate postage, which is considerably higher.

The Clear Zones

There are two sides to a postcard. For clarity's sake, let's call them the art side and the message side. The art side is yours to play with as you will. Have fun with it. On the message side (the side with the recipient's address, indicia/stamp, and postal barcode/markings) however, you must follow (you guessed it) a few rules. Why? Because unless you are paying first class postage, your postcard must be able to pass automated scanning standards to be processed.

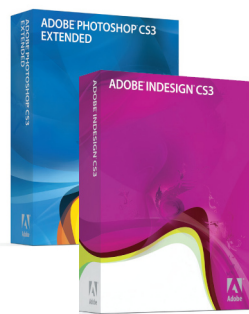
The guide below details the two main zones of concern: the Mailing Address Only Zone and the Barcode & Postal Markings Zone. These areas need are read by the postal scanners that route the mail through the postal system and so must be totally free of text. You should also avoid the use of background colors or photographic images with greater than 7% ink density and vertical lines in or around the blue areas of the guide as they will confuse the scanners.

[Click here](#) to download a pdf of this template.



Paper Thickness

As the size of a postcard increases, it becomes floppy and therefore more challenging to run through high-speed postal equipment. This is why postcards smaller than 4.25" x 6" must be at least .007 in. thick. Anything larger than 4.25" x 6" must be at least .009 in. thick. In paper terms, this normally translates to 80 lb. cover for postcard rate postcards and 100 lb. cover for letter rate postcards. *Always check with your printer when selecting a paper stock to be sure it meets postal requirements.*



Adobe InDesign and Photoshop CS3 Workshops Announced!

If one of your New Year's resolutions is to sharpen your design skills, you are in luck—EBSCO Media is now taking reservations for the latest in its series of FREE Adobe workshops. The day will be divided in half to the two most requested topics: Photoshop and InDesign. Attendees may sign up for one or both sessions. One lucky attendee will win their very own copy of the Adobe Creative Suite (must be present to win)!

Back by popular demand, Claudia McCue will be our instructor. She is the well known author of Real World Printing and owner of Practicalia, a prepress house in Atlanta, GA.

August 28th, 2007

Session 1 - Photoshop Time: 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon
Session 2 - InDesign Time: 1:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

McWane Science Center

200 Nineteenth St. North, Birmingham, AL 35203

To register for this FREE workshop online, go to:

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