

10 Things You Must Know About Addressing Envelopes

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It's the final countdown to your wedding day. You've reviewed your guest list dozens of times. Your invitations are in. Your envelopes are ready to be addressed, stuffed, stamped, and sent. This is the single, most important day of your life, and you want to make an unforgettable first impression. Ready, set, panic!

Ah, etiquette! The word alone strikes fear in the hearts of brides everywhere. At first blush, the thought of using proper envelope etiquette can feel scary, overwhelming, and complicated. There's so much to know and a mountain of information is available. Read three different etiquette books, or look at various wedding websites, and you will find conflicting information everywhere. Who has the time to learn it all? By following this practical, common sense approach to envelope addressing, those around you will see you as a knowledgeable bride with style, taste, and sophistication.

1. Take your time. Your wedding invitation is the first piece of correspondence that your invited guests will receive. It makes a statement, builds excitement, and gives your guests a glimpse into what is yet to come. It deserves as much care as your other wedding details. If you are sending have 100 invitations, it will take a while to get them ready for mailing. Enlist the aid of family and friends to help you if necessary, production-line style. Have an envelope stuffing party! Take your time, relax, and enjoy the process.

2. Use hand writing. According to Emily Post's Etiquette, envelopes for any formal (or informal) social event should always be hand-written. This often overlooked detail is one of the most important of all. "Do not use labels to address wedding invitation envelopes, even when inviting hundreds of guests. Instead, plan ahead and take the time to handwrite each envelope, so that it is in keeping with the personal tone of the wedding." Why hand-written? It's more significant to the receiver. It adds warmth, value, and worth. If you are unsure, uncomfortable, or even embarrassed at the thought of using your own handwriting, someone close to you may have beautiful penmanship. Or you may want to employ the services of a calligrapher.

3. Know your guest list. If you have a big family, sometimes it's hard to keep relative's names straight in your mind. Ask a family member to help you organize your list. Also, keep in mind that other people are living their lives as you're planning your wedding. Just as you are ready to mail your invitations, you may find out that Cousin Sarah has a new boyfriend, or that Uncle Fred has just moved. The key word is "flexibility".

Although weddings are a family event, the words "and family" are not used on envelopes. To invite children, list first names on the inner envelope only, in birth order, from oldest to youngest, under the parent's names. If you don't know the names of your distant cousin's children, make a call to someone who does. They will appreciate your efforts. Adult children (over the age of 18) who are still living at home should have their own invitation.

4. Spell it out. When addressing invitation envelopes, all words should be completely written out, with no abbreviations. The exceptions are: Mr., Mrs., Sr., and Jr. Write out the word "and," as in "Mr. and Mrs.," "Apartment", "Suite", "Post Office Box", and the name of the state. You may either write out the word "Doctor", or use the abbreviation "Dr.". Both are considered acceptable. Full names and addresses are written on the outer envelope, while the inner envelope is for surnames only, like "Mr. and Mrs. Smith". How do you tell the difference between outer and inner

envelopes? The outer envelope has a return address printed on the back flap, has glue on it, and is slightly larger than the inner.

5. Use proper titles. From religious to military to occupational, full and proper titles are always used. It is in good taste (and shows respect) to include the title your guests have earned, like The Reverend, Rabbi, The Honorable, Doctor, or Captain. In the case of two doctors, their names are written on two separate lines, one under the other, even if they are married. For instances where the wife has chosen to retain her maiden name, two separate lines are used as well, but with the word "and" in front of her name on the second line, to denote that they are a married couple. Just as "Mr. and Mrs." are the most obvious titles, "Miss" and "Master" are still used for young children. Widows or married women attending alone are addressed as "Mrs." The word "Ms." can be used for an adult single or divorced woman.

6. Just say no to nicknames. The use of nicknames is considered inappropriate for formal correspondence. Chances are that the friends you've known your whole life as Sandy, Katie, and Annie have proper, given names like Sandra, Katherine, and Ann. Bobby, Tommy, and Jimmy are no doubt Robert, Thomas, and James. Good etiquette dictates that these names are used for wedding envelope addressing.

7. Always include guests. It is a thoughtful gesture to include guests for single adult attendees. The words "and Guest" are used on the inner envelope only, and only if the guest is truly unknown. If the guest is known, include the guest's last name, with title, on the inner envelope.

8. Don't assume anything. Is the couple you're inviting living together or separately? Couples living together are listed on two separate lines, one under the other. The woman's name usually appears first, with the man's name dropping to the second line. If you know the man better, or if he is a relative, his name should appear first. If they don't live together, you can either send two separate invitations, or include the partner's last name, with title, on the inner envelope only.

9. Double check your information. What could be more frustrating and annoying than having an invitation returned to you as "undeliverable as addressed"? Or with the wrong zip code? You can check zip codes at the United States Postal Service website: www.usps.com. Here's one of the best-kept secrets of this website: as you're checking for the right zip code, you will find that the search feature corrects the spelling of the street address, too!

10. Check your postage. More often than not, wedding invitations are overweight. Oversized or square envelopes will require extra postage. You can check postage even before you are ready to mail your invitations. Simply assemble a sample all of your invitation's components, along with all of the extra inserts (hotel information, maps, etc). Then take the "blank" to the post office and have it weighed. Don't forget to purchase the stamps for your reply envelopes. The U.S. Postal Service has recently increased their awareness regarding wedding invitations, so you will find a variety of beautiful stamp choices. Invitations are normally mailed out four to six weeks in advance of your wedding; eight weeks ahead if you are inviting out-of-town guests who require hotel reservations. Check the response deadline on your invitation. It is customary to allow 2-3 weeks for your guests to respond.

Finally, don't panic. Remember that there are no invitation police. In the end, the most important thing is that all of your etiquette decisions feel comfortable for you. For more information about wedding etiquette, read Emily Post's *Wedding Etiquette*, Crane's *Wedding Blue Book*, and *Bride's Book of Etiquette*.

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More information available online at 24karatdesigns.com