

## **STAMP COLLECTING 101**

**An educational offering from the American Philatelic Society,**

**[www.stamps.org](http://www.stamps.org)**

The APS beginning stamp collecting workshop -- Stamp Collecting 101 -- is not complicated. Even a few energetic and knowledgeable collectors can easily organize a similar event -- although the more helpers, the easier the task. Keep in mind why you enjoy the stamp hobby, convey that excitement, and you should create some new collectors. Here's how!

### **STEP ONE: WHAT YOU NEED FIRST**

**An organizing group of several people**, some of whom also may be willing to be instructors or helpers.

**A place to hold the event.** Whether you make Stamp Collecting 101 a part of a stamp show or a freestanding event sponsored by a club or any group of interested people, aim for a quiet, controlled environment, i.e., a room away from a stamp show floor; a classroom; or a meeting room. When setting up your room, make this a festive area. Ask your local post office for stamp posters to use in decorating the area.

**Funding** up front to cover the purchase of supplies, photocopying expenses for handouts and flyers, making signs, "freebies" for students, and advertising your event.

### **STEP TWO: MAKE SOME DECISIONS**

Your committee should discuss and **agree on an age limit for admission** to your event. The APS Stamp Collecting 101 usually offers an adult session for those 15 and up. Our youth version is tailored to ages 10-15. A younger age group also might be considered.

Why hold an adults-only session? Many adults find the most comfortable atmosphere for learning means being treated as an adult, by adults, in the company of adults. Some adult beginners have even expressed that they feel slightly embarrassed to be starting the hobby as grownups, and having children in the room may increase the feeling that they're starting a "kid's hobby." Whatever you decide, mention the age limit in the promotion, and on the signs at the entrance to the program.

Decide if you will **charge a registration fee** and **if you will limit the number of attendees**. Charging a modest registration fee (\$5-\$15) will encourage potential students with a serious interest to sign up and show up! In exchange for this modest fee, APS Stamp Collecting 101 attendees receive a plastic treasure bag full of educational leaflets, a packet of stamps and covers (with a minimum catalog value of \$25), a stamp magnifier, tongs, a packet of hinges, and a stock book page. Local collectors and dealers may be willing to donate materials for the bags; a local dealer may be generous in exchange for some free advertising in the bags, the pre-event publicity, and at Stamp Collecting 101 itself.

Consider **limiting the number of attendees** to no more than 20. The class works best with a low student to instructor ratio, where direct, personal interaction (questions and answers and conversations) can take place during hands-on activities. We've operated stations for larger groups, but have had the most success in a classroom setting with about 20 students.

### **STEP THREE: SET A TIME SCHEDULE**

One morning and/or one afternoon session seem to be the most successful scenario.

Allow 20 minutes of instruction and 10 minutes of question and answers for each of the planned topics. One of the best features of Stamp Collecting 101 is the chance for beginners to ask questions and get answers on the spot -- make sure the opportunity exists! Remember: your aim is to provide general information, not to lose your audience in esoteric byways of specialty collecting.

#### **STEP FOUR: SUGGESTED SEMINAR HIGHLIGHTS**

Review the suggested activities, and choose instructors to lead beginners through the following hobby highlights.

**Overview of the hobby:** The instructor gives a general talk about why he or she collects, and a brief summary of the different types of philatelic items and collecting interests. Let your enthusiastic “people person” do this lesson! In the APS Stamp Collecting 101 we use a PowerPoint presentation called *Stamp Collecting Fun* available on the APS website as a pdf or from the APS Education Department.

*Supplies Needed:* ruled paper and pens for the students to take notes or you can develop a handout with all of the information, less a few key points for students to fill in the blanks.

**Tools of the hobby:** Instructor should be familiar with correct procedures for using philatelic tools and have a good understanding of the various kinds. Demonstrate how and why to use tongs; demonstrate how to measure a stamp’s perforations on a perf gauge, the merits of paper, plastic, and metal perf gauges; show them stamps with an actual watermark, with fluid and tray; mention the importance of color for early stamps; etc. Make sure each group of 2-3 students has the opportunity to see tools in action; then give them a hands-on experience, too.

*Supplies needed:* Examples of the various tools: tongs (varying tips and lengths), perforation gauges (metal, paper, plastic), millimeter scale, magnifiers, watermark detectors (high tech vs. fluid vs. dark paper of glass), color guides

**Stamp identification:** Help students understand the languages on stamps by using the stamp identifier in the back of each *Scott Catalogue*, by visiting websites that offer stamp identification services (Google “stamp identifier”) or by using the *APS Stamp Identifier* book for sale on the APS website.

*Supplies needed:* *Scott Catalogue*, web access and computer with digital projector, or *APS Stamp Identifier*.

**Sources of stamps:** Instructor should be familiar with various types of dealers (e.g., mail-order, shows, Internet). Display philatelic publications with classified and dealer ads; mention membership in the APS and various specialty groups; review other sources of stamps, such as philatelic auctions, mailbox, businesses, etc. The APS brochure *10 Low-Cost Ways to Collect Stamps* is a good resource.

*Supplies needed:* Suggested handouts include the APS brochures *Welcome to Stamp Collecting*, *10-Low-Cost Ways to Collect Stamps*, and *Three Tips for Stamp Collectors*. Have copies of philatelic publications for browsing and a list of addresses of the major publications. These brochures are downloadable from the APS website.

**Using a stamp catalog:** The instructor should be at ease with the Scott Catalogue and other stamp catalogs and should be able to walk a baffled, new collector through a typical entry. Use

the introduction to the *Scott Catalogue*. Review each element of a typical catalogue listing; show and explain the Specialized and Classic catalogues. You could also review and explain the other catalogues, such as *The Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps* (which illustrates all U.S. stamps in color), Michel, Stanley Gibbons, etc. It's also helpful to talk briefly about stamp condition, gum, centering, and other details in the introduction.

*Supplies needed:* Sample catalogs (ideally a full set); also photocopies of the page explaining catalogue listings in the *Scott* introduction. Do use visuals, such as overheads or slides, or provide a sample listing photocopied for each student or an enlarged example of a stamp catalogue listing on poster board

**Storage options:** Instructor should be familiar not only with the various storage options but common problems and/or mistakes that occur due to poor quality plastics, humidity, rough handling, and exposure to heat and light, etc.

*Supplies needed:* Have examples of various types of albums, from beginner's types to more specialized, mounts and hinges, stock sheets, glassine envelopes, mint sheet file, cover album, various stock books. Provide a list of companies that specialize in archival storage products. The APS website has a searchable database of dealers, many of whom sell via their website.

## **WORKSHOP AND ACTIVITY AREAS:**

**Soaking stamps off paper** -- One or more helper/monitors should be available to go over the do's and don'ts of soaking stamps. They should be able to discuss the frequently asked question, "When should I not soak stamps off an envelope?"

*Supplies needed:* Small plastic bowls, piles of stamps on paper, and/or envelopes with stamps on them; multiple pairs of scissors, several 2-quart or 1-gallon plastic jugs of water, a bucket into which used water can be discarded, rolls of paper towels, waste bucket. Offer the APS flyer *Three Tips for Stamp Collectors*, available on the APS website, which discusses soaking stamps. Modern U.S. stamps since 2004 are difficult or impossible to soak away from the paper. A helpful article, *It's Like Magic* explaining the solution to removing paper from self-adhesive stamps, is also available on the APS website

**Stamp browsing** -- Helper/monitor should be familiar with the various types of stamps and be able to show how to use reference materials to identify items.

*Supplies needed:* Piles of worldwide stamps, revenues, postage dues, cinderellas, etc. These may be "on paper." APS Stamp Collecting 101 students fill a stock page of the various types of stamps they find and label the stock page accordingly.

**Stamp exhibits** -- As space allows, display a few exhibits that would appeal to beginning adults. As time allows, explain the exhibit competition process.

**Philatelic publications and audiovisuals** – Provide samples of journals, periodicals, DVDs, and cds to show your participants the breadth of information and research. Include information about the American Philatelic Research Library as a resource.

## **STEP FIVE: PUBLICITY**

Articles/news releases for local media should be sent out to allow publication beginning about a month and a half before the event. Send out follow-up releases to encourage attendance. Be sure to use the community weekly papers as well as any larger, "mainstream" papers. In addition, post brightly colored notices in libraries, community centers, and other public gathering spaces!

To get you started, we're providing a **sample news release**. Use active voice and remember to include all the basic W's: who, what, where, when.

### **STAMP COLLECTING 101**

Find the fun and explore the fundamentals of stamp collecting in a special workshop [Date] at the [Location] from [Time Period]. Sponsored by [Organization or Individuals], this friendly hands-on workshop invites adults and older teens, age 15 and up, to learn more about stamp collecting. Start a postage stamp collection at this workshop or learn more about your collection. Students will work with worldwide stamps and questions are welcome! Registration is limited to the first [number] people; a registration fee of \$[ ] entitles the student to admission to class plus a bag of [ ]. For more information about Stamp Collecting 101, contact [\_\_\_\_\_]. Spend half a day today and get a hobby for a lifetime.

**Ads and free listings in newspapers**, community events columns, local cable TV lists, and public-service radio announcements, may have to be short to meet the requirements of the provider. The minimum promo should emphasize the adult (family, or youth) beginner opportunity to learn more about the world's greatest hobby, where and when the event will be held, and a contact person.

**Other promotional opportunities** include using local libraries, community centers, senior citizen centers, post office lobbies, and even supermarket bulletin boards. Don't overlook anywhere you could hang one of your posters. You should ask if proprietors would like you to return to collect your posters.

**Posters/flyers:** These can be of the same design, one photocopied on bright paper and the other copied on heavier weight paper or printed on poster board. Use some attractive stamps as designs and state at least the basic event information. These are so inexpensive to make that you should paper your town with them; give a good supply to everyone on your committee and in the club. They flyer should be sent to anyone who calls or writes for information.

**Registration form:** Enclose one with the flyer to reply to inquiries. Keep the name and address of anyone who inquiries, whether they sign up or not, as you may want to mail stamp club information to them!

AS YOU CAN SEE, there is no mystery about hosting a beginner's workshop. It's basically a dialogue between happy collectors and those who want to be, in a setting that includes lots of stamps.

The American Philatelic Society has something for everyone! Whether you are a beginning collector or have collected for years, we welcome you to join the more than 35,000 members of the APS. Joining the APS provides services and educational opportunities to broaden your interests and enhance your collecting enjoyment. Please make your students aware of the opportunity to be a part of the larger hobby by joining the American Philatelic Society.