



“United States Postal Service”

Reading Comprehension – Informational Passages ⁽⁸⁾



Directions: Read the passage. Then answer questions about the passage below.

The United States Postal Service (also known as USPS, the Post Office, informally as the P.O., or the U.S. Mail) is the third largest employer in the United States, after the Department of Defense and Wal-Mart. It employs over 785,000 workers in over 14,000 U.S. postal facilities.

The Postal Service has certainly grown and changed since 1775 when the first Postmaster General – Benjamin Franklin – was named to head the Post Office Department, the forerunner of the current USPS. At that time, members of the Second Continental Congress agreed that the Postmaster General **headquarters**, or most important offices, would be stationed in Philadelphia, and that the Postmaster would be paid \$1,000 a year for his or her service.

As the country grew westward, it became necessary for the railroad system to carry the mail. The Railway Mail Service (RMS) was initiated in 1862. The RMS workers sorted mail on the train, and became some of the fastest workers in the system. They sorted about 600 pieces of mail per hour. All the mail had to be **sorted** before the train reached the first stop, since some of the mail was destined for that first stop on the route.

By 1918, the Post office took over air mail from the U.S. Army. The first airplanes used in U.S. air mail were **surplus** planes from World War I. The Post Office started with only four pilots flying these leftover planes in August 1918, but by the end of that year, the Post Office had hired 36 more pilots. By 1920, over 49 million air mail letters had been delivered.

The Post Office has used alternate methods of transmission during its history. It owned and operated the first telegraph lines from 1884 to 1887 – when the lines were privatized. It utilized “V-Mail” (Victory Mail) during World War II when U.S. military mail was put on microfilm in the U.S. and printed near its destination, in order to save space on military transport. During the 1980s, Electronic Computer Originated Mail, called ECOM, was used for some bulk mailings. Computer generated mail was printed near its destination, and bore a blue ECOM logo on its special envelopes.

In 1970, the Postal Reorganization Act, signed by President Richard Nixon, replaced the Post Office Department (a Cabinet-level department) with the independent US Postal Service.

The independent US Postal Service has **streamlined** its workload and modernized operations. Today’s multi-line optical character readers (MLOCs) can read the entire address on an envelope, print a barcode on the envelope, and sort the mail at the rate of nine letters per second. The zip code + 4, a four digit code added to the end of the existing 5-digit code, has decreased the number of times a piece of mail needs to be handled. Special barcode sorters assign an 11-digit zip code to each address, apply a barcode to each letter, and sort the mail in order of delivery.

The Postal Service has installed automated customer-service equipment in lobbies, and is planning to **automate** even more of its work, including more machines which will process parcels and forwarded mail.

The price of a first-class stamp - recently approved at 44 cents and good for up to one-ounce domestic mail - seems relatively inexpensive compared to its predecessor; the first U.S. postage stamp, issued in 1847. The first stamps, adorned with a picture of Benjamin Franklin, sold for 5 cents apiece. They were used for letters weighing less than one ounce with a travel distance of less than 300 miles. By way of comparison, pay records available for the 1890s indicate that a typical year’s pay for a schoolteacher was around \$500, or 10,000 times the price of a stamp. Stamp prices then seem relatively high when compared to today’s average teacher pay, in the \$40,000 per-year range, or about 1,000,000 times the price of a postage stamp!



Questions:

- 1) What is another name for the United States Post Office?
 - A. The P.O.
 - B. The U.S.A. Mail
 - C. The Ministry of Mail
 - D. The Mail Department
 - E. The U.S.A. Postal Department
- 2) How much did Benjamin Franklin earn as Postmaster General?
 - A. \$100 per year
 - B. \$500 per year
 - C. \$1000 per year
 - D. \$14,000 per year
 - E. \$40,000 per year
- 3) What technological innovation did the Post Office use during World War II?
 - A. Telegraph lines
 - B. Surplus airplanes
 - C. Mail on microfilm
 - D. Computer-originated mail
 - E. Multi-line optical readers
- 4) When was the Post Office removed from the Executive Cabinet?
 - A. 1847
 - B. 1918
 - C. 1920
 - D. 1970
 - E. None of the above
- 5) What acronym was used for the system of transporting mail by rail?
 - A. RMS
 - B. USPS
 - C. ECOM
 - D. MLOCs
 - E. None of the above

Vocabulary:

- 1) The best synonym for *headquarters* is...
 - A. employer.
 - B. postmaster.
 - C. main office.
 - D. mainstream.
 - E. central hub.
- 2) When you *sort* items, you ...
 - A. collect them.
 - B. unify them.
 - C. arrange them.
 - D. organize them.
 - E. Both C and D are correct.
- 3) Which is the best synonym for *surplus*?
 - A. Superfluous.
 - B. Antiquated.
 - C. Military.
 - D. Damaged.
 - E. Pristine.
- 4) The best synonym for *streamlined* is...
 - A. Made more durable.
 - B. Made more popular.
 - C. Made more efficient.
 - D. Made more expensive.
 - E. Both A and C are correct.
- 5) To *automate* is to ...
 - A. mechanize.
 - B. make automatic.
 - C. accomplish by machine.
 - D. All of the above.
 - E. Both B and C are correct.

