

Excerpt from:

APS Manual of Philatelic Judging and Exhibiting
Seventh Edition
revised October 2019

[View entire Manual on the APS website](#)

APP. 2.1.7 First Day Cover Exhibits

A first-day cover (FDC) exhibit focuses on the earliest date of use, usually the official first day issuance according to the postal administration, of a stamp or series of stamps or other postal emissions, including postal stationery, meter stamps, and frame labels. FDC exhibits mirror traditional exhibit types, generally developing the story from initial stamp design and production, to the stamp announcement and related para-philatelic elements, the cancel and cachet studies associated with the first day of issue and, finally, commercial uses. This order presents a logical evolution of the issue from conception to implementation. Stamp production would usually include items such as artists' sketches or drawings, stamp models, essays, proofs and other archival material that is available to the public. Following the design or proof section, it is appropriate to discuss printing aspects (plate layouts, plate numbers involved, plate proofs, marginal markings, plate flaws and varieties, perforations, etc.). Production mistakes such as pre-printing paper folds or creases, perforation errors, missing colors and other oddities enhance the exhibit.

Para-philatelic material directly related to the issue of the postal emission could include documents and letters soliciting the issue, stamp release announcements, ceremony programs, postal agency publicity photos, newspaper articles, press releases, etc. Prior to the 1937 "Ordinance of 1787" issue, the United States Post Office Department did not produce a special First Day of Issue cancel, so in earlier FDC exhibits, it is appropriate to include a cancellation study, discussing the various cancellation marks used including main post office, station post office, airmail field, parcel post, duplex and hand cancel postmarks. For many issues after the advent of the First Day of Issue cancel in 1937, several varieties of these cancels also exist. Therefore, a cancellation study is important for these issues as well. Machine cancel varieties include different spacing between the killer bars and different killer bar lengths. In addition, the machine cancel dial details may differ. Foreign issues may also feature multiple marking devices and they should be presented and explained when employed.

The cancel section would also showcase pre-dates, and those uses, if known, of the postal emission prior to the official first day of issue. Unofficial cities are also important to show. These may be known and listed in the American First Day Cover Society listings or they may be previously unlisted as unofficial cities.

The cachet section traditionally starts with a showing of first cachets (the first mass-produced cachet for distribution and sale by a given cachet maker). Many cachet makers began by making a cachet for an issue for fun, friends or family members; these however, would not be considered their first cachet. It is important to showcase first cachets generated for the stamp or issue being exhibited.

The cachet section can be quite large and dominate the center portion of the exhibit, so it is important to organize this section in an interesting and logical manner and break it into several manageable chapters. You would best avoid simple organizations such as an alphabetical showing of the cachet makers or black-and-white to single color to multicolored cachets. If you focus on cachets you also need an emphasis on postmarks that constitute earliest documented use (EDUs) and un-cacheted FDCs that passed through the mail. This is especially true of postal emissions preceding the mid-1920s.

Studies of a single cachet maker also are popular. Many cachet makers have had long and storied careers and the treatment of such exhibits usually study the chronological evolution of their careers through their art work and production changes. These exhibits also would include a brief biography of the cachet maker.

General purpose cachets may be included, but they would take a secondary status compared to those cachets

that are directly related to the stamps. Likewise, add-on cachets are a postscript to the conception and implementation of the issue, and if shown, at all, are best held to a minimum. The exceptions are a few well-known and highly sought artists whose material has come to be expected in FDC exhibits.

A good segue from the cachet section to the commercial uses of the stamp, is a section dedicated to FDCs addressed to domestic and foreign destinations. These are not cacheted, and they are true commercial usages, postmarked during the first day of issue. Commercial uses would ideally include a variety of period rates, fees and services to both domestic and foreign destinations.

FDC exhibits may also focus on a single first-day cachet maker and trace his or her story through their cachets. Occasionally, a FDC exhibit may emphasize cancellations, postal markings, rates, destinations, and/or commercial FDC uses.

First-day cover exhibits can demonstrate many aspects of postal history and these stories would be organized along the guidelines explained in APP2.1.10 on postal history types. Almost any aspect of postal history could be told with an exhibit of FDCs, but the exhibitor should focus on the postal history story and avoid the temptation to let the cachets overwhelm the postal history. Importance will center on the completeness of the postal history story told.

First-day covers can also be used to tell thematic stories. FDCs of a stamp or set of stamps illustrating a subject can be used to explore that subject in more depth with related collateral material. FDC exhibits using this creative approach explain it thoroughly in the synopsis, and the Title Page clearly states what is being shown to avoid confusion of purpose.

Additional Considerations

- Importance in production subject FDC exhibits lies in the thoroughness of treatment and the presence of key pieces important to the purpose. An exhibit focus with more production aspects is inherently more important than one with limited production aspects.
- Importance of postal history subject FDC exhibits is similar to that of postal history exhibits, gaining philatelic importance based on the number and complexity of postal services or activities that it examines and explains.
- Importance for non-philatelic subject FDC exhibits is not based on the importance or significance of the selected theme. Broad subject areas that display range and depth in a comprehensive treatment are more important than a narrow exhibit focus that is self-limiting and shallow. An exhibit seen as a definitive showing of a particular subject or that provides a new perspective and insight to the subject by its organization, treatment or overall content, or an exhibit that is creative in concept and execution, has a greater exhibit importance than one that is more common in its approach and treatment.
- The production subject FDC exhibit offers an extensive opportunity to demonstrate your philatelic knowledge. In addition to cachet knowledge, you can show stamp production knowledge and postal history knowledge demonstrated through the commercial usages exhibited. The correct identification of all philatelic aspects of the first-day material is expected. This includes information on the postal emission as well as the cancels and auxiliary postal markings. The write-up should reflect knowledge of the literature on the subject. Demonstrating personal research beyond the standard catalogs and handbooks is always desirable.
- Since cachet production can involve many different approaches to production, explaining the cachet production method(s) (such as lithography, photogravure, thermal printing, intaglio, etc.), also demonstrates your knowledge.
- Attributes of other exhibit types may be found in the write-up and the material displayed. For example,

exhibits of airmail FDCs may include first flight covers with explanations of the rates and routes represented, airport dedication covers, AMF postal markings, crash covers, pilot autographs and similar material. A postal stationery FDC exhibit may delineate die, watermark and knife varieties.

- Archival material and some para-philatelic material are often difficult to acquire. Classic cachets, early EDUs and some highly sought cachets are also difficult to obtain. You should identify such items for the jury and explain why they are rare.
- Exhibits of modern FDCs would include cachet or cancel varieties and commercial or uncommon uses.
- First-day covers with auxiliary markings, unofficial cancels, or those mailed to foreign destinations, are usually hard to find.
- Items correctly franked to pay the intended rate are often more difficult to find than covers with blocks, plate blocks, sets of stamps, or other over-payment of postal rates. Some stamp varieties available on the first-day date may be a challenge to find.
- Rarity may apply to any time period, including modern material. If census information is provided, the source for a citation of the number of covers known is best provided.
- Loose stamps or those on piece that are clearly canceled on the first day or earliest known date are often shown if covers are exceptionally rare or if these items illustrate an important aspect of the story.
- Your presentation ideally avoids large numbers of pages with the same overall appearance. Creative layout schemes that provide diversity in appearance while drawing attention to key aspects of the material shown are best. Overlapping covers can be an effective approach as long as key cachet, cancel or stamp aspects are not covered up.