

UK ZINE SHIPPING & PACKAGING GUIDE by Nerinea

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Our national postal service - Royal Mail - is very efficient and convenient.

Open a **Click & Drop** account with them so you can purchase labels yourself for a lower "Online price" rate. Take some time to familiarize yourself with all their rates and shipping zones. Your Click & Drop account can be linked with some store sites like Etsy and Shopify and it will pull labels directly from your orders so you won't have to type them all manually.

Please note, to effectively use Click & Drop and another service I mention later you'll have to have a way to print your shipping labels. You can use a regular home printer with special label paper, or invest in a thermal label printer. Alongside the benefit of having access to cheaper shipping rates, now you don't need to visit the post office anymore and can just dump all the post in a letterbox/parcel box. **For smaller projects, these are not necessary and the price might not be worth investing in a label printer** - if you're not planning to handle more than 100 orders it's perfectly fine to just visit your Post Office and have them calculate and print labels for you. Look into **Royal Mail Drop & Go** service in this case. It will save you A LOT of time.

Always aim to ship your bundles as **Large Letter**, if possible. Royal Mail's prices rise quickly for Small Parcels, even if your package is small and light. Large Letter dimensions go up to A4 and **25 mm thickness**, while max weight is **750 g**. Parcel thickness and weight will be important as you'll want to plan your fulfilment with this in mind.

[Domestic shipping](#) is always super cheap, fast and effective, so you needn't worry about it too much.

International shipping comes in a couple of options: International Economy, International Standard, and International Tracked (with all its variations). The first two are untracked services.

[International Economy](#) is slower (can take anywhere from a week up to 8 weeks) but prices are consistently super low. I recommend it for a default cheap (or "free") shipping option for zines as people are not expecting their orders to arrive quickly anyways. USA and Canada (where most of your orders will be) will take two to three weeks on average, even though the website lists expected delivery as up to 6 weeks.

[International Standard](#) is faster (takes up to 8 business days) but imo it's the worst option for zine projects as it's considerably more expensive (for the USA especially) while still not providing tracking. The only thing it gives you is half the time for the order to arrive, and in my experience, people will rather wait longer than pay more. Int Standard also becomes as expensive as tracked service for Small Parcel weights.

[International Tracked](#) can be a budget tracking option but for packages over 750g I recommend checking with the next service I mention. Depending on the country your package might NOT be tracked all the way to the receiver but rather just until it leaves the UK. This is because Royal Mail hands their packages over to other national postal services and these might not have tracking support. In my experience, some countries will not have this option available anyways and Royal Mail will display International Signed instead.

Once your package surpasses Large Letter, and definitely once it's over 2 kg in weight, I recommend switching to **Parcel2Go** for International shipments. [Parcel2Go](#) is a Courier Comparison Site that also doubles as an order site where you can get discounted parcel shipping. You don't need an account to use it and it is super straightforward. Prices for tracked shipping bought over P2G becomes the same or cheaper than Small Parcels and Parcels over at Royal Mail. You will need a way to print your labels to use Parcel2Go.

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Keep in mind that if we want to keep our parcels Large Letter friendly 2 cm is the widest/thickest your merch items can be! So 20mm or thinner washi tapes, stamps etc.

Most of the companies will have a "large letter" filter or category on their websites so you can easily find boxes and mailers that can be shipped with this category. For a cheap and effective solution I recommend so-called PiP boxes as they are easy to find, cheap, and if you're making an A5 or A4 sized zine they will fit your zines nice and snug. Keep in mind that generic boxes can be executed with a different cardboard quality, and some might not be as resistant to bending. A4-sized boxes suffer more. If you end up with a flimsy box you can line it with cardboard boards to make it sturdier, but keep in mind that these will take up some of the box capacity.

I wholeheartedly recommend [Colompac bookwraps](#). They are made out of super rigid cardboard and have buffer corner zones which ensure the envelope is sustaining damage and not your precious zines. They come in many sizes.

Their [rigid pockets](#) are an excellent alternative for thin zines. These are super rigid and virtually unbendable, and will ensure your zines and flat merch arrives in perfect condition.

AVOID [Expandable cardboard wallets/envelopes](#) and [cardboard backed envelopes](#).

I do NOT recommend these envelopes for zine projects as they are not rigid enough and do not provide protection from bending. Postpersons also like to force-fit these into small mailboxes so your zines and prints can easily get permanently damaged. These serve well for A5 and smaller flat items that can stand some bending (like prints, stickers and sticker sheets) so can be used as a budget solution for some merch a la carte items.

ECO-FRIENDLY SOLUTIONS

You can easily replace all plastic in your packaging. All of these items are provided by UK-based companies too which saves you shipping costs.

Bubble mailers should be replaced with **hive/honeycomb mailers**. You can also get rolls of this material for cheap and use it as a void fill for your boxes.

Honeycomb mailing products:

<https://www.kitepackaging.co.uk/scp/papers/hivewrap/>

<https://www.davpack.co.uk/postal-packaging/jiffy-bags/paper-padded-envelopes.htm>

<https://www.srmailing.co.uk/collections/honeycomb-products>

I haven't tried them myself but corrugated cardboard lining is another solution for a padded envelope: <https://www.kitepackaging.co.uk/scp/postal-envelopes/paper-padded-envelopes/>

Another alternative to bubble mailers are **Jiffy Green Padded bags** but these are much pricier and heavier. They are filled with loose recycled material that gets everywhere if the envelope is cut open, so I also don't recommend them from the unboxing perspective.

Replace your plastic tape with (kraft) paper tape that can be recycled with cardboard boxes/envelopes. These can be found rather easy these days. I get them from [eco-kraft](#).

Cello bags (used to protect zines and waterproof zines and paper merch) can be replaced in a couple of ways:

1) Biodegradable transparent bags. I use [eco-kraft](#) for these. These are made out of vegetable starch and will degrade into water and CO2 on their own no matter where they are discarded (so they can also be dumped into general waste and will degrade on their own in a couple of months). They are waterproof and will not simply start disintegrating in contact with water.

2) Glassine bags. They are a very attractive semi-transparent option and were a pain to find at first but I found two UK-based sellers:

<https://xoandquin.co.uk/product-category/eco-friendly-packaging/> and <https://amarapackaging.co.uk/> (the latter sells via Amazon).

3) move waterproof protection on the outside. Put your cardboard boxes/mailers into a **compostable mail bag**. These are eco-friendly replacements for commonly used polythene bags. A couple of companies supply them and can be easily found by googling words in bold. I was very happy when I discovered [wastebased](#) - their compostable mailing bags are super affordable and look beautiful!

Don't forget to wrap your items inside the box too as they can be damaged by the movement of other items inside the box. Tissue paper and paper envelopes are very cheap and eco-friendly options. Try using recycled paper. <https://www.eco-craft.co.uk/> offers recycled tissue paper.

Credit:

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Finance and Shipping Mod for 4 past zine projects at the time of writing

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