

EXPERTIZING WORKSHOP

-How to examine stamps for genuineness

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Lighting Conditions

1. **Dark Room** - The best conditions for examining stamps includes the use of a dark room, the darker the better. The reason for this is the necessity to be able to see the stamps in obtuse lighting angles to check for tears, creases and other faults. If you have incandescent overhead, this kind lighting is detrimental to proper examination.

2. **Lighting** - The best lighting for examination of stamps is an *OTT-Lite Truecolor* or an *OTT-Lite Rechargeable* lamp. The bulbs give off a very clean, white light comparable to 99% sunlight. When examining stamps, it is very important to always view them under the same, ideal conditions. Therefore, set up your 'examining room' so that you can recreate the same conditions every time you bring out your collection or new purchases.

3. **Ventilation** - Most professionals use various forms of 'watermark fluid' to check for not only watermarks, but also faults. If you are examining more than just a few items at a time, it is important to have adequate ventilation to get rid of noxious and potentially dangerous hydrocarbon fumes. It is best to get up every 30 minutes or so and make sure the room is aired out a bit. If the room you are using is fairly large, it won't take much time to eliminate these trace gases.

4. **Comfortable seating** - It is best for you to have a desk or table that reduces the stress on your back. Having the correct height of the platform you are using and a comfortable chair will make it much easier to sit and examine your collection over long periods of time. Getting up and walking around for a few minutes also helps to reduce stress in your back muscles.

SOURCES:

Ott-Lite Lamps - www.otllite.com, Desk Lamps, Ott-Lite Battery Task Lamp -
-\$99.99

www.Joann.com, Desk Lamps, *Ott-lite High Definition
Battery Task Lamp* - \$59.99

Both of the above are identical lamps. I suggest you get it from *Joann's Fabric!*

Tools

1. **Tongs** - get a set of tongs that is comfortable to you and one that you can wield around without much chance of damaging the stamps you handle. I prefer *Showgard 902* tongs. You can easily get into pockets on auction lot sheets, stock books, stock cards, mounts and other various stamp holders. Once you get used to them, it will be like having another set of fingers.

2. **Lighting** - as mentioned in *Lighting Conditions*, an Ott-Lite is indispensable in proper examination. Colors will leap off the page as compared to viewing with incandescent lighting. And with the movable 'arm' of the light, you can change the angles of the light to help 'bring out' various points, such as creases, tears and perforation hole structure.

3. **Watermark Fluid** - Commercial watermark fluid is fine to use for watermark detection but it dries too fast to be of much value in detecting other faults. It is best to have both commercial watermark fluid AND *Ronsonol Lighter Fluid*. Ronsonol is best for detecting defects since it dries much slower, enabling you to see creases, tears and thins much easier than standard watermark fluids. It also costs one-third as much!

4. **Watermark tray** - You can purchase many different designs from your local stamp store or just use a matte surface *Showgard* black stock card. It all works just about the same.

5. **Perforation gauge** - You can get commercial perforation gauges but almost all are really technically worthless for good examination. The only satisfactory gauge I've ever used is the *United States Specialist Gauge* for United States stamps (also separately available for Canadian stamps and costs about \$20+ if you can find them) by Kiusalas (copyright 1965). These gauges are made of strong aluminum and have the proper spacing and perf hole size for US & Canadian stamps. This is absolutely critical for detecting reperfornated stamps. They are very difficult to come by since they are no longer manufactured. A possible substitute is the Sonic Imagery Labs *Precision U.S. Specialty Multi-Gauge* on transparent acetate. However, I strongly suggest ONLY the "10 Measuring Devices" version. The '11 measuring device' version is NOT ACCURATE in some of the measuring devices and should be passed on if the '10 device version' is available. The perf gauge is OK on the "11" but other measures are a bit off.

6. **Magnifiers** - You can actually spend as much or as little as you like here. Best strengths are 4X, 6X, 8X, 10X, 20X and a Stereo Microscope with zoom up to 45X. That covers the gamut of 'usable' sizes. I have a 4X, 5X, 8X and 20X that I use on almost 95% of my examinations. Magnification is really a subjective parameter since everyone's eyes are a bit different and react differently. You need to pick a few that relate to the task at hand. A PEAK 10X Scale Loup is ideal for measuring sizes of things down to 0.05mm accuracy. For grading, this item is an absolute requirement unless you can measure under a computer scanner with distance measuring capabilities.

7. **UV Lamp** - Get a good *Long wave/Short wave Combination UV light* (UVP Model UVSL-14P). These can be used for checking UV coatings (Tagging), removed pen cancels, alterations in design, Florescence of different inks, etc., etc. You can usually obtain one from your local stamp shop or other retail outlets. For advanced specialists, a *Spectroline Model SB-100P* will be useful for detecting repairs, defects and design alterations (cost about \$300-\$500).

Sources for Philatelic Supplies:

1. Your local retail stamp store
2. Mail order at *Subway Stamp Shop*, www.subwaystamp.com

Stamp References

1. **Types** - Try getting good examples of types from all series that have different types by buying USED examples where the cancel does not obscure the important points to see. This is a pretty inexpensive venture since you don't have to be concerned with buying defect free stamps. Just get good examples of the type and get defective examples to keep the cost down to the minimum. Books are also available but there is

never a better substitute than a REAL stamp example. Diagrams are OK, real life examples are better.

2. **Shades** - Differentiating the shades of a particular stamp can be one of the most difficult and challenging problems in philately. Having certified and/or good quality examples of various shades to compare subject stamps is vital. There are no viable substitutes in 'print' for real stamps. Developing 'used' examples is much more difficult since soaking and removing stamps from covers (as they originally existed) tends to change the original state (and shade) of the stamp.

3. **Fakes** - Buying FAKES may seem counter to the hobby but it is very informative when looking at coils, types, postmaster provisionals, etc. Knowing what fakes look like will help in determining what 'genuine' stamps should look like. FAKE coils, especially Perf.12 and Perf.10's, are readily available...probably a lot more exist than we'd like!

4. **Coils** - Buy certified coil pairs, the cheapest of a set, and use them to compare your subject coils. If you compare FAKE and GENUINE coils side by side, it's usually pretty easy to see the difference.

5. **Gums** - Again, buy the cheapest original gum, lightly hinged OFF-CENTERED stamp you can find of a set. You are only using it to compare 'og' to your subject item so the front of the stamp is irrelevant. This isn't a fool-proof way of examining since many sets have different og on stamps by denomination. However, you can get the sense of the thickness, color and texture of the og.

6. **Perforations** - The best way to get all of the genuine characteristics of perforation holes is to have BLOCKS of 4 in reference. This will give you the correct appearance of genuine perf holes on all the internal perforations. Pressure ridges, feathering and alignment of the shape of holes can easily be determined from blocks, no questions asked if there is no imperforate stock available to make this stamp.

7. **Watermarks** - Try getting a vertical sheet margin pair of the cheapest example from Single and Double Line watermarks. If you are really lucky, you might find some examples of the spacing and arrangement of Single & Double Line watermarks on clear acetate. That is the best of all worlds. I might have some available in January for sale at \$10 per set for SLW and DLW's. USIR will be available in February at \$5. This is a full grid of each, 5 X 5 actual size images.

8. **Special Printing Papers** - 1875 and 1880 Special Printings paper can best be obtained from purchasing the Official stamps with '*SPECIMEN*' overprint.

Continental Hard Paper Special Printings - O10S, O11S, O25S, O26S, O35S,
O47S, O57S, O83S

American Bank note Co. Soft Porous Paper - O10xS, O35xS, O57xS

Having one from each group should be adequate. The Hard papers can be had at \$25-\$40 each and the Soft Porous papers at about \$100 each. Try to get SOUND copies here. They might cost a bit more but well worth it!

Reference Library

A good reference library is worth more than stamps...maybe much more!

Having a good philatelic reference library will set you apart from most 'stamp collectors' and provide countless hours of enjoyable and valuable reading. This knowledge will

stay with you for the rest of your life and form your core as a true **philatelist**.

I have listed some of the best reference works and tried to separate them into areas of interest:

Classic United States -

Scott US Specialized Catalog (recent edition), Scott Publishing Co.

United States Postage Stamps of the 19th Century, by Lester Brookman, 3 Vol. Basic must have 19th century overview. Highly illustrated.

The New York Postmaster's Provisional, by Stanley Piller

The United States 1847 Issue: A Cover Census, by Thomas J. Alexander

The United States One Cent Stamp of 1851 to 1861, by Mortimer L. Neinken

The 3c Stamps of the United States, 1851-1857, Revised, by Carroll Chase

The United States 5c Stamps of 1856, by Henry W. Hill

The United States Ten Cent Stamps of 1855 - 1859, by Mortimer L. Neinken

United States 1851-1857 Twelve Cent Stamp, by Mortimer Neinken

United States Cancellations 1845-1869, Hubert C. Skinner and Amos Eno

Foreign Mail Cancellations of New York City 1870-1878, by Willaim R. Weiss

The Waterbury Cancellations 1865 - 1890, by Paul C. Rohloff

Durland Standard Plate Number Catalog, by Bureau Issues Association

United States Postage Stamps of 1869, by Jon Rose

The United States 1c Franklin 1861-1867, by Don L. Evans

The Harry F. Allen Collection of Black Jacks, by Maryette B. Lane

The Micarelli Identification Guide to US Stamps, 1847-1934, Scott Publishing

20th Century United States

United States Stamps 1902 - 1935, by Max G. Johl

The Experts Book, A Practical Guide to the Authentication of United States Stamps, Washington-Franklin Issues 1908-1923, by Paul W. Schmid

United States Stamps, 1922-1926, by Gary Griffith

United States Coil Issues, 1906-1938, by Martin A. Armstrong

US Definitive Series, 1922-1938, by Martin A. Armstrong

The Inverted Jenny: Money, Mystery, Mania, By George Amick

Errors on U.S. Postage Stamps (most recent edition), by Stephen R. Datz

U.S. Parcel Post, A Postal History, by Henry M. Gobie

Guide to United States Vending and Affixing Machine Perforations 1907 - 1927, by Steven R. Belasco

Literature Sources:

James E. Lee - www.jameslee.com

Subway Stamp Shop - www.subwaystamp.com

Websites:

<http://www.psaginc.com>

http://slingshotvenus.com/FranklinArchive/frnkln_archv_Main.html

<http://www.1847USA.com>

<http://www.theswedishtiger.com>

<http://www.japhila.cz/hof/0583/index0583a.htm>

<http://www.stamps.org/>

<http://asdaonline.com/>