



Five Steps to Stress-Free Holiday Cards

Use these steps to get your Holiday cards finished early, so you'll have plenty of time to relax and enjoy the holiday season!

1. Create Your List

The first step is deciding how many cards you need and getting a handle on the scope and size of your mailing list. Write a list of the people you've interacted with professionally and personally over the last year. Are there people who have made an impact in your life, who you'd like to thank, or who you'd simply like to stay in contact with? When it comes to Holiday cards, the rule of thumb is to send to the people you won't see in person over the holiday season.

If your list is larger, you may want to divide it into segments. A few questions to help craft your list:

- *Which recipients are professional contacts, where a simple card is appropriate?*
- *Which recipients should receive a longer heartfelt message?*
- *Are there people who you'd like to send a small gift or gift card?*
- *Do you plan on writing a family newsletter or update to share with your recipients?*

Generally speaking, while giving a gift card or present to everyone is lovely, most people would truly appreciate a heartfelt message even more than a gift. If your holiday budget is tight or if you're moving away from the more commercialized aspects of the holiday, a letter or personalized message is simple, meaningful and more impactful. [Say no to gifts](#) and opt for meaningful messages from the heart.

2. Avoid Post Office Stress by Creating Cards Early

The post office is notoriously the worst place during the last two weeks of December. Save yourself the headache and hassle by aiming to get your holiday cards and items to mail ready early.

3.Planning to create a photo card?

Order them in November for the best results. Take family photos in the fall, so you'll find plenty of time to adjust and change the card if something goes awry during the process.

Photo companies

like **Snapfish** and **Shutterfly** offer great deals on cards at this time of year in anticipation of the holiday rush. Similarly, handmade holiday cards are beautiful and so meaningful, but DIY takes time! Build plenty of room into your schedule so you aren't stressing out, creating cards at the last minute (or throwing in the craft towel after spending money on supplies). Give yourself plenty of time to work on your creations and the process will become much more rewarding.

Save yourself time and stress by buying stamps ahead. Many grocery stores offer stamps. You can purchase them through ATMs or online. If you purchase from the USPS website, plan on giving yourself a week lead time, as stamps often take a while to ship.

4.Track Down Addresses

Whether you keep an electronic or a paper address book, it's time to drag it out and start to pinpoint addresses for everyone on your list. Make it a point to write and record addresses each time you receive a letter in the mail, so you have a robust list to refer to.

These days with everyone on email, Facebook and cell phones, our street addresses aren't often tied to our contact information as they once were. Still, with a little tracking, you can usually find addresses for everyone on your list. Remember to check email signatures if you're working to pinpoint an elusive address.

When it comes to deciding on holiday cards, the sky's the limit! There are so many beautiful seasonal designs out there. Create your own cards with stamps, stickers and printed paper. Help your kids design a card and then print copies or order online.

Photo cards are always popular and fun. They're easy to design online and online sources like Snapfish and Shutterfly ship right to your door.

If you want to include a family newsletter, the best guidelines suggest keeping it short, humble and positive (while being authentic, of course). Offering a candid look at your family's activities for the last year is often appreciated most by close family and friends. Use humor and keep it light, succinct and anecdotal. Including a few pictures is always a fun addition as well.

Digital cards and e-cards are less personal but are appropriate for people with whom you only have a digital or online relationship. Paperless Post, Blue Mountain and others offer beautiful cards with digital animation, customizable designs and more. Online cards are also an easy way to send greetings to family and friends overseas or in the military (although there are programs to get mail to soldiers through the Department of State).

If you would like to include a gift card, look for cute options and specially made cards that are flat and easily sent in an envelope at the regular card rate. You can also send gift certificates online but including or following up with a handwritten note or card is always an appreciated gesture.

If your holiday list includes people of other faiths and denominations, there are many general "holiday" cards that still capture the sentiments of this time of year. Also consider sending New Year's cards, which you can send a little later. Any genuinely penned, kind wish is appreciated, though, so don't worry too much about the card. It's the message inside that counts!

5. And if you forget someone...

We've all had a moment where we receive a card or even a gift from someone we inadvertently left off our list. It's a little embarrassing and we may feel guilty. Ugh! The best way to handle the situation is to send a follow up note or response, or even make a phone call.

If you receive a Holiday card from someone, mention the card the next time you see them and let them know how much it meant to you. There's no need to wax on about

how sorry you are you didn't reciprocate (or invent a story about how you didn't send out cards). Instead, offer genuine thanks and appreciation for their gesture. Send a New Year greeting as a follow up and wish them all the best in the upcoming year ahead.

Cards are especially appreciated by older neighbors and family members who might not be on social media (and may not receive as many gifts). Remember any senior friends especially as the cards mean so much to them.

If someone gives you a gift, write them a letter of appreciation and let them know how much you'd love to enjoy time with them. **Giving experiences over gifts** is often more meaningful and creates lasting memories. Sentiment captures the spirit of the holidays much more strongly than another gift or more "stuff." Make your holiday count this year by really putting meaning behind your greetings and focusing on the message over the medium.

Holiday cards truly capture what the season is all about—telling loved ones how much they mean to you and why you appreciate them, and letting them know they're on your mind. As long as you focus on those messages in your holiday greetings, you're guaranteed to spread joy and cheer!

Start planning your holiday greetings now to enjoy your best, most meaningful and stress-free holiday ever!

To recap, here are 5 Steps to Stress-Free Holiday Cards

1. Create Your List
2. Avoid Post Office Stress by Creating Cards Early
3. Track Down Addresses
4. Explore Card Options
5. And if you forget someone...make a call