

‘BEGINNING COLLECTING’ SEMINAR

The APS Beginning Stamp Collecting Seminar -- Stamp Saturday -- is not complicated. Even a few energetic and knowledgeable collectors can easily organize a similar event -- although the more helpers, the easier the task. Keep in mind why you enjoy the stamp hobby, convey that excitement, and you should create some new collectors.

Here's how!

STEP ONE: WHAT YOU NEED FIRST

- **An organizing group of several people**, some of whom also may be willing to be instructors or helpers.
- **A place to hold the event.** Whether you make S-SAT a part of a stamp show or a free-standing event sponsored by a club or any group of interested people, aim for a quiet, controlled environment, i.e., a room away from a stamp show floor; a classroom; or a meeting room. When setting up your room, make this a festive area. Ask your local post office for stamp posters to use in decorating the area.
- **Some funding** up front to cover the purchase of supplies, photocopying expenses for handouts and flyers, making signs, “freebies” for students, and advertising your event.

STEP TWO: MAKE SOME DECISIONS

- Your committee should discuss and **agree on a bottom age limit for admission** to your event. The APS Stamp Saturday usually offers an adult session for those 15 and up. Our youth version is tailored to ages 10-15. A younger age group also might be considered.

Why hold an adults-only session? Many adults find the most comfortable atmosphere for learning means being treated as an adult, by adults, in the company of adults. Some adult beginners have even expressed that they feel slightly embarrassed to be starting the hobby as grownups, and having children in the room may increase the feeling that they’re starting a “kid’s hobby.” Whatever you decide, mention the age limit in every bit of promotion, and on the signs at the entrance to the program.

- Decide if you will **charge a registration fee** and **if you will limit the number of attendees.** Charging a modest registration fee (\$5-\$15) will encourage potential students with a serious interest to sign up and show up! In exchange for this modest fee, APS Stamp Saturday attendees receive a plastic treasure bag full of educational leaflets, a packet of stamps and covers (with a minimum catalog value of \$25), a stamp magnifier, tongs, a packet of hinges, and a stockbook cover page. Local collectors and dealers may be willing to donate materials for the bags; a local dealer may be generous in exchange for some free advertising in the bags, the pre-event publicity, and at Stamp Saturday itself.
- Consider **limiting the number of attendees** to no more than 20. Class works best with a low student to instructor ratio, where direct, personal interaction (questions and answers and

conversations) can take place during hands-on activities. We've operated stations for larger groups, but have had the most success in a classroom setting with about 20 students.

STEP THREE: SET A TIME SCHEDULE

- One morning and/or one afternoon session seems to be the most successful scenario, with the preferred morning-session starting time of 10:30 or 11 am.

2. Allow 20 minutes of instruction and 10 minutes of question and answers for each of the planned topics. One of the best features of Stamp Saturday is the chance for beginners to ask questions and get answers on the spot -- make sure the opportunity exists! Remember: your aim is to provide general information, not to lose your audience in esoteric byways of specialty collecting.

STEP FOUR: SUGGESTED SEMINAR HIGHLIGHTS

Review the suggested activities, and choose instructors to lead beginners through the following hobby highlights.

- **Overview of the hobby:** The instructor gives a general talk about why he or she collects, and a brief summary of the different types of philatelic items and collecting interests. Let your enthusiastic "people person" do this lesson!

Supplies Needed: Some interesting visual aids, such as a tabletop poster listing some major points to be covered.

- **Tools of the hobby:** Instructor should be familiar with correct procedures for using philatelic tools and have a good understanding of the various kinds. Demonstrate how and why to use tongs; demonstrate how to measure a stamp's perfs on a perf gauge, the merits of paper, plastic, and metal perf gauges; show them stamps with an actual watermark, with fluid and tray; etc. (If you need ideas, see Gary Burghoff's video, available on loan to APS affiliated clubs.) Make sure each group of 2-3 students has the opportunity to see tools in action; then give them a hands-on experience, too.

Supplies needed: Examples of the various tools: tongs (varying tips and lengths), perforation gauges (metal, paper, plastic), millimeter scale, magnifiers, watermark detectors (high tech vs. fluid vs. dark paper of glass), color guides

- **Sources of stamps:** Instructor should be familiar with various types of dealers (e.g., mail order, shows, Internet). Display philatelic publications with classified and dealer ads; mention membership in the APS and various specialty groups; review other sources of stamps, such as philatelic auctions, mailbox, businesses, etc. (See the APS brochure "10 Sources for Stamps" available online at http://www.stamps.org/kids/kid_tenways.htm)

Supplies needed: Suggested handouts include the APS brochures "Welcome to Stamp Collecting," "10-Low-Cost Ways to Collect Stamps," and "Three Tips for Stamp Collectors."

Have copies of philatelic publications for browsing and a list of addresses of the major publications.

- **Storage options:** Instructor should be familiar not only with the various storage options but common problems and/or mistakes that occur due to poor quality plastics, humidity, rough handling, exposure to heat and light, etc.

Supplies needed: Have examples of various types of albums, from beginner's types to more specialized, mounts and hinges, stock sheets, glassine envelopes, mint sheet file, cover album, various stock books. Could have a list of companies that specialize in archival storage products.

- **Using a stamp catalogue:** Instructor should be at ease with the Scott and other stamp catalogues and be able to walk a baffled, new collector through a typical entry. Use the introduction to the *Scott Catalogue*. Review each element of a typical catalogue listing; show and explain the Specialized and Classic catalogues. Could also review and explain the other catalogues, such as *The Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps* (which illustrates all U.S. stamps in color), Minkus, Michel, Stanley Gibbons, etc. It's also helpful to talk briefly about stamp condition, gum, centering, and other details in the introduction.

Supplies needed: Sample catalogs (ideally a full set); also photocopies of the page explaining catalogue listings in the *Scott* introduction. Do use visuals, such as overheads or slides, or provide a sample listing photocopied for each student or an enlarged example of a stamp catalogue listing on poster board

WORKSHOP AND ACTIVITY AREAS:

- **Soaking stamps off paper** -- One or more helper/monitors should be available to go over the do's and don'ts of soaking stamps. They should be able to discuss the frequently asked question, "When should I not soak stamps off an envelope?"

Supplies needed: Small plastic bowls, piles of stamps on paper, and/or envelopes with stamps on them; multiple pairs of scissors, several 2-quart or 1-gallon plastic jugs of water, a bucket into which used water can be discarded, rolls of paper towels, waste bucket. Could also have a supply of APS flyer "Three Tips for Stamp Collectors," which discusses soaking stamps. Available at http://www.stamps.org/kids/kid_tips.htm

- **Stamp identification** -- Helper/monitor should be familiar with the various types of stamps and be able to show how to use reference materials to identify items. *Supplies needed:* Piles of worldwide stamps, revenues, postage dues, cinderellas, etc. (These may be "on paper.") Stamp identifier publications such as Linn's, etc. One full set of Scott Catalogues recommended. (APS S-SAT students are allowed to fill the stock page from their treasure bag to take home. Set your own rules on this.

- **Stamp exhibits** -- As space allows, display a few exhibits that would appeal to beginning adults.

- **Videos, philatelic publications** -- If you wish, these could be one or two other areas for browsing.

STEP FIVE: PUBLICITY

Articles/news releases for local media should be sent out to allow publication beginning about a month and a half before the event. Send out follow-up releases to encourage attendance. Be sure to use the community weekly papers as well as any larger, "mainstream" papers. In addition, post brightly colored notices in libraries, community centers, and other public gathering spaces!

- To get you started, we're providing a **sample news release**. Use active voice and remember to include all the basic w's: who, what, where, when.

Discover STAMP SATURDAY -- an introduction to stamp collecting -- at [place, date, time]. Sponsored by [organization or individuals], this friendly hands-on workshop invites adults and older teens, age 15 and up, to learn more about stamp collecting. "Spend half a day today, and get a hobby for a lifetime."

[Local club members, visiting experts, experienced collectors] will share tips on where to find stamps, types of collecting, hobby tools, how to store stamps, and other useful information. Students will work with worldwide stamps and questions are welcome!

Registration is limited to the first [number] people; a registration fee of \$[] entitles the student to admission to class plus a bag of []. For more information about STAMP SATURDAY, contact [_____].

- **Ads and free listings in newspapers**, community events columns, local cable TV lists, and public-service radio announcements, may have to be short to meet the requirements of the provider. The minimum promo should emphasize the adult (family, or youth) beginner opportunity to learn more about the world's greatest hobby, where and when the event will be held, and a contact person.
- **Other promotional opportunities** include using local libraries, community centers, senior citizen centers, post office lobbies, and even supermarket bulletin boards. Don't overlook anywhere you could hang one of your posters.
- **Posters/flyers:** These can be of the same design, one photocopied on bright paper and the other copied on heavier weight paper or printed on poster board. Use some attractive stamps as designs and state at least the basic event information. These are so inexpensive to make that you should paper your town with them; give a good supply to everyone on your committee and in the club. The flyer should be sent to anyone who calls or writes for information.
- **Registration form:** Enclose one with the flyer to reply to inquiries. Keep the name and address of anyone who inquires, whether they sign up or not, as you may want to mail stamp club information to them!

AS YOU CAN SEE, there is no mystery about STAMP SATURDAY. It's basically a dialogue between happy collectors and those who want to be, in a setting that includes lots of stamps!