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HOW PRISONER MAIL (incoming and outgoing) WORKS

Mail is a serious thing here--every day I'm on edge during "mail call", in wait (and hope) for a letter. It's like ... an affirmation that I matter, that I'm worth something, I'm worth writing to; and, I'm always in hope of a photo (I like to sketch, and paint artworks of people, and if I can, I let them have them as a gift--a thank you).

Here are the current rules:

● INCOMING

1. You must address it to the prisoner, with the prisoner's full name (that they are incarcerated under), along with their SCDC number (prisoner number).
2. You have to put a return address, and it needs to be on the same side of the envelope as the addressee; not on the reverse side as some businesses like to do.
3. You have to put a FULL return address! No partials.

● EXAMPLE: Candy Jane Doe
Anytown, SC 696969

*This could be denied, and not given to the prisoner.

● CORRECT: Candy Jane Doe
803 Glengarry Way
Anytown, SC 696969

*This will be accepted. This, is, of course a fictitious example. So don't go writing Candy Jane.

4. If you send photos, send no more than 10 at a time, and they can be any size, but no larger than a 5x7. However, a photo collage, on an 8x11 piece of paper, is okay--and it may contain many photos all next to one another and/or overlapping, etc. I personally have a nice photo album I keep my photos in. NO ONE sees it but me! (No full nudity in photos either)

5. Normal size envelopes should be used, nothing scented or overly decorated, and don't write anything else on the envelope except who it is addressed to, and from. (Example: Jennifer used to write FREE MY JOHNNY on the outside of the front of the envelopes, and eventually the mail room started denying them, and returning them to sender, until she stopped, and wrote in only on the letter itself.) That was over 10 years ago....
6. You can mail a 9x12 manila clasp envelope when needed. Say, you didn't want to bend the 5x7, or the collage, or the kids' drawings, etc. Or, you just had a lot to send. Maybe some printed out info from the Internet, etc.
7. Prisoners can have magazine subscriptions, and pretty much every publication is allowed, just no porn.
8. Prisoners can receive books--but they must be purchased from a book store--like www.EdwardHamilton.com or any legitimate book seller. They just cannot be sent from a private individual or address--they have to be sent from a business.

* Paperbacks only! Except for prisoners in "Character Based Units, CBUs", they can receive hardbacks. I am currently in a CBU, and I can get hardback and paperback books and/or textbooks.

* No more than 10 books at a time.

9. Nothing scented. No perfume soaked mail.

* I reiterate this because THEY HATE IT in the mail room.

● OUTGOING

1. We can mail out letters Monday through Friday.
2. We can go to the mail room one day per week, each building has a specific day that they can go--I go on Mondays. I have to physically go there when I need extra postage stamped on anything, or I need to mail out a box (I'm in the hobbycraft and art program). Or, if I need to cut a check from my account to send someone money, order something, or put money on anyone's phone account so that I can call them, etc.
3. During a lock-down, we often times will not have access to the mail boxes, or the mail room. This could last for days! We'll still GET mail; but, can't send it out.
4. We buy envelopes from the prison store for 0.61¢ each.

5. We buy 9x12 manila clasp envelopes for 0.15¢, and then have to take them to the mail room for postage to be affixed at whatever rate the weight justifies.
6. We can also buy boxes: I like to send my educational books to my kids when I'm done with them. My son Collin has recently been enjoying my science, sci-fi, and art books. I have a new dictionary/thesaurus, history book, and a how-to-play chess book (I hope to take him on during visit one day, and teach him some strategies.) that I'm about to send him.

● INCOMING AND OUTGOING DELAYS

1. All mail is subject to be searched!
2. Incoming mail is opened in the mail room, peaked in for any contraband (e.g., drugs, porn, cash, etc.), it is then taped or stapled back shut, and sent to the "dorm" for the officer to put into the hand of the prisoner it is addressed. This process may add a one day delay on the delivery of the mail. There's a LOT of mail for the mail room to process; but, they are very efficient, and get it done relatively fast.
3. Outgoing mail, cannot be sealed: I drop my envelope in the mailbox, like those with the rotating drop, in front of a Post Office--there's one here by the cafeteria, not far from the mail room. The mail room staff empties it once every morning. I fold the flap inside the envelope, this gives the mail room staff the opportunity to peak inside to make sure I'm not mailing out anything sketchy (not referring to my artwork, no puns here). They go through, sealing it all, and it goes to the Post Office usually that evening.
4. All-in-all, the mail runs pretty fast. The only real hinder-some thing effecting mail, is a lock-down; and, that mostly just slows the outgoing because it's hard for us to get our mail into one of the mailboxes. Guards will come around and collect it at those times, for us, but, depending on what's going on to cause the lock-down--mail might not be a priority for them at that time.
5. If mail is denied, and never given to the prisoner--they don't always necessarily notify the prisoner--and if the mail does not have a full return address and is denied--it's shredded! If it does have a return address, it's returned to sender, and has a paper in it, that tells WHY it was denied by the mail room. So, if you mail a letter, and never hear back: your letter might not have ever made it to its destination.... So ... you might need to write again.

* Or double check the prisoner's location at: