

Tearing stamps apart

The first stamps did not have perforations, which are rows of holes punched through a sheet to separate each stamp. Perforations in the sheet of stamps means that you can easily tear the stamps apart without damaging them.



The first stamp was the penny black, issued in 1840. The sheets of penny blacks had no perforations. The stamps had to be cut apart with scissors. Some people were very careful and cut around the stamp neatly but some didn't cut straight or cut off the edges of the stamp.



Read on for:

- more about perforations;
- how to measure perforations;
- make your own perforated stamp.

More about perforations

It wasn't until 1854, on the penny red, that perforations were issued and over time, different perforations were used. Therefore there can be two stamps which look the same but have a different number of perforations. The perforations can affect the value of the stamp.

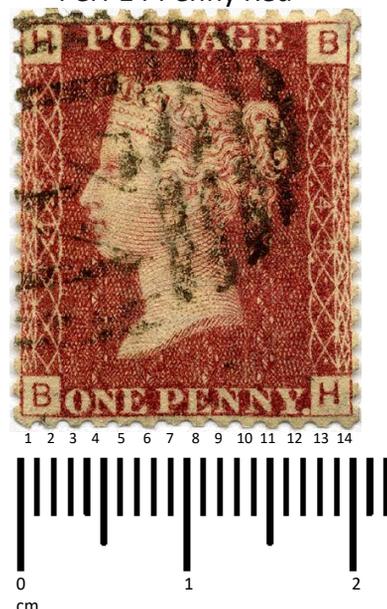
There are penny reds with **Perf 16** (*Perf is short for perforation*) which means that for every 2cm, it has 16 complete holes. There are penny reds with Perf 14 which means that for every 2cm, it has 14 holes.

Penny reds were first issued in 1841, so there are also penny reds without any perforations. A stamp without perforations is called an imperforate (*sometimes shortened to imperf*).

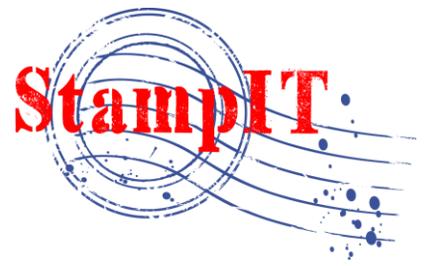
Imperforate Penny Red



Perf 14 Penny Red



Other stamps can have a different perforation measurement for the horizontal (along the top or bottom sides) and the vertical (left and right sides) of the stamp. For example, a stamp described as Perf 11 x 12 means that there are 11 holes per 2cm on the horizontal and 12 holes per 2cm on the vertical.

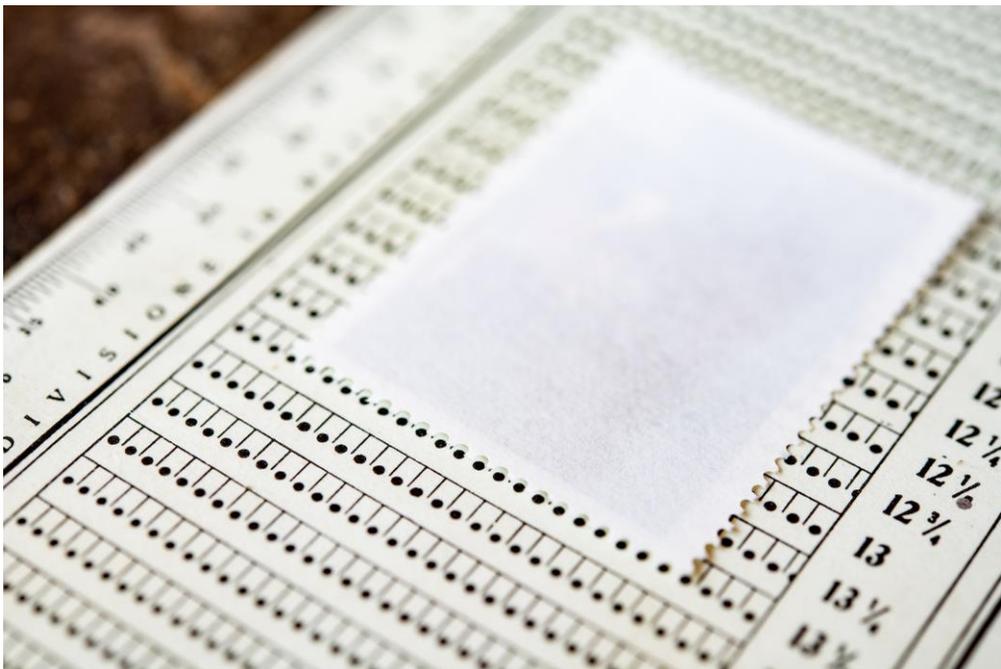


How to measure perforations

You can just measure 2cm with a ruler and then count the holes but there are tools to make it easier called perforation gauges.

How to use a perforation gauge:

- Slide your stamp up and down the perforation gauge until all of the perforation holes fit **exactly** with the black dots on the gauge. Some gauges have black lines with or without notches. For these gauges, match up the lines to the tip of each perforation. Again you have to have them matching **exactly** to measure correctly.
- Read the number along from the row. That is the perf.
- This picture shows a stamp with perf $13\frac{1}{2}$.



Make your own perforated stamp

You can make **pretend** stamps from any pictures. Draw your own, use your own photos, or cut out from magazines. There are many children's stamp-edged scissors* available online and in craft shops. Cut around your picture with the stamp-edged scissors and you have a pretend stamp.

You can glue your stamp to an envelope and draw a postmark.

Just have some fun!



*You can also use hairdressing thinning scissors which make your stamps look more realistic! Adult help may be required.

