

Posting something this Christmas?

Many people have problems when posting to family and friends, so make sure you know what to look out for when sending presents this Christmas

The Christmas period is a time when many of us are thinking about sending cards and presents to loved ones either in the UK or overseas. However, our research has shown that people are not always getting the service they expect and that problems are highest for those sending to friends and family.

Nobody wants to spend the run up to Christmas worrying about whether the parcel they've sent will arrive on time, or spend time in the New Year trying to resolve an issue with a late or damaged present. That's why we've put together some useful tips to help you avoid stress and worry during the festive period.

Our research

We've found that almost 1 in 5 people sending a parcel to friends and family experience some kind of problem. This is significantly more than those sending parcels for other reasons such as returning items bought online, or posting things sold on online marketplaces such as eBay.

Over half of people who had a problem said it was related to the delivery of the parcel, such as late delivery or being delivered to the wrong address.

Late delivery can be annoying, especially at Christmas, but more worryingly, our research also found that 1 in every 10 problems related to an item arriving damaged, with a small number of parcels never arriving at all.

There are almost 120 million parcels sent to family and friends in the UK per year, which means that every year, up to 3 in every 100 parcels are damaged in transit, 2 in 25 are delayed, and over 1 in 200 parcels are lost completely.

When something goes wrong with a delivery, it should be easy for people to resolve the problem or claim compensation. However, our research found that of the people who tried to get in touch with the parcel delivery company after experiencing a problem, almost half said they found it difficult to find contact information, with over 1 in 10 having to make contact multiple times before being able to resolve their issue.

What's more, some people are finding that they are not able to get any compensation at all, as some parcel delivery companies do not cover damage to items such as glass or ceramics, not matter how well packaged.

We're publishing a report, calling for parcel delivery companies to make it easier to contact them and to be clearer about items excluded from insurance or compensation policies. But there are also steps you can take yourself to make sure things go smoothly this Christmas.

Top Christmas posting tips

Sometimes things go wrong unexpectedly, but here are some ideas to help protect your packages this Christmas.

Before sending your parcel, check the last posting dates - especially when sending this abroad. You will need to send things in good time if you want to be absolutely sure they'll arrive before Christmas.

You are not allowed to send some types of things, such as high percentage alcohol, matches, and air fresheners via the post, and the rules are stricter for sending abroad so you should check the rules before you put your present in the post.

Most basic postage services come with a small level of insurance if your item gets lost or damaged. But some parcel companies will not insure fragile items for damage at all so if, for example, you are posting a vase or a teapot, you will not be able to claim compensation. If you are planning to post something fragile, it's important to check that your chosen parcel delivery company will provide compensation if your parcel is damaged in the post.

If your present is valuable, you may also want to pay a bit extra for additional insurance to cover the whole value of the item if it's damaged or lost.

It's also a good idea to keep the receipts of any presents you plan to put in the post as this will help you to prove the value of the item if you need to make a claim for compensation. Or, if you are planning to send money in the post, it's a lot safer to send a cheque rather than cash.

Make sure you package your present carefully and that it is well protected from any damage. If your present could be easily damaged, it is helpful to label it as fragile so parcel delivery staff know to take extra care. It is also a good idea to avoid tying your present with ribbons or string as these can get caught in parcel sorting machines.

You should also make sure the address is clear, and to put a return address on the back of the parcel in case delivery is not possible for some reason.

When dropping off your parcel it's a good idea to ask for proof of postage which should be free. This confirms the date you posted your parcel and can help you claim compensation if something goes wrong. You may also want to pay extra for proof of delivery which will let you know when your parcel was successfully delivered. These services often also offer additional insurance if you need to claim compensation for loss or damage.

What to do if something goes wrong

If your parcel arrives late:

Christmas is a busy time so parcel delivery companies might take a little longer than usual to deliver your parcel. You can check how long delivery is expected to take when you post your parcel. You should make sure you get proof of posting, such as a receipt,

when you drop off your parcel as this will help you make a claim for compensation if your parcel is delayed.

If your parcel arrives damaged:

If your parcel has been damaged in the post you should ask the recipient to take pictures of the packaging and any damage. Different parcel delivery companies have different compensation processes but to make a claim for compensation, you will normally need to provide; your name and address; the name and address the parcel was sent to, the date you posted the parcel, a description of the contents of the parcel, evidence of how you the parcel was packaged and addressed for sending, and proof of damage to the packaging.

If your parcel never arrives:

If your parcel hasn't arrived on time, it may still be on its way as most parcel delivery companies won't consider something lost until at least a week past the date it was due to arrive. If after this time your parcel still hasn't turned up you should be able to make a claim for compensation. Different parcel delivery companies will have different compensation processes but to make a claim you will normally need to provide; your name and address, the name and address the parcel was sent to, the date your parcel was sent and any proof of postage, a description of the contents of the parcel and any proof of value such as a receipt, and proof of the service used or cost paid.

Get more help

Contact the Citizens Advice consumer service on 03454 040506, or 03454 040505 for a Welsh-speaking adviser. It's open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and provides advice on consumer issues. You can also visit us online at www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer.