



Skills: *Classifying; comparing and contrasting*

## Olymphilex Lesson 4

# What Is a Stamp Collection?



If every year on your birthday your grandfather gave you a box of 1,000 different stamps, what would you have at the end of ten years? Obviously, you'd have 10,000 stamps. But more than just numbers, what would you have?

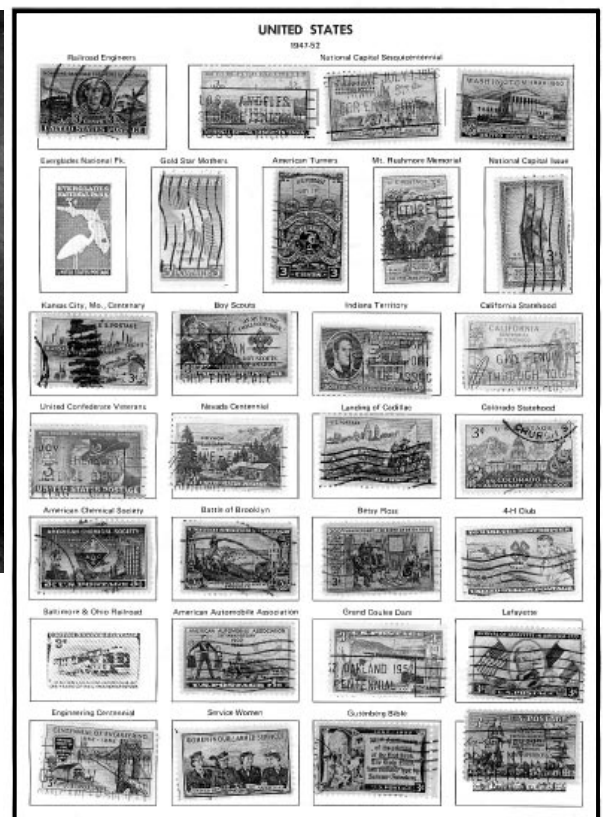
The term "accumulate" means to gather or collect little by little over a period of time, so certainly after ten years you would have an accumulation of 10,000 stamps—but would you have a stamp collection? It depends on what you did with the stamps once your grandfather gave them to you. If they are still in the boxes at the back of your closet, then you don't have a real stamp collection—rather you have a stamp accumulation.

What's the difference between a collection and an accumulation? A **collection** is any group of similar things that have been classified, sorted, and organized in some manner. An **accumulation**, on the other hand, is a group of things that has not been classified or organized. Stamp collections tend to be mounted in albums or exhibitions, while stamp accumulations tend to be found unmounted in boxes or other containers.



The box above contains over 1,000 stamps. Would you say that this a *stamp collection* or a *stamp accumulation*? Why?

At right is a page from a typical stamp album. Pages have photos for most stamps so you will know where to mount them.



Is a collection better than an accumulation? Definitely—that is, if you ever plan to use, look at, or display the things you've accumulated. Imagine going to a library that was strictly an accumulation of books with no order or sorting. If the books were not classified by topic along with catalog numbers, how would you know how to find a particular book ?

The ability to classify—that is, sort things that are similar into groups—is an important skill you will use throughout life. For example, in high school and college you'll be asked to write a research paper on some topic. To do this, you'll need to go to the library, look up books on the topic, take notes, and then write your report based on the notes. But before doing all of this, you'll first learn about preparing an outline. This outline organizes your paper into different topics, which then allows you to sort—or classify—your notes. For example, if your report is on George Washington, topic A on your outline might be "Washington's Birth and Childhood." As you read different books and articles about Washington, you'll want to mark an "A" next to any notes that deal with his childhood. Later, as you're writing your paper, you'll first look for all the notes identified by an "A."

Many stamp collectors find that they frequently need to classify their stamps. Why? First, for all practical purposes, thousands of unsorted stamps kept in a box are of little use or value to anyone. Even if there is a valuable stamp in the accumulation, how would anyone know it's there? Second, what fun is there with a box full of all types of stamps mixed together? Third, should you ever want to show off your stamps to someone else, not many people will be interested in seeing you dump 10,000 stamps onto the table. Finally, if you ever decided to sell your stamps, collectors or dealers would be more interested in an organized collection—as they would have to first sit down and go through all the accumulated stamps to see if there is anything worth buying.

So, there are many reasons why you should organize your stamps. Actually, many stamp collectors report that spending a little time every week or two going through their accumulation and classifying it into a collection is one of the most enjoyable aspects of being a **philatelist** (pronounced fa - la' - te - list), the technical name for stamp collectors.

Let's say you decide you want to start a stamp collection. Before buying an album or stamps, the first thing to do is to learn more about the hobby. Maybe your parents or grandparents were stamp collectors and can help you. If you don't know anyone who collects stamps, try checking your local library to see if there are any books on philately.

Once you do some reading, you'll quickly learn about the different ways philatelists classify their stamps—which is essential in creating and maintaining a collection.

### ***Give it some extra thought:***

- (1) Compare and contrast a stamp accumulation with a stamp collection looking specifically at definitions, characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages of each.
- (2) If instead of stamps, the box contained 1,000 baseball cards, what are some different ways you could classify the cards?