

# Using IT in philately

Software can make the philatelist's work easier.  
Here are some of the aspects that IT can help with.

1. Making documents for publication / display
2. Keeping records
3. Researching
4. Manipulating images and measuring small distances

But first some general considerations...

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## Some general considerations

1. The more a program can do, the longer it will take to learn
2. The 'headline' software (Microsoft, Adobe etc) is costly and mostly available only on subscription
3. Free alternatives can be good or dreadful. Documentation and support may be poor
4. There's a lot of review information online to help you choose. Free trial periods are common. But it takes time to explore options
5. Apple Vs PC. File formats and compatibility issues
6. Computing power: the more complex the program, the more demands it makes of your IT equipment

Let's have a look at **making documents**

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## Using IT to make documents

1. To write up album pages, make displays, compose an article, publish a book
2. All programs can 'word process' text. Most will provide extras: tables, images, graphics. MS Word is pretty powerful but expensive (part of the Office 365 suite).
3. Free alternatives include LibreOffice and Google Docs
4. The major programs enable 'publishing' features such as indexing, pagination, mail merge, but for really versatile publishing software producing print-ready pages you'll need...
5. Adobe Indesign or MS Publisher are fully featured (and pricey). Affinity Publisher 2 is cheaper (and a one-off payment) but good. Scribus is reasonable, and free
6. If your work involves lots of awkward images (eg stamps at angles), you might find photo processing software better.

Let's have a look at **keeping records**

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## Keeping records

1. The more you collect, the harder it is to remember what you've got, and where you put it.
2. Keeping records on computer enables sophisticated searches: good for covers where you might record postage, cancels, dates, cachets, destination for each, plus location in your stamp room.
3. Software: either database or spreadsheet. Latter is perhaps easier to set up.
4. MS options: Excel spreadsheet or Access database. Latter is complex!
5. Free options: OpenOffice, LibreOffice, Google sheets
6. Check how many records the software will hold...

Let's have a look at **researching**

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## Researching

1. Researching is a real skill: knowing where to look, who to ask, evaluating results
2. Using the internet may help, but a lot of older material is not online or poorly indexed
3. Using library catalogues (online or not) may well locate material the internet doesn't.
4. Using AI such as ChatGPT is perilous: gives well-written results which may be untrue
5. Important to record what you find **and** where you found it.
6. Camera / phone can be very useful (subject to library rules), but a scan preserves sizes
7. A good librarian can be an invaluable ally
8. [https://www.rpsl.org.uk/Portals/0/RPSL/Beech\\_David\\_Philatelic\\_Research\\_2019.pdf](https://www.rpsl.org.uk/Portals/0/RPSL/Beech_David_Philatelic_Research_2019.pdf) and <http://www.ukphilately.org.uk/ukphil/megalinks/links.htm> are both worth checking

Let's have a look at [working with images](#)

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## Working with images – in general pt 1

1. Software ranges from automated photo-retouch apps to complex and versatile programs which will do a great deal once you master them.
2. Professional-level programs will help with page layout as well as manipulating images. They are less good at drawing and working with 'vector' images.
3. Photoshop is the most popular 'professional' program. Subscription only, and pricey
4. Free programs generally won't do as much. GIMP is an exception. And there are good programs which don't cost a lot (eg Affinity Photo 2 at under £50).
5. Important to use any free trail period and online reviews to check that a program will do what you want

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## Working with images – in general pt 2

6. To make full use of photo software you'll need a decent scanner to input images and a good-sized screen to see detail.
7. Photo software can be very hungry on computer memory and speed
8. There's potentially a lot to get used to, especially if preparing material for professional printing – find out what resolution and file types your printer prefers.
9. There's considerable difference between web-page resolution (72 dpi and good print resolution (minimum 300dpi, 600dpi better)
10. Getting your screen and printer to show the same colour precisely can be tricky

Let's have a look at **what you can do with 'professional' photo software**

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## What you can do with 'professional' photo software

1. Crop and resize images and change their resolution
2. Change brightness, colour balance and sharpen
3. Draw and trace over images – useful for cancels.
4. Measure diameters of partial cancels
5. Measure distances accurately
6. Measure colours
7. Compose pages with images and text positioned exactly

We'll have a hands-on look at each of these in a future WASC Zoom session