

Notary Public Seals or Stamps

The need for a trusted and impartial witness who can write down commercial and other agreements has been recognized since the time of the ancient Romans, who created the office of *notarius* or *scribii* to fulfill this need. If the parties to the agreement could not write, they used a metal or clay disk with a distinctive design or coat of arms (a private seal) pressed into melted wax in place of a signature. In the following centuries, as paper making became more widespread and written agreements became longer, the pages of a document were bound together by making holes in the margins, tying the pages together with a ribbon, and pouring wax over the ribbon's knot. If the document were to be notarized, the notary would press his official seal into the wax, thereby sealing the pages of the document together.

The word "seal" means to make secure or to enclose an object. So, by sealing the knot of the ribbon that held the pages of the document together, the notary was making the document secure from tampering. This is the origin of the notary public seal or stamp. From this history, we can see that the notary public seal is a very important tool of the notary. It must be used carefully and only when circumstances warrant its use.

Unless your state does not allow its notaries to use a notary seal, you must always seal every document that you notarize. Even if your state does not require a notary seal, it is still an expected element of all notarized documents. The notary signature and notary seal are the two most critical of the five notary-specific elements of a notarized document. If either the notary signature or notary seal are missing, there is a strong likelihood that the notarization will be considered invalid. Knowing this, most recipients of notarized documents will reject them if they are presented without both a notary signature and a notary seal.

No one else may use your notary seal. Your seal is exclusively yours and is part of your equipment as a commissioned public official. You should never stamp anything with your notary seal that has not been notarized by you. Stamping a document for any purpose other than notarizing the document is an improper use of your notary seal and may be illegal in your state, even if you X out the stamp and write a note below it.

You should always stamp in such a way that your stamp can be read. Avoid stamping over typed wording; some states allow this practice, but it may cause the party who receives the document to reject it. Never stamp over signatures or anything hand-written.

If it is not possible to find a proper place on the document for your seal, attach a loose notary certificate of the same type as what is preprinted on the document, complete it by filling in any blanks, and add a note below the preprinted notary certificate to indicate that you have notarized on the attachment ("see attached notary certificate" works), then sign and seal the attached loose certificate.

It is an unfortunate fact that many documents, including some prepared by agencies or departments of your own state government, may not have room for the state-mandated notary seal. Some document recipients will object to any alterations or any attached loose notary certificates. However, such an objection does not release you from the requirement to follow the laws of your state.

Delaware Code Title 29, §4309(a), §4310(a)

The notary MUST use either a metal embossing seal OR a black-inked rubber stamp.
The seal MUST contain:

- The notary's name exactly as it appears on the commission.
 - The words "My Commission expires on" followed by the expiration date*
 - The words "Notary Public" and "State of Delaware"
- *The expiration date on the seal of a limited governmental notary public must instead read, "My commission expires upon office."

NOTE: This article serves as information purposes to broaden the knowledge of the notary public. The Delaware Notary Association is dedicated in keeping the Delaware Notary with working information in performing their duties to the best they can and to the fullest.

This article is part of the series that began with [What Does a Notary Public Do?](#)