

Books

VAT guidance for printed matter and e-publications

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1 Overview

The information below is only a summary of the zero rating of printed matter and e-publications. HMRC VAT Notice 701/10 provides full information. If you have any queries, please contact vat@reading.ac.uk.

Supplies of the items listed below are subject to a zero rate of VAT.

1. Books, booklets, brochures, pamphlets, and leaflets.
2. Newspapers, journals, and periodicals.
3. Children’s picture books and painting books.
4. Music (printed, duplicated or manuscript).
5. Maps, charts, and topographical plans.
6. Covers, cases and other articles supplied with items 1 to 5 and not separately accounted for.
7. The publications listed in Items 1 to 3 when supplied electronically but excluding publications which: (a) are wholly or predominantly devoted to advertising, or (b) consist wholly or predominantly of audio or video content.

Items 1 to 7 do not include plans or drawings for industrial, architectural, engineering, commercial or similar purposes.

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2 Meanings of the items that have a zero rate of VAT.

2.1 Books and booklets

Books and booklets are normally bound in a cover stiffer than their pages. They may be in the form of printed, photocopied, typed or hand-written items.

2.2 Brochures and pamphlets

Brochures usually consist of several sheets of reading matter fastened or folded together, which are not necessarily bound in covers. They usually contain advertising material in the form of text or illustrations.

Pamphlets are usually comprised of material of a political, social, or intellectual nature.

2.3 Leaflets

Leaflets are normally either of an ephemeral nature or designed to accompany some other product or service, for example an instruction leaflet.

If the item's main function were designed to be kept or used for a specific purpose in its own right, rather than as ancillary to another supply, it would not be a leaflet. For example, items designed to be used as a calendar.

Items printed on laminated paper are not leaflets.

Items which might otherwise be considered to be leaflets, brochures and pamphlets may not be zero-rated if they are primarily intended for completion or detachment. This distinguishes brochures, pamphlets, and leaflets from standard-rated forms.

Items are not primarily intended for completion or detachment if 25% or less of their total area consists of:

- areas which are blank and available for completion and/or
- parts that one can detach and return.

2.4 Newspapers

- Issued at least once a week in a continuous series under the same title.
- Each issue usually has a date or a serial number.
- Contain information about current events of local, national, or international interest.
- Publications which do not contain a substantial amount of news are not newspapers.

2.5 Journals and periodicals

These are magazines issued in a series at regular intervals, more frequently than once a year, either in newspaper format or as paper-bound publications.

2.6 Children's picture books

Examples of articles which are standard rated as toys include:

- books consisting wholly or mainly of pictures of models for cutting out.
- items where the pages are boards for games.

Colouring or dot-to-dot books are zero-rated only if they:

- do not include content that is only suitable for adults (people aged 18 or over)
- are not advertised or held out for sale as an adult product.

2.7 Music

Music rolls and blank music manuscript are standard-rated.

2.8 Maps, charts, and topographical plans

They can be printed on paper or other material (such as cloth) and in the form of single or folded sheets or a collection of such sheets bound together in book form (for example, an atlas).

3 Items that do not have a zero rate of VAT.

3.1 Posters

3.2 Stationery items

For example, exercise books, diaries, address books.

3.3 Letters

Permanently bound collections of letters have a zero-rate of VAT.

3.4 Incomplete publications

For example, parts of books, unbound pages, separate illustrations.

3.5 Photocopies

Unless the copies can be properly described as books, booklets, brochures, pamphlets, leaflets.

Photocopies of parts of books, extracts from periodicals cannot be zero-rated unless they are complete in themselves and have the characteristics of zero-rated items.

4 VAT Liability of supplies related to zero rated items.

4.1 Incidental articles supplied with zero-rated items.

Minor accessories, for example dust covers, clasps, bookmarks, slip cases and presentation cases, supplied with any zero-rated items, are usually regarded as forming part of the zero-rated item.

4.2 Binders and folders

A binder or folder supplied on its own is zero rated only if it is either:

- designed to contain a loose-leaf book and the exact title of that book is printed on the outside or
- supplied with loose-leaf pages to make a book.

Binders for part works, journals, or periodicals (whether specifically titled or not) are standard rated.

4.3 Loans, hire and shares, e.g., by libraries

A loan or hire of an item that is zero-rated as described in this document is a zero-rated supply.

5 Single and multiple supplies

5.1 Introduction

When you supply the same person at the same time with several different goods or services or both, if the individual elements are not liable to VAT at the same rate, you must decide whether you are making a single supply or a multiple supply.

You make a single supply when one element of the supply is the principal element to which all the other elements are ancillary, integral, or incidental.

An ancillary element does not constitute, for the customer, an aim in itself, but is a means of better enjoying the principal service (or goods) supplied.

Integral elements are elements that are essential, necessary, or incidental to the main supply.

An incidental element is something that naturally accompanies the main supply, such as packaging.

If there is a multiple supply, where two or more items are distinct and independent, if the items are sold for a single price and are liable to different rates of VAT you must make an apportionment.

5.2 The package test for packages consisting entirely of items printed on paper or card.

1. If the package contains more zero-rated than standard-rated items, the package as a whole can be zero-rated.
2. If there are more standard-rated items, the package as a whole is standard-rated.
3. Where there are equal numbers of zero-rated and standard-rated items, the liability of the package is decided by the costs of the goods, if the zero-rated elements of the package cost more, the whole package is zero-rated and the other way around.
4. If the standard and zero-rated elements cost the same amount, apportionment should be applied.

6 Production of zero-rated goods

6.1 Services of an original or specialist nature

Such services are standard rated. Any goods produced are incidental to your services.

When you supply a standard-rated service such as:

- original writing or composition or
- those involving a specialism such as translation, typing, shorthand transcription or transcription of musical scores,

you must standard-rate goods you supply with those services as incidental products even if they are zero-rated as books, booklets etc.

You may zero rate any extra copies of such items provided they are:

- in a format which qualifies for zero rating and
- supplied at a price which covers only the cost of producing the extra copies and a reasonable mark-up.

6.2 Production of new zero-rated goods

If your service is of the production of goods, then it will be zero-rated where your service has produced new goods and those goods are themselves zero-rated. New goods are produced when the essential characteristics of the goods are altered.

If, as a subcontractor, you provide typesetting services only, the charge for these services must be standard rated, even though the supply of the final product by the main contractor may be zero-rated.

If you apply a treatment or process to someone else's goods which produces new goods, the liability of your service follows that of the goods produced. For example, if you bind loose papers into a book, your service is zero-rated but if you re-cover or otherwise repair an old volume your services are standard-rated.

7 E-publications

7.1 E-publications that are “wholly or predominantly devoted to advertising, audio, or video content”.

If more than half of an e-publication is devoted to advertising, audio and/or video content, its supply will be standard rated for VAT purposes.

7.2 Items excluded from zero rating.

1. E-audiobooks have a standard-rate of VAT.
2. An e-publication that is predominantly for completing (for example, an electronic diary) is standard rated, unless it is an electronic version of a printed book whose supply is already included within the zero rate or an electronically supplied children's picture or painting book.
3. E-book readers have a standard-rate of VAT.
4. Software (for example, an “app”) used to access e-publications is standard-rated.
5. Supplies of intellectual property in e-publications are standard-rated.
6. supplies of standalone digital music manuscripts, maps, and charts (items 4 and 5 in the list in Overview above) are standard rated.

7.3 Lending of zero-rated e-publications

Charges for the lending of zero-rated e-publications have a zero rate of VAT.

8 A to Z List of common items of printed matter and their VAT liability

Acceptance cards	Standard-rated
Account Books	Standard-rated
Accounts (fully printed)	Zero-rated
Address books	Standard-rated
Advertising leaflets	Zero-rated
Agendas (fully printed)	Zero-rated
Albums	Standard-rated
Almanacs	Zero-rated
Amendment slips	Standard-rated
Amendments (loose-leaf)	Zero-rated
Announcement cards	Standard-rated
Annuals	Zero-rated
Antique books	Zero-rated
Antique maps	Zero-rated
Appointment cards	Standard-rated
Articles of association (complete in booklet form)	Zero-rated
Astronomical charts	Zero-rated
Atlases	Zero-rated
Autograph albums (uncompleted)	Standard-rated
Autograph books (completed)	Zero-rated
Badges	Standard-rated
Bags, paper	Standard-rated
Ballot papers	Standard-rated
Bankers' drafts	Standard-rated
Bibliographies	Zero-rated
Billheads	Standard-rated
Bills of lading	Standard-rated
Bills of quantity (blank)	Standard-rated

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Bills of quantity (completed)	Zero-rated
Binders	Standard-rated
Bingo cards	Standard-rated.
Biorhythm charts	Standard-rated
Blotters	Standard-rated
Book covers	Standard-rated
Bookmarks	Standard-rated
Book tokens	Standard-rated
Booklets	Zero-rated
Bookmakers' tickets	Standard-rated
Books	Zero-rated
Brochures	Zero-rated
Bulletins	Zero-rated
Business cards	Standard-rated
Calendars	Standard-rated
Catalogues	Zero-rated
Certificates	Standard-rated
Charts (geographical or topographical)	Zero-rated
Cheques and cheque books	Standard-rated
Cigarette cards	Standard-rated
Circulars	Zero-rated
Cloakroom tickets	Standard-rated
Colour cards	Standard-rated
Colouring books (children's)	Zero-rated
Comics	Zero-rated
Company accounts and reports	Zero-rated
Compliment slips	Standard-rated
Copy books	Standard-rated
Correspondence cards	Standard-rated
Coupon books	Standard-rated
Coupons	Standard-rated

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Credit cards	Standard-rated
Crossword books	Zero-rated
Delivery notes	Standard-rated
Diaries (completed)	Zero-rated
Diaries (unused)	Standard-rated
Dictionaries	Zero-rated
Directories (completed)	Zero-rated
Dividend warrants	Standard-rated
Dressmaking patterns	Standard-rated
Election addresses	Zero-rated
Encyclopaedias	Zero-rated
Engineers' plans	Standard-rated
Envelopes	Standard-rated
Exercise books	Standard-rated
Fashion drawings	Standard-rated
Flash cards	Standard-rated
Folders	Standard-rated
Football pool coupons	Standard-rated
Football programmes	Zero-rated
Form letters	Standard-rated
Forms	Standard-rated
Framed decorative maps	Standard-rated
Games	Standard-rated
Geological maps	Zero-rated
Globes	Standard-rated
Graph paper	Standard-rated
Greetings cards	Standard-rated
Handbills	Zero-rated
Holiday and tourist guides	Zero-rated
Hydrographical charts	Zero-rated
Hymn books	Zero-rated

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Index cards	Standard-rated
Inlay cards for cassette, C.D., or video	Standard-rated
Instruction manuals	Zero-rated
Insurance cover notes	Standard-rated
Invitation cards	Standard-rated
Invoices	Standard-rated
Journals	Zero-rated
Labels	Standard-rated
Leaflets	Zero-rated
Letter headings	Standard-rated
Letters (handwritten)	Standard-rated.
Logbooks (blank)	Standard-rated
Loose leaf books	Zero-rated
Lottery tickets and cards	Standard-rated
Magazines	Zero-rated
Mail order catalogues	Zero-rated
Manuals	Zero-rated
Manuscript paper	Standard-rated
Manuscripts	Standard-rated
Maps	Zero-rated
Medical records	Standard-rated
Membership cards	Standard-rated
Memo pads	Standard-rated
Memoranda of association (completed in booklet form)	Zero-rated
Memorial cards	Standard-rated
Menu cards	Standard-rated
Microfiche	Standard-rated
Microfilm	Standard-rated
Microform copies	Standard-rated
Missals	Zero-rated
Monographs	Zero-rated

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Music	Zero-rated
Music rolls	Standard-rated
Music scores	Zero-rated
Newspapers	Zero-rated
Notebooks, pads, and paper	Standard-rated
Order books and forms	Standard-rated
Orders of Service	Zero-rated
Painting books (children's)	Zero-rated
Pamphlets	Zero-rated
Paper, unprinted	Standard-rated
Parts of books	Standard-rated
Pattern cards	Standard-rated
Periodicals	Zero-rated
Photograph albums	Standard-rated
Photographs	Standard-rated
Picture books	Zero-rated
Plans	Standard-rated
Playing cards	Standard-rated
Poll cards	Standard-rated
Pools coupons	Standard-rated
Postcards (whether completed or not)	Standard-rated
Poster magazines	Zero-rated
Posters	Standard-rated
Prayer books	Zero-rated
Price cards and tags	Standard-rated
Price lists (fully printed leaflets or brochures)	Zero-rated
Printed pictures	Standard-rated
Programmes	Zero-rated
Questionnaires	Standard-rated
Rag books (children's)	Zero-rated
Receipt books and forms	Standard-rated

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Recipe books	Zero-rated
Record books	Standard-rated
Record labels	Standard-rated
Record sleeves	Standard-rated
Registers	Standard-rated
Rent books	Standard-rated.
Reply-paid coupons and envelopes	Standard-rated
Reproductions of paintings	Standard-rated
Road maps	Zero-rated
Score cards	Standard-rated
Scrap books (blank)	Standard-rated
Scrap books (completed)	Zero-rated
Scrolls (hand-written)	Standard-rated
Seals	Standard-rated
Shade cards (unless they contain substantial printed text)	Standard-rated
Share certificates	Standard-rated
Ships' logs (completed)	Zero-rated
Sports programmes	Zero-rated
Staff journals	Zero-rated
Stamp albums (whether completed or not)	Standard-rated
Stationery	Standard-rated
Stationery books	Standard-rated
Stickers	Standard-rated
Swatch books	Standard-rated
Swatch cards	Standard-rated
Sweepstake tickets	Standard-rated
Tags	Standard-rated
Temperature charts	Standard-rated
Textbooks	Zero-rated
Theses	Zero-rated
Tickets	Standard-rated

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Timecards and sheets	Standard-rated
Timetables (in book or leaflet form)	Zero-rated
Tokens	Standard-rated
Topographical plans	Zero-rated
Toys	Standard-rated
Tracts	Zero-rated
Trade catalogues	Zero-rated
Trade directories	Zero-rated
Transcripts	Standard-rated
Transfers	Standard-rated
Transparencies	Standard-rated
Travel brochures	Zero-rated
Visiting cards	Standard-rated
Vouchers	Standard-rated
Wall charts	Standard-rated
Wastepaper	Standard-rated
Wills	Standard-rated
Winding cards	Standard-rated
Wrapping paper	Standard-rated
Wreath cards	Standard-rated