

# *Bread Baking Planner*



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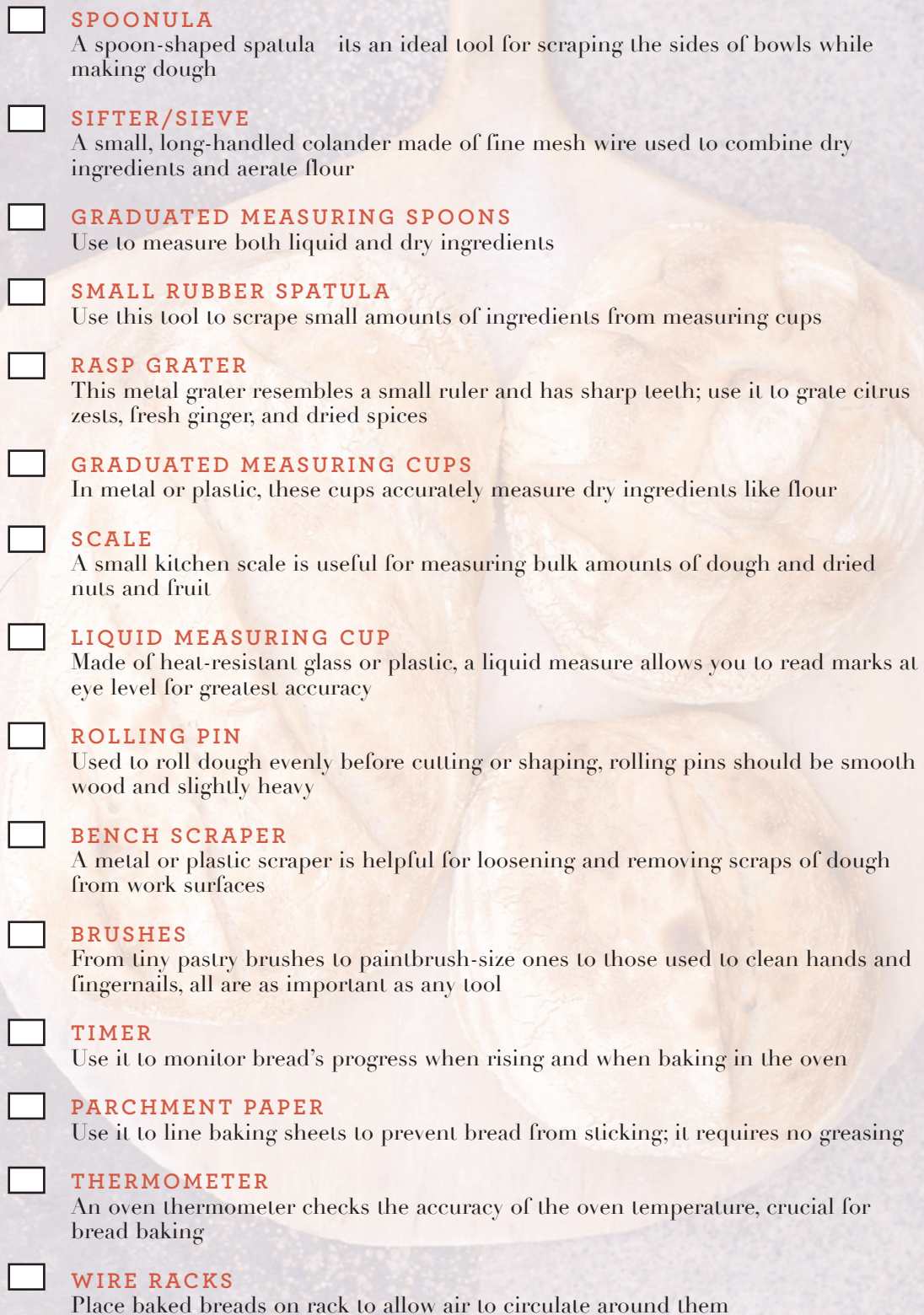
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BREAD-BAKING ESSENTIALS CHECKLIST  
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- ☐ **SPOONULA**  
A spoon-shaped spatula is an ideal tool for scraping the sides of bowls while making dough
  - ☐ **SIFTER/SIEVE**  
A small, long-handled colander made of fine mesh wire used to combine dry ingredients and aerate flour
  - ☐ **GRADUATED MEASURING SPOONS**  
Use to measure both liquid and dry ingredients
  - ☐ **SMALL RUBBER SPATULA**  
Use this tool to scrape small amounts of ingredients from measuring cups
  - ☐ **RASP GRATER**  
This metal grater resembles a small ruler and has sharp teeth; use it to grate citrus zests, fresh ginger, and dried spices
  - ☐ **GRADUATED MEASURING CUPS**  
In metal or plastic, these cups accurately measure dry ingredients like flour
  - ☐ **SCALE**  
A small kitchen scale is useful for measuring bulk amounts of dough and dried nuts and fruit
  - ☐ **LIQUID MEASURING CUP**  
Made of heat-resistant glass or plastic, a liquid measure allows you to read marks at eye level for greatest accuracy
  - ☐ **ROLLING PIN**  
Used to roll dough evenly before cutting or shaping, rolling pins should be smooth wood and slightly heavy
  - ☐ **BENCH SCRAPER**  
A metal or plastic scraper is helpful for loosening and removing scraps of dough from work surfaces
  - ☐ **BRUSHES**  
From tiny pastry brushes to paintbrush-size ones to those used to clean hands and fingernails, all are as important as any tool
  - ☐ **TIMER**  
Use it to monitor bread's progress when rising and when baking in the oven
  - ☐ **PARCHMENT PAPER**  
Use it to line baking sheets to prevent bread from sticking; it requires no greasing
  - ☐ **THERMOMETER**  
An oven thermometer checks the accuracy of the oven temperature, crucial for bread baking
  - ☐ **WIRE RACKS**  
Place baked breads on rack to allow air to circulate around them

## HELPFUL BREAD-BAKING TECHNIQUES

Bread baking can seem daunting to the beginner. The following list of essential techniques utilized by expert bakers is sure to make bread-baking satisfying and enjoyable.

- Start with warm liquids to achieve a final dough temperature of 75 to 80 degrees. When adding liquids to yeast, keep them at or less than 110 degrees; yeast dies at about 140 degrees.
- Salt kills yeast when in direct contact; when adding salt to dough, do so as you add the bulk of the flour, then immediately mix well to disperse. Never add salt to a “starter” (the mixture of warm liquid, yeast, and other dry ingredients that form the base of some dough).
- The most accurate way to measure flour is by weight, not volume, using a kitchen scale.  
(See checklist on page 3.)
- Never add all of the flour in a recipe to the dough until you are sure it is needed. It’s usually better for the dough to be slightly wet and sticky, which encourages fermentation better than if the dough were too dry.
- Always cover bread dough while it is rising; otherwise a skin will develop on the dough and the bread will be tough after baking. You can use either plastic wrap (lightly oiled in case the dough touches it) or a slightly damp cloth.
- Don’t rush rising times. Flavor develops during the fermentation process, so slower and longer is always the best way to proceed.
- Checking the internal temperature of bread is a foolproof way to tell if it is fully baked. Insert an instant-read thermometer through the side of the loaf (so you don’t puncture the top), straight into the center. The temperature should be 190 degrees.

## FOCACCIA

MAKES ONE 17-BY-12-INCH BREAD

*This recipe makes classic focaccia which is great on its own and for sandwiches.*

2 1/4 pounds (about 7 cups) bread flour, plus more for dusting

3 1/2 cups warm water (about 110°)

1 teaspoon active dry yeast

2 tablespoons coarse salt

3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Sea salt, such as Maldon (or other coarse salt), for sprinkling

1. Whisk together flour, water, and yeast in the bowl of an electric mixer. Cover bowl with plastic wrap, and let rise in a warm place until tripled in bulk and full of sponge-like bubbles, about 2 hours.

2. Add salt. Attach bowl to a mixer fitted with the dough hook. Mix on low speed 3 to 5 minutes, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. When dough begins to cling to and almost climb sides of bowl, raise speed to medium; mix 15 seconds. Dough will be wet, slack, and very sticky.

3. Using a plastic bowl scraper, turn out dough onto a well-floured work surface. (The dough will be hard to handle, but resist the urge to add flour to the top; instead, keep your hands and tools well floured.) With the bowl scraper (and, to a lesser degree, your fingertips), gather

and fold bottom edge of dough about 1/3 of the way toward center. Pat down to deflate slightly and dislodge any extra flour. Fold top edge down 1/3 of the way toward center; the 2 folds should overlap slightly. Repeat with left and right sides, until all edges meet and overlap in center. Tap off excess flour as you work. Gently scoop up dough and flip it over, seam side down. Place dough in a lightly floured bowl, smooth side up. Cover bowl with plastic wrap, and let rise in a warm place until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour.

4. Return dough to a well-floured work surface. Repeat folding process, making sure to brush off excess flour. Lightly flour the mixing bowl, and return dough to bowl, smooth side up. Cover with plastic wrap, and let rise in a warm place until doubled in bulk again, about 1 hour.

5. Preheat oven to 450°, with a rack in lower third. Coat a 17-by-12-inch rimmed baking sheet with 1/2 cup oil; set aside.

6. Place dough on prepared sheet. Flip dough over, and coat both sides with oil. Push dough out toward edges of sheet. Cover with plastic wrap; let rest 10 minutes. With plastic wrap still on top, press out dough to fill sheet. Remove plastic (dough should be very bubbly and supple). Drizzle remaining 1/4 cup oil over top. Sprinkle generously with sea salt.

7. Bake, rotating halfway through, until evenly browned on top and bottom, 25 to 30 minutes. Immediately slide focaccia onto a wire rack set over a rimmed baking sheet; pour any oil left in pan over top. Serve warm or at room temperature.

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## BEATEN BISCUITS

MAKES 3 DOZEN

*These are really more like soda crackers than flaky doughy biscuits; they are small and firm. For best results, be sure to bake them in the oven one sheet at a time.*

1 cup plus 3/4 cup all-purpose flour, plus more for work surface and rolling out dough

2 teaspoons salt

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

1/4 cup pure vegetable shortening

1/4 cup milk

1. Line two baking sheets with the dull side of aluminum foil facing up. Set aside. In the bowl of a food processor, pulse to combine the flour and the salt. Add the butter and shortening, and pulse until the mixture resembles fine meal. With the machine running, pour in the milk and 1/4 cup ice water through the feed tube. Mix until most of the dough has formed a ball, then continue to process for 2 minutes.

2. Heat oven to 300° with a rack in the center. Transfer the dough to a lightly floured surface. The dough will appear wet and slick. Sprinkle top of dough lightly with flour. Use a rolling pin to beat across the top of the dough, beating in the flour, until the dough is about 10 inches long and 1/2-inch thick in size. Fold up the dough loosely into thirds, sprinkle again with flour,

and beat flour in. Stretch out the dough again until it is about 1/4 inch thick. Sprinkle the dough again with flour, and repeat process for about 10 minutes. The dough will become very smooth, and little bubbles will form in it. As the dough is beaten with the flour and folded, very thin layers form in the dough.

3. When the dough is smooth and satiny, roll out until it is about 1/8 inch thick. Cut out biscuit rounds with a 1 1/2-inch biscuit cutter. Transfer the rounds to prepared baking sheets, placing them about 1 inch apart. Prick each round twice with the tines of a small fork, poking fork all the way down through the dough to the baking sheet.

4. One sheet at a time, bake the biscuits 15 minutes; reduce heat to 200°. Continue to bake until biscuits are golden brown on the bottom but not colored on the top; biscuits will dry out in center as well. Watch carefully, this can take anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes more. The biscuits actually turn a very slight white-pink color when done; they should not be golden or brown on top at all. Continue to sprinkle any remaining dough with flour, and beat and bake any scraps of dough until all the dough has been used. Serve biscuits cut in half with very thin slivers of baked country ham. Biscuits freeze well in an airtight container, up to 1 month.

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## CHOCOLATE BABKA

### MAKES 3 LOAVES

*When shaping the babka, twist dough evenly throughout the length of the roll a full five to six turns. The babka can be prepared up to step eight and frozen for up to a month before baking. When ready to bake, remove from freezer; let stand at room temperature for about five hours. Bake according to recipe instructions.*

1 1/2 cups warm milk (110°)

2 packages (1/4 ounce each) active dry yeast

1 3/4 cups plus a pinch of sugar

3 whole large eggs, room temperature

2 large egg yolks, room temperature

6 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for work surface

1 teaspoon salt

3 1/2 sticks (1 3/4 cups) unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces, softened,  
plus more for bowl and loaf pans

2 1/4 pounds semisweet chocolate, very finely chopped

2 1/2 tablespoons ground cinnamon

1 tablespoon heavy cream

**Streusel Topping** (recipe follows)

1. Pour warm milk into a small bowl. Sprinkle yeast and a pinch of sugar over the milk; let stand until foamy, about 5 minutes.
2. In a bowl, whisk together 3/4 cup sugar, 2 eggs, and the egg yolks. Add egg mixture to yeast mixture, and whisk to combine.
3. In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine flour and salt. Add the egg mixture, and beat on low speed until almost all the flour is incorporated, about 30 seconds. Change to the dough hook. Add 2 sticks butter, and beat until the flour mixture and butter are completely incorporated, and a smooth, soft dough that's slightly sticky when squeezed is formed, about 10 minutes.
4. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface, and knead a few turns until smooth. Butter a large bowl. Place dough in bowl, and turn to coat. Cover tightly with plastic wrap. Set aside in a warm place to rise until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour.
5. Place chocolate, remaining cup sugar, and the cinnamon in a large bowl, and stir to combine. Using two knives or a pastry cutter, cut in remaining 1 1/2 sticks butter until well combined; set filling aside.
6. Generously butter three 9-by-5-by-2 3/4-inch loaf pans; line them with parchment paper. Beat

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## CHOCOLATE BABKA (cont.)

remaining egg with 1 tablespoon cream; set egg wash aside. Punch back the dough, and transfer to a clean surface. Let rest 5 minutes. Cut into three equal pieces. Keep two pieces covered with plastic wrap while working with the remaining piece. On a generously floured surface, roll dough out into a 16-inch square; it should be 1/8 thick.

7. Brush edges with reserved egg wash. Crumble a third of the reserved chocolate filling evenly over dough, leaving a 1/4-inch border. Refresh egg wash if needed. Roll dough up tightly like a jelly roll. Pinch ends together to seal. Twist five or six turns. Brush top of roll with egg wash. Carefully crumble 2 tablespoons filling over the left half of the roll, being careful not to let mixture slide off. Fold right half of the roll over onto the coated left half. Fold ends under and pinch to seal. Twist roll two turns, and fit into prepared pan. Repeat with the remaining two pieces of dough and remaining filling.

8. Heat oven to 350°. Brush the top of each loaf with egg wash. Crumble a third of streusel topping over each loaf. Loosely cover each pan with plastic wrap, and let stand in a warm place 20 to 30 minutes.

9. Bake loaves, rotating halfway through, until golden, about 55 minutes. Lower oven temperature to 325°; bake until babkas are deep golden, 15 to 20 minutes more. Remove from oven, and transfer to wire racks until cool. Remove from pans; serve. Babkas freeze well for up to a month.

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## STREUSEL TOPPING

### MAKES 3 3/4 CUPS

*This topping is the crowning glory of Chocolate Babka.*

1 2/3 cups confectioners' sugar

1 1/3 cups all-purpose flour

12 tablespoons (1 1/2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened

1. In a large bowl, combine sugar, flour, and butter. Using a fork, stir until fully combined with clumps ranging in size from crumbs to 1 inch.

## BANANA-NUT BREAD

MAKES THREE 3 1/4-BY-5 3/4-INCH LOAVES

*Banana bread is a good way to use very ripe bananas.*

5 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened, plus more for pans

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon salt

1 cup sugar

2 large eggs

1 cup mashed very ripe bananas (3 small bananas)

1/2 cup sour cream

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1/2 cup coarsely chopped pecans (about 2 ounces)

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Butter three 3 1/4-by-5 3/4-inch mini loaf pans, and set aside. Into a medium bowl, sift together the flour, baking soda, and salt; set aside.
2. In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the butter and sugar on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the eggs; beat until incorporated, scraping bowl as needed.
3. Add the reserved flour mixture to the butter mixture, and beat on low until combined. Add the bananas, sour cream, and vanilla; beat until well combined. Stir in the pecans. Divide mixture evenly among loaf pans.
4. Place loaf pans on a baking sheet, and transfer to the oven. Bake until loaves are golden brown and a cake tester inserted in the center comes out clean, 30 to 35 minutes. Transfer the pans to a wire rack to cool completely. Once cool, remove loaves from pans.

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'GOOD THINGS' FOR BREAD BAKERS  
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#### DISH-TOWEL APRON

Fashion an apron from a beautiful dish towel (a good size is 16 by 24 inches). Cut three pieces of wide twill tape (one 20 inches long for the neck loop; two 24 inches long for the waist ties); notch ends. Fold in right and left sides of towel 3 inches. Put each end of neck loop 1/4 inch in from a folded edge. Fold excess fabric back over ends; pin in place. Pin one end of each waist tie to each long side, 9 inches from top. Stitch over tape ends.



#### BETTER BREAD BASKET

Linen-lined baskets to hold rising bread dough are valuable additions to any baker's pantry.



To make your own, measure a round basket, run a cloth tailor's tape down into it from lip to lip. (For a rectangular basket, repeat for crosswise measurement.) Add two inches all around for a hem; cut a piece of unbleached linen to size. Center the linen in the basket. With heavy linen thread and a sturdy needle, sew the lining in place along the bottom inside edge of the basket using half-inch stitches. (If the basket is tightly woven, use pliers to pull the needle through.) Smooth cloth and pleat it to fit, making four evenly spaced folds (at corners for a rectangle); secure each fold with one big stitch the depth of the basket. Stitch linen around the basket's outside lip, turning hem under as you go.



#### KEEPING BREAD WARM

Once set on the dinner table, prolong the warmth of rolls or bread by adding a few clean, unglazed terracotta tiles to the oven for the last 5 minutes of baking. Place the hot tiles in a towel-lined basket, add bread or rolls, and cover.

#### BREADSPREADS

Blend butter and preserves to create colorful little pats to spread on bread in one neat layer. Combine one stick of softened unsalted butter and a half-cup plus two tablespoons of good jam or preserves; mix thoroughly with a rubber spatula. Wrap in parchment paper, forming an even cylinder; tie ends. Keep refrigerated for up to two weeks, or frozen for up to a month. Slice off pats; serve with your favorite bread.



## APRICOT JAM

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

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2 1/2 pounds apricots

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3 cups sugar

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1/2 cup water

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Juice of 1 lemon

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1. Cut the apricots in half, and remove the pits. Reserve four or five pits, discarding the rest. Cut the apricots into 1-inch chunks. Wrap the pits in a kitchen towel, and bang on them with a hammer to break the hard outer shell. Discard the hard shell, and reserve the soft inner seed, which resembles an almond.
2. In a large heavy-bottomed pot, combine the apricots, sugar, soft inner seeds, and water. Stir to combine.
3. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Cook, stirring frequently with a long wooden spoon skimming foam as necessary, until reduced and thickened, about 15 minutes, stir in the lemon juice.
4. Ladle jam into clean jars. Let stand until cool. Cover, and store, refrigerated, for up to 1 month.

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BREAD GIFTS: PACKAGING AND SHIPPING  
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## PACKAGING BREAD GIFTS

Try these simple wrapping ideas.

Present beaten biscuits in the tin they were baked in. Wrap it in a cellophane bag and then in linen with frayed edges; tie on a tag, and the recipe if you like, with twill tape.

Bake banana bread or babka in wooden molds, which then serve as gift boxes (they can't be reused for baking). The loaf can also be covered in cellophane, then put in a loaf box from a baking-supply store and wrapped with loose-weave cotton fabric and sewing thread.

For a simple hostess gift, wrap two loaves of your favorite bread or tin of biscuits in a linen dish towel, and top with a jar of homemade jam. Tie them together with a colorful ribbon to match the towel, securing a wooden spreader in the knot of the bow.



## SENDING BREAD THROUGH THE MAIL

Every gift of food you ship should have two basic lines of defense: It should be well packed in an inner gift box, which should be well packed in a second, outer shipping box that will see it safely through the mail. The golden rule of packing is to choose a box appropriate in size to the item it will contain. Movement is the enemy; if you give something a chance to shift, you give it the chance to break.

Once the bread is packed, you will need the second shipping box to make the tough trip. Most shipping services recommend a two-to-three-inch cushion between the bread box and the wall of the outside box. But the heavier the item, the thicker the cushioning layer should be. Standard corrugated-cardboard boxes are available in a range of sizes, often in one-inch increments (boxes made of recycled cardboard are also available, but you have to ask for them). Fill the box with foam peanuts, Bubble Wrap, wood excelsior, or crumpled paper. Don't underfill the box—the package will shake. Don't overfill it, either—bulging sides run a greater risk of puncture.

The shipping box should then be sealed well with tape. Before closing, include a shipping label inside in case the box is damaged and the outside label is lost. Seal the box along its seams with two-inch-wide pressure-sensitive tape. Tape the bottom seams as well as the top. Don't tie the box with rope or string, which can get snagged on sorting machines.