

## Passport Book Cover Color

A **blue** passport is what every American carries. Diplomats carry them too, for when they're traveling on private business.

**Red** passports, which are "official passports" in our parlance, are for when you're traveling on official governmental but not diplomatic business.

**Black** passports, "diplomatic passports" are for diplomats or government officials on diplomatic business. It's not that unusual for a diplomat to have all three passports at the same time, particularly if s/he is working on secondment to the Department of Defense. I have done so.

Which passport do you use? Here's how it would work in practice.

For starters you can only use one at a time. Say you're going to the Bahamas on leave? Haul out the **blue** passport. You're going to a meeting that the Department of Defense is paying for in Stuttgart about military matters that is largely an internal (U.S. Government) meeting? Use your **red** passport. You have to go later that week to NATO for a meeting including NATO and the European Union and the State Department? Use your **black** passport.

There is a large legal/diplomatic backstory here. The bottom line is that **diplomatic passports offer certain immunities but they also require notifications and diplomatic visas that are burdensome.**

It's a matter of what assignment is being undertaken, under what circumstances, and where.

[Andrew S.E. Erickson](#), former Counselor of the Foreign Service at U.S. Department of State (1990-2017).

A US Diplomatic Passport (**black** cover) is issued to certain Embassy staff (such as credentialed ambassadors) and their dependents (spouse, children etc.) for travel connected to their duties overseas. It is often also issued to a sitting US President and Vice-President, certain Cabinet officials (like the Secretary of State) and a US President-elect and Vice-President elect. I believe it can be issued to past Presidents and Vice-Presidents as well.

A US Official Passport (**reddish brown** cover) is issued to MoC (Members of Congress - both House and Senate) who may, in connection to their official duties, have to travel overseas. They are also issued to Department of Defence personnel (and their dependents if accompanied), either active duty or civilian, who have overseas duty assignments.

Often times though, either a Diplomatic or Official Passport holder will have to carry a "regular" **blue** passport too. They have to travel for business/duty related "official travel" on their black or red passports while traveling for pleasure/touristy activities on their blue ones. Why waste time if assigned to a permanent/long-term duty station overseas and not travel for pleasure too if possible?

As a side note, I worked as a government contractor overseas in Europe and Asia for almost a decade. As a contractor, I had a “regular” blue passport. But I was able to get documentation allowing me to get “stamped in” to the local country under a special status that essentially turned my “blue” passport “red” when turned to the correct visa page. Best of both worlds really.

[Chris Deiulio](#), Owner/Founder (2018-present)

<https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-a-diplomatic-US-passport-and-an-official-US-passport>