A stock certificate is a printed certificate issued by a corporation to a shareholder which documents ownership in a stated number of shares of that corporation's stock. A stock certificate is a document that identifies an investor's ownership share in a corporation. A certificate usually contains the following information:

1. **The number of shares**

2. **Serial Number** – A unique serial number is assigned to each certificate. This is usually preprinted.

3. **Registrar** – The Registrar is usually a trust company or bank charged with the responsibility of keeping a record of the owners of a corporation’s securities and preventing the issuance of more than the authorized amount.

4. **The class of shares** (such as common stock or preferred stock). Some companies further sub-divide these classes into ‘Class A,’ ‘Class B,’ “First Preferred,” and so forth. The intent is to give variable voting rights and dividend rights to stockholders. Capital stock represents the entire issuance of all classes of stock. Most companies issue only one class of stock, so capital stock is generally synonymous with common stock.

5. **Vignette** - A vignette (pronounced vin-YET) is an illustration that appears on stocks, bonds, paper money, checks, letterhead, and invoices. Vignettes are artistic, but they also have important security purposes. In theory, complicated and delicate vignettes are hard to counterfeit. Vignettes are normally more valuable if they were made specifically for use by one company versus generic vignettes which were used by many different companies.

6. **Company name** – The entity that is issuing the stock.

7. **Shareholder’s name** - The name of the person or entity who owns the stock.

8. **State of Incorporation** – The state in which the company was incorporated and registers their corporate charter

9. **Transfer Agents** - Hired by companies as “caretakers” for their shareholders. They maintain shareholder records and issue new certificates
(virtual or paper) when needed. They also distribute proxies, dividends and annual reports to shareholders and brokers, and forward company correspondence to shareholders.

10. **Par value** - Originally the selling price of a single share of stock, but the term later evolved into a bookkeeping term. Confusion eventually forced some companies to state that their stocks had ‘no-par value.’ Modern companies often give their stock 1¢ par values. It is also the minimum legal capital per share of a corporation that cannot be distributed except by special legal action.

**Assessable stock** - When a company could ‘assess’ existing stockholders for additional funds to be invested. Non-assessable stock indicates the stock is immune from further company demands for investment. Most recent stock certificates say, ‘Fully paid and non-assessable.

11. **Date issued** - The date the certificate was printed.

12. **Signatures of authorized corporate executives.** This is performed by facsimile or hand written signatures.

13. **Corporate Seal** - The official seal of the corporation which can be printed or embossed. The seal usually it has the name of the company, state of incorporation and incorporation date.

14. **Printer’s name** - The name of the company who printed the certificate. For major companies, it was normally printed on special security paper with embedded disks of colored paper. This technique was invented by American Bank Note Company in 1891, and widely used after 1940.

15. **Ornate border and design** – This is used for fraud protection which typically contained elaborate designs and etchings, which make them more difficult to fraudulently replicate. Many large companies were required by the stock exchange to used different designs in their borders.

16. **Cancellation Markings and Date** – This is performed when a certificate is redeemed and it is usually marked cancelled by stamp or pen, or punched with holes. On the more modern certificates, the pin holes show the date of cancellation.

Stock transfer information is preprinted on the back (Verso) of the certificate.