Expressing Gratitude

When I was little, I always tried to get out of writing thank-you notes – not because I didn't appreciate the present, but because it felt too much like homework. Now, I actually enjoy finding a quiet moment with pretty stationery to jot a note of thanks. In a world of email, a handwritten note is more than just a perfunctory courtesy; the time you take to pause for a moment and put down your thanks on paper demonstrates your appreciation as much as the words you choose to write.

When to Thank

Always send a note of thanks for engagement, shower, and wedding gifts, regardless of whether or not you said thank you in person. (In fact, always write a note for a gift, period.) But don't forget other gifts: There are many weddings where friends and families help with everything from baking the cake to snapping photos, or amassing bouquets of beautiful blooms for the tables. Other gifts come in the form of hospitality, such as hosting a shower in your honor or offering room and board to wedding guests. It's also a thoughtful idea to thank your attendants with a note of appreciation for all they have helped you to do. They might not have a little blue box, but all of these gifts are just as sterling as Tiffany silver.

Thank-You Notes

Sitting down to a tall stack of blank thank-you note cards waiting to be written can feel like a daunting task. For some, it is simply about finding time, so be vigilant about carving out time from your day to focus on your replies. For others, it is about knowing what to say.

Start by placing the gift on the table in front of you if you can. Open your note with a line of thanks and a mention of the gift itself. This makes your thanks prominent, and the specific mention keeps it from sounding generic. If you can compliment the gift (the lovely candlesticks, the beautiful vase), do so in your own words. If it applies, mention how you plan to use the gift. It paints a beautiful picture for the giver to say, “Tim and I look forward to using the gravy boat you sent at our first Thanksgiving this year!” The idea is to keep the note personal and genuine. Thank-you notes don’t need to be long; three to five sentences is fine. Thank again for the gift at the end, and sign off.

In the event you don’t like the gift, or plan to return it, refrain from saying so in the note. Instead, keep it sincere by thanking the sender for their thoughtfulness.

It’s an equal-opportunity world these days, and that goes for thanking, too. It doesn’t matter whether the bride or the groom writes the thank-you notes – however you wish to divvy them up is fine. Regardless of who composes the thank-you, both people should be mentioned as appreciating the gift – “Jason and I love the hand-carved salad bowl you sent!” When signing the note, it’s fine for the person writing to sign only their name, sign for themselves and their spouse (or soon-to-be-spouse), or have each person sign their own name – any of these is appropriate.

If a gift is missing a tag, do your best to track down the giver by process of elimination. A discreet call to check is better than letting it go unthanked. “Sarah, I’m sorry to have to ask, but the cheese knives Mark and I received didn’t have a card and I thought they might be from you.” It’s an awkward situation when a guest hasn’t sent a gift, but it’s worth checking in a little while after the wedding. The goal is not to embarrass, but to be sure the gift wasn’t misplaced. If it was, the sender would be left wondering why they weren’t thanked.

Contrary to popular myth, couples don’t have a grace period of a year in which to send their thanks. All thank-you notes should be written within three months of receiving the gift. In a perfect world, a response should be written the day you receive the gift. If that’s not possible, try to set a daily or weekly goal as gifts arrive – this will help you keep from falling behind and will also let you compose your note while the pleasure of opening the gift is still fresh in your

mind. Besides, the last thing you want to return to after the honeymoon is a hundred notes still waiting to be written!

If for any reason you haven't sent your notes within three months, you're not off the hook – no matter how late, sending a note for a gift is still a must. Send it as soon as possible, with an apology for the delay. Any potential embarrassment over sending a late note won't be nearly so bad as the embarrassment you'll feel at never having sent one at all – not to mention the hurt it might cause the giver.

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