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WRITE YOUR THANK YOUS

Tips for penning perfect notes of gratitude by *Michaela Garibaldi*

I PLAN AHEAD. If you want your thank yous to echo your invitations, discuss them during your first visit with your stationer and order everything at the same time, says Karen Bartolomei of Boston-based Grapevine. Otherwise, make sure your notes will be ready shortly after your first pre-wedding event. As for quantities, order twice as many thank yous as invites to cover all wedding guests, plus the women attending your shower, as well as anyone who gives you an engagement gift.

STAY ORGANIZED. Since a thank you should go out within three months of receiving a gift, keeping yourself organized is key. Dominique DeVito, author of *A Note of Thanks*, recommends bringing a notebook to your engagement party and shower and asking a bridesmaid to keep track of who gives you what. (Ask her to be detailed: "Vase" may not help you narrow it down later.) DeVito also suggests keeping your supplies (stationery, gift list, address book, etc.) in one box, or if you have the space at home, on a shelf where everything can be easily found.

OPEN AND CLOSE YOUR NOTES WITH TACT. You'll likely use first names in most of your greetings, but when writing to people you don't know well, refer to them by last name (Mr. and Mrs. Borner). For your closing, whether you write all the notes or your groom helps, it's common practice for one person to sign and reference the other person in the body of the thank you. A more modern approach, and one that DeVito recommends, is to sign both names. As with your salutation, first names are often appropriate, but for formal notes you may want to use your last name, too (Maria and Russ Pratt).

PERSONALIZE YOUR MESSAGES. Your thank yous need not be flowery and long; sincerity is what's really important, DeVito says. Keep them personal by handwriting them (as well as the recipient's address, instead of using a computer-generated label) and mentioning the specific gift you received. You may also want to include how you intend to use the present or how you will spend it, if it's a monetary gift. Should the retailer you registered with notify you that a gift has been purchased but it's on back order, write your note anyway, says DeVito. Simply mention that the present is on its way and you can't wait to get it.

SELECT AN UNCONVENTIONAL DESIGN. In lieu of a standard card, consider a vintage postcard thank you with a hand-drawn map of your wedding destination letterpressed to the back. Or, send photo thank yous in creative pocket-style cards. Rather than mailing guests a picture of you and your groom, Bartolomei suggests enclosing a shot of your entire wedding crowd. "It's great to have a photo of the couple, but it's more fun to have a group photo," she says.

FINISH THEM IN STYLE. Besides a black ballpoint pen, Bartolomei likes the look of ultrafine Sharpies: "They come in so many colors, and the thin tip looks beautiful," she says. "Other pens blotch and may fade or bleed over time." She also recommends looking into custom postage. For vintage stamps, visit championstamp.com. To personalize stamps with your picture, or—if you don't want to use your photo—with your monogram, wedding logo or a pattern, try zazzle.com.

