



THANK YOU LETTERS—HOW TO DO THEM RIGHT

Summary: *This article explains when and how to write thank you letters, and the common mistakes to look out for.*

Question: What's the general etiquette on "thank you" letters after first-round interviews? E-mail okay? Do they have to be snail mailed? How should they be tailored? I don't know the first thing about them, and I have interviews coming up!

Answer: I'm all for "thank you" letters. Sending them shows you're thoughtful, shows you're detail oriented, and shows you care. They give you a chance to say: "Here I am and, by gosh, I'm interested in the job we discussed—and by the way, thanks for talking to me about it!"

However, as in every business agreement, there are caveats: If you misspell words, you'll sink your chances of landing the job. If you say the same thing to everybody you talked to, chances are they're going to find out—and that won't impress your hiring manager the way an individualized letter will.

You should also know that hiring managers in different industries have different expectations regarding "thank you" letters. Many investment-banking recruiters say they don't like them: "thank you" letters do more harm than good, overall, because of snafus like those above. In I-banking, we've heard recruiters say, too, that they've made their decision before a "thank you" letter arrives—so it does no good.

Still, I recommend sending them. I also recommend proofreading them three or four times, having a friend proofread them three or four times, and then proofreading them again.

Should you e-mail or snail mail your thank you? That depends. If it's a tech company, you should e-mail it. No matter what type of company it is, if they're going to make the decision overnight, right after your interview, then you should probably e-mail it, too.

But let me ask you a question: when was the last time you received a "thank you" letter in the mail? How did it make you feel? If it was sincere, printed neatly, and on a nice card, I bet it made you feel good. And if a recruiter received a "thank you" of that type, you can be sure it's going to make him or her feel good, too. Even if you're dinged from the job, they're likely to remember you as a thoughtful applicant. And who knows when your paths will cross again?

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