

The Importance of Thank-you Letters

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A thank-you/follow-up letter or note is an ideal, professional way to maintain contact with an employer after a meeting or interview. This correspondence will assure the hiring official of your continued interest in the position. The primary purpose of this is to maintain contact, but you'll want to be sure that you have a substantial reason for contacting the employer each time you write, such as:

- ▶ Thanking the employer for the opportunity to interview.
- ▶ Sending supportive materials, e.g., updated transcripts.
- ▶ Notifying the employer of a change of address or additional experience gained since submitting your application.

Thank-you letters should be sent as soon as possible after the interview (preferably within 24 hours) and before the hiring decision is made. Well-written notes should say more than "thank you." Here are some elements to consider:

Express Enthusiasm:

Remind the interviewer that you are a good fit for the school or district and that you have continued interest in and enthusiasm for the position. It is one more chance to market yourself for this specific job.

Answer Unresolved Issues:

Answer and expand upon any relevant questions raised in the interview. If you did not get a chance to mention certain points, you can address those items now. The thank-you note is another opportunity to expand on your fit for the position.

Express Sincerity:

Be genuine and sincere in your gratitude. Comment on the importance of the meeting.

Personalize It:

Highlight a key point from your meeting that was unique and meaningful. This will refresh the interviewer's memory of you. Interviewers are typically impressed with proof that candidates listen and remember the conversation. If you met with several people, it may not be obvious who the real decision-makers are. Make sure you vary slightly the content of each thank-you note. No one likes to receive a carbon copy of a message that everyone else received. This will also force you to remember with whom you interviewed, which will make your follow-up more effective. Remember to ask for business cards before leaving the interview so that you have the correct spelling and title of your interviewers, and make some notes while your memory is fresh.

Keep It Short:

The "Rule of Three" in communications says that the human mind can only remember three things about anything. If pushed to remember four, the mind will forget all four from overload. Choose three points you want to stress about yourself which might include skills, knowledge and personal traits. Ideally, these three points should be presented in the resume, reflected in the cover letter, discussed in the interview, and then summarized in the thank-you note.

For more conservative school districts, you may want to consider

typed thank-you letters. Using a business letter format conveys that this meeting was important enough to take the time to present yourself in a professional manner. However, alumni and people with whom you are more familiar may prefer a handwritten thank-you note. You must still prepare it carefully, write legibly and use tasteful stationery. If you want to add to one of the answers you gave at the interview, a lengthier, typed letter directed toward the issue may be beneficial.

If the school district representative has been communicating with you online, then a well-written email message may be appropriate. A word of caution: do not make the message overly friendly (people have a tendency to be less formal with email). Also, try to keep your message to one screen length; administrators appreciate brevity. However, be aware that some employers may appreciate the traditional approach, especially because handwritten notes are so rare these days. In addition, hard copy thank-you notes typically get filed in an applicant's folder, whereas email is usually read and deleted.

A thank-you note can make you stand out from the competition by demonstrating your professionalism, follow-through and interest. And a little common courtesy never hurts! Statistically, fewer than 10% of interviewees follow up with thank-you notes. Imagine how positively that 10% will be viewed compared to the 90% who neglect to write a thank-you letter.

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