

## Thank you Note Etiquette 101

### **(Ann Price's: More than you ever wanted to know about thank you notes)**

There are a million “rules” about the proper way to write thank you notes, but most people do not know the rules and most do not even care that there are rules. What people do care about is being sincerely thanked. Thus, you can totally ignore the rules if:

- You write your note quickly (ex. In the case of residency interviews, within one-three days post interview—the sooner the better!)
- You write a sincere message that includes details explaining your thanks  
Tip: always try to get the business card of every person you plan to thank.  
On the back of the card or in a separate folder (digital or paper) jot down a few details that you discussed (It's a lot easier if you do this immediately post interview).  
Amazingly, all the people you talk to begin to run together in mere hours)
- Use correct form of salutation and closing (see suggestions below)
- Write neatly
- Write utilizing excellent sentence structure, perfect spelling, and perfect grammar.

### **Thank You's: Merits of Email vs. Handwritten vs. Business Letter**

My personal advice is an email thank you to all major contacts at all programs within 24 hours using correct business format. Then, especially for programs that are high on your list, follow up with a handwritten thank you within 2-3 days post interview (never exceed 5 business days). Utilize a typed business letter in correct business format if you have lots to say or if your handwriting is particularly horrible. Remember that all your emails, handwritten thank you's, and business letters will probably all be placed in one file. Thus, individualize all emails and letters. Do not use a template that will look cut and paste when all the notes are placed together.

### **Date, Salutation, and Closing: Correct format:**

- **Date:** With Email date placement is not an issue; for handwritten notes, date should be in upper right hand corner justified to right margin; for business letters follow standard business format (Consult The Gregg Reference Manual or another reference such as the templates in ‘Word’ if you are not familiar with correct business format.)
- **Salutation:** For all types of correspondence: Dear Dr. ‘Last Name’ (use this for both MD’s and PhD’s) for all others; Dear Mr./Ms. ‘Last Name’; Salutation is always left margin justified in all formats
- **Closing:** For all formats, I suggest using “Sincerely,” or some alternate formal closing. Sign with name as utilized on ERAS (sign clearly for hand written notes)  
Use your full name with your middle initial with a business letter, but your middle initial is optional for email/handwritten notes). I highly recommend placing your contact info below the name. For ex:
  - Emails, set up a standard signature; include your unique ERAS ID number, along with address, etc.
  - Handwritten notes, contact info is especially important, since envelopes are frequently discarded, be sure to sign clearly, and place unique ID number in contact info.
  - Business letters, if letter head is used, you may abbreviate your contact info.

**(Closing continued)**

The examples below are simply suggestions for closings. Set yours up as you choose—but, be sure the reader knows who you are and what school you are from.

**Ex. Email closing:**

I am extremely enthusiastic about XXXXX and hope my candidacy for the XXXXX program will be viewed with favor by the residency selection committee.

Sincerely, Ann H. Price

Ann H. Price  
Vanderbilt University School of Medicine  
ID #XXXXXX  
1032 Tyne Blvd.  
Nashville, TN 37220  
615-xxx-xxxx

**Ex. Handwritten Note closing:** Place your closing at conclusion of note. Start closing in middle of the note paper but keep within note margins.

*Sincerely,  
Ann Price  
Vanderbilt School of Medicine  
ID # XXXXXX*

At the bottom left hand corner of the note paper, you may include your address—remember the envelope will probably be discarded.

*1032 Tyne Blvd.  
Nashville, TN 37220*

**Ex. Business Letter closing:** Use preprinted letterhead or set up an inside address per standard format. After the body of the letter, start your closing about two lines below the last sentence, at the bottom left margin. Ex.:

Sincerely,

*Leave 4 or 5 single spaces for signing your name—sign clearly!*

Ann H. Price (typed name)  
Vanderbilt University School of Medicine  
ID#XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

**The Body of the Letter (also known as the part that really counts):**

- **Business Letters** can be any length, up to one page and can contain a “Re:” (Regarding) or “Subject:” line. This line can go before salutation or after—no consensus on this. The Subject or Re: is sometimes bolded and underlined. Here’s an example.

Dear Dr. XXXXXXXX:

**Re: Ann H. Price, #XXXXXXX, Candidate for XXXXX’s IM Residency Program**

Start your letter two spaces below the subject line. Close as noted above

- **Emails and Handwritten notes** should be brief. Utilize the 5-7 sentence concept. First sentence is introductory. Three to five sentences to make points. Last sentence or two concludes the note.

Ex. Utilizing handwritten style (modify for emails by left margin justifying, no indents for paragraphs, but do place a one line space between paragraphs. Use closing as noted above).

October 31, 2011

Dear Dr. XXXXX,

*Introduction: It was a true privilege to interview at XXXXX on Friday and Saturday of last week for a position in the XXXXX residency program. Or ---I greatly appreciated the time I spent with you on 11/X/2011, discussing my candidacy for XXXXXX. (Note: Use your own voice, but I advise referencing the date you interviewed whether you are emailing, handwriting, or using business letter format).*

*Body: The following are some example sentences for the body of the note. Use 3 to 5 sentences—try to mention specific things you discussed. Our discussion about XXXX (ex. research opportunities, subspecialty exposure, relationship of residents to students—whatever you talked about) within the program was extremely helpful. I especially enjoyed learning about your personal career path and how you have balanced teaching, research, and clinical care. You were very kind to answer my questions about XXXXXXXX. As we discussed, I am especially interested in XXXXXX, and my ultimate goal is to pursue an academic career in XXXXXX. (I advise reinforcing whatever you discussed—especially if you talked about your goals/objectives. Also, if you discussed your particular qualifications for the program, it's OK to mention these here, but be very succinct and never, ever use a tone that might sound in the least arrogant.)*

*Closing: One or two sentences. The following are examples: I was extremely interested in XXXX for my residency training prior to my interview day, but I came away with even greater enthusiasm for your program. Or-- Thank you again for the extra time you spent talking with me. Or---XXXXX is definitely my first choice (at the top of my list/a program of major interest/a program that greatly appeals to me—just utilize the phrase that best fits) for my residency. I hope my candidacy will be viewed with favor by the selection committee and that I will have the opportunity to train under your guidance next year. (Note: Use phrasing consistent with your own voice and your level of interest. Don't indicate more interest than you actually have, but if this is #1—let them know.)*

Sincerely,  
Ann Price  
Vanderbilt Medical School  
ID #xxxxxx

1032 Tyne Blvd.

Nashville, TN 37220 (Again, I suggest that placing your contact info on a handwritten note is not totally necessary, but, since the envelope will probably be tossed, it's not a bad idea, and it is socially correct. Just be sure to leave room, and justify to left note margin.)

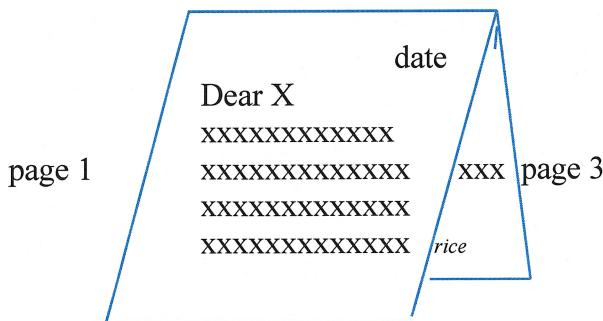
## Relatively Esoteric Stationery and Writing “Rules” for Handwritten Thank You’s (Just in case you want to know)

Handwritten Thank You’s for interviews may be written on several types of stationery.

**1. Folded notes:** Use notes made of heavy white or cream paper. These may be plain or have a tasteful image (ex. “The Doors”). Notes without an image on page one may be bordered, or perhaps have a monogram or name printed on first page. Write with blue or black ink only. Folded notes are correct for both men and women (but probably favored more by women than men). The front of the folded note is termed page one. When the note is opened, page two is above the fold (page 2 is on the back of page 1) and page three is below the fold. The very back of the note is designated as page four. One of the “rules” that everybody breaks is that you are not supposed to write on page 4 because this will show through the front of the envelope when the note is properly inserted in the envelope. (I say use page 4 if you have something meaningful to say and are writing to someone younger than me, and need more room. On the other hand, if you are writing to someone who is quite “senior,” they may actually know the rules—so, use your judgment.)

- a. If the monogram or printed name is centered on page 1, begin the note on page 3 and utilize page 2 only if necessary. [Our VMAA note cards with the “doors” are examples of folded notes, and, while not as formal as monogrammed or personalized notes, these are acceptable for handwritten thank you’s.] Strict etiquette gurus advise that one should never use a folded note with “Thank You” printed on the front—but, here again, how many people really care or know this rule? You decide—especially, if writing to someone my age or older, who might actually know “the rules.”
- b. If the note is completely plain with no personalization or image on page 1 (Lots of Crane bordered folded notes sold in boxes are like this), you may either start your note on page 1, then use page 3 to finish your note, or you may start the note on page 3 leaving page 1 completely blank (Leaving page 1 blank always looks “strange” to me—but it is a correct format). Whether you begin your note on page 1 or page 3, use page 2 only if absolutely necessary to complete your note—but, in my opinion, if you are writing this much, you should probably use half sheets (see below).
- c. If a monogram is on the very top or in the extreme left hand corner of page 1 (an “old timey” look—but very elegant and occasionally still used for personalization), begin your note just beneath the monogram, then continue to page 3, and only use page 2 if absolutely necessary.

Folded note are inserted with the fold up with page 1 facing the flap so that when the reader of the note removes it from the envelope the writing is right side up and ready to read.



**2. Correspondence Cards:** These are a great option. Our VMAA stiff heavy cards with the V at the top are good examples of correspondence cards. These cards are generally preferred by men but are equally correct for males and females. If you purchase these, you should buy cards made of heavy white or cream paper or even gray for males. These may be personalized with your name or monogram at the top. Plain or bordered cards are equally correct. Write only on the front of a correspondence card. (Again—who knows this rule? I suspect lots of people in my age group and older know correspondence card etiquette, so stick to the front of the card when writing people in my age group—otherwise, use your judgment.) If you have more to say than will fit on the front of a correspondence card, you should probably use another form of stationery. Insert a correspondence card with the front facing the flap so that the writing is facing the individual and right side up when removed.

**3. Half Sheets:** Half Sheets are another great option for men and women. They should be made of good quality white or cream paper. These sheets can be bordered or plain and are often personalized with a monogram, a full name, or even a name and address at the top. One does not generally use Mr., Mrs. or Dr. with personalization of this sort (ex. Ann H. Price). Write only on the front of a half sheet—never, ever on the back. If you want to write more, you will need unembellished second sheets. It's a real pain to buy a second set of plain sheets if you have gone to the expense of having these personalized. Thus, my recommendation is plan to complete your note on one page. If you know you generally like to write more than one page, just buy plain sheets and skip the personalization. Half sheets are folded in the middle and are generally placed with the fold down so that slitting the envelope will not slit the letter.

I hope you find this information at least marginally helpful. You now know more thank you note “rules” than 99.99% of the population—but, then you, as VMS’s, are the very best!

When I write to you as alums, I hope you will forgive the fact that I often break the “rules,” but please know that my notes are definitely sincere.

With very best wishes for residency interviewing success, Ann H. Price (VUSM, Class of '78)

P.S.

This website is a good reference and provided some of the info above:

<http://www.paperaffair.com/etiquette/stationery.html>

Here's a company that I have used quite a bit for personalized stationery:

<http://www.americanstationery.com/>

This company has always been reliable and delivered as promised and on date they promised, plus their stationery is good quality and relatively cheap compared to Crane and other high end notes and correspondence cards.