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Dear Grandma,
Thank you so much for
the money you sent me. I love
it. I hope you had a good Christmas.
I hope Santa gave you what you
wanted. I love the money you
sent me.

Love,
Sarah

Take time to send thank-you notes

Time involved
for written messages
demonstrates
genuine appreciation

By VIVI HOANG
Staff Writer

After they've unwrapped their presents and savored their gifts, Christy Stouffer's kids know exactly where to head next: the family supply of stationery.

"Thank-you notes are a must when any of my four children receive gifts for birthdays,

Christmas or other occasions," says the 46-year-old Cantonville, Tenn., mom. "I believe that chil-

dren who are fortunate to receive gifts need to know how to express gratitude and should take the time to send a written note to the giver."

If everyone headed home such as Stouffer, the U.S. Postal Service would be bursting at the seams with grateful, post-Christmas missives. Etiquette experts say thank-you notes are a must whenever someone's gone out of their way to do something nice for you. It's the least you can do.

"There are some things you have to make your children do for their own good, and writing thank-you notes is one of them," says Carol Holland of First Impressions Consulting in Franklin.



Etiquette consultant Carol Holland, pictured with a variety of thank-you notes at her Franklin home, believes in instilling kids at a young age on the importance of the missives.

© Please see NOTES, B2

Dear Grandma,
Thank you so much for the
money.

Notes: Personal effort is show of appreciation

FROM PAGE 1D

"It will serve them well through life. It says that you have gone to the trouble of showing your appreciation through a personal effort."

When Stouffer's kids were too young to write, she says, she'd have them dictate to her and then let them mark on the card in some way, such as with coloring or fingerprints. Now that they're older — ages 8-17 — they know the routine.

Although, she adds ruefully, she sometimes has to remind them several times before it gets done.

Stouffer practices what she preaches, too. "I write thank-you notes often — when I receive gifts, if I read a good book and want to thank the author, after I hear a special sermon or solo at church, when I go to someone's house for a meal, when our friends helped us move last year, and for other acts of kindness for which I'm extremely grateful."

Here's a few thank-you notes from Holland, who teaches etiquette courses for children ages 4-16, and Susan Fitter, Middleburg, Va.-based founder of Global Manners etiquette consulting firm.

■ When should you write? Holland boils it down to three occasions: when someone gives you a gift, when you've been someone's guest or if someone has extended to you a kind gesture.

"It's never inappropriate to send a thank-you note," adds Fitter. "One of the reasons is that they're so rare these days, it makes people feel extra special."

■ The type of paper you use should match the gravity of the occasion you're commemorating. The type of card you use — a fold-over or one-piece — doesn't matter, but a formal event calls for a formal piece of stationery. For a party, perhaps a playful card.

For kids who can't write, try fill-in-the-blank style stationery. Or a drawn picture will suffice.



SUBMITTED
Christy Stouffer taught her children to write thank-you notes when they were about 3 years old.



COURTESY OF
RANDALL MICHAELSON
Susan Fitter is the founder of Virginia-based Global Manners.

■ If Holland could have her way, all thank-you notes would be handwritten. But she realizes there are occasions when e-mail has its advantages because of its instant delivery. Holland suggests following the quick e-mail with a handwritten note.

■ Make your note brief and to the point. Three or four heartfelt sentences will do the job.

Fitter suggests personalizing this formula: Use the first sentence as an introduction ("How kind of you to..."), or "What a delightful surprise..."; the second sentence to make a specific observation about the gesture or gift, and the third sentence to say thanks.

■ For most occasions, a note received within the week is best. (Exception: A bride has until her first anniversary to send out thank-you cards for wedding gifts.) But even if you don't meet that deadline, don't let that stop you. A late note of thanks is better than no thanks at all.

"The most impressive and polite thank you is the one issued promptly," Fitter says. "The warmth of appreciation will be reflected in your writing if the event is fresh in your mind."

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