10 Tips for Social Notes

1. Mail your note as soon as possible after the event that prompts the note, but no later than three days after the date of the event. If you miss that deadline, send the note as soon as you can. A month later is better than never.

2. Plain is best for every occasion. However, as you become more established, your personal brand may govern your choices. Memorable, prompt, and personal all beat plain vanilla in some cases, and nearly always when the relationship with your recipient is well established.

3. Cursive is good, but a dying art. If you do not write well, print neatly. Blue or black ink, please. Cursive is old school, but some people prefer even hard to read cursive and it matters to them. Keep your purpose in mind and choose accordingly.


5. Notes are not just for thanks. Congratulations, condolences, thoughts of another sparked by an event or encounter, response to a publication, quick opinion, or an apology are also good reasons. But you don’t really need a good reason, just an inspiration.

6. Gift enclosures (tiny note cards) should only be used with gifts, but any sized note can be used with a gift.

7. Note cards should always be enclosed in an envelope. Very casual note cards can be affixed to a magazine or article without an enclosure.

8. Use the recipient’s first and last name on the envelope, at minimum. For formal effect, use full name and honorific (Mr. Ms., Senator, Your Ladyship). This applies even when hand delivering a note. Some positions and titles—Ambassador, Governor, Justice, for example—require the name on the envelope to begin with “The Honorable.” In some cases, this honorific applies for life. Check a reliable etiquette source before mailing anything to an official or former official.

9. Never - ever - apologize for lateness, stationary, penmanship, or any other condition of the note itself, as it redirects attention to your request for an indulgence. This includes cloaked apologies, such as “thank you for your patience with my horribly late note written indecipherably in ghastly purple ink.” A note of apology is strictly for apology, and never includes any other tone or subject, or a presumptive conclusion (such as “see you soon”).

10. Avoid overuse of social notes. Overuse of social notes diminishes their effectiveness, suggests unattractive motives, and may not be well received by the recipient. Take care to vary your communication methods; you cannot replace the in-person you with writings.

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