Thank You, Acceptance, and Other Letters

You survived the interview! Take a deep breath, and start thinking about your thank you letter.

The thank you letter can serve many purposes. First and foremost, it is proper business etiquette, and it will set you apart from other candidates who choose to skip this step (and an alarmingly high number do). Second, it is yet another chance to make an impression on the employer and show why you are the ideal person for the job.

This one is a biggie, and it is not optional. During the interview, you will have brought a pad of paper and pen with you for taking notes during the interview. (This will make you appear professional and interested in the job.) Immediately following the interview, make notes of things you want to mention or address in your follow-up letter. Do this before you start your car or hop on the bus to go home. While you may think you will not forget anything, chances are you might, so do not skip this step.

Upon arriving home, start composing a thank you letter to the person or persons with whom you just interviewed. If you met more than one person, address a separate letter to each one, using different wording and stressing different points for each one. For example, if one interviewer seemed concerned about your lack of work experience, address those fears in your letter, showing why your experience qualifies you for the position. If another seemed concerned that you lack the necessary technical skills to do the job, address that issue by showing how you learn quickly. In other words, customize your letters. Whatever the issue, mention it in your letter and show how you do in fact have the necessary skills. For example, you could write, "You mentioned concerns about my ability to work on a team. Let me assure you that I possess the necessary skills to work with other members on a project. For example, I recently served on a volunteer committee to develop plans for a local park. Not only did I work with several other members of the community, but I also conducted extensive research regarding the costs associated with the project." This not only addresses the employer's fear (that you lack the ability to work on a team), but it also conveniently ties in another of your skills—the ability to conduct research.

Just as you customize your initial cover letter when submitting your résumé, customize the thank you letter as well. A "canned" letter that you send to every contact will be obvious and will leave a negative last impression. You want the employer to be even more impressed with you following an interview, not less. As with the other letters, keep it brief, but respect the valuable tool you have in front of you.

In your letter, first thank the interviewer for taking the opportunity to meet you and reiterate your interest in the position. Then, as with your original cover letter, address the points that show that you are the right person for the job. The direction of the interview will determine what you decide to focus on in your thank you letter. You may want to reemphasize your experience and skills in a particular area that was mentioned. Or, if you forgot to mention important information or an opportunity to discuss it never arose, this is the place to include that. Perhaps the conversation moved toward some mutual interests. You may want to mention these to jog the person's memory, just in case. Remember, people tend to hire those who are similar to themselves.
Did you forget to mention something in the interview, or did the conversation not allow for a
natural place to discuss specific experience you wanted to mention? Use the letter to show that you
have that experience. As you did in your original cover letter, highlight your experience using strong
action verbs and writing in the active voice. You can present the missed information using a
paragraph or bullet style—just be sure to include the information.

Now that you know more about the job, you may decide that you need to introduce additional
information about yourself that is not on your résumé. Use your thank you letter as a selling tool to
show how you have just the skills to address the requirements mentioned by the interviewer.
Remember, the interviewer is looking for someone to solve a problem; that is, he or she needs a
person to do a specific job, and, until someone is hired, there exists a problem. How can you solve
this problem? Show that you can come into the workplace and make an immediate difference
because of your background/skills/education that support/s the goals of the position.

After you have composed your letter, print a copy and review it for errors. If necessary, find a
second pair of eyes to proof it for you. When you are satisfied with the letter, which needs to be
finished and sent within 24 hours, send the letter as either a hard copy, or, if doing so seems
appropriate, send it by e-mail. While a hard copy can help you stand out from other candidates, e-
mail has the advantage of speed. Use information learned in the interview to determine which
method is best. If you use e-mail, keep your letter short and to the point, just as you would with an
e-mailed cover letter.

By sending your letter immediately, you keep your name in front of the person with the hiring
power. You remind that person of your qualifications and have yet another chance to sell yourself
for the position. And you make a good impression by demonstrating your professionalism, drive and
attention to detail.

**Acceptance Letters**

Congratulations! You aced the interview with flying colors. You have been offered a job and have
discussed all the particulars. Now you need to put it in writing.

Even if the interviewers tell you a formal job offer is in the mail, it is still a good idea for you to write
your own letter thanking the company for the position, expressing your enthusiasm about working
there and outlining the details of employment as you understand them. It will often take the
company a few days to compile your offer letter; you can put together a quick letter and send it
immediately. Then, should any discrepancies in the understanding of the terms occur, you will be
able to discuss these immediately before you sign the formal acceptance letter or agreement.

**Letters to Other Employers**

If you have interviewed with other companies and have not yet received a response, it is common
courtesy to send a letter to them, explaining that you have accepted a position elsewhere. If you
were in the running, this allows the company to focus their time and efforts elsewhere. Thank them
for their time and let them know you enjoyed meeting them. You want to maintain and build as
many positive relationships as you can in your job search and throughout your career. You could
face a layoff or leave your accepted position for a variety of reasons; if you project a positive and
professional image to those you meet along the way, you will be much better off if you find yourself looking for employment again down the road. Think of it as another networking opportunity.

**Thank You Letters Following a Rejection**

You did everything correctly, but you still received that letter or phone call stating that you were not chosen for the position. This will happen. Not every job is for you, and not every interview will result in a job offer.

However, you can still use a thank you letter to your advantage. First, it helps to avoid burning any bridges. Second, if you are still interested in the company, you can express this in your letter. Third, you never know if the person who takes the job will work out, so if you are a close second, you have yet another chance to put your name in front of the hiring manager(s) and project a positive image.

Fourth, the interviewer may at some point leave the company you interviewed with and may be in a position to hire you elsewhere.

Thank the interviewer(s) for the time invested in meeting you. Express your best wishes for the company, and, if appropriate, state that you are still interested in working with the company. You may want to ask that your information be kept on file and that you appreciate being notified of any related openings in the future.

Maintaining your professionalism on all levels is important. You never know what might happen in the future. You could be referred to another opportunity by the people who turned you down. Interviewers have been known to send their "second choices" to their network contacts. Just because you are not an exact match for one position does not mean that the people who have "rejected" you do not know of the perfect opportunity somewhere else. Keep those contacts open!

Many people enjoy helping others when they can, and it works to the advantage of all involved. If someone recommends you for another position, you will remember that person's name, and perhaps at some point you will be able to return the favor.

Think of thank you letters and other correspondence as not only polite, but ongoing opportunities to network and build relationships. When you have this clear purpose in mind, the process can be an enjoyable and productive one.