

The Better Donation Thank You Letter Checklist:

From Lisa Sargent

Original version on SOFII > <http://sofii.org/article/how-to-write-a-better-thank-you-letter-and-why-it-matters>; see points #2 and #17 for updates.

1. Is it personalized? (As in “Dear Lisa” vs. “Dear Friend”)
2. Is the gift amount noted? **Update 2015: I’ve been criticized for this by some who say that you need to send a thank-you without the amount, and separately, later, a receipt. When expenses like printing, human capital, and postage aren’t so much of an issue, this may be fine. But over a decade+ of including the amount in the thank-you, we’ve found that noting the amount is well received, delivers good retention – and saves money.*
3. Do you start with something other than “Thank you for your gift of...”?
Use an exciting lead.
4. Do you tell the donor when and how they will next hear from you?
5. If this is a repeat gift, do you also thank donor for their:
 - a. Past generosity (and indicate all its made possible), and
 - b. Continued contributions/support
6. If this is a gift membership (meaning made by someone else on giftee’s behalf):
 - a. Do not thank the giftee, but talk about what “this kind gift makes possible”
 - b. Send a thank you letter to the giftor so they know their gift is on its way as intended
7. Say something new or timely in the P.S. – videos online, a holiday message, an upcoming opportunity to visit or meet with you, etc.
8. Include a contact number they can use if they have questions (you can add an e-mail, but not the generic “info@yourorg.org.” Direct them to a warm body, please.)
9. Do you need to thank them for something specific? For example:
 - a. Membership renewal
 - b. Holiday appeal
 - c. Memorial gift
 - d. Capital campaign (focus on all the good this new building/machine/wing will do)
10. Do you need to reference something specific? For example:
 - a. A gift you’ll be sending
 - b. A certificate or photo you’ve enclosed
11. Do you have a website? Mention it in the letter, with a simple call-for-action to drive them there. (“Keep up with all the ways you’re helping XYZ at www.XYZ.org.”)
12. And remember to:
 - a. Keep the letter short (3-4 paras plus a P.S.)
 - b. Add required tax-deductible language
 - c. Share with them “all your gift makes possible...”

13. Use more “you” than “we” and “our.”
14. Say thank you more than once.
15. Proof your letter:
 - a. Use spell check
 - b. Print the letter and read it out loud, word for word
16. If you can, hand-sign them all. If you have too many donors, determine an amount at which you or a board member will hand-sign. And an amount for a phone call.
17. Make sure your donation thank you does NOT include:
 - a. An additional “ask”
 - b. An upgrade to monthly giving or other program
 - c. ~~A gift reply envelope (even if there is no ask)~~
***Update 2015:** *although our thank you letters don't include an ask, many of my clients include a reply envelope. It hasn't seemed to affect retention either way. That said, we haven't done a head-to-head test so I can't say for certain – however I can tell you that one of my clients regularly pulls a 65% average donor retention rate, a very good sign that you can safely include a reply envelope.*

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About Lisa Sargent:

- **Subscribe** to Sargent's FREE e-news, www.lisasargent.com.
- **Connect** w/ Lisa on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lisasargent>.
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Lisa Sargent has been called “one of the finest fundraising copywriters on the planet.” An award-winning international donor communications specialist who is dedicated to helping her nonprofit clients raise more money and retain more donors, Sargent is most often found behind the keyboard crafting successful direct mail appeals, newsletters, and other retention-driven communications.

Sargent's unique brand of spunk and “No B.S.” results-based advice can be found in her own [Loyalty Letter e-news](#) and leading press including *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, Bloomerang, The Agitator, Future Fundraising Now, Blackbaud's npExperts series, and Sargent's free exhibit on donor thank you letters – the most-ever visited on SOFII (Showcase of Fundraising Innovation and Inspiration, 100,000+ visits to date). She is a multi-year Irish Fundraising Awards winner and a bronze winner in the FundraisingSuccess Gold Awards. Experts such as Tom Ahern and Professor Adrian Sargeant regularly use her work in their talks, books, and training.

Past and present clients include Merchants Quay Ireland, Shriners Hospitals for Children, Best Friends Animal Society, Northwestern Memorial Foundation, ChildVision, Alley Cat Allies, Montana Wilderness Association, Starship Foundation (NZ), St. Patrick's Hospital Foundation (Dublin), and many more.