

# How to Write Thank-You Notes That Donors Remember

A guide for fundraisers who want to move people, not just acknowledge them.

Whaddya... John Miller  
we both both - a new team  
dedicated to doing it right  
we plan on doing it  
we hope you'll understand

# How to Write Thank-You Notes That Donors Remember

A guide for fundraisers who want to move people,  
not just acknowledge them.

Some thank-you notes are nice.

Some are polite.

But a rare few... *stick*. They live in someone's drawer. Their inbox. Their memory.

This guide shows you how to write that kind.

Donors give because they want to feel something.

If your thank-you moment:

- **Gives them a memory**, not just a message...
- **Connects to something deeply human**...
- **Shows that *they* are remembered, not just their money**...

They will never forget you.

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## The 3 Memory-Making Ingredients

Use just one and you'll stand out. Use all three, and you've made a moment they'll never forget.

### 1. A Human Detail

Not a stat. Not a program name. A *moment*. Something small, specific, and visual.

#### Examples:

- "She kept her shoes on while she slept. Just in case she had to run again."
- "He folded his acceptance letter like it was a hundred-dollar bill. Tucked it into his sock so it wouldn't blow away."
- "The baby held the bottle with both hands like it might disappear."

- “He didn’t take a second helping. He just whispered, ‘Can I take some to my brother?’”

**Why this works:** The reader *sees* the moment. It sticks.

## 2. A Specific Feeling

Zoom in on what someone *felt* in that moment of impact. The donor gave. Someone felt something because of it.

**Examples:**

- “She walked in carrying more shame than groceries.”
- “When she realized there *was* a bed for her tonight, she let out this laugh. It sounded like relief had finally found a way out.”
- “He looked stunned. Like the kindness caught him off guard.”
- “There were tears, but she kept smiling—like it hurt to hope, but she wanted to anyway.”

**Why this works:** It gives the donor *emotional x-ray vision*. They feel like they were there.

## 3. A Surprising Compliment

Make the thank-you about *them*, not you. Reflect back who they are not just what they gave.

**Examples:**

- “You didn’t just open your wallet. You opened a door.”
- “Not everyone chooses to act. But you did. And it changed everything.”
- “Some people wait for others to fix things. You just stepped in.”
- “Your kindness showed up quietly. But it shouted something beautiful about who you are.”

**Why this works:** It honors the donor’s *identity*, not just their gift.

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## **Where (and How) to Dig for a Detail That Sticks**

This is where the gold is. If you want a powerful thank-you, start by mining the right places for material:

## Start with Your Frontline Staff

Ask:

“Was there a moment this week that made you stop and feel something?”

“What did you see that we *don’t* put in reports?”

Often, the most powerful moments are casual throwaways for people working in the field.

## Look for a Contrast

What changed *before* vs. *after* the gift?

Not just what happened—but what was *different* because of it.

### **Examples:**

- Before: “He hadn’t eaten in 3 days.” → After: “He said, ‘I forgot what warm food felt like.’”
- Before: “She was silent during intake.” → After: “She asked if she could hug the nurse.”

## Listen for Language That Isn’t Polished

Real people say things that stick—not because they’re eloquent, but because they’re raw.

“I just want to be able to eat sitting down.”

“It’s the first time someone looked me in the eye this week.”

“I didn’t know people still cared.”

These real quotes make powerful storytelling seeds. Don’t smooth them out. Use them as-is.

## Ask: What Would I Tell a Friend?

If you were going home tonight and telling your spouse or roommate the best thing that happened today—what would it be?

Start there. That’s your thank-you content.

## Examples: Thank-You Notes That Stick

Each of these uses different combinations of the 3 Memory-Making Ingredients: **human detail**, **specific feeling**, **surprising compliment**.

### Example 1:

**Subject:** You didn't just help, you showed up right on time

Dear Anna,

She was gripping the edge of the chair so hard her knuckles turned white. The intake counselor said it felt like she was holding herself together by one thread.

Your gift meant she didn't have to leave empty-handed.

She walked out holding a bag of groceries, a printed job application, and a little more hope than when she came in.

You didn't just donate. You arrived when someone desperately needed a reason to keep going.

With gratitude,  
James

### Example 2:

**Subject:** "Please tell them thank you—for seeing me."

Hi Daniel,

One of our case workers called me this morning just to say: "Tell the donor this made my whole week."

Here's what happened:

A young mom showed up for an emergency appointment. She hadn't eaten since Tuesday. She had no idea anyone would help.

When she got a grocery card and a place in our parenting class, she teared up and whispered, "Please tell them thank you—for seeing me."

Daniel, that was you.

You made her feel seen. Known. Supported.

That's the kind of donor you are.

—Rita

### Example 3:

**Subject:** You helped someone see beauty again

Dear Thomas,

Last night, an audience member stopped our staff in the lobby. She said, "I haven't felt this awake in months. It's like someone lit a candle inside me."

She had just watched the curtain fall on a show you helped bring to life.

That feeling—that joy, that spark, that *being-alive again*—was your gift.

Thank you for keeping the arts alive, and for giving people moments they didn't know they needed.

In gratitude,  
John

### Example 4:

**Subject:** The river is a little cleaner today—because of you

Dear Judy,

Yesterday, a volunteer pulled a rusted bike frame out of the creek. We laughed about it, but underneath the laughter was something else: hope.

Because with every tire, bottle, and bag removed, we get closer to a river that can breathe again.

Judy, your support made that possible.

Some people walk past problems. You're helping clean them up.

And the river—and everyone who loves it—is better for it.

Sincerely,

David

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## Try This: The 60-Second Thank-You Note Test

**Step 1:** Read your thank-you note out loud.

**Step 2:** Ask yourself:

- Is there an image or phrase that might *stay* with the donor?
- If they read this in 6 months, would it still mean something?
- Does it sound like it came from someone *who really saw them*?

If not, pick one of the three Memory-Making Ingredients above and add it.

Even a single well-written sentence can make your thank-you unforgettable.

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## Copy-and-Paste Phrases to Try

Use these as-is or make them your own:

- "I hope this note finds you on a day when you needed to be reminded what you did mattered."
- "Sometimes help arrives like an envelope in the mail. That was you."
- "Your kindness will outlast the moment. It already has."
- "There are people who talk about change. And then there are people like you, who quietly create it."
- "You weren't there when it happened—but your impact was."
- "You reminded someone that their story wasn't over."

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## Bottom Line

A thank-you can be:

- A task you check off,  
or

- A memory you plant in someone's heart.

The second kind is what creates loyalty.

The second kind is what gets talked about over coffee, forwarded to family, and saved in a drawer.

Go write that one.

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## **Want to create more moments that *stick* with your donors?**

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