RECENTLY, A BUSINESS associate gave me a most generous gift: a Montblanc Bohème. The very first thing I wrote with it was a note to thank him.

In a world of e-mail and text messages, hand-written thank-you notes may seem old school. But they're still important, and for a variety of situations, says Tricia Post, content editor with the Emily Post Institute. Also, writing them gives aficionados a chance to use their favorite pens and stationery.

"Thank-you notes aren't just for gifts," Post says. "Sometimes they're letters of appreciation for a favor, or for hospitality received as a house guest or at a dinner party. Writing is not as instantaneous as e-mail, but it is more permanent—and more memorable."

Besides their social uses, thank-you notes can be important business

tools. As a journalist, I'm frequently invited to large events, where my face and my business card may get lost in the shuffle. I always follow up with a handwritten note with my business card tucked inside. And I've received several assignments from people who remembered the note.

Tricia Post agrees. "If you're a job applicant, thank people for the opportunity to be interviewed," she says. "A handwritten note will get their attention. Even if you don't get that particular job, they'll remember you, and they might consider you for something else because they know you follow through."

The choice of stationery depends on the type of note. More formal letters, such as those for business, should use traditional stationery in white, cream or

gray for men, and the addition of light blue for women, Post advises. But for family and friends, "the sky's the limit," she says. "You can use a beautiful note card, different colors and borders and different inks. Something that reflects your personal taste is wonderful."

And, she adds, there can be many occasions to send a note. "Maybe there's someone who does something nice for you all the time, or always shows up when there's a problem. There's pleasure in receiving something in the mail. It's a special type of communication, and it takes it out of the ordinary and everyday. You're thinking about them and taking the time to write it down. It really makes a difference."

DO'S AND DON'TS

DO SEND THANK-YOUS AS SOON as possible. "If a dinner guest waits two weeks to send a thank-you, the note loses its sparkle. Mail within a day or two if possible. If you received a gift by mail and you're really tied up, it's fine to call and say you love it, but follow up with a note," says Post. An exception applies to those writing notes following a funeral, who should write when they feel up to it. "Sometimes it takes a while, but people

DO INCLUDE YOUR OWN THOUGHTS.

understand."

"People ask about using cards that say 'thank you' on the outside, and that's fine, as long as you write a personal note on the inside. Don't just sign a preprinted message."

DO MAKE REFERENCE TO THE GIFT.

"If it's money, try to say what it will be used for: 'I've had my eye on those shoes for weeks, and I'll use this to buy them.""

DON'T GUSH. "Be enthusiastic, but avoid saying the gift is the most beautiful thing you've ever seen, unless you really mean it. Sincerity is important."

DON'T ASSUME IT'S TOO EARLY FOR

children to start writing thank-yous. "Parents can help children write notes; the youngest children can draw a picture. When Grandma sends holiday gifts, they should be acknowledged, especially if they have not been opened in the presence of the giver. You're never too young to start writing thank-you notes."

Note cards and envelopes by Crane.

OF THE THANKYOU