



## A milestone justified with celebration

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Before you know it, graduation day will be here. Some students will leave high school to enter a university, college or perhaps the job market. Some will go from university to graduate school or find employment in their chosen field. Whichever fork in the road a graduate travels, the journey will always be educational.

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Looking back on my own experience, I remember some days were filled with excitement and joy, such as when the school year began, vacations started and school ended. I also remember some less fun-filled days, such as when report cards arrived in the mail, detention kept me from attending a sporting event or my bicycle was stolen from the bike stand. But on balance, my school days were wonderful. Great friendships were forged, interests developed and skills honed.

Parents will breathe a sigh of relief in some cases when their kids finally reach this important milestone. Others will inhale deeply preparing for the next four years of tuition fees.

But most will agree that an education is one of the most important assets we as a society can offer each generation of students and marking the various achievements with commencement exercises, proms, graduation parties and other activities such as grand marches, academic awards and scholarship ceremonies punctuate this time of year with a justified festive atmosphere.

Questions always flood in during the spring months about graduation announcements and invitations and how they should be addressed, stuffed, mailed and so on. There is seemingly endless variations on the questions asked. I want to simplify these matters so

that your minds can be eased and your focus can be on the joys of the day and not on the faux pas you are worried you might make.

There is a fundamental difference between an announcement and an invitation. An announcement is akin to a news flash. It simply conveys information and should be sent by parents or guardians only about two weeks after the event(s) surrounding the graduation.

Invitations are mailed out at least two weeks prior to the ceremony, with the expectation that those invited will attend the ceremony. Invitations should come from the students themselves, no matter who physically does the mailing, addressing, et cetera. The exception to this would be in the event that there is a limit to the number of people a graduate can invite to the actual ceremony. In this case, a small card would be inserted into the envelope of the invitation to the reception following. This reception is usually paid for by the parents and, therefore, the invitation for just the reception should be come from the parents and not the student.

There should never be any mention of gifts on either the announcement or the invitation. Invitations do not come with a price of admission. But let's face it, certain milestones call for tangible rewards.

Graduation is one of them. Most often, cash is the preferred gift and the one most hoped for by students. You might ask what the best way is to get this message out there if one can't use the invitation itself.

Word of mouth is the answer. People have amazing networking skills. If the idea of cash gifts is passed to one or two people invited to attend the graduation and/or the reception, without fail the others guests will learn of this preference.

The amount of the monetary gift is completely arbitrary. It depends on how close a relationship a person has with the student and the financial ability of the person writing the cheque. It is as simple as that.

People oftentimes seek suggestions for appropriate graduation gifts. My advice is to give something useful. If money is not something you want to give for whatever the reason, consider something akin to it such as a gift certificate to a clothing store or a phone card.

Monogrammed pen and pencil sets are certainly traditional and often come from close relatives. Perhaps there is an heirloom set from a grandparent that might be appreciated.

Today people tend to want practical things which serve a purpose. Remember that gifts are most often remembered when they are things that people would not likely buy for themselves. I advise selecting items with the graduate's personal likes in mind.

Take a few minutes to think about what this friend would really like. Call a parent or sibling if necessary to get the real inside scoop. To make this extra effort shows that you really do care about this person and that you respect their great accomplishment as much as they do.

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