Ingredients for Good Thank-You Letters

Structure/Outline

• Salutation/greeting
• Statement of thanks (including statement of what the thanks is for)
• Description of the writer's experience of Pomona, including some or all of the following:
  o Background/reasons for choosing Pomona
  o Overarching interests
  o Academic and non-academic interests and experience
• Description of goals or hopes for the future (can be long- or short-term, and should honestly but positively reflect where you are now)
• Reiteration of thanks
• Closing/vediction

Content

• AN EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE.
• AN OVERARCHING VISION of what has been valuable about your experience of Pomona – think of this as the capstone to those hopes-and-dreams things you had to write to get in.
• SPECIFIC INFORMATION – your background (however you want to define that), interests, ambitions.
• A FEW SPECIFIC EXAMPLES that fit into your overarching vision (a favorite class, a great event, a club you took a leadership role in).

Tone

• POLITENESS. This is a stranger who might be your parents’ or even your grandparents’ age. Don’t be too casual, but don’t be overly formal, either. It might help to imagine that you are writing to a very wealthy and generous friend of your grandparents.
• RESPECT. This person has a sense of pride in you and your accomplishments, even if that seems a bit remote or weird or silly. Don’t let him or her down. (In other words, don’t sound flippant.)
• ENERGY. On the other hand, this isn’t an application for a job or a fellowship. Let your personality show through—just a nice, polite, grandparent-ready version of your personality.

Something to Remember . . .

The first-order reason to write these letters is because it’s polite to say “thank you” when someone gives you a gift, and that’s what happened here.

The second-order reason to write these letters—and to do them well—is because these donors have been generous to Pomona College and might continue to be so. They’ve chosen to give their money in a way that helps students directly, and this is a way to make them feel as though this is a better—more helpful, more satisfying—thing to do with their money than giving it to the local ASPCA. We want them to continue to feel proud of Pomona students; we want them to keep feeling as though this is a good thing to do with their money. Your letters can help make that happen.