

## Getting the Most Out of a Writers' Conference

Many attendees of our writers' conferences have asked for advice on how they can get the most out of the writers' conferences they attend. Here is a handy checklist full of ideas for you to use. If you have any suggestions, let us know!

### Before the conference

- Research the industry professionals speaking
  - For each publishing house rep: What types of books do they publish? (including genres/topics/authors) What types of books do they not publish? Who are the authors they've recently published? Are their books similar to yours? How does yours fit? Or not? What questions would you like to ask them?
  - For each agent: What types of authors/books do they represent? Are they looking for new authors to represent? Which publishing houses have they sold to? Are their other authors similar to you? What questions would you like to ask them?
- Research the authors speaking
  - What books have they written? Are any similar to yours? What kinds of questions would you like to ask them?
- See if any of your writer friends are also attending
  - It is always helpful to have a friend to bounce ideas with
- Watch for social media posts and emails from the conference organizers in order to learn more about the speakers
- Prepare yourself
  - Know who you are and what you are looking for
  - Have your elevator pitch ready
    - It should vary a little, depending on who you're speaking with
    - Practice your pitch with a friend or two
    - "You need to be prepared to answer questions. Think through specific questions someone might have about your project. Some obvious questions you should be able to respond to: Are there other books similar to yours already in the market? If so, what is your unique contribution to the topic? What other writing have you done similar to this? Have you built an audience and is this the type of work they'd expect from you?" - agent Chris Ferebee
  - Design a one-pager
    - "... an easy-to-read and cleanly styled document with your name, contact information, a short bio, the title of your work, a 2-3 sentence hook, and 5-6 paragraph description of your main thesis or idea" - agent Chris Ferebee
  - Get business cards printed
  - Know what matters most to you
- Construct your priority list of people to meet

- Understand what types of sign-ups are required for specific parts of the conference, and understand how they work
- Plan your schedule for the conference
- Contact the conference organizers to get their suggestions

### At the conference

- Get there early (allow for bad traffic), get oriented, and meet people
- Dive in, and don't check out - pay attention! Be present.
- Be humble, patient, and courteous
  - No one likes to speak with someone who is boastful / snooty / condescending / pushy / monopolizes a conversation / etc.
  - Abide by our [Code of Conduct](#)
  - Dress professionally
- Be there to learn
  - Write things down. A conference tends to be a whirlwind, and it is easy to forget some of what you've heard and learned, so jot things down as you go.
- Be active on social media during the conference, using the conference hashtag or handle
- Make sure you meet with the people you've prioritized
  - Don't forget to make a good first impression; err on the side of politeness, not pushiness
  - Ask questions; if time allows, ask them about their work before telling them about yours
  - "If your opening ice breaker is a statement about why you are excited to meet with this person because you know they work with a specific author or have published a specific book or set of books that are similar to you or what you're working on, you'll have their undivided attention." - agent Chris Ferebee
  - Get their business card, and give them yours
  - Generally speaking, hand them a one-pager or a business card, not a manuscript or a book
  - Once you've met them, don't keep after them; no stalking
- Meet as many new people as you can, and be ready to be surprised - you never know who you will meet that will end up being very important, perhaps in an unexpected way
  - But don't start the conversation by pitching your book; instead ask questions and learn about the other person
  - This is a great opportunity to meet other authors who have similar interests
  - You may learn about a local writers group you can join
  - You may start a new relationship that becomes extremely valuable in the future
  - Don't be afraid to request an introduction to someone who you would like to meet

- “At my first conference, I met my future agent, found an editor and made new writer friends. At my most recent conferences, I’ve found it rewarding to teach workshops, moderate panels and reconnect with friends.” - Carol Van Den Hende
- Get to know the conference organizers
- Be prepared to change

### After the conference

- Follow up with the people you met
  - Wait until a couple of days after the conference, but don’t wait more than a week
  - Send a thank you note to the conference organizer and to others you met. You never know how it might help you.
- Don’t get depressed; know that, for most people, there is a natural letdown from the “high” you were on during the conference
- Use this opportunity to blog about what you learned at the conference. Don’t forget to tag the conference organizer in your posts on social media :-)
- Expert conference-goers know that it’s a good idea to return to the same conferences regularly. It’s the best way to establish meaningful, long-term relationships.
- The conference might be a business expense for you; don’t forget to save your receipts for tax time.
- Finally, from Sarah Arthur: “[Here is the world](#),’ Frederick Buechner said: ‘beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don’t be afraid.’ Write that world. Write those beautiful and terrible things. Write the fear, the courage. Write as if you could salve the hunger, quench the thirst, part light from darkness.”