

Goodie #2 Five tips to maximize your time at conference

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I get the question quite often “I’m going to my first writer’s conference what do I need to know?” I created this sheet to help first timers, as well as seasoned Conference Attendees, maximize their time at writer’s conference.

1. Ask lots of questions

Projecting a professional image (How NOT to look like a newbie)

If you’re planning to attend a writer’s conference for the first time I have just one piece of advice:

Ask lots of questions.

This may seem counter-intuitive but it's true. New people want to show how much they know and have practiced, so they tend to spout off, a lot. They do crazy things to chase editors and agents. YES at conference I did see a newbie follow a poor editor in to the bathroom...

In marketing the person who is talking looses. You need to learn to listen. You need to ask questions. When I went to my first writing conference I had published with 2 national magazines [one time each] and sold an article to a third [though not yet published].

That was it. No stellar record. Just my BA and 2 pub credits. [Plus I regularly wrote for a local free paper which paid me with a byline to add to my publishing credits, but no money.

I went prepared with a list of questions. I kept the editor and agents chatting. I picked their brain for all it was worth. I handed them my one sheet on my various projects at

the beginning but said NOTHING about them. I asked questions on the industry and allowed them to look at my one sheets as they answered questions they could answer in their sleep. I feverishly took notes as they shared years of wisdom with me.

In the end, I said "Well, thank you for your time. Would you be interested in seeing these projects?" The agent said "Sure, send it my way." The editor said "If agent X [the agent I'd spoken to the day before] takes you on, tell him to send the project to me."

And you know what? I wasn't scared a BIT. I spoke very little. I took great notes, learned more in 15 minutes than I ever imagined and had two great results.

More importantly no one had ANY clue it was my first conference, my first pitch or anything.

I felt good because it was a casual side note "would you like to see it" rather than trying to convince them of anything. I think I sold myself well.

So, go to conference believing you are a professional writer and people will treat you like one.

2. Go prepared to learn, not pitch.

Of course you are going to pitch while you're there, and it is important to have a quick blurb that you can recite about your projects, but go to a conference to learn. The conferences I've attended have offered two 15 minute appointments with editors and agents but other than that the draw of the conference was to learn.

It is awful to see attendees who are nervous the entire conference about an appointment they will have on the final day. It is a waste to spend hundreds or thousands of dollars only to pin most of your aspirations pinned to 30 minutes of the entire conference.

Have a pitch ready, create a one sheet, and know about the editor/agents that are coming to the conference, but make your *focus* learning about the industry, craft, marketing and meeting other authors.

Writer's Conferences are very important. It is extremely difficult to move forward in this business without attending a writer's conference on a regular basis. That is because once your craft intersects with the right editor or agent they can throw the door open wide to your writing career. The writing conference opens the opportunity to have contact with a publishing house that wouldn't otherwise ever see your unsolicited Manuscript.

The key to getting the most out of them is to know why you're going. It isn't all about the pitch. It is about the relationships, the networking and the learning.

3. Volunteer

The first conference I attended I did not volunteer, and I regret it. I was advised that since it was my first time that I should soak in everything and enjoy myself. Instead I felt isolated at times, even though I knew quite a few people from talking to them online. [I was an active member of the organization that sponsored the conference.]

I think even if you give an hour of your time helping out at the conference you will again gain valuable knowledge and make lots of friends. When you volunteer during registration or sign in, then you have a chance to meet most of the people as they arrive at the conference. You'll be in the circle of the action and quickly made to be an extrovert.

Maybe you'd rather work at the bookstore where you can get to know a small group of people more intimately. I have done this as well and it is the best place to meet a group of writers. You could also be the room hostess who makes sure everything is ready for the speaker. This gives you a great opportunity to chat a bit with people further down the road than you.

Whatever your comfort zone and gifting there is likely a volunteer opportunity for you. Ask when you register how you can help with the conference.

4. Don't be afraid to rest.

Writer's Conferences are exhausting. You may have changed time zones and thus thrown off your body clock or the deluge of information could make your brain throb. If you want to get the most you can from the conference you have to remember the importance of getting a good night's sleep and taking breaks if you're getting run down. I buy the CDs of the conferences I attend so I don't feel guilty if I have to slide back to my room to rest between classes or even during a class. I will have lots of time later to review the CDs for the information I miss, but the time I have there to meet with people, discuss ideas and learn from fellow writers will only happen when I'm there. And it will only happen if I have the energy to do it.

5. Create a plan to use what you've learned when you go home.

This is by far the most important step and it was from this step that this website was born. You will learn a great deal of information at a writer's conference, but it can be overwhelming. You need a plan for how to implement it piece by piece so you'll make consistent progress on your path to publication. When you go to a conference you need a plan of who you will meet with and what classes you'll take. When you prepare to leave a conference you need a clear plan of what to do with that information so you will make forward progress on your writing dream.

Many times friends have shared with me how they've gotten sick the week immediately following conference. Others have said they spent so much time rewriting the manuscripts that were requested by an editor or agent that they're too embarrassed to send them off months later.

The only way that anything will be accomplished after you attend a writer's conference is if you have a plan that has reasonable benchmarks and goals. That is why I designed my "Writing Career Coach" program. I take you through what you need to do after a writer's conference to take your writing to the next level. But more than that, the program shows you what to do before you go to a writer's conference to get the most out of your time there. I spent thousands of dollars studying the books on my library page and in addition to attending writer's conference and taking business classes in order to learn what I share in the program. For someone who really wants to make steady progress toward their goal of publication it is an excellent tool that will help you create a customized roadmap to your writing goals.

Whether you use my system, read my blog or read some of the books I feature on my suggested reading lists, all your effort will be wasted [and your money too] if you don't have a plan in place to take what you learn from conference to build your writing career.

About the Author



Author Bio: Tiffany Colter is a passionate freelance writer whose credits include national magazines, local papers, E-zines and blogs. Topics have ranged from reporting on-assignment about local businesses to national trends in the writing market. She can speak as readily on overcoming challenges by faith as she can reaching a target market through platform development.

Every month more than 40 pieces authored by Tiffany appear online or in print. She speaks regularly to Writers groups & Business Owners as well as individuals.

The Writing Career Coach Program was born out of her desire to provide affordable options to aspiring writers.

Tiffany has a degree in Political Science from the University of Toledo where she graduated Summa cum Laude from the Honors College. She is fluent in three languages, writes suspense-thrillers and reads business books as readily as she does a novel.

You can learn more about how to build your writing business, whether one article or a series of novels, by visiting Tiffany's blog at <http://WritingCareerCoach.blogspot.com>

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