

Tips for Getting the Most from Write-to-Publish

by Tammie Edington Shaw, Write-to-Publish Alumnus

Meet the Faculty and Show Your Work

As much as possible, study the needs of each publishing house represented to determine with whom you want to set up a private appointment. Knowledge of the editor's house will show her you have done your homework, and you will not waste her time.

If you have published manuscripts, take samples of your best work. If not, take copies of manuscripts you would like to submit. If you have a book idea, prepare a succinct, half-page synopsis or a full proposal. Also be prepared to tell the theme and audience of your book or article in one or two sentences.

One of the first things you want to do Wednesday morning, after registering, is to sign up for individual meetings with faculty members. Sign up for as many as allowed (two for full conference and one for partial conference) and for whatever times are available, even if they are in the middle of a session you plan to attend. You can leave the class and have a friend take notes, or you can buy a CD.

Be prompt for the meeting, and introduce yourself. Present a sheet of paper with your idea or proposal, and then be ready to expand on it. If the editor gives you positive feedback, he may ask you to send a proposal or article. Be sure you know exactly where to send it and in what time frame.

At the end of the meeting, be courteous and thank the editor for her time, even if you do not receive positive feedback. And don't forget to be considerate of the next attendee's appointment by not intruding into that person's time.

If you think editors are the most intimidating people at the conference, remember they were once beginning writers or new to their profession. These are the people—along with professional writers on the faculty—who want to help you in any way they can. So don't be afraid to sit with them during meals and approach them during breaks. Ask questions about writing and publishing, then listen.

Take Advantage of Manuscript Evaluations

Take advantage of the manuscript evaluation service; see the registration letter for details. This fee is quite reasonable compared to professional critique services.

Also plan to participate in the informal critique sessions after the evening general sessions Wednesday through Friday. These provide opportunities for you to read aloud your work and get feedback. Even if you don't have anything to read, attend anyway. Listen and learn from others, and observe how a critique session works.

Volunteer

If you are local, offer to volunteer at the conference. See the local help wanted form for opportunities. Providing airport rides gives you more time to talk with an editor or writer than you'll get in an appointment. But don't expect him or her to read your manuscript or proposal in the car!

Choose Classes Wisely

If you are a beginning writer, attend sessions that teach writing techniques and focus on genres in which you are interested. If you are a seasoned writer, attend workshops that explore new territory, so you can grow in your writing.

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Meet Other Attendees

If you are an introvert, you are like most writers; but make an effort to approach others. If someone seems to be alone in a session, ask that person what kind of writing he or she does. At each meal, try to sit at a different table, so you can meet as many people as possible. In addition to gaining new friends and encouraging one another, you may benefit from this networking later in your writing career.

Pick up Freebies and Bargains

Pick up a copy of everything on the freebie table. Don't take time to sort through the piles since you can do that when you go back to your room or return home. If you discover duplicate copies, give them to other writers who did not attend.

It's a good idea to bring two durable, lightweight bags, one to take home freebies in and another to carry materials to sessions.

Before you begin making purchases from the book table, look through your registration folder for discount coupons and magazine subscription specials. Be sure to take advantage of magazine specials to help you improve your craft and learn about market changes after the conference.

Follow-up After the Conference

Shortly after the conference, send thank-you notes to faculty members you met or had appointments with and to the conference director. Send notes or e-mail messages to other attendees with whom you want to keep in touch. Also be sure to contact those new markets you discovered at the conference.

Take time to ask yourself the following questions: How did I benefit from the conference? Was it worth the cost? Where did I fail in not taking full advantage of the sessions, faculty, and meeting others? Is this the conference I want to attend next year?

Make a list of what you will do better next time, and make plans to return next year. After all, successful writers know that conferences are not a once-in-a-while event.