

What To Bring To the Conference

What to Bring to the Conference To Maximize the Opportunities

According to SFWC Director Laurie McLean, you can leave the weighty manuscript at home.

But do bring your pitches, first pages, a synopsis, and lots of good questions.

When you go to a writers' conference, you want to show off your best work and have the right people see it. It is crucial to present your work so that people take notice. Briefly, the best things you can bring to a conference are the simplest: an intriguing pitch, a synopsis of your book, and the first chapter or short samples of your writing.

Think about it. Will an agent or editor read your entire manuscript while you are sitting next to her at lunch? Probably not! But will she be persuaded to hear you out when you knock her socks off with a well-crafted pitch for your project? You bet.

San Francisco Writers Conference Director Laurie McLean gives you an action plan to get the most out of the conference

experience. She knows what literary agents are looking for because she is also the founder of the Fuse Literary Agency.

Here is her rather specific list of when and where you should bring some of your work to the San Francisco Writers Conference:

1. **PITCH SESSIONS:** On Thursday, the first day of the conference, there are several chances to try out your pitch. If you've written down or memorized your pitch, bring that to the Thursday afternoon pitch sessions (Prepping the Perfect Pitch at 2 p.m. and Workshopping Your Pitch Aloud at 2:45 p.m.). If you haven't written or practiced your pitch, it's perfectly okay to just listen to others.

2. **FREE CONSULTS:** Attendees can also sign up for free 8-minute consultations with an independent editor, a marketing consultant, and/or a book coach on Friday and Saturday. Print out the first chapter of your book, along with a synopsis, for those consultations. You might not use it, but it's good to have it in your bag.

3. **ONE-TO-ONE AGENT CONSULTS:** There is also the option to sign up for a paid 15-minute conversation with an agent on Friday and Saturday. This is something new this year based on what past attendees told us they wanted. It is for attendees

only, and you sign up onsite. For these longer one-on-one agent meetings, you can bring the first few printed-out pages of your book, although these conversations are meant to be just that—conversations, not critiques, of your work. These conversations are your chance to ask agents questions about anything in publishing that you don't understand or need help on.

4. **PRACTICE YOUR PITCH:** There is a group Safe Pitch Practice on Saturday evening sponsored by the Tri-Valley chapter of the California Writers Club where you can again practice your pitch without agents or editors in the room. This is essential if you want to work on the presentation of your pitch—and it's fun—especially for anyone signed up to do Speed Dating for Agents the following day. This “cast off your jitters” session is free and only for attendees. Find out more and sign up at the Registration Area.

5. **SPEED DATING FOR AGENTS:** This is our big extravaganza on Sunday morning. If you register to participate in this optional session, you will get one-hour, basically, to pitch as many agents as you can. I don't recommend you just shove your first page in front of them for their comments. Instead, this is where you take 2 of the 3 minutes to tell them what you're writing, share some comparable titles for context, give them a few words about who

you are as a writer (awards won, previously published work, or the fact that you're just starting out), then listen for that last minute to what they have to say. It all happens so quickly, there is no time, really, for the agent to read anything.

Prepare your pitch in advance, workshop it on Thursday afternoon and Saturday night, then you'll be ready for Speed Dating. You can bring your first page as a backup while speed dating, on the off chance some of the agents will want to read it. But that will take up most of your 3-minute "date," and the agent won't get a sense of the totality of your story or who you are as an author. I think it is better to practice your pitch, keep it under 2 minutes, then listen to what the agent has to say. In fact, I think you'd be better served to work up a couple of questions for an agent about the market for your type of work ("Are memoirs about Alzheimers popular these days?") or what they are looking for especially than to have them read your work during Speed Dating. If the agent says, "Great. Send me the first three chapters," and you still have time left, don't jump up out of your chair and hurry to the next agent's line. Ask one of your prepared questions. Then, sit back and listen.

6. DURING THE EVENT: Should you bring synopsis, test-reader-reviews, or pre-written queries? My answer is you can keep a few copies in your room or pop one set into your conference bag

so if anyone asks to see them you can share them. I do not expect any agents or editors will want to see a test reader review or a query (since that is what you will email an agent or editor after the conference if they ask you to send them some of your work for consideration). Some might want to hear your pitch or the first page or chapter of your novel or book proposal outside of these structured sessions. If you see agents in the hallway and they are not surrounded by a group of eager authors, you might have a chance to talk to them then. If a member of the faculty has his badge on, his is open to talking to attendees. We run a very friendly conference.

Remember, the agents and editors at the conference WANT to find the next best-selling book. That is why they come to the SFWC. Nothing would make them happier than developing a long-term mutually rewarding business relationship with the author of that book. We know that is why you decided to come to the San Francisco Writers Conference too.