

Preparing for Conference

By Chellesie B. Dancer

1. When you check in at the Conference, they'll give you a badge, and a book tote with the conference schedule, notepad, pen, etc.

2. If you plan on carrying that tote, and especially if you're sharing a room, I'd recommend bringing a permanent marker to label your bag since they all are the same.

3. Instead of a regular purse, you may want to bring a large all-purpose bag, with pockets for your business cards, and the ones you collect from others, and big enough for:

a notebook, and a couple of pens

several books (you'll often get a book or two at meals, workshops, spotlights)

snacks (bring some to fill in on these long days!)

a light sweater or suit jacket (the AC is usually **cold** in the hotel)

lipstick, hairbrush, etc for touch-ups during the long day

4. Bring business cards of some sort, and pass them out whenever you meet anyone. You'll need 2-4 dozen, depending on how assertive you are at passing them out. (www.VistaPrint.com offers some very inexpensive business cards, even some 'free' ones where you only pay shipping.)

5. How to dress: There is a huge variety of clothing styles there, many women dress up, some wear cute trendy jeans, and many just wear knit separates. The recommendation is 'business casual,' so that gives you a good range. Make sure you wear comfortable shoes for the workshops-they are long days with a lot of walking in a huge hotel. For appointments with editors and agents, a suit is appropriate, but it's most important that you wear something you feel good in. And for any cocktail party, the Divas Dinner, and the Saturday night gala, dressy evening clothes are a must.

6. Wear your badge all the time-it's your ticket into most things, and other attendees will chat with you or introduce themselves everywhere you go, even at nearby restaurants and shops. People are extra helpful when they see your 'first-timer' ribbon.

7. Talk to anyone, everyone. Agents and editors are there to meet authors, so don't be afraid to talk to them. Just don't corner them in the restroom, or act like a stalker. The same goes for your favorite authors, they love to hear that you enjoy their books, and are happy to give autographs. Even Nora Roberts will chit-chat with you!

8. Go to the spotlight of any editor with whom you have appointment, or go see them on a panel at a workshop. That goes for agents too. You'll be more comfortable at your appointment, and then you can ask a good question, or make an comment and they'll be pleased you did your homework. If you're pitching to Harlequin, they have podcasts with many of their editors here <http://community.harlequin.com/forums/write-stuff/meet-editors-podcasts>.

9. Do try going to an appointment, even if that agent or publisher isn't a good match for you-it's good practice.

10. If you didn't get an appointment, or specifically want one with someone in particular, you can show up during their appointment time and check for cancellations, or just wait, and if someone doesn't show you can jump in. It's fairly likely you'll get a spot.

11. Practice your pitch with a friend, it'll help you more than you would guess!

12. Keep in touch with LARA folks, they'll keep you "in the know."

13. Volunteer at workshops to meet new people, including the presenters. Sign up on arrival, or ahead of time online at RWANational.

14. Online at RWANational, check your registration to make sure your badge has whatever name you want to go by. Below your name, add LARA and any other groups you belong to. (The title line is for Board members.)

15. While you are on-line there, check out their conference FAQ.

16. I'd highly recommend bringing an extra duffel bag, or else leave lots of space in your suitcase, for the books you bring back. You may end up buying books at the literacy signing or in the bookseller's room. If you do not purchase any books, you'll still end up with about one or two dozen, depending on what all you attend—many publishers have book signing where their authors sign books and they give them away for free (though they often run out early).

If you end up with more than 20 or 30 books, you may want to ship them home from conference, instead of carrying them. There's always a shipping desk set-up at the conference for that, and they should have boxes, but it's going to be cheaper to go outside the hotel to ship. I believe you can also pre-arrange shipping options ahead of time to save money. Remember, most airlines charge per bag now, and they charge extra for going over the weight limit.

How to Pick Workshops

For me, the hardest part about going to conference was trying to decide which workshops/spotlights to attend. So many sound interesting! Here are a couple tips that helped me.

First of all, before I went, I highlighted my preferences. Often I had two or even three highlighted for one time period. That ended up working out just fine, because once I was there, I heard something about one of the presenters so picked that one, or a friend asked me to join her at one of them, or I got an appointment that overlapped one thing, but not another, etc. I also found that when I was there immersed in that world, I focused on my career differently than I had at home, and so I made somewhat different choices.

Also, if there are a couple workshops at the same time, check to see if one or both are being recorded, and then you can buy the tapes afterward. The conference program will most likely have a symbol next to the ones that are being recorded, but it's safest to stop by beforehand and be certain. If both are being recorded, pick the one that's more interactive to attend.

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