

PREPARING FOR CONFERENCE CLASS
GRAPEVINE, TX – SEPT. 21-24, 2017

COMPILED BY CARA PUTMAN
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Introductions:

Hello everyone! I'm so excited you'll be joining us in Dallas in September for the 2017 ACFW National Conference. A team of us will spend the next two months helping you get ready so you can maximize your ACFW experience and minimize your stress. I well remember my stress when attending my first ACFW conference. I'm an extrovert, and it was still overwhelming. Over the next weeks, I'll walk you through what to expect, how to prepare, and more. Brandilyn Collins will have one day in August where she will help you refine your pitches. That's always an extremely valuable day. As you have questions, feel free to email them to me. I'll make sure we cover them.

Since it's the holiday weekend, we'll start slowly with introductions.

One of our goals is that when you walk into the conference you will feel like you're entering a family reunion rather than a strange environment. So I'll get things started...

My first ACFW conference (and first writers conference) was in 2005. I went knowing two or three people, but quickly felt like I'd walked into a gathering of friends. I volunteered in numerous spots, meeting people each time. With one of those volunteer opportunities I met the editor who ended up liking a book that led to my first contract. In 2006 I was offered a contract at ACFW — quite a rush — and still one of my favorite moments of each conference. By 2007, I was on the board and helping run the conference. In 2008 I organized the massive booksigning at the Mall of America and won 2008 Book of the Year in the short historical category with my debut novel, *Canteen Dreams* — yep, the book who's idea was birthed in 2005 when I started talking to an editor. I just turned in my 27th book and will be writing my 28th book, a legal suspense, during this class. I've also had three repackages and one nonfiction, so it's been an amazing journey since I first walked in to ACFW in 2005.

I know some of you are published. Some are close. Some are beginning. ACFW will have something for all of you.

Each year has just gotten better and I love working with all of you...because I do remember the excitement and trepidation of stepping into a new environment at conference. You're taking a risk by coming, and my prayer is that God would meet you in an incredible way at conference.

So my prayer for each of you is that God would orchestrate your time. You'll quickly learn we're all in different places in our writing lives. But God knows exactly where you are supposed to be. And He is the ultimate agent/career coach.

Let's spend the next few days introducing ourselves. Tell us a bit about you. Where you're from. What you write. What the rest of your life consists of, etc.

In addition to what you read above, I'm the homeschooling mama of 4 kiddos: almost 16 down to 5.5. Starting this year I'm moving from part time to full time teaching of business law and related classes at Krannert School of Management at Purdue University. I'm an attorney who lives in Indiana with my husband of 20.5 years and am a proud native of Nebraska. Go Huskers! And because I had 15 extra minutes a day, I got my MBA in May 2015.

Your turn! Tell us about you. Where are you from? What do you write? What are you most excited about, nervous about, etc.

Setting the stage

Before we get started, I wanted to set the stage for you with an email from one of our 2015 first timers.

Dear First Timer,

When I received my first email from the FirstTime loop, I honestly wondered what I had done. I think a lot of us felt that way. You may feel that way. If so, let me tell you what you've done.

You've chosen to connect with some of the most amazing men and women you could ever dream of. You are not just attending an indifferent conference. You are joining a beautiful group of people pursuing their hearts. They get you. They are going to cheer for you, support you, cry with you, pray for you, and love you.

How do I know that? Because long before the FirstTime loop 2015 ever got to the conference, we had cheered for each other. We were supporting each other through our fears, life difficulties, and pitches and proposals. We cried together, and oh my goodness did we pray for each other! And by the time I walked into that conference, I loved these people. When they told me of their successes in their appointments, I cheered. Sincerely cheered! Because these weren't just people from an email loop. They were MY people.

If I could tell you anything, I would tell you to allow the people on your loop to become your people and for you to become their people. Pray for them. Learn names. Share life. Let this conference be less about a book you want to pitch and more about the lives you get to be part of.

I would also tell you to breathe. Don't worry about getting it all right. You won't. Not being negative. Just being honest. And besides, perfect is such an odd term. I sat down across from an agent and said, "I don't know what I'm supposed to tell you about," and then told her about my fictional works and non-fictional works and ideas, and I mean, really, who pitches non-fiction stuff at a fiction conference? I did, and believe it or not, that was perfect. She loved the whole thing, so I'm sending her all of it. So, do your homework. Do the best you can, and then let God do something that makes it impossible for anyone but Him to get the credit. We saw it over and over in this loop. Trust Him. He'll show up.

Finally, I would tell you to enjoy this. Enjoy the whole experience. Enjoy the loop, the connecting, the sharing of fears and faith. Enjoy it all. I told Cara Sunday morning when it was over I don't know if I'll ever want to attend another conference because this one was so amazing. Even now, I get emotional thinking about it. Enjoy this. It is a very special gift.

May God be with you to bless you, keep you calm, and give you hope.

May your experience be as wondrous as ours.

Jerri

Email Management

As we get going you're going to receive a lot of email from me and others. I often receive questions about the loop. A couple points that will make it easier for you:

- 1) Always make sure you send email from the email address that you subscribed with. Many of us have more than one email address, so it can get confusing!
- 2) It will also be helpful to send all of your first time orientation email to one folder so it's easy to find and review.
- 3) There are loop archives that you can access by clicking on the link in the footer of each loop email. It's a great way to loop back and get access to past emails. You can search by date, topic, and sender.

Logistics and things to know

Are y'all as excited about conference as I am? I hope so!

Even though I've attended every year since 2005, each year I get so excited I can hardly

stand it. The conference is like one giant family reunion. I love getting to see people I only see once a year. The hugs and squeals are so fun. And I love the learning.

This year is ACFW's 17th conference! Woot! Randy Alcorn is keynoting, and I can't wait to hear what God has him share with us.

As we get started with this course, I wanted to remind you that the conference webpages are packed with information. I almost guarantee that most of your questions will be answered in those pages.

A few pages to spend lots of time on:

The general conference page: <http://acfw.com/conference/>

Curious about appointments? Then spend time on these pages:

Editors: http://www.acfw.com/conference/appointments_editor

Agents: http://www.acfw.com/conference/appointments_agent

Mentors: http://www.acfw.com/conference/appointments_mentor

Specialty: http://www.acfw.com/conference/appointments_special

The program schedule can be found here: <http://www.acfw.com/conference/program>

Information on the hotel can be found here: http://www.acfw.com/conference/hotel_info

And the all important parking: http://www.acfw.com/conference/hotel_info#parking

There's a lot more about the conference on the ACFW site, so be sure to spend a few minutes exploring it. Don't forget to download the conference app as well. You can find it here:

Itunes: <http://bit.ly/1ll0crp>

Android:

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.kitapps.android.builder.acfwconference>

If you have specific questions about how to prepare for conference or what to expect, please email those directly to me and I will work on answers: cara.putman@comcast.net.

So my prayer for each of you is that God would orchestrate your time. You'll quickly learn we're all in different places in our writing lives. But God knows exactly where you are supposed to be. And He is the ultimate agent/career coach.

Cara

Travel Tips:

Been awhile since you flew? Then read this short list of tips from Cynthia Ruchti:

Some of you have mastered the fine art of flying. Some who are coming to the conference haven't flown since the Reagan administration...or at all.

I only fly a couple of times a year, but have discovered several tips that might make your flying experience more pleasant and efficient. If you're a frequent flyer, you may have others to add to the list.

1. Dress in layers. Temperatures inside the plane can range widely and change seasons while your plane taxis!

2. Dress comfortably both for the flight and for moving swiftly through security checks. If you can, wear slip-on shoes (still have to be comfortable enough to race through the airport). Leave your plate-sized belt buckle in your suitcase and consider saving your heavy metal jewelry for after you've landed. The more complicated your outfit, and the more security-wand buzzing it creates with metal buttons, buckles, chains, and chunks, the more you'll have to remove and toss into the gray bins to pass through security check points.

3. Since each piece of luggage will cost you (from \$15 to \$25 IF it complies with weight restrictions. As much as \$80 or \$100 if the piece of luggage weighs too much--check your airline's specific rules), pack as light as you can. Items that serve two purposes. Shoes that match more than one outfit. A jacket that works dressed up or dressed down. And consider tucking heavy items--like books--into your carryon. No weight restrictions there, just size.

4. If it's something you can't live without, pack it in your carryon. Yes, the airlines are working hard to make sure your baggage arrives with you...but better safe than sorry. You can always buy a toothbrush and deodorant in the hotel or airport gift shop, but the thumb drive with your 18 beloved manuscripts should stay with you. :)

5. If you haven't flown for a while, you might be surprised to learn how early they board planes and how strict the gate personnel are about not allowing late arrivals. Homeland Security has changed the face of flying. Check with your airline's website for other hints and details about check-in and boarding. Allow yourself plenty of time. People watching will build your arsenal of "interesting characters to incorporate in novels" as you wait.

6. Unless you're flying first class or with an airline I've never flown on before, you won't be served food...maybe not even peanuts or pretzels. Some flights do have box lunches available for a dollar amount and nutritional value that will make your hair pale and your feet swell. Consider tucking a granola bar, apple, or a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in your carryon. Or purchase a salad or sandwich from an airport restaurant after you pass through security. It can be a long stretch from check-in to landing.

7. Don't forget to stay hydrated. But also remember that you can't take liquids through security. You'll have to refill your water bottle on the other side.

8. Consider bringing your pocket New Testament rather than your Ryrie Study Bible. :)

Maybe some of our frequent and recent flyers will jump in with other helpful hints.

A few more travel tips:

Here are a few more: If you are flying domestically, don't forget the 3-1-1 rule for liquids and gels in your carry-ons. (Nothing larger than 3 oz. bottles, in a one-quart clear plastic bag, and only one per person.) Here is a link to the TSA website with more details.

<http://www.tsa.gov/311/index.shtm>

Also, bringing your favorite water bottle sounds like a good idea, but don't fill it until you are through security.

pack an extra change of clothes in my carry-on just in case the airline does lose my luggage!

Here are a few more from Robin Miller:

Some other tips:

* Check the weight of your suitcase at home before you leave. MUCH easier to redistribute in the privacy of your own home than at the ticketing counter at the airport. (Hint: round up to the nearest pound on bathroom scales)

*Most all airlines will allow you to "check in" for your flight online, 24 hours before flight time. This can help speed up your wait at the airport.

*It's a good idea to check your flight's status via app or web hours before scheduled departure time. You can be prepared if there's a known delay, possibly even rebooking a connecting flight if needed

*It's a good idea to charge your phone/tablet/laptop before heading to the airport. Often, if there are delays, electrical outlets are in big demand

*I'd suggest downloading the airline app, if you available and you can. I've been able to get assistance via the app without having to stand in line at the ticketing counter or gate if there's a problem. Most airlines have them available for free download

*Speaking of apps, don't forget to download the ACFW Conference app and allow for notifications. Last minute changes and notes will be sent this way to keep all attendees up-to-date with the latest information!

Getting to the hotel:

At the airport, there are signs to direct you to the "ground transportation" area...that's where you can be directed to grab a taxi, arrange a shuttle, etc.

One thing I noticed about the airport were how friendly the airport workers were. I had to ask where something was located, and they were so polite and helpful.

Cara

Today I thought I'd share some tips on packing. Admit it. Some of you are already stressed about what to bring. Jaime lurks on this loop to answer your questions, and I love her advice below. You will find me in the workout room — and the one at the Gaylord is AMAZING plus there's an outside running/walking path. For me it's a matter of stress management. But do be realistic about what you'll need/use. Hope this is helpful.

Starting in a day or two, I'll start sending more specifics about the conference itself.

Cara

Packing Light: Jamie Wright

I just sent the below email to someone on this loop who messaged me privately, but figured, I may as well share for all of you who want to save \$\$ on checked baggage and are flying on a airline that allows a carry on and personal item. Ok. Some easy tips:

1. Most women don't realize they have a lot of thin shirts in their closets. Especially if you live in warm climates (which I don't, and I still have a lot of thin shirts!). By this I mean, the gauzy, flowy shirts that a little cami underneath makes cute. You can roll these, stuff them in shoes and corners and they don't really wrinkle. So I pack anywhere from 5-6 of these in my carry on and make sure every one of them matches my 1 or 2 cardigans I also pack. Cardigans pack very flat, unlike bulky sweaters. AVOID bulky sweaters. And we'll be in Dallas, so really, bulky doesn't equate to southern heat. :)
2. Wear your dress boots on the plane. I know, not as comfy but you just saved yourself a bootload of space. AND if you wear one pair you can often fit those cute ankle boots in because they tuck into a carry-on bag corner very nicely.
3. Lay your jeans/pants out full length. Put the legs in the bottom of the bag. Lay your cardis on top of the legs, your dresses (again go for the non wrinkle style of dress with some polyester in it and folded, they'll survive well. plus hotel rooms have irons), and then fold the top of your jeans over. It compacts them, sandwiches them, and you can press down hard without worry about too much wrinkles especially in the cardis. With this alone you have probably 5-7 different outfits. Especially if you pack some silky scarves to dress them up.
4. Stuff undies and socks in the shoes you pack. Cell phone chargers, too. One shoe in each corner allows for two extra pairs of shoes. Otherwise pack flats if you need more shoes so they compress easy. The flats can rest base down on top of your jeans.

5. Jewelry. DO NOT pack a jewelry bag. Get creative. Swipe a Ziplock or two. wrap each item in a Kleenex and put it in the Zip lock then lay flat or tuck into a shoe. Big jewelry bags take up space.

6. Cosmetics. This gets a tad trickier. You'll have to go light on the amount. If you're like me, that's easy cause you don't wear much. If you're not like me, then don't hate on me. ;) Powders/eye shadows and powder blushes aren't considered liquids. Again, avoid the make up bag. It takes space. Zip lock so the items lay flat in the inside carry-on pocket. Make up brushes, same thing, flat Zip lock. Liquids have to be 4oz or less per most airlines and need to be in a quart sized Ziplock that you can lay out when you go through security. SO. Here's what I can fit in mine: mascara, eyeliner, 2 lipsticks. travel size deo (some airlines consider these items to be liquid, some don't, check), small moisturizer (you may have to sacrifice the three bottle nightly routine), travel size toothpaste, travel size contact solution, 1 nail polish, and if you have to have your own shampoo like some of us curly haired girls, I get mine in a 4 oz and just go easy on it. OR I just take my conditioner cause a lot of time, shampoo doesn't help the curls anyway. Put this quart sized bag in the outside pocket of your carry-on if you have one. Otherwise throw it in your purse.

7. Coat? wear it on the plane then take it off. Bam. Problem solved. They'll never worry about it if you're wearing it or tied it around your waist, so why pack it and take up space?

8. pajamas. don't be like me and forget to pack these.

9. formal wear? Again, buy something that isn't 100% cotton the wrinkles will be out by Saturday night gala. Pack in tissue and lay on top. If you're worried. Otherwise if you're sloppy like me you just fold and lay and assume it will live to see Saturday night. lol

10. Gym clothes? really. unless you're a freak of nature and LIKE to get up at 4 am (like Cara the Wonder Woman ;)), don't pack it. You'll go to sleep around 1 am and wake up by 6 am to get ready and if you have roomies, you'll be all chatty. If you're an introvert and prefer your space, go for a walk in flip flops. They're easy to pack and odds are you're not going to have an intense work out anyway. Save the tennis for home and keep the space for that adorable pair of shoes you'll wear all day. ;)

11. Don't pack to the hilt. Leave some space. You'll get free books and buy books at this conference so you need some space for that. I usually can fit 3 books in my carry on and 1 or 2 in my purse/satchel. Other than you may find you choose to leave some stuff behind and/or mail it home if you buy books at the bookstore.

12. Hairdryers -- the hotel has them, use them. If you need a diffuser, ask me. I have my secrets for that too.

13. Curling iron/straightener - those go in the carry-on and usually pack well in the outside pocket.

14. Notebooks/laptops? I use a satchel as my "personal item/purse". So they all go in that bag. Along with my Kindle, my charger, my coffee thermos, wallet, and stuffed animal my

daughter makes sure I bring so i'm not lonely. I buy a small, empty clutch handbag an pack that inside for when I actually need a purse at conference. Hope this helps!! now if you see me at conference all wrinkled and looking shabby, you know my packing scheme worked, but i was wrong about wrinkles ;) Jaime Wright

The Early Bird: http://www.acfw.com/conference/early_bird

A few notes for those of you who are attending the early bird. If you haven't registered and would like to, you can still add it to your registration. This is not included in your regular conference registration, but is an add on.

Registration and the appointment desk will be open Wednesday from 4:00-8:00 p.m. You cannot enter the early bird without your badge that you will receive during registration.

The early bird runs Thursday from 8:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. without a break. So you will grab lunch on your own after the early bird session.

If you bring a laptop, keep in mind that there simply aren't enough plugs for 100 people to all plug in laptops. If you see me with my computer, it's because I decided to take a chance on getting five-six hours out of my battery. Here's the information from the website:

Taking Your Fiction Deep So It Sells Wide In this 6 hour workshop, #1 bestselling writing coach James Scott Bell will teach you the innovative tools and techniques that will move your fiction from good to unforgettable. You'll learn about the "mirror moment," a crucial beat that reveals the true heart of your story; the secrets of dazzling dialogue (the fastest way to improve any manuscript); how to find what agents and editors always ask for (and what readers are drawn to): a unique, compelling voice. And more!

JAMES SCOTT BELL is the author of the #1 bestseller for writers, Plot & Structure, and numerous thrillers, including the Mike Romeo series and the Ty Buchanan legal thriller series. His novel Final Witness won the Christy Award winner for suspense, and his novella One More Lie was a finalist for an International Thriller Writers Award. Jim attended the University of California, Santa Barbara where he studied writing with Raymond Carver, and received his law degree from the University of Southern California. After practicing law for ten years, Jim turned to full-time writing. He became the fiction columnist for Writer's Digest and began teaching writing workshops that have traveled all over the world. Visit his website at <http://www.jamesscottbell.com>

We also have a post conference. I'm super excited about this year because Margie Lawson will be back and teaching. She is WONDERFUL. I've learned a lot from her especially early in my writing career. But I have one of her classes printed out and refer to it when I need to get inspired to write deeper. Her class is a great way to see how to deepen your writing.

Power Up Emotion: How, When, and Wow!

Want to turn your WIP into a page-turner? This is the workshop for you! In this power-packed, high energy workshop, you'll learn: * Margie's Four Levels of Powering Up Emotion * The Style, Structure, and Strategy of Subtext * Visceral Responses: Beyond Hammering Hearts * Psychologically Based Deep Editing Techniques * Tricks to Finesse Backstory * Top Twenty Rhetorical Devices for Fiction Writers. Guaranteed to impress. * The EDITS System: Your scene analysis power tool. You'll be treated to trainloads, and brain loads, of strong examples and teaching points. You'll load your writing toolbox with incredibly powerful tools. Tools you can use right away that will make your scenes soar.



Margie Lawson —editor and international presenter – teaches writers how to use her psychologically-based editing systems and deep editing techniques to create page turners.

Margie has presented over 120 full day master classes in the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, and on cruises in the Caribbean. Writers credit her innovative deep editing approaches for boosting them toward contracts, awards, and bestseller lists.

To learn about Margie's 5-day Immersion Master Classes (in 2017, in Denver, Dallas, Atlanta, Washington D.C., San Jose, Calgary, and in Sydney, Melbourne, Coffs Harbour, Brisbane, and Nine Mile Beach, Australia), her full day and weekend workshops, keynote speeches, online courses through Lawson Writer's Academy, lecture packets, and newsletter, please visit: <http://www.margielawson.com>

Meals during conference: Today I wanted to explain some of the meals at conference. This hotel has great restaurants for you. The buffet at the Mexican restaurant is very good. And the Italian restaurant was excellent. Plus the Starbucks has sandwiches and salads.

Thursday lunch:

If you're attending the early bird, lunch is not included. So make plans to either bring something with you or hunt for food. There are many restaurants within walking distance and a couple in the hotel.

Meals that are part of the conference:

Seats at the tables are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Don't worry: God has a way of having a seat open at the table you need to be at. So if you don't get an appointment with your first choice, you may see the agent or editor at a meal and still have an opportunity to meet that person.

Often tables will be reserved for zones, chapters or other groups at breakfast.

The genre dinner is a fun time to dress up – if you want to – like a character in your book or a favorite time period. You don't have to, but a lot of people have fun with the meal. Last year the extent of my costume was a Wonder Woman t-shirt. Who knows? That may be it again this year ☺

The zone breakfast is Friday morning. This gives you an opportunity to meet other people from your ACFW zone. So I encourage you to get up and join the meal. One of the best parts of the conference is meeting people who are writers – better yet if they live in your part of the country!

Friday night dinner: This is a free time. It's a great opportunity to hang out with friends, but where do you go? There are about four options inside the hotel complex, plus a zillion more in the Grapevine area. Grab a group of fellow writers or first timers and head out. I'm at Thrillerfest for the first time and did just that last night. It's a great way to get to know people in a smaller setting. Don't forget that if you need help finding options, just ask the concierge. This hotel is great for having lots of meeting spaces when you're out of workshops and sessions. Lots of nooks and places to connect with other writers.

The gala is Saturday night and is a time to dress up and have fun. We celebrate the best of Christian fiction with the Carol Awards and the Genesis Contest winners. We also will recognize Francine Rivers with the Lifetime Achievement Award. Very fun!

Recap:

Thursday	Genre Dinner
Friday:	Zone Breakfast
Friday:	Lunch

Saturday: Lunch

Saturday: Gala Banquet

I often throw a box of granola bars or other snacks in my suitcase, but rarely find time to eat them or a need. Nuts and fruit are another great option to throw in a bag and bring with you. Also, you can refill water bottles in the exercise area.

Paid Critiques:

Paid critiques... Some of y'all signed up for paid crits. Awesome! It is a great way to get feedback on a WIP from someone who is in the business. I learned a ton from mine in Nashville and began to forge a relationship with the author, which was a nice side benefit.

Here are Deb Raney's thoughts on the paid crit...

Q: I'm having a paid critique done for the first time and feeling a little nervous about what to expect. Maybe you could shed light on the meeting with critiquer/editor/publisher sessions. I.E. What to expect, tips for a smoother session, what NOT to say...

A: Usually if you have a paid critique, the critiquer will lead the conversation and the meeting. They will probably go over your manuscript with you, or they may have a sheet of comments to talk to you about. If they don't take the lead, this is your opportunity to ask questions that will help you gauge your work. Some good questions to ask:

- *What do you see as the biggest weakness in my writing? (Or if you're not quite that brave, What do you see as my greatest strength?)

- *What one thing could I do that you feel would improve my work the most?

- *Where do you think I should go from here? Do you feel this manuscript is ready to submit?

Ask any specific questions you might have about your plot or characters.

Ask questions about the business of writing. About the only topics off limits when you're talking to a published author are questions about money and contracts (many of us have confidentiality clauses in our contracts) and personal questions about family, religion, politics, etc. But feel free to ask questions of a general nature such as "What does it take to make a living as a writer?" or "What are some things I should watch for in a contract?"

One last thought on paid crits, we purposefully selected the authors who are offering paid crits. They represent a wide range of genres, many have their own editing businesses, and most of all they want to help other writers grow. It'll be like any other crit: you may not agree with all of it, but use the crit as an opportunity to brainstorm, probe weaknesses and strengths in your writing, and get to know someone who is a few steps further down the publishing road.

Here are a few thoughts on paid critiques and mentor appointments from Jaime Jo Wright:

I've received a couple great questions about the critiques. I forgot to include the link: http://www.acfw.com/conference/paid_critiques. At the link you'll see a critique is \$40. You'll also see who is offering them and what they will critique for you. There's a great range of authors and an editor giving them. This can be a great way to get help on your writing/story. See what's working. Get a professional opinion of where you fit in the market, etc. If you have more questions about critiques, just let me know!

I'm super excited for paid critiques this year, because I'm signed up to be a "mentor". To give you insight into my thoughts as someone who will be sitting down with writers, my goals are:

1. Encourage! It's a scary world, this writing thing, and it's even more terrifying to have a stranger line by line critique what you've poured your heart into. So the idea is while we offer advice, we also want to encourage!
2. Constructive Criticism. One of the areas I've learned a lot from is, as a writer, to be able to see past my personal prejudice about my story and listen to constructive criticism from other writers/readers/agents/editors. There is a HUGE difference between negative criticism and constructive, and the critiques at conference are meant to gently and kindly offer advice on how to better what you have written. So I'm excited to be able to help writers find this blessing!
3. Reveal Strengths. It's one thing to be shown where you need to improve, but it's also important to identify your strengths. Often, those strengths are a critical piece of your "voice" as a writer, so identifying them is as critical as identifying areas of improvement. So I'm excited to uncover those as well!

I'm not sure how all of the fabulous people offering critiques go into theirs, but this is a glimpse into how I envision mine going. And, I can say, the line up of those offering paid critiques is stellar! You can't go wrong! It's a very worthy investment.

Appointments.

I bet this one of the areas that has you most excited and nervous. At my first conference I didn't take appointments on the advice of my mentor. I didn't have a completed manuscript and just wasn't ready to pitch. Instead I had casual conversations with editors that led to requests. I've had appointments all other years except last year. They are an exciting and terrifying part of the conference. It's your chance to connect with editors and agents. It's also a chance to see if there is any interest in your WIP, your baby.

- 1) When will you learn about your appointments: When you register at the conference, you

will receive your list of appointments. The times have been coordinated with things like volunteering, teaching, etc.

2) So, great, you're thinking. How on earth am I supposed to prepare for those all important appointments?

First, step way back. It is fifteen minutes. It is not the end of your life. Take a deep breath, pray, and smile. It'll be okay.

Second, pull up your receipt from when you registered for the conference. Look at the list of folks you requested and...

Third, do research. We're writers -- research is part of what we do. Review their bios on the conference website. Scan their house's catalog or their agency website. Who are they buying or signing? What do they like? How are you similar or completely different? For example, one year I met with Sue Brower, who was with Zondervan at the time. James Scott Bell wrote for Z then. I could write the most incredible legal thriller but Sue Brower wasn't interested then. However, we had a great chat and have built a relationship. And it all started with a 15 minute appointment. No contract, but Sue has invested time in me and my career and I will always appreciate her for that — even if I never get to write for her. A few years ago, Sue asked if we could have dinner. We met, had a great time, and at the very end she asked if I had a legal ready. That's what motivated me to create a new legal proposal - one that is being bought by a major house. So build those relationships. You never know long term what will happen.

You won't know where your manuscript could fit if you don't do research.

Fourth, Relax. the editors and agents are people, too. They are looking for the next best writer and it just might be you.

This is a great blog by Edie Melson on how to organize your stuff/how to carry your things at a conference.

<http://thewriteconversation.blogspot.com/2011/04/get-organized-for-writers-conference.html>

And this a vlog by Beth K. Vogt on pitching and what to bring for that.

<http://thoughtsonplot.wordpress.com/2012/09/04/the-real-pitch-guest-author-beth-k-vogt-video-pitch/>

If you've had appointments at other conferences, what did you learn from the experience?

Mentor Appointments

Mentor appointments can really take any tack that you choose.

When I have served as a mentor, my goal and heart has been to ask each person as we sit down what they need from the meeting. My goal is to encourage, answer questions, help brainstorm, help with direction, etc, and close with prayer. As I've watched others, I've seen a similar approach. Think of it as a conversation with someone who is a few steps further down the writing journey than you are. I've even had a published author take an appointment- — which floored me — but she just needed some encouragement.

Maybe you have a book you just can't get out of the middle slump.
Maybe you aren't sure where you fit in the market
Maybe you keep getting rejected and not sure what to do
Maybe you want help picking agents and houses to target
Maybe you want specific feedback on your writing

You can do any of these or a hundred other things in a mentor appointment.

I hope this helps!

Cara

Pitching:

The following is several years of compiled advice on how to prepare for a conference pitch. There are many perspectives from veteran agents, editors, and authors. Hopefully within these suggestions, you'll find something that clicks for you.

Cynthia Ruchti puts it this way:

Pitching is like potato salad.

My daughter's in-laws have a dilemma at every family reunion. It's the potato salad. One uncle hates onions. Another is heavy-handed with mustard. A cousin is allergic to mustard. Some like bacon added. Some are on low fat diets.

To prevent the hosts from having to make eight different bowls of potato salad, they (pardon the expression), "boiled" it down to its essence. The host prepares a potato salad bar--cubed potatoes, chopped celery, diced onion, mayo, mustard, bacon, pickle relish, Miracle Whip (because as we all know, it's not the same)...

Family members then have all the ingredients for tailor-made potato salad.

You won't know until you get to the conference which editor or agent among your choices will work out for your schedule...or for that matter which ones the Lord will bring across your path at a meal or in a hallway or lobby.

Solution? Potato salad bar.

Come with the basic ingredients of a great pitch and a clear understanding of your novel's appeal...to anyone. Then at the conference itself, sprinkle in the extras that will catch the attention of THAT particular agent or editor.

They all want a well-told story with a gripping premise and reader-appeal. Potatoes.

The rest is...um...gravy. :)

Pitching

Here are some additional thoughts on pitching, though Cynthia's potato salad bar is a great visual...

I didn't take appointments my first year after much prayer and advice from writers I highly respect. The next year I did, but it was a surreal experience because I'd been awarded my first contract the night before. My editor appointment was also with an editor I had really connected with the prior year. Bottom line, these appointments are a great way to get to know someone and build a relationship. In other years I went into the appointments purely to learn more about what publishers were looking for and to see if we'd be a good fit. Last year I didn't take any because I had just signed a contract with Harper Collins Christian Publishing and was writing with Tricia Goyer on a Guidepost series. I've been busy!

I saw these videos recently, and thought of y'all. Melissa Tagg shares how not to pitch. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmGW0Fe7Eqo> and here's a post from Sara Ella on pitching: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZCHtghzOtk>

Here are more helpful pitching posts:

<http://www.booksandsuch.biz/blog/2-keys-to-successful-agent-and-editor-meetings/>

<http://www.booksandsuch.biz/blog/creatively-pitching-your-project/>

<http://www.booksandsuch.com/blog/writers-conferences-and-networking/>

<http://www.booksandsuch.com/blog/agents-not-feared/>

What Editors wish you knew about meeting with them:

<http://www.stevelaube.com/editors-wish-knew-meeting-conferences/>

Pitching at a Conference: <http://www.booksandsuch.com/blog/pitching-at-a-conference/>

<http://www.booksandsuch.biz/blog/anatomy-of-a-conference-experience/>

A mock pitch: <http://www.booksandsuch.biz/blog/a-mock-15-minute-author-agent-meeting-at-a-conference-follow-along/>

Elevator pitch post Steve Laube recommended: <http://www.susanspann.com/?p=3217>

Get thee to a writer's conference: <http://stevelaube.com/get-thee-to-a-writers-conference/>

Elevator pitches: <http://www.omnivoracious.com/2012/11/elevator-pitches-how-to-talk-about-your-book.html>

Do you have perfect pitch: <http://stevelaube.com/do-you-have-perfect-pitch/>

The Wild Pitch: http://stevelaube.com/the_wild_pitch/

What caught my eye (Steve Laube) <http://stevelaube.com/what-caught-my-eye/>

Pitching yet again.

Here's one more pitch video. This one from Sara Ella: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZCHtghzOtk>. And here's her video about last year's conference with tips for first timers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DE1e-sDcbs>

One key thing to remember...listen to the agent/editor. If you let them, they will lead conversation. If you go in and slap six folders and a one sheet and your business card in front of them and launch into your pitch, that is too much. Introduce yourself, pause, listen. The agent/editor will almost 100% of the time say, "so tell me about your story". Give your pitch and then ... pause, listen. The agent/editor will lead you from there. And if you're on the last day of pitches, they're tired. VERY tired. So offer your appreciation for their time. Be genuine. Give them a Dove chocolate. :) Jaime Jo Wright

You may have notice that pitching is what makes most conference attendees anxious. That's why I'm sending you so much information on this area and why Brandilyn will spend three days with you practicing your elevator pitch. My theory is the more knowledge you have, the less nervous you will be. However, all the preparation in the world won't get rid of the butterflies. It simply helps them to fly in formation.

If you're beginning to feel overwhelmed, that's okay. Just file these emails where you can find them later when you do have time to study them and get ready for conference. Everybody gets ready differently. Some will spend hours now, others next month, and yet others the night before. All of those are fine. So don't get overwhelmed by what others are focused on now. The hotel will have a business center, so you can print that first chapter at the conference.

I hope the material I've been sending on pitching has been helpful. I know how stressful pitching can be. Your book is your baby. You've poured hours and time into it. And then you sit down in front of a stranger who it feels controls your destiny. They don't really — God does, but that doesn't change how it feels. Today I want to share some more perspectives with you as you prepare for your pitches.

Here's one more pitch video. This one from Sara Ella: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZCHtghzOtk>. And here's her video about last year's conference with tips for first timers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DE1e-sDcbs>

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Pitching is one of the most stressful elements of conference. I'm going to send you many resources over the next couple days on how to better prepare. Let's start with this advice from a fellow ACFW member:

Our 15 minutes with editor or agent - how do we best utilize that time? Tracy Bolton Jones

If you have a book ready to propose, then by all means, use the time to pitch it to the editor/agent. You should have a one- or two-minute "speech" about your book memorized and practiced until you can say it in a conversational, not-too-rehearsed voice. Usually after you present your pitch, the editor/agent will ask you a few questions about your story.

Answer the questions as concisely as possible and feel free to ask a few of your own. You should have already done your homework and know what type of books this publisher is looking for, and some of the titles they've published that may be similar to yours. At the same time, publishers are always branching out and trying new things, so don't be afraid to ask something like "I wonder if Publisher XYZ has any plans to start a chic lit line, etc.?" If you are invited to submit your proposal to the agent/editor, they will want to know when they should expect it, and you will need to know what medium they prefer (snail mail, e-mail, etc.) and to whom you should address the package. (If you are invited to submit, it's fine to ask for a business card. If they don't invite and don't offer a card, you may assume they are probably not interested. Don't take it personally. It only means your specific pitch wasn't suited to their house at this time.

Now let's turn to some great information from Rachelle Gardner's blog. I so appreciate her willingness to share via her posts. She really peels back the curtain. This also lets you know how she likes to hear a pitch:

To me, the best pitches include the following information without me having to ask for it:

My name is ____ and I wanted to meet with you because ____.

I'm represented by ____ (agent name if applicable).

I'm writing ____ (what genre).

My publishing history includes ____ . OR I'm currently unpublished but have been writing for __ years.

Today I want to tell you about my book called ____ which is a ____ (genre).

This book won the ____ award (if relevant).

I'm writing about this topic because ____ (if relevant. For example, you are a police officer and you're writing a cop thriller).

My tagline is ____ (20 words or so that capture your book). (Cara here: don't worry if you don't have one of these. I still don't and I'm writing my 28th book.)

Then, launch into your pitch. This should be a couple of minutes long, max, allowing time for the agent or editor to ask questions. Have a 1-minute pitch prepared, too, in case of mealtime or elevator pitches.

The rest of her great article can be found here in the bottom of two posts: <http://cbarambblings.blogspot.com/search/label/ACFW>

This is the last big post on pitching. If you've missed one, don't worry. In every email to this loop, if you go to the footer you'll find a link to the loop archives. Then just search by author. If you look for me, you'll find all the emails I've posted. Just stick with this year. I've been running this loop since 2008, so that's a lot of emails. The material just expands each year. Also, in a couple weeks, I will take all of these and post them in a downloadable PDF on my website. Then I'll send you the secret super link ;-)

This next piece comes from Chip MacGregor's blog. He just retired it, but it's a great resource of information on what's happening in the industry, how tos, etc. Chip gave me permission to forward this post to you. Even though this is a couple years old, it's fantastic advice. So here's the advice straight from the keyboard of an agent:

Chip MacGregor .com

Talking with Agents

Martha wrote to say, "I have heard the best way to connect with agents (and sometimes publishers) is to attend writer conferences. I had also heard you can make an appointment to have an agent or editor look at your material. If so, how does an author find when and where conferences are held, and how does one go about making those appointments?"

It's true. In fact, one of the BEST ways to connect with agents these days is at a writing conference. In a few weeks, I'm going to be at the American Christian Fiction Writers (ACFW) conference in Dallas, Texas. There will be several hundred writers attending, so it's a great time to connect with other people who write fiction. There will be a dozen or so editors representing the publishing houses who compete in the Christian fiction market. And there are close to a dozen agents who will be in attendance. All of them make themselves available for a limited number of 15-minute appointments with authors. That allows an author to come into a room, sit across from me, and pitch his or her book idea. We may talk about the author's experience, or I may evaluate the author's proposal, or we may talk about the overall salability of the author's idea. In some cases, I'll read the first couple of pages of the author's opening chapter and offer my initial impressions. While there isn't time for this to be a full-blown evaluation of an author's work, it at least gives you some sense of how an agent will respond to your idea.

Many conferences also offer in-depth analysis of your proposal, done by a working professional in the field. This is usually an extra charge -- but to pay \$30 and have a full-time freelance editor or writer examine your work is, frankly, a steal.

To check out writers' conferences, just google "writer conference" or "Christian writers' conference." Some of the biggest and best are the ACFW conference, Mount Hermon (California), Glorietta (New Mexico), Ridgecrest (North Carolina), and Write to Publish (Chicago). There are good Christian conferences in Florida, Colorado, Oregon, and Philadelphia every year, and there are good secular conferences all across the country. In addition, Jerry Jenkins' Christian Writers Guild puts on some very good conferences, as does Reg Forder's organization, though neither of these have literary agents attending. There are also many local conferences, as well as dozens of good writing conferences offered through colleges and local writer organizations.

Every conference will list the agents and editors who plan to attend, and will offer free sign-ups to conferees. Be aware that you have to go into a 15-minute meeting with realistic expectations. "I'd like to make a good first impression" or "I'd like to get an agent's opinion on my writing" are realistic. "I expect to convince a person I've never met before to take me on as a client in a fifteen-minute interview" is probably not realistic. But I encourage you to attend. It's one of the few places an author will find where he or she can not only meet agents, but hang out with them at meals and in hallways.

On a similar note, Dayle wrote and said, "An editor requested I send him my manuscript at a conference. They later sent me an evaluation memo with a few editorial notes, with a request that I rewrite it and send it back. Is this worth mentioning in an agent query?"

Absolutely, Dayle. The fact is, many editors get fatigued saying "no" at writers' conferences, so after a while they find themselves telling authors, "Go ahead and send that to me," thinking that it'll be easier to reject via an email after the conference than to sit face-to-face and tell the author, in essence, "I don't think this idea is any good." I understand that -- I've been fatigued at conferences in the past, and occasionally asked somebody to send me an idea that wasn't particularly stellar. But I've stopped doing that, since it just creates more work for me later, when the hard copy of the bad idea comes into my office and demands a response. It would have been easier just to say "no thanks" in the first place. So an author who tells me "the editors at a recent conference all liked it" doesn't gain much prestige in my mind.

However, an editor who asks for your proposal, then takes the time to review it, make notes, and send you a request for a revised version is showing serious interest in your work. THAT means a lot to me as an agent. So yes -- make sure that information gets conveyed to your prospective agent.

Now we're back to Cara :-)

I'm not an expert on pitching and there are tons of us here. But if you'd like to practice a pitch, let's take the next week to do that. You can't build a one sheet without knowing how to break your book down into the 30 second elevator pitch.

There are a couple ways to approach this.

First, think about the GMC (Goal, Motivation and Conflict) for your primary character. In my books that's often the heroine. What's happening to her and why should anyone care?

Second, think about the genre. How does what you're writing fit with the houses you're pitching to? How is it similar or different from books and authors that they already have.

Third, check out Michael Hague's article:

<http://www.screenplaymastery.com/subofmonth.html>. My pitch below is based in part on the structure he recommends.

Here's mine for a book a publisher released in 2010:

Stars in the Night is a historical romantic suspense about Audra Shaeffer, a smart, savvy attorney who lives in the Midwest in 1942 with her family struggling to actually practice law. When Audra's sister disappears, Audra travels to Hollywood to find her. But when her sister's body is discovered, Audra now must find the killer and bring him to justice by getting a job at a studio to determine who wanted her sister dead. The studio sends her on a second Hollywood Victory Caravan, and together with Robert Montgomery and other stars, she criss-crosses the southern United States as the stars sell war bonds. When Robert's ex-wife and another woman are found dead on the train, Audra is convinced those

deaths are tied to her sister's. She's afraid the killer is the man she's falling in love with. Can she identify the killer before he targets her?

It's not perfect by any stretch, but it sold the book.

Here's the basic formula I used: Try to break it down into key elements. Who's the main character and what's the genre? In mine that's the first sentence. Then what's the main problem? Second sentence: a body is found. What's the MC's goal? Find the killer. How does she do that? Takes a job at the studio to be surrounded by the suspects. Intro the romantic element and end with a question. So that's how I did this. You'd ideally want a 20 word or less pitch, too.

Ramona Richards has an editor's perspective of pitch sessions here: <http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=4149>

Rachelle Gardner shares advice here: <http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=4119> and here http://www.rachellegardner.com/?s=pitch&et-month-choice=no-choice&et-cat=102&et_searchform_submit=et_search_process

Belinda Peterson posted an article here <http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=308>

Ashley Clark gives some advice from the pitcher's perspective here: <http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=1285>

The gals at Seekerville have 4 posts on pitching that might be helpful: <http://seekerville.blogspot.com/search/label/pitching>. Camy Tang's on top is worth reading on breaking down a pitch and be sure to read Missy Tippens on GMC (goals, motivation, conflict).

I hope this helps, but don't forget to pace yourself!

One Sheets

One Sheets:

Here's a link that may be helpful. <http://www.booksandsuch.com/blog/how-to-create-a-compelling-one-sheet/>

I made my one sheets in Word. Just found a simple template and made it my own. If you feel overwhelmed, there are people who will make one for you for a very reasonable price. The one sheet helps you focus and helps the editor or agent know a bit about you and your story. ACFW is one of the conferences where many people have them, but it is not a requirement. Angie Dicken (<https://www.facebook.com/angie.dicken>) is one of many people in ACFW making them for folks. Just watch the loop and you'll see people mentioning that they make them. Ask to see samples and make sure you like their style before you hire them. If you google Writer One Sheet you can see dozens of images — just a word. The further you scroll down the more questionable the content.

Proposals:

Proposals are generally the up to two page synopsis, 3 sample chapters, your bio, marketing plan, any publications, etc. Here are guidelines from Steve Laube Agency: <http://www.stevelaube.com/guidelines/> and <http://www.stevelaube.com/the-keys-to-a-great-book-proposal/>; from MacGregor Literary: <http://www.macgregorliterary.com/resources/>; Books & Such Literary: <http://www.booksandsuch.com/blog/book-proposals/>. If you look at those, you'll see varying degrees of detail, but helpful information and some consensus on what goes into it.

Tips for writing a synopsis: How To Write The Synopsis-- free Youtube video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmF3Zr3L2tI>

I'm going to let Deb Raney tackle several of the questions about one-sheets and what to bring to conference. (When you see her, be sure to thank her for letting me use her material. It's saved me a ton of time while I'm on deadline, and she has so much experience to share!)

Okay...materials. What to bring to your editor and agent appointments. How to format them, and when and how to use them. I think all these questions will best be answered as responses to your specific questions below:

Q. Should I have a business card? If so, any suggestions on format and content would be appreciated.

A. A business card is not a necessity, but it IS a really great way to exchange information, not just with editors and agents, but with writing friends too. If I could only come with one "tool" for pitching, I'd choose a business card over a one-sheet, proposal packet, etc. And in my opinion, the most important thing you can put on a business card is your photo-not a glamour shot, but a picture that looks essentially the way you look at the conference. This is an excellent way to help an editor or agent remember their meeting with you and connect your name-and possibly a manuscript they get from you later-with that charming person they talked to-one of dozens of equally charming people they talked to! J

Q. Packets - I keep hearing about packets and one-sheets. What information should be included in each, and when, where and to whom do I give them?

A. I assume a packet contains a proposal, sample chapters and maybe a one-sheet. I would advise against a packet or a full proposal simply because most agents/editors do not have room to take reams of paper away from the conference with them, and will most likely ask you to mail or e-mail them

your proposal after you get home. Having said that, it can't hurt to have one or two copies of your full proposal tucked away in your briefcase or bag, just in case. But don't offer it unless you are specifically asked for it.

Q. First, what is a specific outline for a successful one sheet and how many copies should I bring? I know most editors and agents don't like to take more than a business card, but will they sometimes take one sheets? Are there others at the conference that might be interested in these as well?

A. A one-sheet is just what it sounds like-one sheet of paper (that can be printed front only or front and back) that represents you and your proposal. There are various formats for a one-sheet, but it should contain your contact info (name, address, telephone, e-mail, and Web site if you have one), a blurb about the book(s) you are proposing. I also recommend that you incorporate your photo somewhere on the page (no glamour shots) to help the editor/agent connect that page to the person they spoke with.

To me, the most important elements of a one-sheet are a good, current photo, clear contact information and a very brief synopsis of the book(s) you are pitching. It's not necessary to fill every possible space on the page. White space can be very effective. If you do include a great deal of information, be sure the sections are clearly separated by using boxes and other graphic elements. If graphic design isn't your thing, have someone else format your page. Use only one or two different fonts, not too much color (they don't have to be in color at all) and remember that simple is better than "busy."

An important note about one-sheets: While you may not have many editors or agents ask for your one-sheet, it can still serve several purposes:

- *a handy reference (ie. cheat sheet) for you to refer to while you give your pitch

- *a handout to give other authors who express an interest in what you're writing

- *to serve as a visual aid-something you can hand to the professional before you give your pitch. Don't be offended if the professional doesn't take the one-sheet with them, but it may help take the edge off your nerves to have something "solid" for the agent or editor to look at while you talk. Just don't make your one-sheet do all the talking for you. And if you prepare a one-sheet expressly for this purpose, it would be best to have only a bare minimum of information on it-one side, photo, contact info and maybe a short bio or brief synopsis. Used for this purpose you could even use a half-sheet.

In the last email, I gave you a lot of information about one sheets. There are other things you can bring as well. The important thing is that bottom line review what the editor or agent asks to see in their information on the ACFW website. Some want to read a first chapter, some just want to talk. So that information is your first clue on how to prepare.

You don't have to bring anything. You can conduct a perfectly fine interview/pitch without so much as a business card, but all these things-business cards, one-sheets, proposal at the ready just in case-are tools that will help you feel more confident in your presentation, and more prepared should the best-case-scenario occur and a professional asks for your proposal on the spot. Most though will ask that you email it to them after the conference.

Also, having all these tools with you makes it easy to share about you writing and exchange contact information with all the new writing friends you make at the conference. I can't tell you how many times AFTER I get home from a conference, that a photo on a business card or Web site has made all the difference in me remembering and connecting a face with the writing I critiqued.

But as you're looking at the one sheets, be sure to read Dineen Miller's posts on the subject:

<http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=170>

<http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=137>

Other one sheet examples:

<http://wannabepublished.blogspot.com/search/label/One%20Sheets>

<http://bonniescalhoun.com/documents/BOOK%20PROPOSAL%20for%20Touched%20by%20Fire.pdf>

<http://bonniescalhoun.com/documents/New%20touched%20by%20fire%20sell%20sheet%201.pdf>

<http://www.lornaseilstad.com/forwriters.html>

And here's a link to another article on one sheets: <http://valeriecomer.com/?p=452>

And this one: <http://seekerville.blogspot.com/2009/04/pitch-sheet-and-one-sheet.html>

Mindy Obenhaus had a helpful article on one sheets, etc, here <http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=299>

Now let's talk about the appointment itself.

Preparing for Editor/Agent Appointments

A few thoughts: take the time to really think about what you would like to accomplish in the appointment, but also maintain a teachable spirit. Many of the editors and agents will want to put you at ease and get to know you. Others will want to read your one page before they talk. Still others will want to read the first page or two of your novel. Go in with questions: what are you looking for? What's the best book you've read this year? What can I do as an unpublished author to prepare to write for you? Etc. But be very willing to let them control the direction of the conversation.

For those of you who don't follow Chip MacGregor's blog — and you should — in August 2012, he wrote about getting the most out of a writer's conference. <http://www.chipmacgregor.com/questions-from-beginners/how-can-i-get-the-most-out-of-a-writing-conference/> Good reading as you prepare for conference: He's also written about the best way to approach an editor: <http://www.chipmacgregor.com/questions-from-beginners/whats-the-best-way-to-approach-an-editor-at-a-conference/>

He had a great post about agent appointments: <http://www.chipmacgregor.com/conferences/the-acfw-conference-is-next-weekend-sept-17-19/> And Amanda Luedeke has a series of posts on promoting yourself at conference: <http://www.chipmacgregor.com/uncategorized/thursdays-with-amanda-promoting-yourself-at-a-conference-part-4/>

Another great agent blog is Rachelle Gardner's: <http://www.rachellegardner.com/category/popular-posts/>. Her blog is always filled with fabulous advice. Want her take on elevator pitches? Start here: <http://www.rachellegardner.com/tag/elevator-pitches/> Word Serve's clients just started a blog, too: <http://wordserwatercooler.com/>.

And the agents at Books & Such have a blog as well: <http://www.booksandsuch.biz/blog/>. Rachel Kent had advice on appointments here <http://www.booksandsuch.com/blog/reflections-on-acfw-conference-pitching-your-project/#more-10941> and another on conference etiquette: <http://www.booksandsuch.com/blog/conference-etiquette/>

Another agent at the firm has some great advice on the 15 minute appointments: <http://www.booksandsuch.com/blog/a-mock-15-minute-author-agent-meeting-at-a-conference-follow-along/>

The Hartline Agency also has a blog: <http://hartlineliteraryagency.blogspot.com/>. And Steve Laube's agency has one too... <http://www.stevelaube.com/blog/>. These are great places to research the agents. Plus Steve talks about the 15 minute appointments here: <http://www.stevelaube.com/that-conference-appointment/>

Here's the link to editors and agents who are attending: http://www.acfw.com/conference/appointments_editor and http://www.acfw.com/conference/appointments_agent

And some of you may be panicking because you're an introvert. Then read Michelle Shocklee's excellent thoughts in her post *I'm too shy*: <http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=287>
<http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=291> : advice from Amber Stockton

Elevating your elevator pitch by Janice Thompson: <http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=1401>

Please don't read all of this in one sitting. Instead, scan one article a day so you don't get overwhelmed.

I hope this helps, and if you have any questions, please email me and I'll answer them.

Day Three and Four: Preparing Spiritually

As we prepare for conference, it's so easy to focus on the external. Is my pitch ready? Who will I have appointments with? Will I know anyone? How about hanging out after sessions? What do I need to learn? Who do I need to meet?

Our thoughts focus there and we can forget the most important part: Am I prepared spiritually?

Expectations. Life is all about them. So as we start this section, I want to send you to a post by Deborah Vogts on what to expect at conference: <http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=289>

Then I want to challenge you to take a moment to consider your expectations.

Is one of them to be used by God?

Are you expecting Him to meet you in a real way?

Are you expecting to praise and worship Him and sense His presence as you offer Him your heart, your writing, your all?

Maybe part of what God wants you to do is step out. It can be hard when surrounded by 700-750 people who all seem to know everyone but you. Trust me, you're not alone. I'm an extrovert to the nth degree but still have moments at conference when I feel no one would notice if I disappeared.

Carla Stewart had an excellent post over at the ACFW blog on how to reach out and meet

people. Pop over and read her great suggestions: <http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=304>

This week I want to spend some time focusing on our spiritual preparation for conference. As you work on pitches and researching appointments and deciding which classes to attend, don't forget that you also need to prepare to meet God. What are your expectations? How do they line up with His?

Cynthia Ruchti posted this on the conference blog. It's about a topic we never want to think about in relation to a conference, but oh so important as we prepare spiritually for the conference:

What do writers do if they don't have confidence in the God of All and instead think everything's up to them? It's up to them to figure out how to catch the ear of an agent and editor. It's up to them to decide which editors and agents are the right match for their project. It's up to them to make their manuscript rise to the top of the Genesis or Book of the Year contest so anything less than a first place finish is failure. It's up to the person to find exactly the right seat in the banquet hall, the classrooms, at the dining tables. It's up to them to impress. What do they do if they believe they're humanly responsible for details only the Lord can do perfectly?

How does any writer survive the natural dips and dives of emotions at a high-intensity event like the ACFW national conference?

And what difference does it make to know that Jesus is the Redeemer of Disappointments? No crying at conference? Au contraire!

Conference disappointments range from forgetting to pack your good shoes to realizing that the genre about which you're most passionate took a nose-dive in a shallow pool. Ouch. ACFW attendees thrive on imagination, but imagination has a flip side, creating multiple opportunities for disappointment.

"Did you see the way that editor ignored me in the elevator? I sat with her at lunch. Now she doesn't even acknowledge we ever met. I think she hates me. I know she hates me. Or this jacket. Maybe it's my jacket. And she must despise my book idea. Now I'll never sell anything and I'll have to go back to cleaning out the grease traps at the fast food restaurant. Dreams? What dreams? When's the next flight home?"

Disappointment reproduces quickly in an environment like a conference for which you planned and saved all year, spent a bucket of money and time you could have used for other things, and invested a healthy portion of hope.

If your measure of success depends on your leaving the conference with a contract, you will be among more than 400 people who are disappointed. If completing the items on your personal agenda for "A Good Conference Experience Depends On..." is all you care about, it's almost a guarantee you'll be disappointed. Even if you think you have the Lord's intentions figured out regarding what should happen during that week in September, you're likely to feel the gut-kick of disappointment. It might last a micro-second and pass quickly as you move on to the next glorious moment. Or it may linger, hover, choking your joy because you thought it all depended on you.

Along with one-sheets and business cards and a 30-second pitch sure to generate the coveted "Ooh!" from your tablemates and target editor, have you made preparation for how you'll handle disappointment if it ambushes you at the conference?

Consider these tips:

Remind yourself that, as God's Word says, "He works for those who wait for Him" (Psalm 64:4).

Return to the unwavering truth of His love for you and His unique design for your writing career.

Refuse to believe disappointment is a synonym for failure.

Request a heart to hear from the Lord and let Him take the lead.

Remain faithful to His principles and confident of His "mysterious ways."

I had what might have been considered an unproductive and uncomfortable 15-minute appointment one year at conference. Within minutes, it became obvious it was the redirection I needed. Hard as it was. It pointed me where I needed to go.

At another appointment, an editor I highly respected took a pen to my sample, crossed off the first page and a half, and repeatedly circled a single, buried sentence (Not exactly the reaction I'd hoped to generate for my work). "Here's your beginning," he said, as I reached to grab my heart from where it had landed on the floor. He was right. (It's now the opening of the book coming out next spring.)

I nursed a splinter of disappointment when I missed sitting where I wanted to for an important meal. Instead I stumbled onto new forever friends.

The publishing house I thought sure was the one the Lord wanted for me six years ago folded. Where would I be today if I'd gotten my way?

Without doubt, nerves and excitement and adrenalin and high hopes form a breeding ground for conference disappointments.

But Jesus redeems even what seem like grave disappointments for writers who trust Him with the outcome.

Tim Akers posted this on the first time orientation loop last year, and I loved it so much, I asked his permission to pass it on.

This may be my first conference with the ACFW, but I am no stranger to presenting and public sharing. Yes, I still get a little nervous too, but not much anymore.

Just a bit of clarification, if you don't feel some nerves in stressful situations than you're probably dead, or could care less about what you're doing. Good presenters learn to train those butterflies flying laps in their stomachs. That queasy feeling is just an adrenaline response causing blood to flow away from your stomach and into your arms, legs, and brain. Some people can become debilitated by the stress, if their physical responses are strong enough, and they allow their feelings to overwhelm them.

How do you train those butterflies? Well--practice, but you really don't want the nerves to go away completely. Why? Because your senses become heightened, your mind can become more focused, and you will pick up on little cues most of us will miss when we're not nervous. That adrenalin can make you sharp. So after decades of preaching, teaching, street witnessing, IT presenting, and sales work, here are a few tips for confronting your worst nightmares in public speaking (sharing). (Nothing new)

1. Over prepare. Have you all your water fowl linear (ducks in a row) before you arrive. You may not use all you prepared, but it won't matter. The last thing you want to do is have to think about your pitches, your one-sheets and everything else. Have everything organized in a nice box, brief case, or whatever.

2. Practice your pitches in the mirror so you don't have to think so hard about what you're going to say, because you might have a moment where you actually "choke" and your mind will draw a blank. Take a deep breath, don't panic, laugh or tell a joke, it will all come back to you.

3. Remember points 1 and 2.

4. Writing and being published is your dream. This is where you want to be, and this is what you've chosen to do. Have fun and enjoy the moment. I get to see my mentor Frank Peretti, of course he has no clue that I exist or that I consider him a mentor, **PIERCING THE DARKNESS** and **THIS PRESENT DARKNESS** opened up new possibilities for me a long time ago.

5. Understand why you are at the ACFW conference and what you want to get out of it. It's good to have a few secondary goals. People may come because they want that publishing contract, what happens if that doesn't happen? You can be devastated, or you can use this experience to achieve other more reachable goals. For me, I wasn't planning on coming, but because I finaled in the Genesis, I changed my mind. I also want to meet my scribe group face to face for the first time since we've been critting one another. If I make that agent connection or publishing op, I certainly won't complain.

Note: I learned point 5 from street witnessing. Some people may not want the gospel when I share with them, I can't make them, but I can leave that individual more open to the next person that comes a long to share with them. If you don't get that publishing opportunity, you can use this chance to make new connections and stellar first impressions.

6. If you are doing this alone, than you're working harder than you have to. I have been a charismatic for all my life since I was 15 years old. The fire of the Holy Spirit has always been intense in my life and His Presence is something I'm constantly aware of. I'm in the ACFW because I'm sure there are other people here that have relationships with Jesus Christ to, so sit back and let The Good Shepherd do his thing (assuming you put your time in praying about this already-praying some more won't hurt).

And I love this perspective from Jerri Phillips, a first timer in 2015.

Just a few thoughts from an inexperienced newbie. I'm not worried. Honestly. I've signed up for appointments with agents, and I'm not worried. Here is why:

1. This is not MY baby. It's God's. He has the right "village to raise it."

2. I have prayed over this. My friends have prayed, and as a member of the group who wrote prayers for this conference, I know the leaders, coordinators, etc., have prayed.
3. I believe the agents, editors, speakers, and so on have prayed as well because they want this to be about God's will, too.
4. My steps are ordered of God, and so are yours. I've given Him all of this, and in the time I've worked on this book, He's given me crazy favor with the right law enforcement people, deputies, investigators, and so on. One of the first things I did was walk into a firing range and explain what I was writing and asked if anyone could give me information on the kind of rifle a sniper would use. The next day I was training with a retired Army sniper who worked at that gun range. Of all the gun ranges within an hour of my house, really? The one with a retired Army sniper who had multiple sniper rifles he could train me with? I could write a book just on the many ways God has met my exact need at the exact time of that need. I imagine most of you can, too. Y'all, if He has been so faithful until now, we have every reason to believe He will continue to be faithful.
5. I trust His timing. It has taken me a LONG time to get here in my life, but I can honestly tell you if no agent falls head over heels in love with my book, I'm going to be okay because I trust God's timing. I know who I am. I am settled in my identity as a writer. I know this book is God's plan, and I know in the perfect time His plan for it will come to pass. That could be this year at this conference. It could be something else. I don't know. What I do know is, this book does not determine my identity or my personal value. Only God does that, and if it isn't the darling of the ball, God and I are still okay, which means I'm still okay.

Yes, the idea of researching and preparing for multiple agents is a bit daunting, but so was asking a police detective to shadow him while he worked. So was entering First Impressions with an experimental speculative fiction piece (didn't win but learned tons!). So is trying to figure out the right scuba tour for my daughter while we are on vacation. So is figuring out which pickup would work best for my lifestyle and figuring out a good haggle price.

My point is, we do this kind of thing with all kinds of stuff, and we trust our decisions. We trust the people helping us, giving directions. We trust the reviews we read. You know why? Because we know those decisions are not life and death. Honestly, neither is this because it isn't about the book. I know that is shocking to see, but it isn't.

It's about God and what He wants to do with the book, and He will not let that plan fail. And I can tell you that as much as I respect the ACFW leaders, not one of them has the power to stop what God wants to do, and certainly not when they are praying and fasting and seeking Him to hear Him and be in alignment with Him. Everyone is praying for the Word the Lord has sent out over your work to not return void but to accomplish everything He has planned for it.

By the way, I can tell you that our vacation had hiccups but was great, and I love my truck which has its own "only God could do it that cool" story. Do any of us really think scuba or a pickup is more important than these messages the Lord has compelled us to write? One the contrary, I have every reason to believe God is going to do another "only God could do it that cool" story, not just for me but for you as well.

And you need to know, the leaders of ACFW, teachers, advisors, etc., are not the only ones praying for you. I'm praying for you, and I have great faith for God's perfect plan and purpose. I'm not the only one. You and your schedules are soaked in prayer. Isaiah 26:3 says: You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. I pray you are all at peace in His faithfulness. ACFW leaders, thank you for taking great care of us and praying for us with great passion. You are deeply appreciated. Blessings, Jerri

So what do I need to Bring?

Mindy Obenhaus had a couple posts, one focused on clothes: <http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=300>, and the other focused on other items to pack: <http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=301>

What to wear:

The conference is business casual. That can mean a lot of thing to different people, so I've created a pinterest board to give you ideas. <http://www.pinterest.com/caraputman/acfw-conference-clothing/>

The gala is everything from Sunday best dress and khakis to floor-length gowns and formal kilts.

The genre dinner is a bit of everything. Some people dress like a character, time period, etc. I wore a Wonder Woman tshirt ☺

What to wear: the conference version

One thing that always causes stress is how to make a good first impression in what you wear. Now, I've been to many conferences and see a wide array. Kristy Dykes always looked beautiful in jewel-toned suits. Others wear jeans and t-shirts. My personal goal is to make a nice impressions and feel good about what I'm wearing. That will vary a bit from person to person, but here are a few general suggestions:

- For your appointments treat it like a job interview. You certainly do not need to wear a suit! But I wouldn't wear holey jeans and ragged t-shirt. You can look very nice with jeans and a blouse or polo. But I'd consider adding a fun cardigan or sports coat for the 15 minute appointment. Now if you don't have these in your wardrobe, do not run out and buy one. You might spend a few minutes in a Goodwill or thrift store and see what you can find, but chances are good you have something in your closet that will work great.
- For the workshops, wear a nice outfit, but you're not in an interview setting. I'd always make sure you have an extra layer because those rooms can get cold!

- Wear comfortable shoes. This is easier for guys, but gals, unless you're used to wearing them, leave the 4 inch heels at home. You'll cover a lot of ground at the conference and blisters are no fun! Ask me how I know ☺
- I've created a pinterest board to give you visible examples of what I usually see at conference. There are even a few pins for the guys:
<http://www.pinterest.com/caraputman/acfw-conference-clothing/>
- Banquet: This is a formal event. However, we do not want you to stay in your hotel room if you don't have a gown or tuxedo. That's why we say Sunday best up to formal wear. You will see full length gowns. You will also see nice dresses and khakis with a sport coat. Think of this as an event to celebrate what God has done and is doing in Christian fiction. It is not the place to dress in character. Think Oscars not masquerade ball.
- Genre Dinner: this is where you can dress up – if you want to! I don't ☺ But you will see people in all kinds of costumes. **Please use wisdom.** Dressing as a soldier is NOT a good idea. Please don't do so. We've had security descend when someone got a little carried away with their model guns. Steampunk is great. Dressing like a character from the 1800s is great. Just use discretion ☺
- Always keep in mind this is a Christian conference. And people outside the conference are watching as well. We're large, but the hotel is larger. Let's be a great testimony for God!

Tipping:

Tipping: Maybe you grew up in a family that didn't go to many hotels. We definitely didn't tip hardly ever. Just wasn't something we knew to do. Well, at ACFW we want to be a blessing to those who are serving us, so Robin put together this little chart to help any of you who might have a background like mine :-)

My rule of thumb——

taxi/shuttle services drivers: I tip \$5 per bag

bellmen if they carry in my bag: \$5 per bag

housekeeping: \$3-\$5 per day per person in the room—I leave on the pillow every morning when I leave, usually with a little note of thanks

room service delivery-while most hotels add in a delivery charge, that's usually NOT given down to the actual person who brings your food: \$5 per tray

in-house hotel restaurant: 20% of pre-tax total unless the service was just horrid

Last thoughts

<http://www.acfw.com/blog/?p=284>: Dana Mentick's excellent thoughts...

1. Find someone who is alone and ask them where they're from and what they write. Bingo! You've made a connection. Now make arrangements to sit with them at lunch. Having a built in lunch partner is such a comfort.

2. Go to morning worship. I know, I know, it's early, but it will really jump start your spirit and remind you that writing doesn't have to be a solitary endeavor.

3. Don't be afraid to make an appointment with an agent/editor simply to ask questions about the business or ask what they are looking for. It doesn't always have to be a high pressure, you've-gotta-present-a-killer-pitch-or-else deal. I have found the editors/agents to be very warm, encouraging people if you aren't trying to beat them over the head with an idea!

And if you'd like my thoughts ☺

Attending a conference is nerve-wracking.

Let's face it, you're taking huge risks by going.

You've invested a lot of money: registration, hotel, airfare, some meals, and other incidentals. You've invested who you are – by attending you're joining the ranks of those who have moved from wanting to write, to those who have taken steps to actively chase a dream. You're risking your heart because you've gone public with your dream.

Bundle that with the fact that you might not know many people and you might be pitching the book of your heart to an editor and agent, and suddenly your stress is through the roof.

It's okay.

Sit back, take a deep breath, whisper a prayer for peace and help.

You'll be okay.

As someone who's been in your shoes, and helps those first-timers attending ACFW each year, I'd like to offer a bit of advice.

Pray, pray, pray. If God has lead you to attend ACFW or another writer's conference, then He has a purpose and a plan for your time there. It may not be what you intend. But pray and ask for His will to be done. Ask for opportunities to serve others – nothing better to take your thoughts off your fears than to focus on others. And ask Him for peace to carry you through the days.

Prepare, prepare, prepare. ACFW has a conference blog that is packed with fabulous advice on everything from how to get from the conference to the hotel, where to find food for Friday's free night, and how to get ready for that editor appointment. Take advantage of

that repository of advice. Get your one-sheet ready if you have time. Polish that first chapter, and have it in your bag for appointments. Have business cards to leave with those you meet. Get your toolbox loaded and ready.

Research, research, research. Take the time to know what the houses you are pitching are currently publishing. How does what you write line up with that? Is it a new niche? Different from current authors? Etc. Google the editors so you can learn what you can. Same with the agents. Some of the agents have blogs. Read them. It is a wealth of information not just about the industry and their firms, but also on personality. You can tell so much from how a person writes for a blog.

Relax, relax, relax. ACFW, at least, is one big family. You may not think you know anyone, but you're wrong. You'll spend the conference giving and receiving hugs from folks you've met on the loop or first timers loop. Reach out to others with a smile, and they'll be delighted to reciprocate. At my first conference, the friend and I who had driven down together grabbed a gal who was flying solo for lunch. Before conference officially began, we'd connected in a very cool way.

Volunteer, volunteer, volunteer. By serving others you will find yourself relaxing, meeting others, and having a great time. There are so many ways to do it that don't take much from you, but help the conference run efficiently and smoothly.

Rest, rest, rest. Sometimes you just have to skip a workshop because you're brain is on overload. Or you can't fathom the thought of another meal surrounded by people. That's okay. Escape to your room. Put your feet up. Take a bath. Read a book. Do whatever it takes to recharge. We understand.

And at ACFW don't forget the prayer room. It is open all the time, and the perfect place to escape when you're rattled and overwhelmed.

Here are Mindy Obenhaus's top ten tips for conference attendees:

~DO dress in layers. Those meeting rooms can be freezing or stuffy.

~DON'T stress out over having to make every workshop.

~DO bring a good attitude. Yes, there will be lines. No, things won't be perfect. Choose to adapt.

~DON'T forget your business cards. Even if you're not planning to meet with any editors or agents, you'll want them available to exchange with friends.

~DO bring a few just-in-case items, like safety pins and band aids. Nothing worse than to discover those new shoes are rubbing a blister on your heel or that you've popped a button. Sewing kits, if not in the room, can usually be obtained from guest services.

~DON'T plan to break in a new pair of shoes at conference. Trust me on this one.

~DO allot a portion of your conference budget for tipping. Skycap at airport - \$1 per bag if you check-in curbside; \$2 per bag if skycap takes bags to check-in counter; Bellhops - \$1 per bag if they bring your bags to your room (\$2 minimum); Hotel housekeeper - \$2-\$5 per day. Hey, anyone who cleans my bathroom and makes my bed is worth that!

~DON'T take it personally if an editor/agent doesn't ask to see any of your work. Your manuscript may not be a fit for them or it may need work. Remember, this is their business. They're not trying to hurt you.

~DO make at least one trip to the prayer room. You'll be glad you did. And finally -

~DON'T corner your targeted agent/editor in the bathroom (or anywhere else) and try to pass them your manuscript!

Details from the conference director:

PRAYER ROOM: The prayer room is open throughout the entire conference for each and every conference attendee. You can pray alone, if you prefer, or ask someone to pray with you. Because ACFW members come from a wide range of denominational backgrounds, please be respectful of others' emotions, needs, and traditions in the prayer room. I would encourage everyone to remember to use the prayer room during conference. I've seen God move strongly within that room at every single conference. What a blessing to have!

CONSIDERATIONS: As in recent years, the ACFW is fragrance free as many conference attendees have dramatic sensitivities to smells. Please refrain from using perfume, fragranced lotions, oils, etc.

Conference Tips from attendees:

Some tips I would like to share: To prepare for the conference--research the speakers, especially the ones you are planning to attend their classes. Research the editors/publishers/agents. If you have time to and opportunity to have an appointment with one or more of the editor/agent people (the conference I went to locally had sign up sheets for 15min. with some of these people) do some research on them. On a side note, one of the fellow attendees at the last conference I attended gave me a tip w/o knowing it. She said she checked the sign up sheets on that day, found some one who had volunteered to talk with attendees--but his sheet didn't have any one scheduled for about an hour. She

took her stuff over and knowing he was free for a nice bit of time--asked if he could spend some time on what she had. Unlike myself, who signed up for an agent that had people scheduled before and after me. Even though it is always announced for 'everyone to be considerate' the person in front of me took seven minutes (at least) extra, and the person who was after me was early--I might as well have skipped trying to fit in there. That happened two conferences in a row. :P Another thing that for the second conference was: business cards, one sheets, and a note book. Edie Melson has a wonderful blog that covers some of these things if anyone would like to check it out. Her tips on a notebook are priceless. Here's a link for any one who wants to check it out, but you will need to check through the lists on the side to find the one on conferences. <http://thewriteconversation.blogspot.com/> Donevy Westphal

I would recommend to plan on spending money on a couple of extra things, but not to fill your schedule too full. Leave some down time to digest things and make sure you join a group to go to dinner with on the free night.

I am ever thankful that I spent the money on the flash drive of the conference. If you are pinching pennies, plan on buying that. It is worth it. Even if you took some of the classes, it is good to refresh and review over and over throughout the year. **Martha Artyomenko**

My tip would be to let God lead you. I can't tell you how many divine appointments I've had at conferences that have turned into something. God always does amazing things when I set aside my own agenda. **Alycia W. Morales**

My tip for conference: Read the Moment. Late one evening, I stepped into an elevator and saw Bethany House's Dave Long standing in the corner. As the doors closed, I thought "elevator pitch" and turned to begin my delivery. In that instant, I saw the wear of the day on his face, faint dark circles under his eyes and bent posture, so I held up. Instead, I said a sentence prayer for him which was, by far, a better elevator pitch that the one I had memorized. In that same elevator, I learned that some newbie writers had been holed-up in their hotel rooms to minimize exposure to the crowds attending conference. Since I had felt similar coping pangs at first, I wanted to encourage your readers to put themselves out there for the entire duration of conference. Minimize regrets when looking back on conference opportunities by saying "yes" to time shared learning the craft of writing. That starts with the kick-off session for newbies, which I thoroughly enjoyed, thanks to you, Cara!

----- Cindy Amos

I think making a point of using the meals as a place to connect is a great idea. Start a round-table introduction and be sure everyone shares, then hand out business cards. Introduce yourself to the people sitting next to you before the start of a topic. Have fun! blessings,

----Carrie Stuart Parks

I have a few tips for conference attendees and one in particular mirrors what Bob Mayer speaks of in "Write It Forward." Please take the time to introduce yourself to others. We all have a built in conversation starter with "What do you write?" On the practical side, I always have breath mints because pitching is stressful and who wants to have an intimate conversation about your book with bad breath. I keep powder in my purse/briefcase because once I had a late pitch and had to tame the oily "T" beforehand and the agent commented that I looked put together (I thought it was odd, but hey, I'll take it). I also keep chocolate on me--dark chocolate--as 2 squares a day are supposed to be healthy. And I make sure I have business cards on me at all times. My original ones were very plain and I would update them by placing a clear mailing label on the back with information on the book I was pitching. My cards were a linen color, so the clear label looked nice.

Barb Britton

Agent Terry Burns told me that you must develop a filter before you go to a conference or you will be overwhelmed. He said your filter is that you take in the limited amount of information that you need at this particular part of your writing journey so you won't be overwhelmed or miss what you need to know right now.

Morgan Tarpley

you have to remember that an agent/editor works to help you. One big thing people rarely do at these meetings is ask questions. We're too busy pitching instead of learning. Ask them what they think of your idea. What would the genre be. And if they don't think its their thing, perhaps who might be. It's a two way exchange. Remember they wouldn't be at the conference if they didn't need clients. Bob Mayer

I know YOU already know this, but as someone who worked closely with the faculty for so many years, I can tell you that many of them are JUST as terrified of sitting across from the attendees at the appointments as the attendees are! Many are introverts. So, if the attendee is an introvert, remember that the person across the table from them may be, too. And if they are an extrovert, remember the introvert may be across the table. Give grace, no matter on which (or even a middlevert like me ;-)) side of the spectrum you fall. :-D

In Christ,
Allison M. Wilson

My biggest piece of advice is to not worry if you can't do everything you want to do. It is absolutely draining to try to attend every single session, appointment, worship time, speaker, etc. Give yourself permission to skip out of something to relax and recharge and have a moment to breathe and pray.

Melissa Parcel

Advice from Colleen:

My beloved ACFW conference is right around the corner. You might be planning to attend or you may be gearing up for another kind of conference this fall so I thought I'd give you a few tips about writers conferences as you're packing to fly to Dallas. :)

1. The main benefit of a writers conference is not necessarily learning more about writing, although that's VERY important. But the main thing you will come away with is a sense of community. I remember when I was writing my first book. I didn't even know another writer, and I felt odd, weird, out of step with other people in some strange, crooked way. No one else I knew had characters speaking in their head. No one else I knew heard read a newspaper article and immediately thought, "what if." My first Christian writers conference was Glorietta in New Mexico. It was there I met (and roomed) with my friends Kristin Billerbeck and Carol Cox. Of course my parents thought I was crazy to be rooming with two women I'd never met. I mean, what if they were axe murderers or something? :) But I realized I'd come home really. I was with my people. They all had characters in their heads too. They cared about things like point of view and dialogue. All the things I was fascinated with. I left that conference knowing I wasn't alone anymore. I had peeps.

So when you go to a conference the main thing you should be looking for is people you connect with. A critique partner, an encourager, someone who understands. Be on the lookout! Don't hide in your room even if you're an introvert. Hang out in the lobby and the coffee shop. Writers love coffee! Even after all these years, I am usually hanging out in the lobby hugging necks and squealing as people arrive. It's something I look forward to every year!

2. It's a great place to learn more about the industry. The publishing industry has undergone massive changes in the past three years. A good writing organization and yearly conference helps you stay on top of the news. Traditional publishing is still launching debut authors, but the indie route is also a viable place for a polished, well-written novel. Learn more about everything. Be a sponge. Keep learning.

3. Notice I said polished, well-written in the point above. There are always GREAT workshops and tracks at the ACFW conference and other good conferences. Learn all you can, then go home and put it into practice. That's one of the great things about writing—there is always something more to learn. I LOVE that! You never arrive as an author. You can always work on improving. I'm doing a little more plotting on this current book (GASP!) but I'm doing it my way with plotting out my mystery points. It's been fun so far. Learn what works for you.

4. Have fun. Relax! Don't be all tense and scared. Let go of the terror holding you back and realize we are all the same. If you're at ACFW, come find me or any other author you don't know but have read their books. Ask questions, be friendly and realize we are there because we WANT to meet you. We want to encourage you. Don't be afraid to talk to the editor or agent at your table or at the coffee shop. But don't look at them as though they are the answer to your dreams. They are people too, not just an end to a means of getting you published. Care about the people you meet, no matter who they are or what their name badge reads.

5. Keep up the contacts after you go home. Make sure you get a card or email from the people you connect with. Keep up those relationships and build on them through the year. Next year you'll feel like you're going to see old friends. And you are!

I hope to see you there!

Colleen Coble

Those of you preparing to attend the ACFW annual meeting might want to read this about adjusting your expectations:

<http://suspensesisters.blogspot.com/2015/09/adjust-your-expectations.html>

Have a great weekend.

Richard Mabry

Brandilyn's Pitching Tips (just for first timers)

Greetings, all. In just a month we will be together. I so look forward to meeting all of you. I've had a very busy July with travel and company, so I've been quiet here lately. But that will end next week. :]

A week from today, August 4, I will be critiquing your "elevator pitches" on this loop. I have blocked out that day to do nothing but help you with your pitches. Please work on your pitches, using the formula below. You can start emailing your pitches *to this loop* on Monday, Aug. 1. Please note I won't respond until Thursday the 4th. I will respond in order of when your emails were received. Since I expect a lot of participants, I can only help each person once. I won't be able to do follow-ups.

Elevator pitches are the hardest because they require you to *boil down your novel to its essence*. This essence then becomes the foundation for the rest of your longer pitch. *If you don't get the quick essence pitch exactly right, the foundation for your longer pitch is not strong.*

If you're participating, I strongly urge you to read *all* the pitches and my responses. This is why we do this on the loop rather than privately. You will learn just as much from how others are helped as you will from my response to you.

Here is my basic formula for your elevator pitch:

PROTAGONIST, a (fill in blank) stumbles into TROUBLE and tries to (fill in blank) but MORE TROUBLE.

This approach can take many different forms. It's typically 1 to 3 sentences long. Sometimes 4. You may have heard it can't be over 25 words. That's just a guideline. Sometimes it has to be longer. The main point to remember is—every word must be necessary.

Make your pitch intriguing so the listener wants to know more. Make it raise more questions than it answers. Notice that my formula does not go beyond the inciting incident—the first main conflict that kicks off your novel. In your longer pitch you can add in the first twist, second twist, etc. All you want to do with your elevator pitch is attract enough curiosity from the listener that he/she wants to hear more.

Sometimes there are two protagonists, as in the romance genre. In romance the hero wants *This*. The heroine wants *That*. Then they meet or are somehow thrown together for an event. They can't possibly end up together for good because the *This* is completely incompatible with the *That*. So why in the WORLD are they attracted to each other? The *This* and *That* fight escalates, along with the attraction. Attraction wins. The *This* and *That*

intertwine to become ... *This*at. Or *That*is. At any rate, somehow it all works out. The end. So the basic pitch formula above still applies for romances. Just mention both your protagonists right up front--and what they each want. Until they're thrown together, which leads to the TROUBLE.

Example elevator pitches from four of my Seatbelt Suspense® novels are below. I've included links for these novels to their pages on my website, where you can read the back cover copy. If you'll take the time to read the short pitch, then the back cover copy, you'll get a feel for how the pitch presents *only the essence* of the story. Again, I strongly urge you to do this homework before sending in your pitch.

[Vain Empires](#): Six contestants trapped in a reality show on a remote island learn they must uncover which of the Seven Deadly Sins each of them represents. Each person has a damning secret—and these secrets are about to be revealed on live television.

[Gone to Ground](#): In small-town Mississippi six women have been murdered. Now three women, independent of each other, realize they know who the killer is – someone they love. Alone and terrified, each must make the heart wrenching decision to bring the killer down. But each woman suspects a different man.

[Violet Dawn](#): Young Paige Williams, running from her dangerous past, is settling into a quiet life in a small Idaho town. When the body of an internationally famous movie star who lives locally surfaces in Paige's hot tub, she *can't* call the police – or she will blow her own carefully constructed cover.

[Sidetracked](#): When her close friend is murdered, thirty-four-year-old Delanie Williams faces a terrible choice: protect her own life—or save an innocent man from going to prison. Important note: Your pitch must include *specific details* about the TROUBLE and MORE TROUBLE the protagonist faces. Generalized statements aren't intriguing. For example, take my pitch for *Sidetracked*. A generalized pitch might read: *When her close friend is murdered, thirty-four-year-old Delanie Williams is pulled into danger—and the only one who can save her is Delanie herself. But at what cost?*

See the difference in the two? The generalized pitch could be about hundreds of suspenses out there. Nothing to get the editor's or agent's attention. So if it's a suspense, tell me *what* the danger is. And for any other genre, tell me exactly *what* the trouble is. **This is the biggest mistake I find every year when I do these pitches. Many are not specific enough to be intriguing.**

Another note: don't end your pitch with a question. 99% of the time, these questions are rhetorical and are very general. They add nothing to the pitch. Why waste the words when you need something intriguing? For example, so many times I see at the end of a pitch for a romance something like: "Will ___ open her heart to find love again?" Well, of course she will. It's a romance. Plus, that's just plain boring. It does nothing to make your story stand out from the millions of other romances out there. (By the way, this same mistake is too often made on back cover copy. Again—avoid ending with a question on your back cover copy—if that question can be answered with a yes or a no. You will see a question at the end of the back cover copy for my novel *Sidetracked*. But it's an intriguing question, and one you can't know the answer to without reading the book.

Final note: writing these pitches is *hard*. So don't stress too much. Do the best you can, and I'll help you fix what you have. Remember, what I say is only a suggestion. In the end it's *your* book, and you are in control. We are all in this together. Everyone can learn from

everyone else. After this exercise next week you'll have a number of weeks to rewrite your pitch before the conference.

Blessings, all. I look forward to reading your pitches.