

# **How Conferences and Workshops Can Benefit Writers of Any Level**

*by Vanessa Kier*

Have you ever attended a writing conference or workshop? No? Why not?

Writing conferences and workshops provide invaluable information and offer networking opportunities that benefit writers at any stage of their writing journey.

The trick is to understand your current writing goals before you attend and pick the conference or workshop most likely to give you the knowledge you're missing. Even shy writers, or writers on a limited budget, can benefit from these opportunities.

## **New Writer**

My primary goal as a new writer was to learn how to write a compelling story. So I attended as many craft workshops as possible on topics such as goal, motivation and conflict, plotting, character development, dialogue, and setting. I picked workshops based on the issues I struggled with in my manuscript at the time, or issues that I knew were a continuous problem for me.

## **Intermediate**

As I became more adept at putting together a compelling story, my needs changed. I wanted more advanced classes on craft, such as how to draw readers in by writing in deep POV. I also started my hunt for an agent and attended every possible agent or editor talk. Many conferences offer the opportunity to pitch your manuscript to an agent and/or an editor, and I took advantage of these as well. Other helpful workshops covered topics such as writing synopses and cover letters that get you out of the slush pile, and how to start building your author brand.

## **Advanced**

Once I signed with an agent and had my manuscripts out on submission, I found myself more interested in the business and research aspects of writing. I learned about tax and legal issues. I took workshops on self-publishing and forensics.

## **Published**

Can a workshop or conference offer anything to a published author? Many published authors I know are too busy with business meetings during a conference to take advantage of the workshops. However, teaching a workshop, whether at a local or national event, is a positive way to get your name before potential fans and supporters. I say supporters, because having other writers spread the word about your books can be even more valuable than the money gained if they purchase your books.

## **Writers of All Levels**

The wonderful thing about attending a conference is the variety of workshops that appeal to writers of any level. For example: Workshops on marketing, including the effective use of social media, and workshops where the publication process is explained from the moment an editor first looks at your

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manuscript to the day the book hits the store.

I love to attend talks given by highly successful writers. I always come away with some new insight into the writing life or writing business, and often find myself reenergized in my fight to overcome my personal writing stumbling blocks.

## Conferences vs Workshops

Which is right for you? A conference or a workshop?

A workshop is the same as a class. A typical in-person workshop lasts 1-2 hours. An online workshop might last for one day up to one month.

A conference usually spans at least one day, with multiple workshops being presented, sometimes concurrently. There will likely be a mix of educational, motivational, and social events. A conference might be national, with people from all over the country attending, or local.

Smaller, local events might be more comfortable for shy writers. Shy writers should also check to see if the conference offers a first-timer orientation session.

Local conferences are also more affordable for writers on a budget, since travel and hotel costs are minimal.

You don't need to attend a conference to take a workshop. Check the calendar of your local writing group to see if they host one-day intensive workshops. I've attended local one-day workshops on marketing and branding, plotting, and on a variety of research topics.

Not comfortable leaving your home just yet? Can't afford to travel? Check out one of the many sites that offer inexpensive online workshops, such as SavvyAuthors.com or WritersOnlineClasses.com. These workshops are often taught via Yahoo! Groups or another online provider that allows students to receive the lessons as emails. You can also see the replies of the other students and respond with your own comments. These opportunities are good for shy or busy writers, since you can participate as much or as little as you are comfortable with. Because you get the lessons via email, the information is still accessible after the class has ended.

So, there you have it! No matter whether you're shy or an extrovert, a beginner or published writer, conferences and workshop have something to offer you. I hope to see you at a workshop some day!

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