

Nine Business Basics for School Visits

by Alexis O'Neill

As a published author or illustrator, you will be sought to do presentations at bookstores, libraries, schools and other venues. The more businesslike you are about administrative details of your presentations, the more successful you'll be. Here are nine tips to get you started:

1. **ORGANIZING:** When a host contacts you, record pertinent data on a booking form. (See a sample at www.schoolvisitexperts.com) Behind that main data page, place related materials – contracts, maps, travel information, etc. I keep all my booking information in one three-ring binder.

2. **COLLECTING DATA:** Keep records of presentation inquiries for your mailing list. Even if potential hosts don't hire you this year, they may hire you later.

3. **DETERMINING FEES & EXPENSES:** The fee you charge is usually based on your background experience, the number of books you have published, and your geographic location. Explore authors' and publishers' websites to find out what others charge. For examples, see: www.Scholastic.com/authorvisits <http://teach.simonandschuster.net/Plan-an-Author-Appearance/How-To> or <http://ow.ly/23UjJ>

4. **NEGOTIATING:** Most authors and illustrators are willing to negotiate fees with hosts. When I travel, I offer my lower "local" fee for schools that book on consecutive days and schools can then share my transportation costs. Presenters occasionally donate services to special projects or charities.

5. **CONFIRMING CONTRACTS & AGREEMENTS:** Confirm *in writing* with your hosts about the number and duration of sessions you will present in a day; specify your equipment and set-up needs; and clarify the terms regarding payment (amount and due date). I do this in a letter and/or email. Other authors prefer a formal

contract. (SCBWI offers a "Sample Lecture Contract" accessible as a pdf file at www.scbwi.org/pubs.htm)

6. **INVOICING:** Send an invoice with your confirmation letter or contract. Schools need this in order to write a check. Include your Social Security number. Your host will need it to complete the mandatory report of any fees over \$600 on a 1099 Tax Form. When I receive a check, I photocopy it and attach the copy to the invoice, moving it into the Accounts Received folder. Most schools will pay you on the day of your visit. However, large school districts may take from 30 to 60 days to send the check.

7. **OFFERING A PRE-VISIT PACKET:** After a host books me, I send an Author Visit Packet (a two-pocket folder) to the host to help prepare kids and teachers for my visit. It includes a photo of me, a bio, Teacher Idea Sheets, activities related to each of my books, assorted press clips and reviews. Schools often use these materials for promotion and bulletin board displays.

8. **BOOKSELLING:** Clarify bookselling plans with your hosts in advance. If they are unsure about handling book sales, suggest they contact a local bookseller for assistance. For regional lists of independent bookstores, go to <http://www.indiebound.org/>

9. **SENDING THANK YOUS:** When you send a handwritten thank-you note, hosts remember you. I address the envelope and stamp it before my visit. After the visit, I write the note and pop it into the mail.

Alexis O'Neill, Ph.D., is the author of THE RECESS QUEEN and other award-winning books for children. She has been an elementary school teacher, a teacher of teachers, and a museum educator. She is a popular school visit presenter and helps other authors create and deliver quality programs. Visit her at www.schoolvisitexperts.com
