

The Reluctant Presenter

by Alexis O'Neill

Full disclosure: I'm a ham. I love to do author visits. So I was stunned recently when I found out that in a local SCBWI.org region, only 11 out of 170 published members chose to place their names on the "I'm-available-for-school-visits" list. Why? Doing author visits has so many benefits – meeting readers, selling books, earning extra income. Why would anyone not want to do them?

Then I imagined myself walking a mile in another author's clogs. And I came to this conclusion:

It is perfectly okay to never, ever do a public appearance. It is perfectly okay to take a break from doing appearances. And it is perfectly okay to stay home and work on your next book.

Now, let's back up. There are ten main reasons why published authors and illustrators are Reluctant Presenters. Do any of these apply to you?

1. ___ **Family.** My kids are still in school (or my aging parents need attention), schedules are crazy, and it's difficult to justify time away from home. I want to squeeze out every moment of togetherness with my family while I can.
2. ___ **Job-Juggle.** I have to keep another job to pay the bills consistently, so my time-off is limited.
3. ___ **Writing or illustrating schedule.** I'm on a deadline to produce my next book and can't get away.
4. ___ **Shyness.** I'd rather chew rat tails than stand in front of an audience.
5. ___ **Fear.** I hate to ____ (fill in the blank with your own travel nightmare i.e. fly, drive, pack,

skateboard, etc.) and will do anything to avoid it.

6. ___ **Lack of skill or experience.** I like the idea of doing school visits, but don't know what to do for a program.
7. ___ **Disinterest.** I don't care about being out in public. It's too much hassle.
8. ___ **Been-There-Done-That.** I used to do lots of presentations. Now I don't really want to.
9. ___ **The J.K. Rowling Effect.** I make enough money on royalties alone. Fan clubs arise spontaneously. I can stay in my mansion and munch bon-bons.
10. ___ **Children are aliens.** I like writing for children, but the thought of being with them gives me hives.

If you want to overcome the ten Reluctant Presenter challenges, here are some things to think about:

1. **Family.** Limit appearances to within driving distance of your home. Do half-days (mornings only) so you can still pick up your kids at school. For appearances further away, consider doing virtual school visits via formal Internet chats, teleconferences or e-mail interviews.
2. **Job-Juggle.** Give your new books a big push at launch time. If your family doesn't mind, you might use vacation days for big events. You might even check with your employer about flex-time and trade evening or weekend hours for a day when schools are in session.
3. **Writing or illustrating schedule:** It's good to keep your creative process flowing. However, you might want to identify specific times when you can be available between books.

4. **Shyness:** You may be shy or you may lack confidence. If you're shy, check out <http://shrinkingvioletpromotions.blogspot.com/> to find a community of talented-but-shy kindred spirits. If you need to bolster your confidence, consider joining a local chapter of Toastmasters www.toastmasters.org the organization of choice for many shy authors, and you will amaze yourself with the strategies you'll learn to become an engaging speaker.

5. **Fear:** If you fear flying but want to travel, either plan enough time for taking a train or bus, hire a driver, or enroll in a program such as www.gogetterjetsetter.com. For fear (or dislike) of packing, check out www.onebag.com.

6. **Lack of skill or experience:** You're in luck. That's what this column is geared to help you with. Also, observe authors in action at schools, libraries and bookstores and join in discussions about appearances on your local SCBWI listservs.

7. **Disinterest.** No one can make you want to do this. So, don't!

8. **Been-There-Done-That.** You've written tons of books over a long career. You've done lots of programs in schools. Now you're all tuckered out. Just find a kind way to tell your fans that you're "booked." (Posting a note on your website can take a bit of the pain away from answering email invitations.)

9. **The J.K. Rowling Effect.** So, would you really *want* to overcome this situation?

10. **Children are aliens:** You are not unlike Roald Dahl. He did okay. Stay home.

One more thing.

Even though your availability may not be consistent, I'd advise you to list your name and website on school visit lists. You can politely decline any invitation, but then recommend another presenter to the host. You can still provide information about your presentations and possibly suggest a virtual visit. Most importantly, you can keep that contact's information for the day when you finally decide to go on the road and meet your fans!

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
