

Taking Charge of Your Schedule

by Alexis O'Neill

Have you ever had to deal with a schedule bully?

Picture this. The advance material you send to your host clearly outlines what your school visit program consists of:

- The number of assemblies or sessions (large group and/or small group) you can do
- Which grade levels your program addresses
- The length of each session
- How much time you need between sessions to transition with materials and props
- How much time you need for a lunch break and autographing

Then, just as you're packing your duds for your trip, an email arrives.

"I hope you don't mind," the host writes, "but we have to shorten your assembly from 60 minutes to 30 minutes."

or

"We have a morning and an afternoon pre-school class here. Our teachers were wondering if they can slip them into your assembly for the 4th and 5th graders?"

You thought that the schedule was firmly in place! Now your blood pressure is up. You want to be nice. You want to be accommodating. But you also know what works best for your program to be successful. What do you do?

You have two main choices: Stand firm on original plans OR negotiate changes.

Here's how you can do either option without making enemies.

STANDING FIRM

Spell-Out Scheduling Options

When I send advance materials, I include a sheet that shows the time I need for each of my activities (i.e., 45-minute primary assembly, 60-minute intermediate assembly, and 30-minute classroom sessions or 60-minute writing workshops and at least 30 minutes for lunch.) I also say that I need 10 minutes between assemblies to reset props, and 15 minutes to move from the assembly location to the class visit/workshop location, I discovered the hard way that if I don't identify reset and transition times in my schedule, the school forgets to include them.

Require Schedule Approval

Here's the key – in my advance materials, I state, "I need to review the draft of the schedule before it is published for the staff." Two weeks ahead, I remind the host about sending the draft to me. If there are any issues, I work with the host to fix them. Occasionally, I'll have to go back two or three times to iron out details. It's crucial to do this ahead so that there are no surprises when you arrive.

NEGOTIATING CHANGES

Additional Assemblies

A school may request an additional assembly because its student population is large or the multi-purpose room is small. I always accommodate this request. If space isn't an issue, you can always say, "I'd be happy to, but that will be an additional \$___ to do this."

Another big issue is including the afternoon kindergarten classes. For that, I offer to stop by and read one story to them (15 minutes).

Teachers are happy with this.

Student Mix

My programs are tailored for developmental and curriculum levels. So, while I'll accept kindergarteners in assemblies that include groups up to third-grade, I don't accept grades K-2 in the intermediate assemblies.

Scheduling Order

If the order in which you do your sessions (i.e. assemblies before workshops) is important and the school wishes to make changes, you can always say, "The order I've suggested will result in the maximum educational benefit for your students, which is why I'd like to do it this way."

Most of us try to be accommodating. *But it's very important for you to do the program that you know delivers the best educational value.* Keep your responses to your host's requests simple and

businesslike. Don't make excuses or go into long explanations. You won't regret this. Sometimes, a simple "No" works best.

But if in the end, your host is a schedule bully and too demanding for you to deal with, don't be afraid to decline the invitation. You'll be doing both you and your host a favor by saying, "I might not be the right fit for your school." Then refer them to the SCBWI Speakers' Bureau to find a replacement at <http://www.scbwi.org/Pages.aspx/Speaker-Bureau>

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