

## NEED, SPEED, AND FEED: ORGANIZE YOUR CONFERENCE NOTES

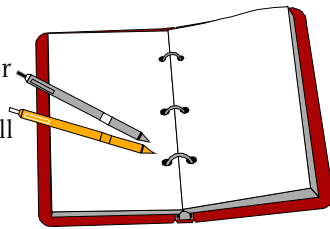


*...write down those quotes that will feed my soul or affirm my motives long after the conference has ended*

**A**fter each major writers' conference I attended, I came home with a suitcase bulging with freebies, a mind spinning with possibilities and a notebook jammed to capacity with unintelligible notes.

Being "too soon and too late smart," it took me awhile to get organized beforehand to make the most efficient use of all that I expected to glean from a conference.

Before attending, I now purchase a small, hardcover coil notebook that I divide into three tabbed parts I call my need, speed, and feed sections. That way I can quickly flip to the appropriate section during the conference and jot down any information I find helpful.



When I come home, instead of sifting through random scribbles, I can quickly locate the notes I want. Here are some suggestions for each section:

### **Need**

While listening to the various publishers represented, keep a running list, not only of what genres they publish, but also the themes, topics and age levels they are looking for.

For example, one company may need fiction (Christian romance novels), another children's stories, (to match theme list, ages 10-12) and another poetry (I wish!).

Write down current editors' names, their publishing houses, and the title of the publications they edit so you can refer to them in your cover letter when you submit material.

In terms of books, citing an invitation you received at a conference to submit a proposal has become one of the few ways to access the major companies if you do not have an agent.

If an editor at a conference sees your writing during an interview and suggests you submit it for consideration, follow through! Editors complain that only 50% of conference attendees make good on their promises (probably because we have trouble sorting

out our notes after we get home). Compiling opportunities in the "needs" section of your notebook will help eliminate that problem.

### **Speed**

At every conference, either from presenters or other attendees, there is a good chance you will pick up helpful hints that make either your marketing or writing more efficient.

In terms of organization, I learned to date and file guidelines alphabetically in a three ring binder, with sample copies available in the same order in my filing cabinet.

Another speaker gave each of us a brown bag as a tangible reminder of the importance of take-away value in any articles we write.

A third suggested a rotary index for keeping track of manuscript submissions. Should my computer crash, or not be booted up when an editor phones about reprints, for instance, I still have the needed information organized and readily accessible.

### **Feed**

Every conference has its inspirational or motivational speakers. I like to write down those quotes that will feed my soul or affirm my motives long after the conference has ended.

At one conference I was struggling with whether humour was too frivolous an undertaking for a Christian writer. Jim Watkins, one of the speakers, pointed out, "Humour is not the opposite of seriousness; it is the opposite of despair." That encouraged me.

As a beginner who found writing rather laborious at times, I was challenged in my endeavours by Peter Lord to keep writing until it became easier. "Go far enough for the fun!" he said, so I have.

Another year, a speaker challenged me with these words: "Good communication skills in writing either connect, confront, or comfort" the reader.

I hope this article has achieved at least one of those goals.

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