

How to Plan Great Book Signings

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/how-to-plan-great-book-signings/>

This entry is part 2 of 8 in the series [Book Promotion](#)

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Whether traditionally or indie published, organizing book signings is entirely up to you, the author. As with [every other aspect of writing](#), this sort of post-writing stuff involves a lot of planning.

To be sure your book signing is a great success, here is what you need to know:

1. It's about much more than signing books.

A book signing is rarely just a book signing. It usually (but not always) involves at least two or more of the following activities as well. In order, you can:

- **Step 1:** Read the entire story if it is a storybook. Read part of the story (such as a chapter, or part of a chapter) if it is a [chapter book](#) or anything longer than that.
- **Step 2:** Talk a bit about your [creative process](#), or what inspired you to write the story. People always want to know about this. Always.
- **Step 3:** Answer questions. This may only be a few minutes of time, especially if your audience is young. For a more mature crowd, allow for about 30 minutes. If they have more questions, they can always ask during the book signing, or even after that.
- **Step 4:** Lead a crafts session or simple how-to lesson. This is especially important if your book is a storybook for kids or perhaps a cookbook or coloring book. Making this a hands-on event will enable people to feel like they get to really have an experience with the author. For novels, this isn't so expected or that easy. But if you can come up with a clever and simple craft project that is

related to the story, I would do it.

- **Step 5:** The actual personalization of books: the book signing part of the event.

2. Pre-sign your books (with the store owner's permission).

The signing of books comes at the tail end of all these other activities. That doesn't mean you wait to the end of the event to start signing books. Make sure the books are all signed ahead of time.

- If you are bringing your own books to this event, you can just sign them in advance.
- If the bookshop owner has ordered the books in specifically for this event, ask the Shop Owner, Manager or the Event Planner if it's alright to sign all the books.

That way, should someone be unable to stay for the whole event (think of those who spontaneously discovered you and your book when they walked in the door), they can still purchase a signed copy before they leave the store.

CAUTION: Readers do like to see you actually sign their book for them. This is why you make your inscription something clever and fun. (See tips #6 & #7.)

3. Sign the Title Page.

Always sign on the Title Page of the book. If you're signing an anthology, sign on the first page of your story in that book.

4. Personalize!

For those who can stay and wait for your signed book, this is when you can personalize your inscription. Above your signature, write a little something just for that one person.

You might have a few stock-phrases in your mind before you do this, just to have something clever to draw from... because after all, you will get tired after a while and you might not be able to think of something nice or clever.

5. Ask for spelling.

When you do personalize a book, be sure to ask for the proper spelling. There are just too many ways to spell the most traditional names!

6. Use an author's signature that is different from your legal one.

You are signing copies of books and spreading them across the globe. This can be scanned and copied; it can be photographed and uploaded to E-bay for resale. You have no control over where your author's signature will end-up, so make sure your signature is not the one you put on contracts.

- If you are using a pseudonym, this really isn't a problem at all.
- If you aren't using a pseudonym, practice your author's signature.

7. Don't use black ink.

Use a permanent pen but do consider not using black. We typically use black ink whenever we want to be more serious or more official. The problem with doing this in a book signing is that it makes your signature more difficult to find. Make it stand out visually by using a different ink color.

If you can draw or doodle, do a bit of that as well. Disney illustrator [Ward Kimball](#) (the legend) once signed one of his books for me when I was a little girl. Here you can see the personal doodle that he uses to sign books (which he uses along with an inscription). Very cleverly, he uses his thumbprint.

Do this type of thing only when with the reader (*not* ahead of time). It's a special thing to do and something the reader will always remember. I remember watching Ward Kimball create this doodle for me as if it were yesterday.

Ward Kimball's thumbprint signature. A truly signature doodle!

8. Always date your signature.

ALWAYS. Try to sign your books within the first month of its release date (the publication date). This increases the value of your signed book and the demand for it by collectors.

9. Create bookmarks that promote your book or your book series.

Include these with every copy you sell at the book signing. Make sure your website is on there.

10. Also create bookmarks that announce your book signing.

Before the book signing, give the bookshop maybe 100-300 bookmarks (depending on the store) and ask them to simply include a bookmark with every single purchase. Note your website URL on there too.

11. Don't sit down.

If you sit behind a table, nearly no one will spontaneously walk up to you and ask to buy your book. This is your chance to stand up, walk around, and talk to people. (You've got to sit while writing. This is your chance to *not* sit!)

Have signed copies of your book stacked up on the table next to you, and when people walk in, hand them a copy. Tell them they can read it, walk around with it, and return it on their way out. *Invite them to do this.* Let them know it is OK to not purchase.

Chances are they will buy it. Let people know they won't lose face and you won't grind your teeth if

they don't purchase your book.

If the shop is packed with a long line of avid readers waiting to speak with you, that's a whole different story! That's when you get to sit down (if you really need to) and chat with your fans. But that's something you have to work your way toward.

12. Don't wait for people to take.

Give your book to people. Pick it up and put it in their hands. (See tip #11.)

13. Don't just stack books.

Make sure your books are presented in a visually interesting way. There should absolutely be stacks, but there should also be face-out standing books that can be seen from every direction where people might stand.

14. Engage people.

Even if they don't stay for the whole event, and even if they don't purchase your book, give them one of your bookmarks (not the one that announces the event, but the one that promotes your book or book series - See tip #9). If you have the few seconds of time to do it, sign the bookmark for them.

It's a simple act of good will that will engage not just that person, but everyone around them as well. It signals to everyone that you are approachable and that it's OK for them to get involved with what you're doing too. Some people are just shy and aren't sure if they should even get in line to get a signed copy of your book.

So it's down to you: your attitude, your smile, you making sure you make everyone feel welcome to approach you. Even if they don't or cannot buy your book. Everyone counts.

15. Don't wait to contact bookshop owners.

Start making plans for being in their shop as early as possible. You should estimate and target a two-month heads-up to shops if you want to be in their bookshop fliers, wall announcements and website newsletters.

This means you should start contacting bookstores about book signing events before your book is published.

16. Make laminated posters.

Put these by the table where you're at, hang them all over the store shop, and put them by the bookshop café. Make sure your event has signage that leads people to where you are! Even at the table, have a poster that explains who you are and what your book is about because otherwise they won't be sure.

Don't plan on being clear, plan on being obvious. People may come in from the heat, or a cold rainy day, or maybe they just had a fight with the boss. You don't know where their head is. Make clear and obvious signs that get their attention on you.

17. Write a press release for every single book event that you do.

The bookshops usually do this as well, but there's no such thing as too much press coverage. Write it up and spread it around. Contact the local papers. Contact everyone.

18. Get pictures taken.

Have someone – anyone and everyone – take photos of the happening. Pose with the store manager and everyone else working there that day. Make them feel they are all a part of the event too, because they are.

Don't be shy about letting readers take pictures of you too. If you can **get a [Polaroid camera](#)**, bring that with you. You can take snapshots of yourself with people and even sign it for them afterward.

19. Bring treats.

At your table, have a big bowl filled with individually wrapped treats. Try your best to make it something related to your story in some way. It brings people to your table and becomes an easy opening for conversation.

“Have some candy.” And as they start to enjoy the treat and glance at your book, ask, “Can I take your wrapper?” They hand it to you and will almost always ask you a question. Probably something like, “Are you the writer?”

20. Promote your next local event.

If you are presenting somewhere else in town, have fliers for that event stacked around the bookshop, including your table. It's a nice and professional thing to do and shows that you are really serious about what you're doing. You're all in.

When people know this, they will want to become part of that excitement and creativity. They might not come to your next event, but you will become more present in their minds.

21. Come early and leave late.

Come 30 minutes early (or more, depending on what you need to set-up) and stay for up to an hour longer. Schedule this into your personal plan. People will love you for staying longer than promised, and you will sell more books.

22. Plan for a brief meeting.

Be sure to ask the Event Planner (sometimes called Community Relations) about talking with the shop staff about your book and what it's about. Even if they haven't read your book, it's important that they be able to answer customer questions about your book.

23. Be gracious.

Bring flowers or fresh tea - something - to give the Event Planner upon your arrival (find out what they like). After the event, always send a Thank You letter to that person.

They didn't need to provide you with a venue at all, and planning for that takes time and energy. Don't forget to thank those who helped you, even if sales weren't what you had hoped.

24. Call ahead.

If you're coming from out of town, call your contact at the shop to let them know you have arrived.

25. Bring more visuals.

If you can bring a laptop or an iPad (with WLAN or a [SIM Card](#)), invite people to cruise your website as they wait in line for you to sign their book. If you have a book trailer on your website, terrific.

When discussing your needs for the event, mention this to the planner. You might need an extension cord if you want to bring a laptop or television screen. If they don't have one, bring one with you.

26. Just relax.

This is a lot to plan around and for, but if you enjoy yourself and engage people, you'll have a great time. Don't let sales be your focus. Remember that this is about making people aware of you and your book.

Enhance *their* day. That's actually what you're there for and [why you write stories](#) in the first place - to enhance peoples' lives. Don't forget that along the marketing path. It will not help your sales if you do.

Keep creating, no matter what.

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