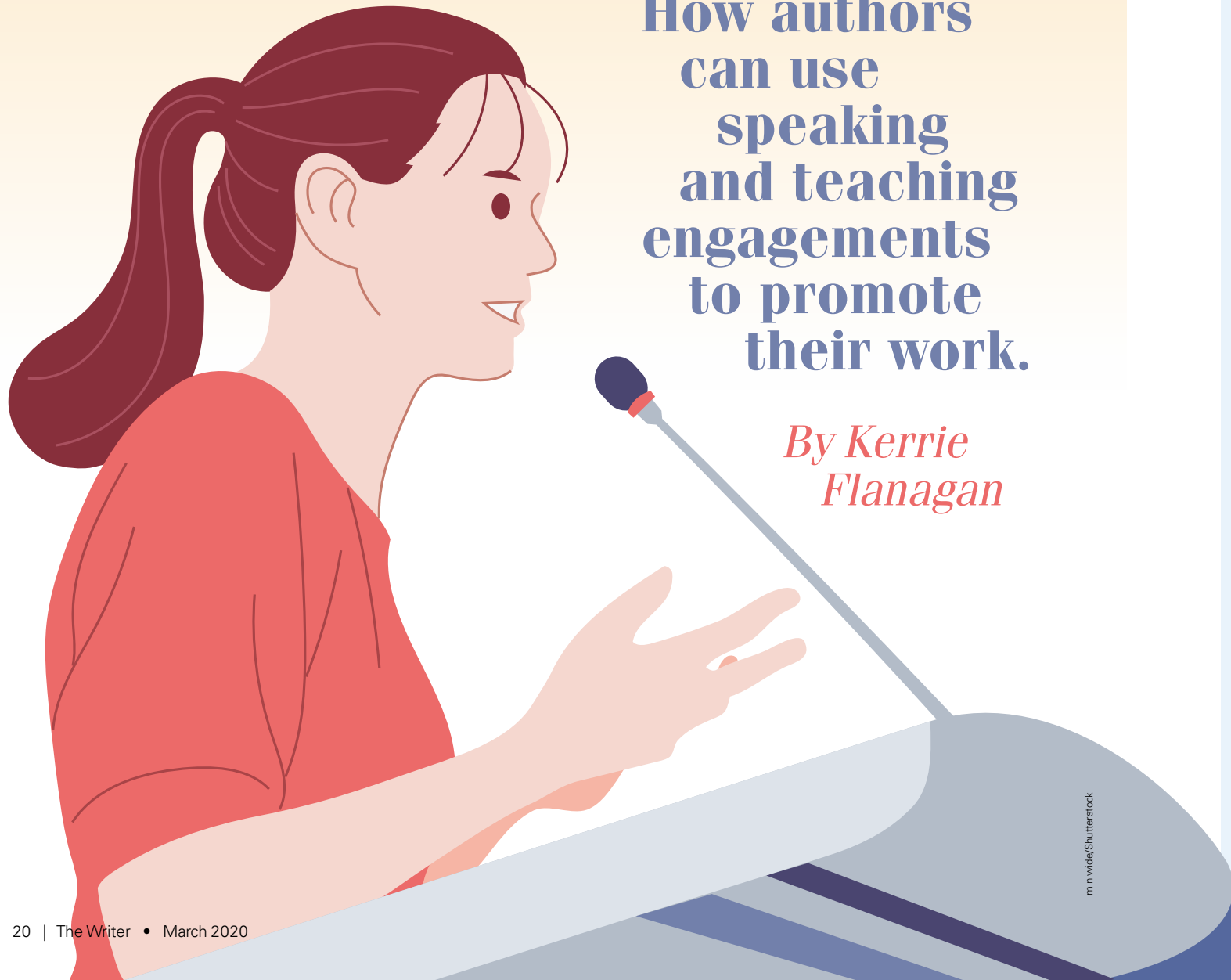


Get your **BOOK** in front of a **CROWD**

How authors
can use
speaking
and teaching
engagements
to promote
their work.

*By Kerrie
Flanagan*



You've just published a book. Congratulations! Now, it's time to get it into the hands of readers. This stage in the process can feel overwhelming since it's unfamiliar territory: We're writers, not publicists. And it doesn't matter if you found an agent and went the traditional route or decided to pursue indie publishing, because letting people know about you and your book is still largely your responsibility. There are many well-known options for marketing your book as an author, including social media, blogs, newsletters, book events, podcasts...and the list goes on.

But one possibility you perhaps haven't thought about is using teaching and/or speaking to promote your book. Before you break out into a cold sweat at the thought of addressing a large crowd, let me explain. Speaking and teaching don't always have to be to a large lecture hall packed with people. There are smaller groups that may not feel as intimidating to a newbie public speaker, including service groups, online classes, and book clubs. Whether the group is large or small, you can seek out the opportunities that fit you best.

When you write, you want the content to resonate with your readers; you want to connect with them. Selling books is no different. When you reach people on a more personal level, they are more apt to buy your work. Speaking and teaching gets you in front of people and allows you to make those important connections, gaining that reader's trust.

LeAnn Thieman, author, professional speaker, and member of the National Speakers Association's Speaker Hall of Fame, agrees that such engagements help authors market their work. "Whether my books are traditionally published or self-published, sales increase massively because I speak [at events]. I sell and sign lots of books in the back of the room, and the publicity around the event increases sales in bookstores and online," she says.

By using these strategies and tips, you'll soon feel ready to step out from behind your computer and in front of a book-buying audience.

TEACHING

Before becoming a writer, I was an elementary school teacher for 10 years. I eventually resigned to be more available to my family and build on my burgeoning career writing for magazines in my spare time. I took skills learned during my teaching career and began offering 12-week adult writing classes through a local continuing education organization. At that time, I didn't have a book to sell, but I loved teaching, and I wanted to share my knowledge of magazine writing with other writers. It provided me a strong foundation for the direction of my writing career, and I continue to be in contact with a few of the writers from my original classes 20 years ago.

Now, I've penned more than a dozen books, including one on how to write for magazines, and I have expanded my teaching commitments. Every opportunity allows me to both share my expertise and connect with potential book buyers.

With the right knowledge and preparation, teaching is a great option for authors who wish to expand their readership and share their knowledge with others. You can find opportunities at conferences, local community colleges, online, local libraries, business workshops, or community events. You can agree to lead short one-hour presentations for a large group, 12-week classes for a smaller one, and everything in between. Obviously, it can be difficult to land large-scale or paid teaching opportunities without any prior experience under your belt. In that case, you may want

to start small, such as by offering a free one-time class for a local organization, in order to build your teaching career from the ground up. And while initially it may be necessary to do these for free, as your experience grows, you can transition to only accepting paid opportunities to share your expertise.

What subjects can I teach?

I write and publish nonfiction books and articles related to writing, along with genre fiction. So when I teach, I choose topics on the craft and business of writing because I consider those to be my primary areas of expertise. I teach on magazine writing, self-publishing, writing for children, and other similar topics.

When deciding on the subjects you would like to teach, consider the content in your books. Nonfiction is admittedly easier because your book is already centered around a certain topic, but that doesn't mean fiction writers can't benefit from teaching as well. For example, think about all the research you did for your novel or topics you were already an expert on that feature heavily in your work.

Regardless of what genre you write in, create an exhaustive list of all the potential topics from your books. Then, look at your list and narrow it down to three that get you most excited. Once you have your topics, it's time to find a venue, a time frame, and a class size that works best with these topics.

The importance of lesson plans

In college, I learned how to write an effective lesson plan – and then put that skill to use for 10 years while teaching elementary school. When I branched out to teaching writing classes, this skill was incredibly helpful because it gave me the framework necessary to teach an effective lesson. Whether they go to a one-hour presentation at a conference or a 10-week class at a community college, all

attendees appreciate an organized and well-prepared instructor.

Here's how to get started:

Step one: Find your objective

Once you have settled on a topic, you need to formulate the objective(s) for your class. If you are teaching a multi-week class, you'll do this for each class session. The objective(s) are what you'd like students to learn from your instruction. Be clear on what you want the students to understand, and create your presentation with that in mind. Here are some examples for classes I've taught:

Objective A: Participants will understand the basic process of writing for magazines and how to increase their chances of getting published.

Objective B: Participants will understand the components of an effective personal essay and how and where to submit them for publication.

Step two: Create an outline

Once you are clear about your objectives, it's time to create your outline. This becomes the essential road map that guides you through your presentation and keeps you on track. I have been teaching writing classes for 20 years, and I still always create an outline for each class. Never assume you know your topic well enough to go without.

Think back to your school days when you had to create outlines for a five-paragraph essay. This same process works for your lesson plan. What are the main points you need to cover? These become your main headings. Under these primary headings, create at least two subheadings; then, if you find you have more details you want to include about this subject, add at least two subheadings under those.

To the right (under "Sample outline"), you'll find an example from my personal essay one-hour workshop, which is divided into two parts. As you can see, simple is better here: I don't waste time or space writing full sentences or a ton of detail about these

Sample outline

Components of a good essay

1. Writing in first person
 - a. Honesty
 - b. Willingness to revisit emotional moments and go deep when necessary
2. Story
 - a. Beginning, middle, and end (of one incident or theme)
 - i. Pay attention to where you start
 - b. Dialogue
 - i. Helps create the scene
 - ii. Builds more complex "characters"
3. Revelation/transformation
 - a. Regardless of length of the essay, there must be a lesson learned, a revelation
4. Universal theme
 - a. Must be relevant to readers
 - b. Must move from story about self to story others can relate to

Submitting your essays

1. What to submit
 - a. Cover letter
 - b. Essay
2. Where to submit
 - a. Literary journals
 - i. *The Sun*
 - ii. *Ruminant*
 - b. Magazines/newspapers
 - i. *New York Times*' "Modern Love"
 - c. Anthologies
3. How to submit
 - a. Submittable.com
 - b. Email
 - c. Follow guidelines

topics. You may write a few more details about certain topics, but *don't* write out everything you want to say because you will spend too much time reading your notes. Plus, you run the risk of missing something if you have to sort through too much content. Trust your knowledge of the subject material, and keep your outlines direct and straightforward.

After you compile the key points you need to cover in the outline, go back and add an introductory section at the beginning as well as one at the end for the conclusion. For the introduction, make notes about what you'd like to share about yourself. Next, give students a brief overview of what you plan to cover during the presentation. This lets them know what to expect from your lesson.

For the conclusion, wrap up by reiterating the key points you covered, and then tell students that you're ready to take their questions.

Bonus tip: As part of your presentation, try to read a section from your book to highlight one of your points. When I do this, I find I sell more books.

Mastering the timing

Calculating your timing is an essential part of a good lesson plan. This does take practice, but once you do it a few times, it becomes easier. For each main section of your outline, write an estimate on how long you think that section will take. If this is brand new to you, run through your presentation and time each section so you have a more solid idea. Write the time next to the section heading to remind yourself how much you have allotted for that segment. Add up the minutes: Does your presentation leave room for five to 10 minutes of questions? Are you running too close to your allotted time limit?

Remember, there are elements out of your control that could impact the timing: the session starts late, students have questions, the PowerPoint gives you problems...By knowing the time you allotted for each section, you can make adjustments along the way so

you stay on track and aren't rushing through at the end to cram in the remaining content.

Linda Osmundson, award-winning children's author of *How the West Was Drawn* and *Papa's Changes*, finds teaching extremely rewarding. She has taught at conferences, art museums, and college continuing education programs. She organizes notecards with her information highlights in addition to each section's designated times. "I make sure I'm well-prepared and rehearsed. This ensures a successful workshop," she says.

Create a great handout

An effective handout provides your audience a wealth of important information. At the top, include your email, phone number, website, services you offer, and social media platforms. For the content below, pull critical pieces of information from your outline and then leave some blanks for them to fill. This has two benefits: It keeps participants engaged in your lesson and encourages them to keep the handout for later reference, as people are less likely to throw away something with handwritten notes. For example, for the essay class handout, you could include the four components of a good essay (written in first person, story, revelation/transformation, universal theme) along with plenty of room under each section for participant notes.

If there are any helpful resources you mention in your presentation, such as websites, tools, or recommended books, include those so attendees can easily find them later. At the end, put a bonus resource they can receive if they sign up for your mailing list in an effort to keep in contact and build your newsletter list. (For the essay class, it could be: "BONUS: Sign up for my mailing list for a list of publications that accept personal essays.")

If you are using a PowerPoint, resist the temptation to include a handout that only shows your slides (See "PowerPoint tips" for more information.) Keep your handout to 1-4 pages.

PowerPoint tips

A PowerPoint provides a helpful visual for your audience. But there is a difference between an effective presentation and one that puts people to sleep. Your slides are meant to enhance your talk and help your audience follow along, not provide a typed-out version of everything you want to say. Remember, *you* are the focus, not the PowerPoint. Here are some tips to get you started:

- Use photos, graphics, charts, and illustrations to enrich your presentation, but don't go overboard.
- Keep text to a minimum. Your audience doesn't want to see a slide filled with text that is then read back to them. Short keywords and phrases are ideal.
- Keep it simple. Avoid using flashy transitions.
- Use dark text on a light background for easy readability.
- Make the type size big enough to be read even from the back of the room.
- Pick a classic font that's easy to read.
- Be consistent. Use the same fonts, sizes, and colors throughout the presentation.

SPEAKING

While many of the guidelines and tips for teaching are also relevant for speaking, these engagements are more along the lines of presenting a keynote speech at a conference or giving a talk to a local service organization rather than teaching a formal class. You are there to provide inspiration to attendees along with a message or takeaway. It's a one-time event and can be an amazing way to connect with readers: After a great speech, the audience is emotionally engaged and wants that moment to last, which often leads to book sales as a way to retain the message and stay connected to the speaker and the experience.

Debbie Dadey, award-winning author of over 160 children's books, including co-authoring "The Adventures of the Bailey School Kids" series, finds that school visits are a great way to touch base with her readership. "I love hearing the laughter of students and [seeing] their faces when they are really into the story. Schools often provide books for students to purchase. I try to make this as painless [for schools] as possible by providing order form letters and step-by-step guides for author visits on my scheduling page."

Choosing your topic

Thieman suggests authors should choose a niche to focus on. "Even though your message may be for the whole world, you can't market to the whole world," she says. "Consider your past experiences and areas of expertise."

Make a list of all your potential topics, and then narrow those down until you have one or two you can explore in more depth for a speech. Reflect on what you want the takeaway to be, and build your talk around that idea.

"Audience members can remember three points," says Thieman, "so your messages must be concise and about/for them, not you. Start with a hook, just like when writing an intriguing story or article, then end by tying back to your opening."

Authors can also watch and study TED Talks to become more familiar with how effective speakers get their messages across.

Bonus tip: As part of your speech, read a short section from your book to highlight one of your points. Hold the book up as you read so the audience can see the cover.

When you feel ready to put yourself out there as a speaker, have your website set up before approaching conferences or organizations. Thieman suggests one that defines who you are, explains what makes you the right per-

"Even though your message may be for the whole world, you can't market to the whole world."

son to share this expertise, and includes a description of your presentation(s), a professional photo, and your contact information. It must also include the intended "benefits" of your keynote: What will people think or do differently after hearing you? And, naturally, this website will include your books and a link to purchase them.

Like any other skill, speaking takes knowledge of craft and practice. If you are interested in using speaking to enhance your book promotion efforts, consider joining Toastmasters International. This nonprofit teaches public speaking and leadership skills. It is a great way to learn effective speaking

techniques, get feedback from peers, and build your confidence.

How to find opportunities

Whether you hope to teach or speak, the procedure is the same. Brainstorm a list of the places you want to contact. Internet searches for organizations and associations in your niche will give you great ideas of the best ones to contact. The process is actually quite similar to querying agents and editors. When you have your list, study the different groups or organizations so you understand their missions. Find the name and contact information of the relevant person who books speaking or teaching engagements. Next, create a professional letter that explains who you are and why you are interested in appearing at their organization. Share information about your planned presentation or talk and close with your qualifications and experience. Be sure to include your contact information and link to your website. For some conferences and teaching opportunities, the group may have specific guidelines on how to submit a proposal. If so, always follow those guidelines exactly. Again, expect to speak for free until you gain more experience and get written testimonials, at which point you can charge a fee for your services.

Whether it is a for a group of 10 people at a book club or 200 people at a conference, both teaching and speaking opportunities can have an incredibly positive impact on your writing career and your book sales. Isn't it time you stepped outside your comfort zone to give it a try? 📌

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