

Use a One-Sheet to Make a Great First Impression

By Tracy Ruckman

Writer's conferences are great outlets for writers. Pitch your project, network with editors and agents, and take workshops to learn your craft.

One item you'll want to prepare before the conference is a document commonly referred to as a "one-sheet." This single piece of paper condenses your book down to one sheet so the editor or agent can tell at a glance whether they might be interested.

The one-sheet is appropriate for fiction or non-fiction books, but it can also be used to pitch a series of magazine articles or a service you may provide to writers.

Plan for this one-sheet to be the most professional-looking document you can produce, clean from any typos, and with just enough information provided about your project, without overloading it.

Your one-sheet should include:

- **Contact information.** Be sure to include your name, address, phone number, email address and website. If you have a blog that features your own writing, you'll want to include it too, so the editors and agents can see samples of your writing. If you already have an agent, put your agent's contact information instead of your own, but still include your Web site.
- **Brief synopses of your project.** Include two versions: a 25-word pitch, and a longer version of approximately 500-600 words. Write the synopsis in present tense, third-person, even though your project may be first-person. Make sure you include all important plot points or topics of your book; you don't want to keep the editor guessing.
- **Manuscript Status.** List the genre and category of your book; state whether your manuscript is complete or give an estimated completion date, and specify your target market.
- **Photo.** Professionals have differing opinions on whether to include a picture of yourself, but if you have a professional portrait that looks like you, include it. It will help the editor or agent remember you after the conference ends.

Layout of your one-sheet

Use professional software, such as Microsoft Publisher, to create your one-sheet. Use the template for a flyer, or from the first page of a newsletter, to get the look you want.

Color attracts attention, so use white paper, black font for the main text, and a minimal amount of graphic design to add a touch of color.

The use of colored paper can strike an editor as the mark of an amateur, so it's best to avoid and use colored ink for design instead. Just don't use it for the main text - that's another amateur flag.

Use a standard font like Times New Roman, size 12, for your one-sheet, but enlarge and bold the title of your project.

At the conference, when you speak with an editor or agent, casually hand them your one-sheet as you make your pitch. The one-sheet is a great ice-breaker, but don't read directly from it. Use it as a tool, to get your project noticed.