

Preparing For RWA National Conference

By Sophie Littlefield

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The Romance Writers of America National Conference is still nearly four months away, but it's not too soon to start preparing.

What do you want to get out of the conference this year? Take a few minutes to jot down some ideas. Don't worry, I'll wait.

(humming along with daughter's latest Taylor Swift downloads...)

Back already? Great. My guess is that if you're a PRO like me, actively pursuing the goal of publication, "networking" and "learning" are high on your list. Here are a few tips for squeezing lots of both out of your conference experience.

1. Focus on goals you can only achieve at conference

Attend special interest group get-togethers and meet like-minded writers, or put a face to those you've "met" online (see sidebar: RWA Special Interest Groups).

Attend workshops by speakers who you haven't already seen. Sure, it's always fun to see our favorite authors' chats, but is there another workshop offered at the same time which might provide information you need to advance your career?

Consider attending the AGM. There, I've said it – I think every member of RWA should attend the Annual General Meeting at least once, to understand how decisions are made and how the board operates – and to show your appreciation to the hardworking board members.

2. Read the RITA nominees

Not only does it make the awards more fun, but there's no better way to understand what's captured the hearts of readers and industry professionals – critical information for writers hoping to sell. Nominees are announced in early April.

3. Sign up for editor/agent appointments *for the experience*

Meeting with your dream date should not be your primary goal. Quoting from the RWA website: "Your odds of meeting with your first choice of either are not high. If your primary reason for attending the national conference is to meet with an editor or agent, your chances are much better at a smaller, local conference."

However, pitching is a skill all of us need to develop, and there's no better training ground than an appointment at National. Start working on your pitch now so you'll have time to run it by your critique partners and practice, practice, practice until you have four sparkling minutes of oratory. Research the agent or editor as though she is your top choice – that's an excellent skill to develop as well.

Appointment signup for PRO members begins on May 12. The complete signup schedule is available at http://www.rwanationalconference.org/Schedule/Schedule_EditorAgent_Reg.htm

4. Plan ahead

One of my favorite critique group meetings of the year is when we all sit with our schedules, pen in hand, and figure out which workshops we want to attend. There is a “pajama party” feel as we compare notes on speakers and programs and figure out how we can cover the most ground as a group.

The conference schedule will be listed in the May issue of the RWR.

5. Volunteer

First of all, giving back is the right thing to do. And second, how many times have you heard a fellow writer talk about the industry movers and shakers she met while moderating a panel or helping at a signing?

The volunteer link should be on the RWA website soon. If you’re interested in helping sell our chapter book [put link here to [Writing Romance: The Ultimate Guide](#)] at Midnight Madness, please drop me an email.

6. Push yourself

What is the one thing you know you should do but are too uncomfortable? Honey, that’s exactly what you need to do this year to honor your commitment to your career. Whether it’s taking a one-on-one appointment, introducing yourself to strangers at a luncheon table, mingling at the chocolate party, or asking a question in a packed workshop, this is your year to be brave and make it happen.

SIDEBAR: Special Interest Groups

Futuristic, Fantasy, & Paranormal RWA

<http://www.romance-ffp.com/>

Elements of RWA (Romance with Unexpected Elements)

<http://www.elementsofrwa.com/>

The Beau Monde (Regency)

<http://www.thebeaumonde.com/>

Faith, Hope & Love (Inspirational)

<http://www.faithhopelove-rwa.org/>

Passionate Ink (Erotic)

<http://www.passionateink.org/>

Heart Beat (Medical)

<http://www.heartbeatrwa.com/>

From the Heart (online chapter)

<http://fthrw.com/index.php>

Hearts Through History (historical)

<http://www.heartsthroughhistory.com/>

Kiss of Death (Mystery and Suspense)

<http://www.rwamysterysuspense.org/>

ChickLit Writers

<http://chicklitwriters.com/>

Celtic Hearts

<http://www.celtichearts.org/>

ScriptScene (Script writing)

<http://www.scriptscene.org/>