

Book signings—Finding one that fits

We've all daydreamed about it—your fans fill your favorite bookstore to overflowing, hang on your every word as you read from your latest bestseller, then eagerly stand in a line that reaches out the door, waiting for you to sign their books, and then, giddy with excitement, to have their pictures taken with you.

Well . . . unless your last name is Rowling, it's highly unlikely that your hand's going to cramp from signing a towering stack of your latest, or that you'll be seeing double from all the camera flashes going off in your face. The reality is that sometimes no one shows up. It's nothing personal against you or your writing; it's just a fact of author life.

Yep, it's happened to me (the no-one-shows-up part, not the giddy horde of camera-clicking fans). Though I did have that happen once . . . uh, that is, if two people qualify as a horde.

The book signings I've been a part of have had from 20 to 50 people in the audience, but these were at signings/panel discussions with multiple authors, not just yours truly. Though my fragile author ego would like to think I could take at least *some* of the credit.

I've never done a “solo signing,” but I'm shy, so I have no doubt that it'd be me sitting at a table with a stack of my books listening to myself breathe, and the only question I'd be answering would be, “Where are the restrooms?” It takes a special kind of author courage to go solo, and quite frankly, I'm not that special—or that outgoing.

But once you find a format that matches your personality, book signings are a blast. Sure, the goal of a book signing is to sell books, but there's nothing like getting to meet and talk to your fans.

If you're newly published and want to dip your toes in the book signing pool, my advice is to ask your local bookstore events coordinator to fix you up with at least one other author in your area who writes in the same genre. That's what I did. You get the fun of meeting other area authors, and it takes some of the pressure off to fill all those seats. Plus, you get what I like to call “fan cross-pollination”—once they meet you, the fans of your book signing co-stars might just become *your* fans, too.

As to getting people to come to your signing, the bookstore will promote the event, but you need to do your share. Post it on your website, talk it up in your blog, announce it to any writers clubs or professional organizations you belong to. Put that cyber network you've worked so hard to build to work for you. And don't forget good old word-of-mouth. Tell family, friends, co-workers, your favorite barista—anyone you know is fair game.

Bottom line, your last name doesn't have to be Rowling to have a fun—and successful—book signing.