



## HOW TO MAXIMIZE THE VALUE OF AN ONLINE WRITING CONFERENCE

By Emma Walton Hamilton

Hello, fellow picture book writers! Attending a writing conference can be a transformational experience, filled with opportunities to hone your craft, connect with your peers, and move closer to your publishing dreams. Online writing conferences offer unique opportunities compared to their in-person counterparts. In addition to saving money on travel and accommodations, you can maximize your learning by engaging from the safety, comfort, and familiarity of home. Whether you're attending your first conference or your fiftieth, here are some tailored tips on how to get the most out of an online writing conference...

### 1. Set Clear Goals

Before the conference begins, clearly define what you hope to achieve. Are you attending to improve your craft, network with other writers and professionals, or perhaps pitch your project to agents and publishers? Identifying your goals early will help you navigate the conference more effectively and prioritize the sessions that align with your ambitions.

### 2. Familiarize Yourself with the Platform

Each online conference uses different platforms, such as Zoom, WebEx, or Google Meet. Prior to the event, take some time to familiarize yourself with the technology of the specific conference you will be attending. At Picture Book Summit, we use Zoom and provide attendees with a fun online pajama party that doubles as a tech check prior to the big event. The key is to clearly understand the technical requirements and make sure your internet connection, audio, and video streaming are up to par to minimize any technical difficulties during the event. Tech happens—but you can take steps to best manage it.

### 3. Plan to Pace Yourself

Study the conference schedule ahead of time so you know when to log in, when it ends, and how to plan your breaks throughout the day. Unlike in-person conferences, online conferences generally offer recordings of sessions for later viewing. Decide which sessions you absolutely want to attend live—perhaps those that feature speakers you are especially keen to hear from, topics specific to your own works in progress, or sessions that offer interactive Q&As—and make note of which ones you can watch after the conference ends.



#### **4. Create a Distraction-Free, Self-Supporting Environment**

At home, distractions can abound. Try to create an environment that mimics a conference setting—quiet, organized, and conducive to focus. Inform others in your household of your plans to minimize interruptions and set your phone and other devices to do-not-disturb mode during sessions. Make sure you have everything you need to support your success on hand—your glasses, a notepad and pen, a lumbar pillow, water, and good lighting. And do everything you can to get a good night’s sleep the night before the conference, so you are at your cognitive best on the day!

#### **5. Prepare Snacks, Meals, and Hydration in Advance**

The conference day usually flies by, and your brain will be buzzing with information and ideas... so make it easy on yourself when it comes to taking care of your basic needs. Keep a large, full water bottle on hand throughout the day. Prepare grab-and-go meals the day before or assemble the ingredients to pull together a quick meal. Stock some healthy snacks. Make choices that will keep you alert and focused – this is not the day you want to have a sugar slump!

#### **6. Engage Actively — and Kindly**

Participate fully by engaging in session chats, asking questions, and taking notes. Active participation not only enhances your learning but also increases your visibility among attendees and speakers. It's a great way to mimic the hallway conversations and serendipitous meetings of in-person events. That said, be genuine —and kind. Read and abide by the conference’s harassment policy. Focus on building meaningful relationships rather than airing your opinions or increasing your contact list.

#### **7. Take Breaks to Move Around**

Online conferences can be hard on the body, given that everyone is sitting in front of a computer all day. At Picture Book Summit we have regular dance break intervals where we play lively music and encourage attendees to dance at their desks. But it’s important to stretch your legs from time to time, do some deep breathing, and keep your circulation moving. Your focus and memory will thank you for it!

#### **8. Take Notes**

Keep a notepad nearby—not just so you can jot down any important things you learn, but also in case a workshop includes an exercise or inspiration strikes.



## 9. Follow Up

Just as with in-person events, follow-up is key. Review and organize your notes to concretize them and include any other important details you want to remember. If there are submission opportunities, be sure you have all the relevant details and instructions, and make a note in your calendar of any deadlines. Above all, be prepared for the “trickle-down” effect... meaning you will continue to gain insights and new ideas long after the conference has ended.

Online writing conferences can be remarkably rewarding. By preparing adequately, engaging fully, and following up diligently, you can maximize the benefits of attending from anywhere in the world. Happy conferencing, and here's to your success!

*[Emma Walton Hamilton](#) is one of the Founders of [Picture Book Summit](#) as well as a best-selling author, award-winning editor, stage and television producer, and writing coach. With her mother, actress/author Julie Andrews, Emma has co-authored over thirty children's books, nine of which have been on the NY Times Bestseller list, including *The Very Fairy Princess* series. She teaches Children's Literature for Stony Brook University's Creative Writing MFA and is the co-host of the *Julie's Library Podcast*. Emma's first poetry collection, *Door to Door*, was published in fall 2022. Her latest picture books co-authored with her mother, *The First Notes: The Story of Do Re Mi* and *The Enchanted Symphony* are inspired by their love of the arts. Their newest collaboration, *Waiting in the Wings*, inspired by true story, is on bookshelves now.*