



## The San Francisco Writers Conference

Perfect your pitches, network and get published.



**WHEN:** Feb. 13–15, 2009

**WHERE:** The InterContinental Mark Hopkins Hotel, 1 Nob Hill, San Francisco

**HOW MUCH:** From \$595 to \$695, depending on when you sign up (\$695 at the door)

**FOR MORE INFO:** [sfwriters.org](http://sfwriters.org)

At the San Francisco Writers Conference, big-name agents, authors and editors help writers learn about the industry, polish their work and get published. Consider Clare Langley-Hawthorne, author of the historical mystery *Consequences of Sin*, who met an agent at the event and subsequently landed a two-book deal with Viking. What writer doesn't dream of a conference coup like that?

The gathering is aimed at authors of fiction, nonfiction, children's books and poetry, and there are events for writers at every level of their careers. Keynote speakers and presenters include Richard North Patterson, author of *Conviction* and 12 other novels, publishing consultant Lisa Rector-Maass, Walker Books Publisher George Gibson, and Regina Brooks of the Serendipity Literary Agency.

This year, for the first time, the conference is offering tracks in poetry and children's writing. "Presenters in the children's track will talk about writing books, getting them published and promoting them," says conference co-founder Elizabeth Pomada of the Larsen-Pomada Literary Agency. "They'll talk about picture books, middle-grade fiction, young-adult books and the new trend in young-adult books, which is paranormals." The poetry track is slated to include information on publishing, submitting to magazines, entering contests and more.

When you think of writing, you may not conjure up images of murder weapons and causes of death, but these are important issues for mystery and thriller writers, among other genre authors. That's why D.P. Lyle, author of *Forensics for Dummies*, teaches the popular session "Plotting the Perfect Murder: An Interactive Workshop."

Another well-attended event is "Speed Dating for Agents," where, for \$50, writers can meet, interview and network with New York and California literary agents. After the agents introduce themselves, writers get three minutes to pitch their ideas to each

one. Attendees can meet with as many agents as possible in their allotted hour-long time slot.

Fear your pitch isn't polished enough? Not to worry—Katharine Sands, author of *Making the Perfect Pitch: How to Catch a Literary Agent's Eye*, gives a presentation on that topic in the days before the "Speed Dating" event. In addition, conference co-founder Michael Larsen of the Larsen-Pomada agency hosts a contest where he critiques pitches as they're read aloud.

Want to work on your pitch before the conference? "I always tell writers to imagine that their book is going to be on television as a movie, and ask them what two sentences *TV Guide* would use to talk about the movie," Pomada says. "That, to me, is the ideal pitch." Larsen notes that you can also describe your idea as a combination of two successful, easily recognizable books, e.g., "*Harry Potter* meets *Jurassic Park*."

"The Editors Roundtable" is like "Speed Dating for Agents," except writers meet editors instead of agents. Every editor introduces himself, then sits at a table with nine attendees, who each have one to two minutes to ask a

## FIFTH HOUSE LODGE PERSONALIZED WRITING RETREATS

At this retreat in Maine's lake and mountain region, you'll honor your creative process through interactive work with coach Joan Lee Hunter, and on your own. Hunter has been working with writers for 17 years, and she's a certified teacher of the Metcalf-Simon Practice of Proprioceptive Writing, a meditative writing method that helps you deepen your attention and write with clarity. She works intuitively to help authors with writer's block and other issues. "I've had many people come and discover that they've been writing the wrong story," she says. "What has been hanging them up is that another—always better—story has been wanting to get out and they've ignored it because they've been too wedded to their original agenda."

The lodge, a blend of modern and rustic styles, has a cozy feel, even though it's large enough to accommodate up to 10 people. Students typically stay three to four days.

**When:** Year-round

**Where:** 535 S. Bridgton Road, Bridgton, Maine

**How much:** Hunter's coaching fee is \$75 per hour or \$60 per hour for guests who don't stay overnight. Lodging is \$80 per night.

**For more info:** [fifthhouselodge.com](http://fifthhouselodge.com); to make a reservation, call (207)647-3506 or e-mail [joan@fifthhouselodge.net](mailto:joan@fifthhouselodge.net)

question. The attendees then move on to another table. Participating editors include Jo Ann Deck of Ten Speed Press, Jennifer Enderlin of St. Martin's Press, Christine Pride of Broadway/Random House and Alan Rinzler of Jossey-Bass/John Wiley.

To get the most out of the conference, brush up on your conversation skills. Larsen stresses the importance of networking—and remembering to get in touch with the editors and agents you meet when you have questions or ideas, even if it's well after the conference ends. "It's possible that the most lasting value of the conference might be the people the writers meet," Larsen says. "If a writer makes a contact with an agent or editor, they can feel free to make use of that contact as far into the future as they need."

To make lasting contacts, be sure to research the agents and

editors you're interested in meeting. Many agents have websites you can check out, and you can also read the sites of the publishing companies the editors work for. Be familiar with what the agents and editors are interested in representing or publishing, and formulate questions you'd like to ask. Having a good question in mind is a great way to head off uncomfortable silences.

Finally, be ready to have fun. "People come to the conference expecting to have a good time, and they do," Larsen says. "That's because it's a very special place, with all these people from different places who want to learn as much as possible—and enjoy it as much as possible." [WD]

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