



SWG Author Readings Program

Guidelines for Hosting a Successful Virtual Author Visit

We encourage you to do additional research to provide the best reading experience for your audience and for the authors reading. Ask us, watch online events, talk to your peers, and practice, practice, practice. Online tools and best practices are frequently changing, as is the technology surrounding these events. There are a wide variety of online events and platforms to host them, and not all tips will apply in all situations. Remember to check the frequently asked questions and troubleshooting sections of your platform of choice for further advice.

For Saskatchewan Writers Guild (SWG) purposes, one reading or presentation is defined as a period of 45 to 60 minutes. During that time, the author will read from a published book or a work in progress, and may also do any of the following: discuss where ideas come from, talk about their career, respond to specific queries about books with which the audience is familiar, discuss the work of other writers or the writing and publishing process or other relevant information.

Thanks to the The Writers' Union of Canada and Sylvia McNicoll for many of these tips. (With permission.)

Research hosting online events. Technology and online tools are frequently changing. To provide the best experience for you, your audience and for the author, research and practice are important. Watch other online events, talk to your peers, contact the SWG and check the FAQs and troubleshooting sections of your preferred platform for further advice. Then rehearse, practice and test before your event.

Set a date. When choosing your date, check for competing events.

Consider time zones. When choosing the time of your virtual event, consider if attendees will be watching from different time zones. Make sure to mention the time zone along with the time in your promotional materials.

Consider the platform. There are many different platforms you can use. Consider which features and tools will work best for your event. Are you already familiar with the platform? Is there a time limit on the free version? Is there a way to track registration? Is there a good interface for questions?

Your event may be a combination of in-person and online. It's possible to virtually bring in an author to your in-person classroom(s) – consider setting up a projector and speakers and encourage other classrooms to join the call. Make sure you dedicate one person as the event host who will introduce the event on-screen, and, if you plan on including a question and answer period in your event, encourage teachers to submit student questions into the chat box for the event host to ask the author live.

Promote your event. Be sure to regularly promote your event beforehand to ensure maximum attendance. Contact your email list, set up a Facebook event, mention it on Twitter, list it in the events section of your local arts newspaper. Use multiple platforms and send reminders.

Request RSVPs. Request a response for attendance with your invitations (email reply, Eventbrite or Zoom registration, Facebook event, etc.) to help you track potential attendance. Keep in mind that positive responses to an online invitation do not necessarily translate to attendance numbers at the event. Send a reminder one day and one hour before your event; some platforms will do this automatically.

Track attendance. Be sure you know how to track the virtual attendance at your event. You will need attendance numbers for your Host Report.

Prepare for technical troubles. Test your internet connection, sound, and video. Prepare back-ups if you have audio-visuals or other files for your presentation. Have a dress rehearsal: Invite a few friends to test the event with you, and ask for their feedback. Whatever platform you are using will likely have its own list of frequently asked questions and troubleshooting responses. Consult these in advance and prepare a cheat sheet for yourself. You may even want to share some simple tips with attendees in advance to familiarize them with log-in procedures.

Mitigate timewasters and trolls. A robust Q&A can add a lot of value to an online presentation, but it is easy to lose control of your schedule if you just hand over the microphone. There may also be some people you don't want to connect with. Check your platform to make sure there are ways to control your audience interface. For example, questions submitted through a chat box or built-in Q&A tool will let you curate questions better than giving everyone access to a microphone. We encourage you to review questions before reading them aloud, and prioritize questions that are related to your subject matter. A chance to look at questions in advance from your audience or your host can also help avoid the "this is a comment, not a question" blues. Market your event to people who are interested in engaging with you, rather than disrupting you. To keep the trolls away, don't post the log-in details of your event publicly. Send the link directly to your registrants. You may even want to set up a password for access.

Learn from others. Attend a few online events yourself. Note what other speakers are doing that works and doesn't work. Use what worked from the audience point of view to engage your own audience.

Consider Accessibility. Are there special access needs for this event? (e.g., ASL, closed captions, large print materials)?

Have a dedicated event host for your event: Prepare speaking notes that include an audience welcome, housekeeping items, tips for the platform, where people can submit questions (if you will have a question period), information about the author and their work, including a bio or publications, and include sponsor acknowledgements and any other details that are important to your event.

Consider a Q&A section for your event. Invite viewers to submit questions in advance of the event and/or ensure you have a process to receive questions during the event and have a dedicated event host who can verbalize them, rather than asking the author to read the questions and provide answers themselves.

Event Recordings. Please do not record virtual readings, unless you have the permission of the author. All recordings will be the intellectual rights and property of the author. To record the reading (without permission) with the intention to share the recording with other groups is an infringement on the author's rights. We encourage groups to book author's for multiple readings to ensure they are paid fairly for their work.

Privacy. Keep privacy considerations in mind. No recording or screenshots of students are allowed.

Sell your book. Just because you aren't face-to-face doesn't mean you can't help the author sell their work to your audience. Provide your audience with a link for online sales or pre-orders. You can send it with the registration information, post it during your event, follow up after, or all three.

Acknowledge sponsorship. Please acknowledge the sponsorship of the SWG and our supporters, SaskCulture and Saskatchewan Lotteries, during the introduction of your writer. A sign or logos may also be displayed at some point during the reading. A template for this can be found on the Author Readings Program page on the SWG website.

Event reporting. Both host and writer should send in their report forms to the SWG as soon as possible after the reading.

Pay your invoice promptly. Hosts should make their payment for their portion of fees promptly. Payments can be made online, by e-transfer, or by cheque. Your invoice will be sent around your reading date.

Tips to look and sound your best:

Audio and video quality. Depending on your set-up, consider investing in a dedicated webcam and/or external mic to improve the quality of your online events. To help ensure a stable internet connection, ask family members or housemates to stay offline during your presentation. If you have access to a direct ethernet-cable connection (as opposed to WiFi), that can also help ensure a more reliable connection.

Lighting. The simplest lighting should be an even, steady lighting directly on your face without side lighting or back lighting that will create distracting shadows or silhouettes. Play with your options in advance to find your most flattering light and be sure to do it at the same time of day as your planned event to account for any natural light.

Consider your video background. Keep it simple and be aware of what the camera is picking up – you may be sharing objects or mementos in your environment you'd rather keep private. Some platforms have the option of a virtual background. If you choose to use one, be sure to test it in advance as the placement of images combined with your movement can sometimes create unwanted, distracting

effects. Be sure to let anyone in your space know that you'll be broadcasting live so they can stay out of your live feed.

Camera placement. Camera views that are even with or slightly above your face work best – a pile of books can help to raise your computer or device to a flattering level. Avoid a low angle looking up at your chin and nose.

Sound connection. The use of headphones or earbuds may give you a better sound connection with your platform and eliminate noise from the room.

Consider your audio background. Be sure to eliminate as much as possible any competing sounds around you. This is a good time to make sure your pet is in another room, household equipment like dishwashers and TVs are not on, and notification sounds on your computer or phone are turned off. Some platforms have a mute microphone function which you can use to eliminate ambient noise when you aren't speaking (just remember to turn the mic back on again when you speak). For a conversation or Q&A format, this can help to quiet competing noises you can't control.

Clothing. When dressing to look your best consider plain solid colours or simple patterns. Patterns that are too busy can distract, plain white or black can be too stark, and green can turn you into a meme.