

SCHEDULE OF PROGRAMMING

- Most book festivals start programming six months to a year in advance. For example, the Mountains to Sea dlr Book Festival takes place in March and programming closes towards the end of the previous year (mid December). Key names are in place 8–10 months in advance for the festival programme. If you are thinking about approaching a festival, make sure you don't leave it too late. Any approach should be made **at least** 4–5 months in advance.

HOW TO APPLY TO A BOOK FESTIVAL

- It's best to apply through your publisher. Tell your publisher which festival you are interested in, and ask for their advice. If your publisher thinks it is a good idea, they may approach the festival programmers on your behalf. However, this may depend on your level of experience at similar events. They may suggest that you try to gain as much experience as you can before applying the following year.
- It is vital to have a professional photo to send festivals for inclusion in their brochure. It must be high resolution and should show something of your personality. It might also be useful to include a photograph of you presenting an event – again, this image should be of professional quality. If you have a publisher, you should have professional photographs available.
- The blurb for your event and your biog should be short, well written and relevant.
- Try to think of an unusual and clever title for the event you are proposing.
- If the programmer decides not to include you in the festival, do not pursue them; it will not make them change their mind. It may simply be a case of not having a suitable slot for you that year, but you can try again the following year.

GAINING EXPERIENCE IN PRESENTING EVENTS

- It's important to attend and support festivals if you'd like to appear at them. You can learn a lot by watching and listening to other artists doing events. It might also be worthwhile to volunteer at a festival to get an idea of how it is run and what they expect from writers.
- If you have no experience, it's important to gain some before applying for festival events. To prepare for children's events, ask if you can present your event in local crèches, schools and/or libraries. Be sure to ask for open and honest feedback from teachers, students, librarians and audience members.
- You could consider making a short video of yourself presenting your workshop or event. This can be a useful way of assessing your own performance, and may help you to make any necessary improvements. Once you've polished your piece, you could also use the short video as part of your application.

APPROACHING FESTIVAL PROGRAMMERS

- Although the best advice is to apply to festivals through your publisher, some festival programmers are open to a direct approach by an author. You will need to prepare a well-written proposal, detailing your event idea and including any experience you have in similar events. It is also important to state whether or not you are happy to be included on a panel.
- The majority of festival events are commissioned or come from publishers. However, approximately one-fifth of the events are generated by direct pitches.
- The average fee for a writer appearing at an Irish book/arts festival is from €150 to €300, depending on the venue.

CAN A SELF-PUBLISHED WRITER APPLY TO APPEAR AT A FESTIVAL?

- The most well-known festivals are curated, which means the programmers select the artists. If an author feels they have something original and unique to offer, they are free to apply directly, but it should be noted that very few artists are selected in this way. The majority of authors are invited by the programmers. This goes for all writers, not just self-published writers.

WHAT A FESTIVAL PROGRAMMER WANTS

- International names who will attract a large audience and fill a theatre (300+ seats).
- Strong, award-winning names for individual events and panels (anything from 120 seats to 300+ seats).
- For a children's festival, writers also need to be excellent performers for school audiences, and have a strong body of work behind them. Experience is essential for school events.
- First-rate storytellers and spoken-word poets.
- Innovative workshops: put time and passion into developing your idea and try to make it original.
- Outstanding workshop leaders who can engage the participants and bring something unique to their workshops.
- Emerging voices: noteworthy new/relatively new writers; young, up-and-coming debuts.
- For a children's festival, exceptional picturebook makers to give talks/workshops to children and offer master-classes to adults.
- Unusual and original book-related events, particularly for non-fiction events such as history, natural history, science and maths.

- Artists who are willing to work hard and go the extra mile. Artists who are adaptable, professional and who can engage an audience.
- Strong local talent, e.g. writers, poets, storytellers, illustrators and picturebook makers.
- Events for children with special needs.
- Experienced and debut writers alike.
- Innovative pairings: dancers, musicians, artists, puppeteers, other writers. Is there an artist you think you could collaborate with to create something original and unusual?

TIPS FOR EVENTS

- Gaining experience in presenting events is essential. Be aware of any local groups – for instance libraries, historical societies, book clubs – that might be an appropriate audience for your event. In this way, you can also receive feedback and fine-tune your event.
- Ask an experienced writer if you can attend any events they are presenting and watch them in action. If they are happy for you to do so, take notes and ask for their advice.
- Prepare a script for your event and practise it until it's perfect. Most events are 60 minutes long. You should try to break this down roughly as follows: 20–30 minutes for your talk, one or two 5-minute readings from your work, and approximately 10–15 minutes at the end of your talk for audience questions.
- Remember that your priority is to inspire and entertain the audience rather than generating sales for your book.

Children's/Family Events

- Think about using props, music, dance, theatre, images.
- It is important to appeal to children in a visual way also, perhaps using costumes.

GROWTH AREAS

EVENTS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILY

- Events for the under 7s.
- Family events that the parents will enjoy as much as the children; innovative storytelling, book-related puppet shows.
- Events for children on the autistic spectrum.
- Drama workshops for children; screen-writing workshops for children; animation workshops for children – also the same for teens.

NOTES FROM PROGRAMMERS OF IRISH FESTIVALS

Writers' Week, Listowel

We would love any writers to contact us either through their publisher or directly themselves, but we would like a brief bio about themselves and their writing included.

The events that we are looking for are fun, interactive events, along with creative writing workshops.

Sinead Connolly, International Literature Festival Dublin

Sinead welcomes approaches from authors, but says it can be easier to talk via a publisher initially to sort out the practicalities.

She is looking for:

1. One–two person events with key authors.
2. Panels of authors and others on a particular theme.
3. Outdoor events that engage families.
4. Newly commissioned work that can imaginatively engage with a wider public conceptually.
5. Sectorial events aimed at programmers, education, library, publishing, etc.

According to Sinead, 'Festivals, I feel, are not a vehicle to sell books (though of course that will be and should be facilitated), but rather are an opportunity to engage with an audience/potential or existing readership in a very immediate way.'

She notes that strong author photographs are very important for the festival website and brochure

Vanessa O'Loughlin, Waterford Writers' Weekend

I prefer the direct approach (less links in the chain, less likely to go wrong). I'm always looking for original, innovative events that are more about entertainment than just about books. With childrens' events I like to get an element of the educational in there, so it's a learning experience as well, however subliminal.

Eimear O'Herlihy, West Cork Literary Festival

I am very happy to hear directly from authors or from their publishers. An initial pitch by email is best and this can be sent to the West Cork Literary Festival office.

Bert Wright, Primary Curator, Mountains to Sea dlr Book Festival

There are so many Irish literary festivals now that I always feel the need to develop and distinct identity for Mountains to Sea. In the past we've been fiction-dominant, but non-fiction draws in more general readers, so we're planning more biography, memoir, politics and history events where possible.

It's good to generate your own event ideas and then source relevant authors to the theme. We like to add a theatrical or musical dimension to the programme also, and these have proved popular. It's all about good ideas, well executed. We get loads of proposals for events and are always willing to entertain suggestions, but you're looking for things you think will work, things that will appeal to your core audience.

Thanks to Sarah Webb for the assistance in preparing this document. Sarah is an award winning writer for both children and adults and is also the Children's Curator of the Mountains to Sea Book Festival.
www.sarahwebb.info **Updated February 2016.**