

National Poetry Day
Promoters' Toolkit



Welcome

If you're thinking of planning a poetry event for National Poetry Day, then this fantastic resource will help you – the National Poetry Day Promoters' Toolkit. The Toolkit takes you through every step of promoting and programming a live literature event, from marketing to evaluating, from lighting to contracts. It has been designed to help you plan for and deliver your National Poetry Day event, and enable you, your visiting poets and audience to get the most out of National Poetry Day. It is not time specific, so you can use this for any National Poetry Day. However, you will find it useful to check out this year's theme for the day with the Poetry Society, before you start planning your event.

The Toolkit was compiled by literature consultant Sue Stewart, Write2B Ltd, as part of a broader National Poetry Day Research and Development Report commissioned in 2002 by Arts Council England's New Audiences Programme. For more information on Write2B, a website is planned for later this year on www.write2b.co.uk, or contact info@write2b.co.uk.

Enjoy National Poetry Day, and good luck with your event!

National Poetry Day Promoters Toolkit - includes extracts from Live Literature by Tamara Smith (Arts Council England, 1998), updated and amended for National Poetry Day, and this publication is gratefully acknowledged. The Toolkit also includes information derived from promoter training programmes commissioned by the Live Literature Officer at Arts Council England and carried out by Book Communications. Highlighted quotes are taken from Words Out Loud - ten essays about poetry readings edited by Mark Robinson (Stride, 2002), to whom acknowledgements are also given.

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"Being able to give good readings is now an almost essential requirement for a poet."

Mark Robinson

"There was the poet who broke someone's nose in a fight before the reading (and who announced after the reading that he wanted a woman). There was the poet who was too drunk to begin the reading (and several who had drunk more than was good for them by the end). There were the poets who never turned up, the poet who forgot to get off the train, the poet who demanded a dressing room, and the poet who played his harmonica instead of reading any poems."

Andy Croft

Type of Event

- Spend some time thinking about what type of National Poetry Day event you want to arrange, your motivations, hopes and ambitions for the Day. Why are you doing it? Who is it for? What do you hope to achieve?
- If you are a professional promoter, employed by an arts venue, local authority or Literature Festival, what are your aims for the event - to try new approaches? Attract new audiences? Target specific audiences in specific areas? Introduce a broader range of poetry to existing audiences? Increase programming of culturally diverse poetry? Celebrate poetry and poets on a landmark day in the literary calendar?
- If you are arranging this event in your own time for your local readers' or writers' group, then you also need to think about what you hope to achieve on the Day. As a group, do you want to meet your favourite poets, promote their work and listen to them reading? Promote new or up-and-coming poets? Promote a range of different styles of poetry? Arrange poetry writing master classes for the group? Provide a forum for discussion, with readings or panels also open to the public?
- Also think about the kind of poet who would best meet your aims for the Day. Do you want a well-known and widely published poet that everyone will have heard of? Or a high-profile performance poet equally well-known for live events? A poet with a track record in both publication and performance? A poet good at creative writing workshops, or community projects? A poet who writes primarily for children, or teenagers, or adults? Does gender matter? Cultural background? Age? Do you want several different poets, and if so, do you want a contrast? Do you want a local poet, or a new poet?
- Give some thought to the National Poetry Day theme for the year. For 2003, the tenth anniversary of National Poetry Day, this will be something special – look out for postings on the Poetry Society site from June onwards this year, on www.poetrysociety.org.uk. You may choose to be quite specific in relating your events to the given theme, or you might like to approach it tangentially. The theme is only there as an aid, to help you focus the event and to create a consistent energy across the country.

- Once you have decided on the type and scale of event, and the type of poet you're looking for, find an appropriate venue. A high profile performance event by well-known poets, for instance, would be best placed in a popular and accessible arts venue with a large audience capacity, whereas an event featuring an up-and-coming local poet would be better in a small-scale setting such as a library. This is not to say that large events can't happen in libraries, or that a lone new poet on a vast stage can't make an impression – just that common sense should prevail.
- If you are a professional promoter, you should have had/be having training in the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and amendments due to take effect in 2004. If not, bring this up with your employer. If you are arranging a National Poetry Day event in your own time, check that your chosen venue has staff trained in all aspects of the DDA. Disability access can include physical, sensory, intellectual and attitudinal issues, and can range from – for instance – the need to provide a signer, ramp or induction loop, to the need to make sure disability organisations are informed of the event in the first place. For further details on this, contact your Arts Council England regional office - see www.artscouncil.org.uk.

“In order to promote poetry, you must have a definition of it, or be prepared to define it, and redefine it. Too few promoters give any thought to this, defining poetry by their acceptance of market forces, rather than consciously, by making choices and discriminations.”

Keith Jafrate

Booking Your Poets

Publishers

- Most poets are more than happy to give readings from their work, particularly on such a high profile day as National Poetry Day, as this forms one of their main sources of income. If they have a new (or first) collection out this year, they will be even more likely to want to be out and about on the reading circuit, so one of your first ports of calls should be the independent poetry presses or larger commercial publishers with poetry lists.
- Phone the presses for their catalogues of forthcoming publications (you'll find phone numbers in the *Writers' and Artists' Year Book*), choose your poet, and ask the publishers if they will forward your invitation letter to them. Be ready to talk to both about the nature of your event and how you'll get an audience. See it from their point of view: for the poet, a potential booking is more attractive if they feel confident of a welcome, a decent sized audience and a positive experience. From the publisher's point of view, they want to shift books and raise the poet's profile – so the bigger the audience, the better for them.
- Not all poets are natural performers. Some may relish the stage, the spotlight and the pub afterwards, whilst others struggle with it, perhaps training themselves out of a natural introversion in order to get on the reading circuit and earn a living. This does not make them lesser performers – they could simply be more suited to small-scale, intimate venues and occasions, and offer equally good value in a different way. In short, try to make sure you match your poet with your venue and target audience.

“Poetry can and should sing and shout, in the open air, in the theatre, in the concert hall. Poetry also whispers and murmurs, around the fire or in the ear of a single person.”

Andy Croft

- If the event can form part of the launch of a new or first poetry collection, then some of the larger publishers may be willing to cover travel and accommodation costs for their poet. Publishers will also often be prepared to let you have show cards and publicity materials as well as books on 'sale or return' at your event. They will take a cut on all book sales, usually 33%. Most poets will be more than happy to do book signings after a reading.
- Many poets buy their own copies of their poetry collections from their publishers at a discount, for them to sell on at events. This is more profitable for them than letting the publisher/venue sort it all out, as they make a bit of instant cash.
- The independent poetry presses are usually good at looking after their poets and only too happy to help them get readings, and so are many of the larger publishers. However, if you do hit a brick wall with the publicity departments of larger publishers, be prepared to be persistent and don't be afraid to call back a number of times. They are busy people, but if you can offer one of their poets an audience and a pleasant experience, they should be happy to work with you.
- The National Association for Literature Development is undertaking an advocacy campaign targeted at improving relationships between NALD members and commercial and independent presses ... one more reason to belong to this important agency (see www.literaturedevelopment.com).
- Don't forget to involve your local bookshop and library, and make sure they have books by the visiting poet in stock. You could also invite your local bookshop to manage a bookstall at the event, rather than arranging sale or return with the publisher direct. You could even get a set fee for the bookstall or commission on sales – Ottakars offer a 10% commission to promoters as part of their other National Poetry Day activity.

“The book signing afterwards takes on an aspect of secular blessing for many people. (This is perhaps too grand – there is also a collecting activity going on.)”

Mark Robinson

Other ways to find poets

- Not all poets write for the page, and performance poetry is as much “big business” as publication. Established performance poets will usually have agents – many high profile poets can be found on www.uktouring.org.uk or www.applesandsnakes.org.uk. Both organisations represent published poets as well as performance poets, with Apples and Snakes leaning more to the performance end of the market.
- NAWE www.nawe.co.uk holds a database of writers and poets suitable for schools workshops and readings. Many of these poets are also available for touring.
- The British Council and Booktrust hold a database of contemporary writers complete with biographies, publisher and prize details: see www.contemporarywriters.com.
- Look on the Arts Council of England’s Live Literature Network Website www.liveliterature.net – this is an exchange forum that holds information on writers available for tour and links users to other relevant sites.

‘Sharing’ Poets

- Most poets work as freelancers today, and time is money. So to spend an entire day travelling for one gig does not make economic sense, for the poet or the region. National Poetry Day could be considered an exception to the rule, because of the high profile and status value to the poet, but even here, if you can combine an evening reading with an afternoon workshop in a school, arts centre or community centre, it will be more worthwhile for all concerned.
- If you arrange a short residency – for instance, in the week leading up to National Poetry Day, with a high profile reading on the day itself – make sure you programme in enough events to keep the poet busy and happy. Poets can feel underused or unappreciated if sitting around a hotel room for whole days between events. At the other extreme, chopping and changing between venues and audiences can be very difficult. It’s about striking a sensible balance between adequate rest and total neglect.

- An increased amount of communication between writers, venues, promoters, publishers, schools, libraries and administrators is supported through websites such as www.liveliterature.net or www.poetrykit.org, so that bookers can inform one another well in advance, before publicity production, when a poet is visiting their region.
- Contact the Literature Officer for your Arts Council England regional office (see www.artscouncil.org.uk) to see if you can tap into the regional networks of literature development workers or literature venues in your region.
- Check out the touring situation in your region, again through Arts Council England regional offices. You could 'piggy-back' on an existing National Poetry Day tour if you get in at the planning stage, and offer attractive added value to the tour. This, of course, is an issue for longer term planning for next year.

“Personality has become central to the spread of the poetry reading, and is often the thing which promoters sell. The popularity of the Liverpool poets, for instance, is based largely on the attractiveness of their reading persona, and the personality this reflects.”

Mark Robinson

New Technology

- The present nature of live literature's relationship with new technologies is mainly one of distribution and access, but projects are also being developed that attempt to redefine the art form, or explore the boundaries of literature or writing in relation to new technology. At the forefront of this movement is www.trAce.ntu.ac.uk.
- Literature promoters are also beginning to explore innovative approaches to live literature events, including original and creative use of digital media. Broadcasting and the convergence of digital media are creating new means, not only of distribution, but also of actual creation.
- You might like to consider the experimental and creative use of new technology in your National Poetry Day event. Even small interventions using the web, such as online poetry discussion groups or workshops, could make a big difference to your event, whilst major interventions, such as the use of online group conferencing facilities to present international poetry readings, could define the nature of the event itself.
- Arts Council England has previously offered training for literature promoters in the use of new media and other art forms in live literature events, which might prove a useful model for your own training needs. Email info@bookcommunications.co.uk for further details. You could consider forming a consortium of promoters and applying for training funds from your Arts Council England regional office, or applying for Arts Lottery funds that incorporate a training element.

"We have never seen the single voice as the sole carrier of poetry, and have placed poets beside and among music, theatre, dance, the visual arts, even mime, as well as beside other forms of text."

Keith Jafrate

Contracts

- Written and signed contracts are essential. They safeguard against confusions and misunderstandings that could escalate into the souring of working relationships, or put the performance quality or the event itself in jeopardy. The process of offer and acceptance, in English law, where an offer of terms has been set out in writing and signed by a venue and promoter, and has been accepted, signed and returned by the poet or representative, is a legally binding contract and will stand up on any point in a court of law as written proof.
- Ask the poet if they have any specific requirements for their event, so you can write this into the contract. Most poets expect a microphone these days (and ideally you should be providing this anyway), but some may request specific lighting, or bottled water, or a lectern, etc. Talking this through on the phone at the booking stage is also a useful ice-breaker, and helps you establish rapport quickly when you meet.
- Counter offers may be made by the poet to initial contractual offers, and these are not legally binding until accepted and signed by both parties.
- If your venue does not have insurance cover for visiting artists, it will be useful for the poet to know about a new personal liability insurance policy for creative writers, designed by Arts Council England and Blake Insurance Services. For details, they can contact Arts Council England Literature Department on tel. No.020 7333 0100 ext. 6258.
- A sample Live Literature Contract is given at the end of this Toolkit, showing the key points that need to be made about the performance and support structures provided by the host organisation. Some elements of this contract may be more appropriate for a major international festival, but you should make sure that all the main areas are covered in yours, even if it is shorter and more straightforward.
- Individual details will vary and the sample Live Literature Contract should be seen not as prescriptive, but as a general template to adjust to specific events, needs and situations.
- A sample Writer in Residence contract is also given at the end of this Toolkit.
- Ensure that both parties have accepted and signed final agreements in good time so that the requirements referred to can be carried out properly.

Paying Your Poets

- In terms of fee level, there is no fixed fee as it always depends on the publishing and/or performance track record of the poet, the type of event it is, how many readings/workshops you expect them to do, whether they are reading alone or with other poets etc, but there is a commonly accepted range. As a guide, anything between £100-£300 for one performance and about the same for a morning or afternoon workshop is acceptable. Less experienced poets will expect less – more famous and experienced poets, often much more. Some enormously high profile poets and performance poets will do things for love sometimes, some won't get out of bed for less than £2,000 ... etc. Be honest with yourself and the poet and stick to your budget.
- The minimum fee within this range may be applicable if, for instance, you are inviting a number of poets to read (a 'shared reading') in a smaller venue. Do, however, bear in mind the time that they will spend travelling there and back, and stretch to £150 if you can afford it.
- Don't, however, drop your fee beyond the minimum rate of £100 for professional poets – those making their living primarily from poetry. Low rates of pay ultimately do nobody any favours. If you can get poets for practically nothing, it is very tempting to under-value them and put less effort into production, marketing and audience development.
- Unreasonably low fees also leave the field open for exploitation by inexperienced poets who want to raise their profile before they have any kind of publishing or performance track record. They can promote themselves in the guise of value for money, but you have no guarantee of a quality event in terms of either the poetry or the performance.
- The only (rare) exception to paying a fee at all is if a publisher courts you to run an event as part of a promotional book launch tour. This can sometimes be regarded as part of a poet's obligation to help promote their new publication. However, tread carefully – it is still better to pay poets 99% of the time.
- Some poets gain their experience through Poetry Slams or 'open readings' or 'open mike' sessions in pubs, clubs and city venues, and some of these are undoubtedly good, but others are not. Check your poets out carefully before booking them for a paid event. Don't go by their extensive curriculum vitae – go and hear them for yourself, or get scouts to do so. Peer recommendation and word of mouth are also valuable guides to quality.

- If you have a limited budget, then consider giving a platform to new, talented local poets. Sometimes new poets – those who are beginning to be published in reputable poetry magazines, but have not yet published a full-length collection, or those with little performance experience – may be prepared to read for a modest fee (£75-100, for instance), if it is a local event and offers them some valuable experience. (Established magazines are listed in the *Writers' and Artists' Year Book*, and Arts Council England can supply a list of funded magazines. Contact Arts Council England Literature Department, tel. No. 020 7333 0100 ext. 6258. The Poetry Library at the Royal Festival Hall has a longer list of both funded and non-funded, established and up-and-coming magazines. For a free copy, send a stamped, addressed A4 envelope to The Poetry Library, Royal Festival Hall, London SE1 8XX).
- Book your poet into a decent hotel or B&B if they need an overnight stop, and arrange expenses to be paid on the night for accommodation, subsistence and travel – in other words, make sure the event doesn't end up costing the poet money. This is particularly true if you're not able to pay them their usual fee. Equally, don't pay them their asking price and then expect them to spend it all on expenses.

Marketing

- Use your local literature development networks by contacting your local authority Literature Development Officer, if they have one, or Arts Officer. You can also find your regional support networks by contacting the Literature Officer for your Arts Council England regional office – see www.artscouncil.org.uk. Or look at the National Association for Literature Development website, which has an extensive list of promoters on its members directory on www.literaturedevelopment.com/development/default.asp.
- See information and advice on event management on www.liveliterature.net, as outlined above.
- Find detailed information and advice on marketing and audience development at Network at www.audiencedevelopment.org/index2.htm and from the Arts Marketing Association www.a-m-a.co.uk.
- Look at these Arts Council England publications, all downloadable from the website given above (go to News then Frequently Asked Questions about the Arts): Guidance notes on carrying out audience/visitor surveys; Marketing Planning; Sample audience survey questionnaire; Sample visitor survey questions. These are primarily theatre-based, and for large-scale events, but the key points will be useful to any promoter.
- Advertise your event online through websites such as www.poetrykit.org.

“Audiences have always been the weak link. No matter how good the poets and their performances or how welcoming and comfortable the venue, in so many cases the audiences simply cannot be relied upon ... Perhaps we should ask not what audiences can do for poetry readings but what poetry readings can do for audiences?”

Jonathan Davidson

- Send out press releases (no longer than two A4 sheets, excluding biographies) no sooner than two weeks before the event to local, regional and national press (including newspapers, radio, magazines, event listing publications and television). Include some quotes from the poets specifically about the event and/or National Poetry Day, and ideally some praise from relevant past productions – if not from the press, then from audience members. (See Sample Audience Questionnaire Feedback form at the end of this Toolkit).
- Remember to say in your press release (and in all promotional materials, leaflets, brochures etc) what will actually be happening at the reading: for instance, that the poet will read from their work, then take questions from the audience. Not everyone knows what happens at a poetry reading, and you need to structure your audience's expectations in some way.
- Include (black and white) photos of the poets with the press releases wherever possible - you can usually get these from the poets themselves or their agents.
- Enlist the support of your local authority press office. If you are a professional promoter, employed by a local authority arts department or library service, you will already be doing this, but independent promoters can benefit too. If the authority sees your event as a boost to the town's reputation, they may support you with press and media expertise, and their general contacts are usually extensive.
- Follow up the press release with a round robin cold calling session, reminding event/arts/diary editors about the time, place and nature of the event. If they commit to coming, keep complimentary tickets for them to pick up at the door/box office on the night. They are more likely to cover events with high profile poets or those providing local interest e.g. a local poet, or a creative writing workshop in a school.
- Make alliances with local journalists, radio and TV. Most local radio stations, for instance, are happy to interview visiting poets, particularly high profile poets, for a special event such as National Poetry Day. If the local arts correspondent from your local newspaper has a particular expertise, consider involving them in the event in some way e.g. chairing the event.
- If you have room on your publicity and promotional material, it's a nice idea to use short extracts from the poet's work. If you do this, get their permission first, and quote the publication it came from, as there are copyright issues involved.
- Door to door mailouts in specifically targeted catchment areas can help for local events. Arts Council England provides the Computed Figures for Arts Attendance that identifies postcode sectors with large numbers of potential attendees.

*“There is not an audience for live poetry.
Rather there are several different and discrete
audiences.”*

Andy Croft

- Direct mail advertising can be expensive and so should be carefully targeted. Venue and box office lists can be huge, and it is best to set up your own database of relevant contacts.
- Make contact with your local library and get lists of local readers' groups and writers' groups. Your poet may also be willing to meet your readers groups or run a workshop for them while they're in town. Expect to pay more for this, though you could involve the groups themselves in supporting it through fundraising or ticket sales.
- Use email listings to publicise your event – they travel far and wide. Make them informative, eye-catching and brief.
- Share mailings and email lists with other like-minded local events or promoters – your local arts centre or library may be willing to let you insert your flyers/publicity into regular mailings.
- Never rely solely on posters and flyers in your local area. Most people find out about most events by word of mouth, which means you need to identify and cultivate your audience over many months and through many events, so that they start to trust your judgement, and recommend your events to others.
- Use incentives – for instance, part or the entire ticket price redeemable against the price of a book; book signings by well known poets; a free drink. NB If you offer free alcohol, do also charge a nominal ticket price otherwise you might get a room full of people who are *'only here for the booze...'*
- Approach local or relevant companies for sponsorship, either for a small part of the production, such as publicity or catering, or a larger, non-specific contribution, depending on the size of the company. If sponsorship is secured, tap into the company's own press network and make use of their publicity methods.

- Ensure that any sponsors or funders are appropriately acknowledged in all publicity. Negotiation may be necessary to agree the prominence of logos.
- Target the market of your sponsor if you have one. If they sell a particular product, ask if you can attach or incorporate advertising to it.
- If your event or tour is national, consider including local poets to give the production diversity and to encourage local press attention.

“All those electric, life-changing moments can’t be sold, to ‘the audience’, to other promoters or to the art quangos. That is to say, a faith cannot be sold.”

Keith Jafrate

- Ask the bookshop supplying books for your event if they will agree to let you place leaflets in poetry books for one week leading up to the event.
- Publicity is expensive but worth the investment. A scruffily presented, black and white photocopy actually keeps people away from events.
- Venue displays are helpful, including an advance visit to the venue to assess display requirements.
- Inform all local bookshops of the event and place display advertising in them, if possible.
- Ensure that your event is detailed in every possible event listing publication imaginable, including ceefax, local papers, tourist information guides, local literature magazines, newsletters and mailouts, etc. Event listing is generally free so there is no excuse for not being included everywhere.
- Be honest with yourself about how many tickets you’ll sell. Base your figures on knowledge and other similar events, not on hopes and dreams.

Ticketing

- Wherever possible tickets should be charged for. It commits people to actually turning out on the night, and puts a value on the event.
- The box office staff members are often the first line of marketing. Make sure they, or whoever is answering your advertised phone line, are fully aware of the nature and details of your National Poetry Day event.
- Keep complimentary tickets on the door for press (see Marketing above). That way, if they don't turn up, you can still sell the tickets.
- Recruitment of members of the public to sell tickets in their local community will help to break down barriers of unfamiliarity to a particular venue or type of poetry event.
- Competitions in the local press or on local radio can help to set up product placement and encourage audience participation.
- Offer ticket discounts to specific and easily accessible target groups such as poetry writing groups, poetry clubs or a particular bookshop's customers.
- A proper, pre-paid ticket or box office facility encourages attendance significantly.
- Always provide a booking telephone number and encourage pre-paid ticketing.

Some Practical Tips for Successful Events

The Setting

- Think about how your event will be presented. Will you need a microphone? You almost always will, for even the smallest of rooms – and try to get quality sound reproduction rather than volume. It's more important that speech is clear and decipherable than loud.
- Always have a sound check well before the event, with the poet, if possible. It helps the poet familiarise themselves with the setting and gives you valuable time to sort out any problems.
- Sort out any special requirements that the poet has asked for at booking stage.
- If you have a single poet on their own, try a lectern or table, a vase of flowers, a jug of water and a glass, or some other prop – it's lonely by yourself on a stage and can appear awkward to those watching too.

“The performance of poetry is an artform uncluttered by props and scenery, unhindered by instruments or music stands, and refreshingly free of leaping around and perspiration.”

Jonathan Davidson

- If you have more than one poet, try seating them around a coffee table or at least providing a lectern for the performing poet and a seat and water for the poet waiting to speak.
- Try a simple cloth backdrop to make your performance area look distinctive and professional - even a simple black sheet or board would help. In simpler venues, try a raised area (a pallet, a box) with a black sheet over it to form a makeshift stage – anything that sets the performance space apart and makes it look like a professional event.

- If you can, use lights to light your performer and dim the audience area. If you can't do that, try not to have the whole space too starkly lit.
- Think about your surroundings.
 - What other sounds could interrupt your event – for instance, if you're in a pub or bar area, get them to turn the juke box off and give your audience a ten minute, charge your glasses, warning so the till isn't ringing throughout the reading. Check that the local church doesn't ring in the hours like Big Ben inside your venue, and that it's not Bell Ringing Night, and that your venue hasn't picked this one day of the year to test the fire alarm.
 - If your space seats 100 but only sell 50 tickets, adapt the audience space to accommodate the 50 – i.e. remove unwanted chairs, or ask if there's a way to reduce the size of a too large space.

"Many poetry venues exist in constant low level warfare with their surroundings, especially effective weapons being jukeboxes, glass collectors and noisy drunkards who decide to give contemporary literature a go."

Mark Robinson

"We have a 10-15 minute beer break in the middle; then there's always time for more drinking at the end. That time is important for discussion of the work, for networking and making contact with new writers ... Part of the function of these events is to meet friends, one has to acknowledge that, otherwise they talk over the poetry or they leave to the bar upstairs."

Ellen Phethean

Audience Interaction

- If you're planning to offer the audience a chance to ask questions at the end of the reading, then plant a few to kick things off. You can ask them yourself, or prime others to ask them. A reflective response from an audience is good, of course, but this is not the time for silent reflection.
- Likewise, be prepared to open up the discussion if one person is monopolising the questions.
- If the questions don't gently amble to a natural halt, be prepared to close the questioning ("We have time for just one more") if the poet needs to leave, or if it has reached the stage where the audience wants to know what the poet had for breakfast.
- If you're planning a book signing after the reading, be on hand to guide people and keep things running smoothly. Avoid allowing one person to monopolise the poet, particularly if they're talking about the book they never wrote ...

The Performers

- To make your event run smoothly, be considerate in your dealings with the poet, and spend some time thinking about the event from their point of view – their comfort, their ability to plan what they're going to read/say, the information they'll need about the type of audience and what it expects, etc.
- For instance, you may have an audience made up primarily of local writers' or readers' groups, who are used to asking informed questions. Or you may need to confess to the poet just how small the audience is, and reassure them that they are a small but enthusiastic group. The more information they have before they go on, the better prepared they are.

"I think there is some connection, at some deep and subconscious level, with the feelings of safety and pleasurable threat ('Boo!') the child has when being read to when very small."

Mark Robinson

- Maps, details of car parks and restaurants, train timetables and so on should be sent out in advance, regardless of whether the poet is being met on arrival or not. It is better to cover all eventualities than lose your poet to the M25.
- When a poet is travelling to a venue by public transport, you should meet them on arrival, unless specific and detailed instructions and directions have been provided and taxi fares reimbursed promptly.
- International gigs should allow adequate time for poets to recover from jet-lag. This obviously varies according to the time difference, and is much worse for poets visiting the UK from the West, for example from the US, than from the East, because of 'catching up' as opposed to being ahead of time. Talk to your poet in good time to ensure that they are happy with the travel arrangements and schedule.
- Long internal travelling distances within the UK also require additional recovery time, and poets cannot be expected to launch straight into a successful performance after a day's driving, especially if the gig is part of a long tour.

"Many cultures have recognised that poetry is for the tongue, the ear and the eye. But the oral tradition is older than the written, and each reading, given or attended, serves as a reminder of the primacy of the oral heritage."

Debjani Chatterjee

- Find out at the planning stage whether the poet would like to eat before or after the event, with the host or alone.
- If you can, provide the poet with a quiet place to wait and to prepare themselves before they go on.
- Offer the poet a drink! - tea, coffee, wine, water - make sure it's all on hand.
- If you have booked a relatively inexperienced performer, and they seem nervous, do not ask them about it. It will make them worse. Simply put them at their ease as much as possible, give them a drink, and leave them in peace and quiet to prepare themselves.

- Make sure you have read their work! You don't have to have read their entire oeuvre, but you should be familiar with at least one of their publications, preferably their latest, especially if you are introducing them to the audience.
- Be very clear about what you want them to do. Most poets are more comfortable knowing the type of audience and their expectations, how long to read for, and whether there will be questions from the floor.
- Let the poets know at the planning stage if any other poets will be reading with them, and who they are. The poetry circuit is a small world, and most poets know one another. You may as well put poets together who like each other and who respect each other's work.

“Contemporary poetry is as atomised and as individuated as its audiences. Sean O’Brien’s image of poets fighting like ferrets in a septic tank at least implies the continued existence of the tank.”

Andy Croft

- Introduce the poet generously at the start of the event. It whets the audience's appetite and makes the poet feel appreciated, and perform well. Make sure you bring in some references to their work, and include a personal reference if possible (“I first came across X’s poetry when I ... etc) to personalise the event and draw the audience in. Do mention how many publications they have, and any special awards or poetry competitions they have won (use www.contemporarywriters.com). Do also keep it short and sweet – no-one wants the promoter hogging the limelight, but a warm, sincere introduction gets the event off to a good start. Say a little about what the event involves – how long the poet or poets will read for, whether there will be a break (for filling up glasses), whether there will be time for a question and answer session.

- Be ready to thank the poet at the end - remarking on any particularly enjoyable poem for yourself or the audience - give news on book sales/book signings, and thank the audience for coming.
- Since, as a programmer, you'll not necessarily be a natural performer yourself, don't worry if you feel unable to introduce and close the event. Ask someone with a particular interest in the poet, or someone who has at the very least read their work (e.g. a graduate student from the local university) if they would like to do it for you. This will make the event more enjoyable for them, the poet and the audience.
- If you are arranging an event that involves a panel or interview situation – for instance, poets talking about the National Poetry Day theme for the year – and don't feel comfortable chairing it yourself, consider bringing in local writers, poets, academics or journalists to do so.

“The only real reason for going to a poetry reading – as audience or poet – is because you care about the sound poems make out loud ... I want to realise that work in performance, just as I prefer to hear music rather than read it, and like my food out of the packet, rather than left in it.”

Richard Caddel

Monitoring and Evaluation

- If your event is part of an ongoing programme of events, or you work for a library, arts centre, festival or other organisation/agency, you will want to monitor and evaluate your event. This will help you to plan for the future, by finding out what works, what doesn't, and how to build an audience and attract future partners. The best guide for evaluating arts education projects is *Partnerships for Learning* by Felicity Woolf (ISBN 0728707918), and copies of these are available free from Marston Book Services on 01235 465 500.
- An indispensable tool in gathering audience reaction is the self-completion questionnaire. These can be left on chairs for people to pick up and fill in, with a box provided for them to pop them into at the exit. Mention could be made of them in your closing remarks, to encourage people to fill them in.
- A Sample Audience Questionnaire is attached at the end of this Toolkit. You will need to fill in details of the venue. Do adapt this questionnaire as suits your purpose.

“There are readings in pubs in industrial towns, readings in abandoned spaces, readings in town halls, libraries, community centre, clubs, prisons, supermarkets and on boats, trains and anywhere else you can imagine. Not all of these are appropriate, and some of the more gimmicky ones – often linked to National Poetry Day – give off the sad air of the ignored roadside preaching tambourine-basher.”

Mark Robinson

The End

- Pay the poet their fee on the night if you can, on completion of the event. This is the ideal professional practice, and can be written into your Live Literature Contract. Sometimes this is just not possible, for instance in some local authorities, but if you can avoid poets having to wait while their reading fees meander through an organisation's (often monthly) cheque run, do.
- Give the poet a travel expenses claim form to fill in, together with any travel receipts (or ask them for an invoice), and pay them from petty cash on the night. (A provisional figure for travel should have been previously agreed with the poet and written into the Live Literature Contract).
- Drive or accompany the poet to the station (or, if they are staying overnight, the hotel or B&B), or arrange for someone else to do so.
- Well done! Now you can go home and put your feet up.

“The totemic, bardic quality that certain poets generate around their readings suggest that charisma, a striking voice (one used as an instrument) and a substantial body of work can add up to an intense experience for an audience.”

Mark Robinson

Appendix I

Sample Live Literature Contract

Letterhead

Retain/return this copy

This document constitutes an Agreement between *(the Promoting Organisation)* and *(poet; poet's address and telephone number)* to prepare and present *(event/performance requirements)*.

Promoting Organisation:
(address, email, telephone, fax)

Attendance dates of reading/visit/tour/workshop:

The performance:

Venue/s and address/es
Capacity
Event title
Schedule/s and format/s

Technical check time/s:
House technician/s:
Latest arrival time/s to actual venue/s:

Support details:

The Promoting Organisation agrees to provide and pay for:

- PA system for use by *(the poet)*
- One vocal mike adequate to demands of space and capacity
- Adequate professional lighting
- Seating onstage if required
- A private preparation space at venue including chair, table, mirror and toilet facilities
- A bookstall stocking *(the poet's)* current titles
- Bookstall provider
- Marketing including advance mailings *(list relevant target publicity groups here)*
- Draft copy of press release
- Draft copy of programme text
- Insurance cover (if appropriate – see under “Contracts above).

Advance warning of one week is required from *(the poet)* for any technical requirements additional to those listed above.

The Poet agrees to provide:

- Black and white press photo
- Relevant past press reviews
- Advance details of published works. Please specify those in print.
- (Add here specific and detailed requirements for the performance of the event itself, including rehearsal and sound check requirements etc.)
- (Specify appropriate dates for receipt of the above material.)
- Personal insurance cover, if desired (and if not provided by venue. Refer the poet to the Arts Council's personal liability insurance policy for creative writers as mentioned under "Contracts" above.)

Travel arrangements

The Promoting Organisation agrees to reimburse all travel expenses to (poet), as listed below. The promoter or promoter's representative agrees to collect (poet) from the nearest station/airport or otherwise bear the cost of taxis. If taxis are not pre-paid, (the Promoting Organisation) will inform (the poet) in advance.

The poet should retain all travel ticket receipts to present to (the Promoting Organisation) for reimbursement.

Nearest rail departure and arrival stations:

Flight, airport and ticketing details:

Arrival times:

Departure times:

Please find enclosed a map showing route by car to venue/accommodation/Promoting Organisation.

If travelling by car, (the poet) will be reimbursed for fuel costs.

Standard car mileage rates for poets travelling to event in their own car will be at (local authority/venue rate, if applicable, or Inland Revenue 2002/3 recommended rate of 40p per mile).

Fees and expenses

(The poet) will be paid a fee of *(fee)*.

(The poet) must provide a written invoice in advance of the event which *(the promoter)* will pay on completion of the performance.

Please note that there will be a charge for the reissue of cheques which are lost.

In cases where payment is not made immediately following an event, the full balance shall be forwarded to *(poet's name and address)* within 30 days. All cheques will be made payable to *(poet)*.

Subsistence/per diems will be paid to *(the poet)* on arrival at the station/airport/venue.

Performance fee:

Workshop/outreach work fee:

Travel:

Subsistence rate:

Other:

(The poet) is responsible for paying his/her own tax and national insurance contribution.

(The Promoting Organisation) reserves the right to evaluate the progress of the reading/course/workshop/tour and seeks your co-operation in distributing and collecting *(Promoting Organisation's)* evaluation forms from each participant on the reading/course/workshop/tour.

Cancellation Terms

In the event of cancellation by *(the Promoting Organisation)* the following terms shall apply: less than one month's notice, full fee payable; less than two month's notice, 50% of fee payable; less than three month's notice, 30% of fee payable.

Late arrival or failure by *(the poet)* to turn up will result in the fee being withheld altogether.

Accommodation

(The Promoting Organisation) agrees to provide and pay for at least single room occupancy in a minimum three star standard hotel/guest house. The room will include private bath and WC facilities.

(Name, address, email, telephone and fax number of hotel)

In the event that *(the poet's)* partner/companion shall accompany *(the poet)*, *(the poet)* is responsible for covering the cost of all accommodation, travel, subsistence for that person, unless otherwise agreed and stated here.

(The poet) is required to provide a brief report on the event/s upon receipt of payment. This will assist *(the Promoting Organisation)* in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the project with a view to future improvements.

This contract completed on behalf of the Promoting Organisation by *(promoter)*

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Completed by/on behalf of (the poet):

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix II

Sample Poet in Residence Contract

Date
Poet
Address

Dear

Poet in Residence Contract

This is a contract between (host organisation) and (poet) setting out the terms and conditions relevant to the post of Poet in Residence.

The residency will take place between (dates) in (Arts Council England regional area or areas; residency site address). During this period you will be expected to (run workshops, give individual consultations sessions, give readings) for three days per week. The remaining days are free for your own work.

We are happy to offer you a fee of (amount) which will be paid in two instalments, (amount) at the beginning of the residency and (amount) on completion of the residency. We will also give you (amount) as cash subsistence (this can be based on a daily amount or an agreed overall figure). This will be given to you at the start of the residency.

We are happy to arrange and pay for your return travel to (this country/the location of the residency) and will also cover the cost of all travel associated with the residency once begun.

We will arrange and pay for the following accommodation during your stay. (Details of accommodation, including equipment supplied, e.g. phone, fax, computer facilities, kitchen facilities etc. and details of who will pay for what – personal phone calls to be paid for by the individual, residency calls to be paid for by the host organisation.)

A support group which will meet regularly will be set up to help you. If you have any questions or problems you should communicate in the first instance with (Literature Officer for Arts Council England regional office/specifically identified host organisation individual on support group).

It is also an important condition of the residency that you submit a report within one month of the conclusion of your stay. This will allow us to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the residency from your point of view and will assist us with overall improvements to the scheme.

You will be responsible for your own tax arrangements, and personal and travel insurance. (For British poets only. Overseas poets will need to have any tax deduction requirements explained here. Money paid as a fee to visiting overseas poets is liable to tax at source. It is advisable therefore for the host organisation to contact their local tax office in advance of the residency to ascertain the implications of this.)

If the terms of this contract are acceptable, please sign and return one copy. Please keep the second copy for your own information.

Yours, etc.

Appendix III

Sample Audience Questionnaire

National Poetry Day Thursday 10 October 2002

We hope you have enjoyed today's event. It is important to us to know how our audiences respond, and how we can help more people to enjoy National Poetry Day in the future, so we would be grateful if you could take the time to fill in this short questionnaire. Thank you!

1. Have you enjoyed today's event?

Yes

No

Please say why

.....
.....
.....
.....

2. What did you think of the venue?

Excellent

Good

Satisfactory

Poor

3. If Poor, can you suggest any improvements to the venue?

.....
.....
.....

4. Are there any other poets you would like to be invited to perform at (*insert name of venue*)? (Please specify.)

.....
.....
.....
.....

5. How did you find out about this event?

(Please tick more than one if appropriate.)

- Promotional leaflet/brochure
- Newspaper
- Radio
- Writers group
- Posters
- Venue
- Word of mouth
- Other (please specify)

.....

.....

6. Have you attended a Literature event at (*insert name of venue*) before?

Yes No

7. If Yes, please say how many Literature events you have attended here in the last 12 months. (Please do not include today's event.)

None 1 2 3 4 5-6 7-9 10 or more

8. Have you attended any other Literature events at other venues in the last 12 months?

Yes No

9. If Yes, how many Literature events in total have you attended at other venues in the last 12 months?

None 1 2 3 4 5-6 7-9 10 or more

10. Are you male or female?

Male Female

11. What is your age? please circle one

16-19

20-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65+

12. About how far do you live from (*insert name of venue*)?

Up to 10 miles

10-25 miles

More than 25 miles

13. Please give your city/town/village and County

City/town/village.....

County

14. If you would like to be on our regular mailing list for forthcoming Literature events, please fill in your name and address below:

.....
.....
.....
.....

THANK YOU for taking the time to do this.

Appendix III

Promoter Questionnaire Feedback

National Poetry Day Thursday 10 October 2002

As part of a broader marketing campaign, we are working in partnership with Colman Getty PR to raise the profile of National Poetry Day, and compile an audit of National Poetry Day activity across the country. As soon as you have arranged your event, please complete the questionnaire below and email/fax it to Rachel Gilmour on email rachel@colmangettyp.com or fax no. 0207 631 2699, so that Colman Getty can include it in their regular local, regional and national press briefings. They will also include your event in the national audit. This is a terrific free marketing opportunity for promoters, and useful information for us, as it forms part of a larger research project for the Arts Council of England, and will affect future plans for National Poetry Day. We are also assessing how useful the Promoters' Toolkit and National Poetry Day poster have been to you, so some of the questions relate to that.

Venue name and address

.....

.....

.....

.....

Promoter's name, job title (if applicable), and address (if different from above)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Promoter's Telephone number

Fax number

Email

Would you be prepared to help publicise National Poetry Day by involving the local media and press?

.....

How long have you been a promoter?

1 year or less

2 years

3 years or over

How did you hear about the Promoters Toolkit?

Poetry Society website

Other website (please specify)

.....

Regional Arts Council

NALD newsletter

Resource (Council for Archives, Museums & Libraries)

Writers in Prisons Network

Reader development agencies (please specify)

.....

Ottakars

Word of mouth

Other (please specify)

.....

Was the Toolkit

Very useful

Useful

Not appropriate for your level of experience?

Was there anything missing from the Toolkit that you would like to have seen? If so, please give details.

.....

.....

Did you use the National Poetry Day poster?

Yes

No

What type of event did you programme?

- Reading/performance
- Creative writing workshop
- Discussion panel
- Media event
- Publishing event
- Readership event
- Other (please specify)

.....

What was the venue?

- Arts centre
- Theatre
- Library
- Village hall
- School
- College/University
- Bookshop
- Other (please specify).

.....

Any other details of your event

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What is your anticipated audience figure?

.....

Did you run a similar event last year, and if so what was your audience figure then?

.....

THANK YOU for taking the time to do this.