Author Visit Checklist (short version)

On the next two pages you'll find a detailed checklist to help you prepare for the visit. If it all seems overwhelming, don't worry; there is one simple thing you can do that will make a huge difference insuring the visit will be a success. Ready? Here it is.

✓ Make sure the students have read the books.

It's that simple. If the students have read my books, they know who I am when the presentation starts. It has meaning for them, they ask intelligent questions, and they remember the visit when it's over. (Otherwise, I'm just some guy they've never heard of.)

The more books the kids are familiar with, the better. At the very least, I would recommend that these grades read the following books. Please emphasize the Mad Scientist Academy books since they are the most recent books and most available books.

Kindergarten, First    Even Monsters Need Haircuts and/or Even Aliens Need Snacks
2nd, 3rd               Mad Scientist Academy (Dinosaur Disaster, Weather Disaster, Space Disaster, Ocean Disaster)*, Even Monsters Need Haircuts, Even Aliens Need Snacks, The Lion’s Share, and/or Bean Thirteen.
4th, 5th, 6th          Mad Scientist Academy books (Dinosaur Disaster, Weather Disaster, and Space Disaster)*, the Benjamin Franklinstein series (if you only have time to read a few chapters of the first book, that would still be very helpful), and/or The Lion’s Share.

* Be sure to use the slideshow of these books so you can project the book large for your whole class to see while you read it. You can find it at www.matthewmcelligott.com/author-visit-downloads. The password is aKmkkXf2Y0 (the last character is a zero)
Author Visit Checklist (full version)

Over the years, I've noticed that some school visits seems to go more smoothly than others. I finally got smart and started asking the teachers and librarians at these schools for their secrets to putting together a successful author visit. Based on their feedback, I've put together this checklist. It’s not a list of rules, but rather guidelines that others have used to good effect. Take what you can from this, and don’t sweat the parts that don’t fit. Every school is different, and every visit is different.

Having said that, if you have any tips, tricks, suggestions or comments on this checklist, I’d love to hear about it. I’m constantly updating it based on the feedback I get.

Two to Three months before the visit:

- Make an initial announcement to your school staff about the visit.
- Make a list of the jobs and assign who is doing what in preparation for the visit. Solicit help from volunteers, parents, teachers and students. It’s really tough for one person to do this alone!
- Talk to a local bookstore (see the list of recommended stores on About My Programs) about purchasing the books. Most will offer discount pricing and allow you to order a large quantity and return unused copies without a charge. Make sure to include enough books for students and staff to purchase the day(s) of the visit as well. If you’re looking for some very general parameters, I usually tend to sell between 50-150 books per visit, depending on the school. I think my record is about 500, at a very large school. If in doubt, order extra.
- If you plan to use BOCES or other outside funding, please get the paperwork rolling since it takes many weeks for them to process payments.

The month before the visit:

- Place posters around the school announcing the visit. If the students can make these, even better!
- Distribute to every child and family a list of books available for purchase and their costs. (A sample order form is included with this packet and on my website.)
- Communicate to all administrators, PTA, and staff details about my books, biographical information, and website (www.mattmcelligott.com) Spread the news widely. The idea is to let the excitement build. The more enthused and prepared everyone is, the more students will get out of the visit.
- Offer suggestions to teachers for integrated activities that connect the curriculum with my books. On my website and in this packet you can find background information on each of my books, as well as projects and lesson plans. There’s even a secret part of my website with content just for schools who are booking an author visit. You can find it at www.matthewmcelligott.com/author-visit-downloads. The password is aKmkkXf2Y0 (the last character is a zero)
Try to get the art teacher involved as well. If the students can work on a related project, the illustration part of my presentation will have special meaning. It could be a mural, illustrated books - anything at all. At one school I visited, the students all designed heads inspired by the characters in my books. The school was filled with them, and it was one of the funniest things I’ve ever seen. It really got the kids pumped for the visit.

Some schools like to do some sort of reception/coffee hour/luncheon to meet visiting authors, and they start planning it at this point. It’s a chance to invite every staff member to meet the author, ask questions, etc. Personally, I love this sort of thing, but I also understand how much work and time it takes to put together. I can tell you, though, that it can help the entire school feel like they’re involved with the visit and really helps build enthusiasm. It’s also a lot of fun.

Schedule every class in the library for a lesson acquainting students with me and my books. Read and discuss the books and upcoming visit. One teacher I worked with tells each class that, among them, at least one will someday be a writer or illustrator, and I think this is a great idea. Brainstorm questions that are appropriate to ask the day of the visit, but also encourage students to add questions they might come up with on the day of the presentation.

Have enough copies of the books in the library for teachers to read in the classroom, and encourage them to do so. Again, the important thing is to make sure the students know the books.

Prepare a schedule of the presentations and circulate them to the teachers. If you’ve hired me for a full day, I can do three or four presentations a day (please see the About My Programs page for length, size, etc. of presentations), and need at least 10-15 minutes between presentations to set up for the next one (more time if you need me to change rooms). If I’ll be signing books for the students then, I’ll need more time as well.

The week before the visit:

Confirm that the equipment and room(s) are ready for the visit. I’ll need:

- A video/computer projector (sometimes called an LCD projector) for my laptop and a screen
- A location, such as the library, where I can set up for the day (This room must be dark! Try the projector in the room to make sure it is dark enough for the images to be clearly seen)
- Extension cords
- If using a cafeteria, gym or auditorium: a sound system with a wireless hands free microphone is required.

Confirm that the books have arrived. If you can, please prepare them for signing by placing a small slip of paper with the student’s name inside each book. You won’t believe how much time this saves the day of the visit.

Please email me a schedule for the day of the visit and let me know what time I should arrive.

If you’re going to be ordering lunch, I would like vegetarian (no cheese) or fish. If not, let me know and I’ll be happy to bring my own. Thank you!

Whew! This might seem like a lot of work, but I can promise you that it will be worth it. The more excited and prepared the students, teachers, and staff are before the visit, the better it goes for everyone. Remember, I’m yours for the day, and if there’s anything you can think of that I can do to make the visit better for you, please don’t hesitate to ask. We’ll have fun, I promise!