

So you've decided to go on tour.

Congratulations! You are about to embark on one of the most frustrating, rewarding, frightening, and memorable experiences the poetry world has to offer. You will meet totally amazing people, sleep in extremely uncomfortable places, suffer from hypoglycemia and homesickness, and find yourself flabbergasted at the cruelty of the world and the generosity of your community at every turn. I truly hope that you are able to enjoy every single moment.

Since inheriting the title of SlamMaster in 2004, I've been booking touring poets from all over the country—and the world—to feature at a little basement bar in Cambridge, Mass. I'd like to think that meeting so many travelers has helped to make me a better host, and a more understanding person. I've hosted for many wonderful people, and I've built an extended family that takes care of me when I leave home, too.

Unfortunately, I've also met at least a few brilliant idiots. There are people out there who seem to believe that the world owes them something, that volunteer organizers are psychic teleportation devices with infinite free time, and that they are the world's best poet whom nobody understands.

You, of course, have common sense, and would never be one of those people. But touring is exhausting, and fraught with undocumented stressors—sometimes before you even get started. This pamphlet is intended to remind you of just a few important things: how to apply for a feature like it's your job (because it is), how to rock a show like it's your life's work (because it ought to be), and how to treat your hosts and audience like family (because we are).

Good luck, poet! I can't wait to see you in my town.
Simone Beaubien

About the Author

Simone Beaubien has been a regular at the **Boston Poetry Slam @ the Cantab Lounge** since 1999. The Cantab is home to one of the longest-running slams in the world, and the BPS can lay claim to six National Poetry Slam Finals appearances, including two championships. Called “the best open-mic in the English-speaking world” by *Slam Nation* star Jack McCarthy and “Home. I walk down those staircases and I feel like I'm going to the prom of my dreams,” by poet-musician Shira Erlichman, the show has presented a weekly open mic, feature, and slam since 1990.

Only the second SlamMaster in the long history of the venue, Simone has operated as the sole booking agent for the weekly show since 2004.



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**How to Be
A Perfect Stranger:
Ten Tips on Being
the Best Touring Poet
You Can Be
from Someone on the
Other Side of Your Tour
Who, for the Most Part,
Has Had Great Experiences
with Lovely Touring Poets
But, Frankly, Really Wishes
More People Used Common Sense
Which, as We Know
Isn't as Common
as We Would All Like It to Be
If You Get My Drift.**

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1. DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Before you make contact, run a simple web search for your target city and reading. Try Google and the poetryslam.com forums, or ask around. Learn the show's days and location, and be sure you are contacting the person who books the show (it's not always the host!). You'll get further faster if you arm yourself with some info. **DON'T** expect the show contact to waste time sending you information that's already available in a public forum.

2. BE PERSONAL

Tailor your cover letter and credentials to each reading you contact. Show what you know: past visits to the area, places you've seen their locals perform. If you were in a Nationals match against them, or if your teammate successfully toured through, mention it. Once you make a personal connection, you are harder to ignore. **DON'T** send mass emails unless you follow up individually.

3. BE AVAILABLE

Know your tour dates and contact the reading well in advance. Not every reading is as organized as you'll be, so start early and prioritize. It might take weeks for someone to email you back; they may have that luxury, but you don't! Be prompt in your responses, and stay in touch. **DON'T** sit on emails or voicemails. Even a quick "I'll get back to you" is better than radio silence.

4. HAVE A SOLID PRESS KIT UPON REQUEST

Your first email to the booking contact should contain a short (three-line) biography or list of accomplishments, a link to one or two video or audio samples of your work, and perhaps one or two appropriate references or blurbs (see #2).

Keep the rest of your kit in your back pocket. At a moment's notice, you should be able to supply a full bio, writing samples, and photos.

DON'T expect the reading to know who you are, or to bother to check. **DON'T** send a long email or attach unexpected files: that's a great one-way ticket to the spam folder.

5. ASK IN ADVANCE

Know what you are getting yourself into: if you expect to be compensated, negotiate how before you confirm. Once you've been booked, get your needs settled well before you get into town. Do you need crash space? Do you need a ride to the train station or your next venue? Do you need a second mic? Work it out ahead of time.

DON'T ASSUME. Take nothing for granted in the touring world.

6. BE LOW-MAINTENANCE

Seriously: figure out the bus schedule, print your own maps, vend your own product, and find your own crash space if you can. Take care of your own business, and do it in advance.

DON'T come up with last-minute requests: unexpected traveling companions, complex audio needs, or day-of phone calls for directions can all be nasty surprises for hard-working show staff.

7. BE GREAT AUDIENCE

The smartest features show up ridiculously early, scope the venue, and eat or caffeinate locally. Get comfortable in the space, meet your physical needs, patronize the venue, and take hints for your set by listening to what works in the open reading. Your host will be relieved to know you're in town, and the open mic poets, slammers and crowd will be glad to see you listening.

DON'T flounce in just in time for your feature.

DON'T ever leave the show when there's a poet onstage. Trust me, they'll remember.

8. DO WHAT YOU WERE BOOKED TO DO

Remember what the show knows about you: if you sold yourself as irreverently funny, don't roll out a set of tragic sestinas. If you were booked based on your performance, don't go on-page for the whole set. If you were booked for thirty minutes, *time yourself* and do exactly that.

DON'T fill up your feature with untested work, covers, musical accompaniment, or explanations and patter. Poetry, poetry, poetry!

9. BE CLASSY

Make time in your set to say something nice about the open mic, slam, or venue space. Thank the DJ. Thank the host for booking you. Learn the bartender's and servers' names and remind the audience to tip them. If you didn't get booked at a show and you have the night free, show up anyway and rock the open reading: there's no better way to get invited back.

DON'T imagine you're too big for any show, no matter how small.

10. GIVE BACK

The show has booked and paid you, maybe provided billeting, maybe even bought you drinks. The gift of your book or CD is a nice gesture (and a good way to keep your work circulating). A shout-out on your tour blog or Facebook page is great press and warms the heart. A personal thank-you note is also sweet, especially if you go so far as to include a quote the venue might someday use to help book other poets. We collect references, blurbs, and good karma, too, you know.

DON'T forget us after you leave! The community you just visited works hard to put together a show. We want to know you liked us as much as we liked you.