

Introduction

On September 3, 2021, a 28-question survey was distributed in an email to members of the South Carolina Writers Association (SCWA) and in a link in the monthly *Quill* newsletter. Members had until September 17 to complete the survey. The purpose of the survey was to:

- Collect feedback on various programs,
- Invite perspectives regarding future programming options, and
- Better understand the collective interests of SCWA members.

The information gathered in the survey will be used by the Board of Directors (BOD) to set strategic direction and make operational decisions. This report highlights trends and patterns in the data as demonstrated by frequency, defined as a response by at least 10 percent of those responding to a particular question.

Results

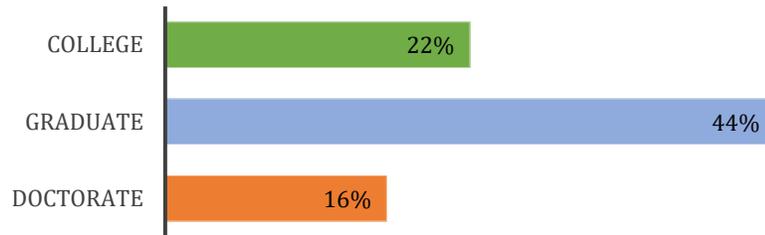
52%

At the time of the survey, SCWA had 379 members. Of that number, 200 members responded to the survey, which equals a response rate of 52 percent. Based on this strong rate, it is reasonable to assume the results represent the general sentiments of the broader membership.

Most SCWA members are relatively new to the organization. Fifty-eight (58) percent of respondents have been a member of SCWA for three or fewer years (Q 25). Sixteen (16) percent have been a member for ten or more years, with the rest of those responding falling between four and nine years (26 percent).

SCWA members are well educated and older. Twenty-two (22) percent are college graduates (Q 27). Forty-four (44) percent have completed a graduate degree, and 16 percent have a doctorate. Eighty-one (81) percent are age 55 or older (Q 28).

Q27 - Highest Educational Attainment



SCWA members are engaged in a broader writing community that extends beyond the SCWA. Over half of respondents (56 percent) are members of other writing associations in addition to the SCWA (Q 26). However, when asked to identify the other associations to which they belong, no pattern exists as to what those organizations are. However, the list indicates attraction to organizations that represent specific genres. In addition, other than national organizations, most were in the Southeast.

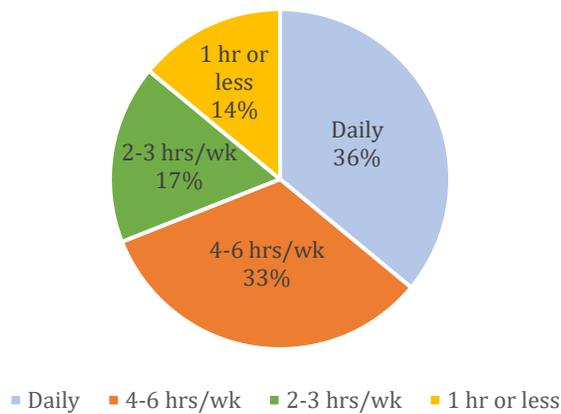
SCWA members are experienced writers. Nearly half (48 percent) have been writing for 21 years or more (Q 1). Another 42 percent have been writing between five and 20 years. Ten (10) percent have been writing for four or fewer years.

Q1 - Writing Experience



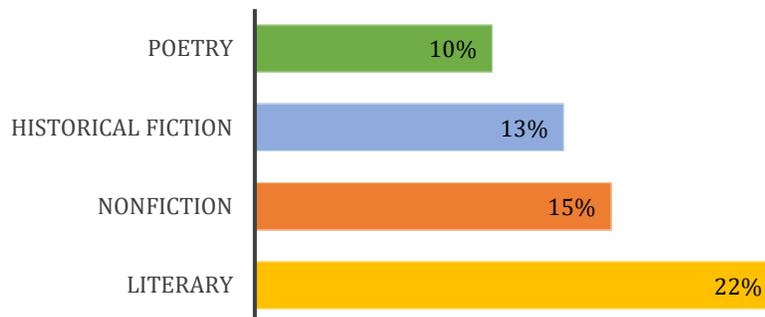
SCWA members view themselves as good writers and write often. Most respondents (45 percent) considered themselves professional writers, defined as published and/or technically advanced (Q 3). Twenty-four (24) percent of respondents considered themselves experienced writers; another 24 percent considered themselves at the middling level. Only 6 percent identified as novices. Question 5 asked, “How often do you write per week?” Thirty-six (36) percent of respondents reported the admirable trait of writing daily, with another 33 percent writing 4-6 hours per week, 17 percent writing two to three hours per week, and 14 percent writing one hour or less per week.

Q5 - How often do you write?



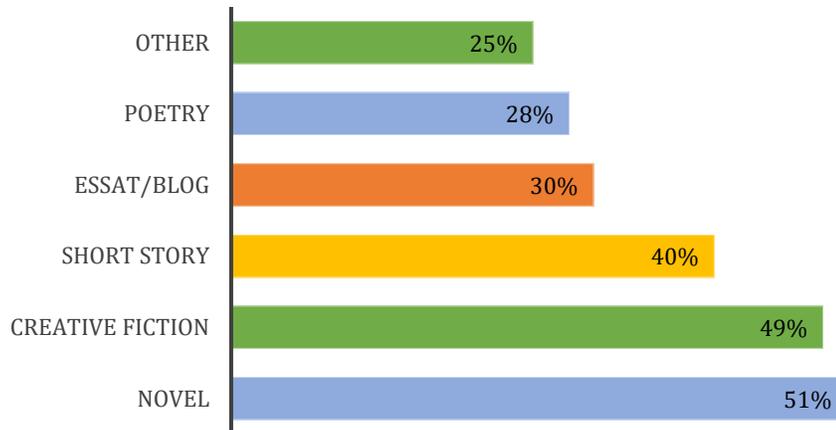
SCWA writers write across an array of genres and forms. Regarding what genre respondents write in most often (Q 4), selection from the 17 common genres listed was quite varied. Getting the most response was literary fiction at 22 percent. The remaining genres selected by 10 percent or more of those responding were poetry (10 percent), historical fiction (13 percent), and nonfiction (15 percent).

Q4 - Preferred Genre



The most common form of writing among respondents (Q 2) is writing a novel (51 percent), creative fiction (49 percent), short story/flash fiction (40 percent), essay/blog article (30 percent), and poetry (28 percent). Twenty-five percent indicated “other” areas, with no single form being routinely named other than nonfiction and memoir, which both still had less than 10 percent identifying them as their preferred.

Q2 - Preferred Form of Writing



The 2021 SCWA annual conference met members’ expectations. Slightly over two-thirds (70 percent) of respondents reported they did not attend the 2021 annual conference (Q 6). Of those who did not attend (Q 7), 23 percent said it was because the conference was virtual. Another 14 percent said the conference was too expensive. Most of the remaining reasons for not attending were listed under “other” (56 percent). Of those, the primary reason was a time or schedule conflict (30 percent).

Respondents who attended the 2021 conference were asked to rate the quality of sessions (Q 9). Eighty-seven (87) percent indicated the conference met or exceeded their expectations. Thirteen (13) percent said it did not. Fifty-three (53) percent said they liked the virtual format (Q 10). However, another 42 percent reported finding the virtual format acceptable but would prefer an in-person conference. Regarding future conferences (Q 11), 44 percent ranked in-person only as their highest preference. That noted, 43 percent said a hybrid of in-person and online sessions would be their first choice. A “virtual only” conference was everyone’s last (third) choice.

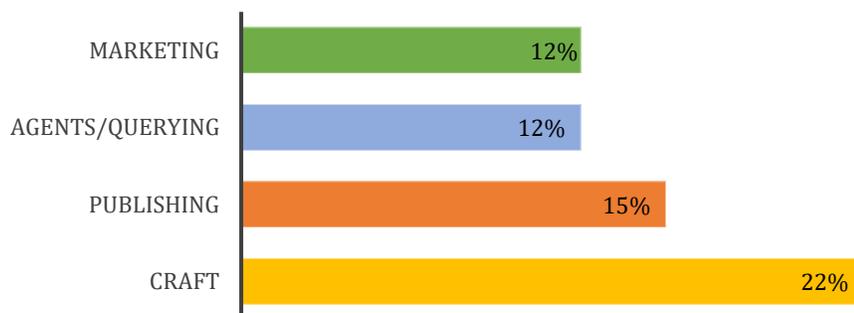
Question 8 asked respondents who did not attend the conference to identify topics for future sessions. Topics getting the most mention were as follows:

- ✓ Writing craft/novel structure (17 percent),
- ✓ Meeting agents, pitching agents, and panels of agents (16 percent),
- ✓ Self-publishing and how it compares to traditional and hybrid publishing (15 percent),
- ✓ Genre-specific workshops (15 percent),
- ✓ Tips for publishing for the first time (12 percent),
- ✓ Editing process, meeting editors (11 percent), and
- ✓ Marketing/advertising (10 percent).

Virtual delivery has a place in how SCWA delivers programs. Question 12 asked about the Become an Author and the Writing Conversations series. Sixty (60) percent of respondents reported not having attended any of these virtual sessions. Writing Conversations was better attended than Become an Author (38 percent and 18 percent respectively). When asked why they did not attend either (Q 13), respondents said the time of day conflicted with their schedule (29 percent); 18 percent said they planned to access the recordings, and 12 percent said the topics did not seem relevant to them. In the “other” category, cited most frequently was time constraints (19 percent). Another 12 percent said they didn’t know about them.

Of those who attended, however, 76 percent said the sessions met or exceeded their expectations, and 12 percent said the sessions partially met their expectations. When asked about the virtual format (Q 15), a whopping 99 percent said they liked it. Regarding what future topics they’d like to see offered (Q 16), craft was far and away the most mentioned (22 percent), followed by publishing (15 percent), agents and querying (12 percent) and marketing (12 percent).

Q16 - Future Topics of Interest for a Series



Question 17 asked respondents to identify topics for future events and educational opportunities they'd not already mentioned anywhere in the survey. The data did not reveal a consensus around a single topic but offered a rich list of ideas for consideration.

SCWA members value the organization sponsoring an outlet for publishing their work.

Respondents also had the opportunity to comment on what SCWA publications offer them as a member. Question 18 showed that 41 percent of respondents had submitted to either *Catfish Stew* or *The Petigru Review* at some point in the past. Fifty-nine (59) percent had not.

When asked in Question 19 why respondents hadn't, 26 percent said they didn't feel ready to submit, and 21 percent said they were not familiar enough with either publication or didn't know they could submit to them. Ten (10) percent said they just didn't prioritize it.

What would encourage them to submit (Q 20), respondents mentioned most frequently clearer guidelines and more notices/reminders (20 percent), cash prizes (18 percent), broader categories for submission (10 percent), and better judging/producing a higher quality product (10 percent).

Q20 - What Would Encourage More Submissions to an SCWA Publication?



Question 21 was an open response question regarding what members who had submitted found most valuable about the experience. Seeing one's name in print and the satisfaction of being published was the outcome most prized (50 percent), followed by the feedback and encouragement they received from the experience (23 percent).

When asked what would encourage them to continue to submit in the future (Q 22), most often cited was getting feedback (11 percent) and ensuring high quality, fair judging (10 percent).

As with the educational programming ideas the survey generated, SCWA's publications subcommittee will review the many other good, but less frequent, suggestions offered regarding publications.

SCWA members support growing its membership. When asked how to grow the SCWA’s membership (Q 23), respondents shared a range of suggestions, among them sponsoring more local events and workshops to increase visibility (25 percent), more marketing and advertising (17 percent), and broadening outreach, including to college writing programs (15 percent). The SCWA membership subcommittee will review all suggestions, including those mentioned less frequently and not listed here.

SCWA members display positive feelings toward their organization. Question 24 gave respondents one last opportunity to identify issues for the SCWA BOD to address or ways to improve the organization. Ideas and suggestions were cited but none with frequency and are therefore not mentioned in this report. The BOD, however, will review the suggestions listed.

Closing

Over the past five years, the SCWA has enjoyed a period of growth and renewal, as evidenced by increased programming and an increase in membership. A high response rate such as the one documented in this survey suggests a strong relationship between the BOD and the SCWA membership. The BOD thanks every member who completed the survey for taking the time to provide feedback.

