



*Sisters  
in Crime*<sup>®</sup>

PUBLISHING SUMMIT REPORT

**2023 BUSINESS  
OF BOOKS SURVEY  
REPORT**

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DEC 2024 // PREPARED BY SISTERS IN CRIME

# Publishing Summit Report

## SinC Business of Books Survey (2023)

Sisters in Crime (SinC) was officially formed in 1987 as an activist group, with a goal of supporting the work of women crime writers and addressing imbalances in the publishing industry. Since then, our mission has expanded, focusing on our core values of advocacy, equity, inclusion, and community.

The SinC Monitoring Project has depended on a network of dedicated volunteers to track reviews of books in newspapers and trade publications to determine what percentage involves the work of women authors. Results are compiled and analyzed annually; reports from 2005 to the present are available in the SinC archives (<https://www.sistersincrime.org/page/history-behindmonitoring-project>).

SinC designed the Business of Books Survey as a companion to the Monitoring Project to collect information directly from members regarding their experiences as readers and writers of crime fiction. Our goal is to gather and share meaningful information about the current publishing landscape, start thoughtful conversations about visible trends, and identify potential opportunities for members. In addition, we believe that gaining a deeper sense of SinC membership identities will help us better serve our organization.

This year's survey was open for a month in early 2024: invitations were sent to all SinC members, asking them to provide information about their previous year's activities (2023) in six categories:

1. Reading Activities
2. Writing Activities
3. Short Fiction and Nonfiction Publications
4. Book-Length Fiction and Nonfiction Publications
5. Author Activities
6. Member Identities

Responses were submitted anonymously, and respondents were allowed to skip any questions they preferred not to answer. A free-response box was offered with every question allowing members to submit comments along with each categorical answer. 585 members took the survey in 2023, compared to 701 members who took the survey in 2022.

# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary for 2023 Data.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Reading Activities.....	3
Writing Activities.....	3
Author Activities.....	3
Member Identities.....	3
<b>(1) Reading Activities in 2023.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Number of Mystery/Crime Books Read in 2023 Number of Books Read.....	5
Preferred Format.....	5
Where Mystery/Crime Books Are Obtained.....	6
Author Outreach.....	7
How Members Find and Review Books.....	7
<b>(2) Writing Activities in 2023.....</b>	<b>9</b>
General Writing Activities.....	9
Short Fiction and Nonfiction Publications.....	9
Book Length Publications.....	12
<b>(3) Author Activities in 2023.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Author Names and Publications.....	15
Marketing & Social Media.....	15
Newsletters.....	16
Blogs & Podcasts.....	17
Social Media.....	18
Conferences & Events.....	18
Publicists.....	19
Agents.....	20
Money.....	21
<b>(4) Member Identities 2023.....</b>	<b>22</b>
Highlights .....	22
Disability.....	22
Sexual Orientation.....	22
SinC Equity Project Survey.....	22

# Executive Summary for 2023 Data

## Reading Activities

The top genres read in 2023 were amateur sleuth, detective, and private investigator. The vast majority of members read adult fiction, but members noted that they read across subgenres. 49% of members report reading between 1 and 24 books this year with e-readers dominating as the preferred method of reading.

Members read and write reviews predominantly on Amazon and Goodreads. 65% of members read reviews on Amazon and 54% of members write reviews on Amazon. 47% of members read reviews on Goodreads and 43% of members write reviews on Goodreads. Social media is the next most frequent place for reading and writing reviews at 35% and 20% respectively.

## Writing Activities

95% of members self-reported as a writer in some stage of the process, down slightly from last year's 97%. 98% of respondents reported writing adult book length fiction and 52% reported being traditionally published. The number of members responding that they were published in a hybrid form (both traditionally and independently) remained largely steady at 7%, compared to 8% last year. In contrast, 62% of respondents who published short pieces of fiction this year did so with traditional publishers, compared with 58% last year, while 12% published hybrid, a slight increase over last year's 11%.

## Author Activities

Authors engage with their readers in a number of ways in 2023, including through author websites, conferences, newsletters, blogs, and social media. Facebook was the most used social media platform, with 92% of members responding that they used it to reach readers.

## Member Identities

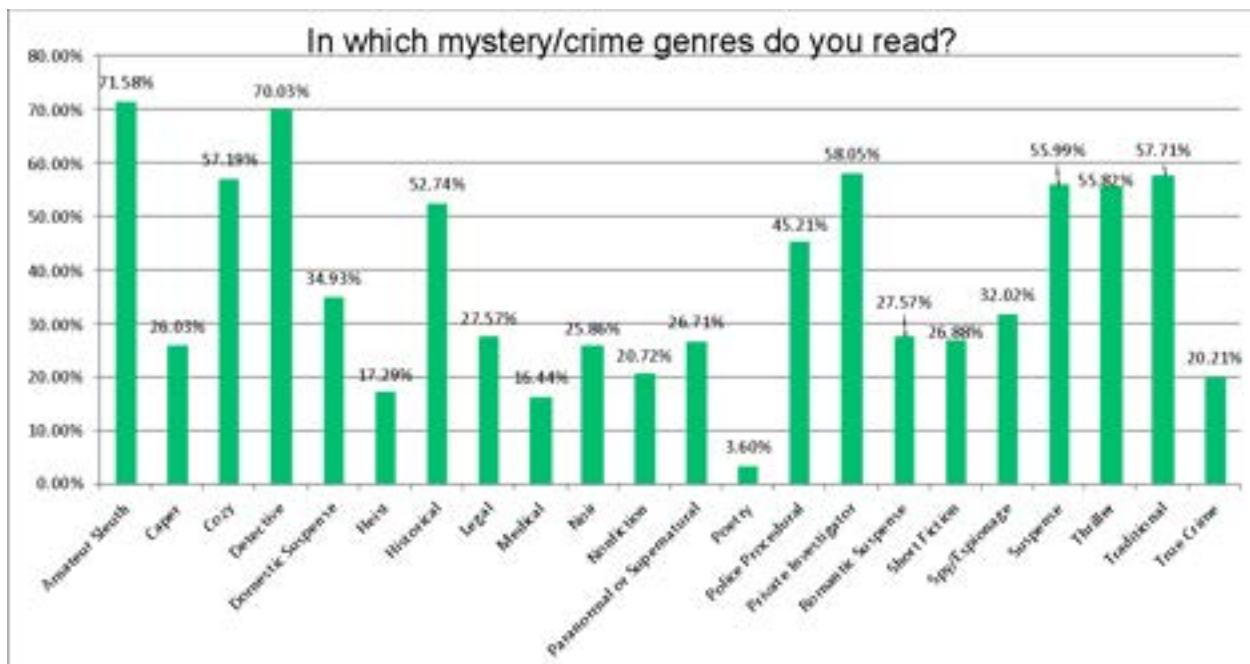
The majority of SinC members continue to be white, cisgender women over the age of 50. In an effort to continue growing our membership, SinC leadership has initiated several initiatives designed to reach out to younger, diverse authors both domestically and internationally who write and read in a variety of mystery subgenres. We look forward to seeing those efforts reflected in the survey responses in the coming years.

# (1) Reading Activities in 2023

SinC has two categories of members: professional and active. Professional members have indicated that they are primarily interested in the business of publishing, including professions such as writer, librarian, bookseller, publisher, editor, agent, or academic researcher. Active members are those who have an interest in promoting the purposes of SinC and include readers and fans. Both membership categories were invited to answer the survey.

Twenty-two categories of mystery and crime fiction were presented to survey takers. Multiple categories could be selected.

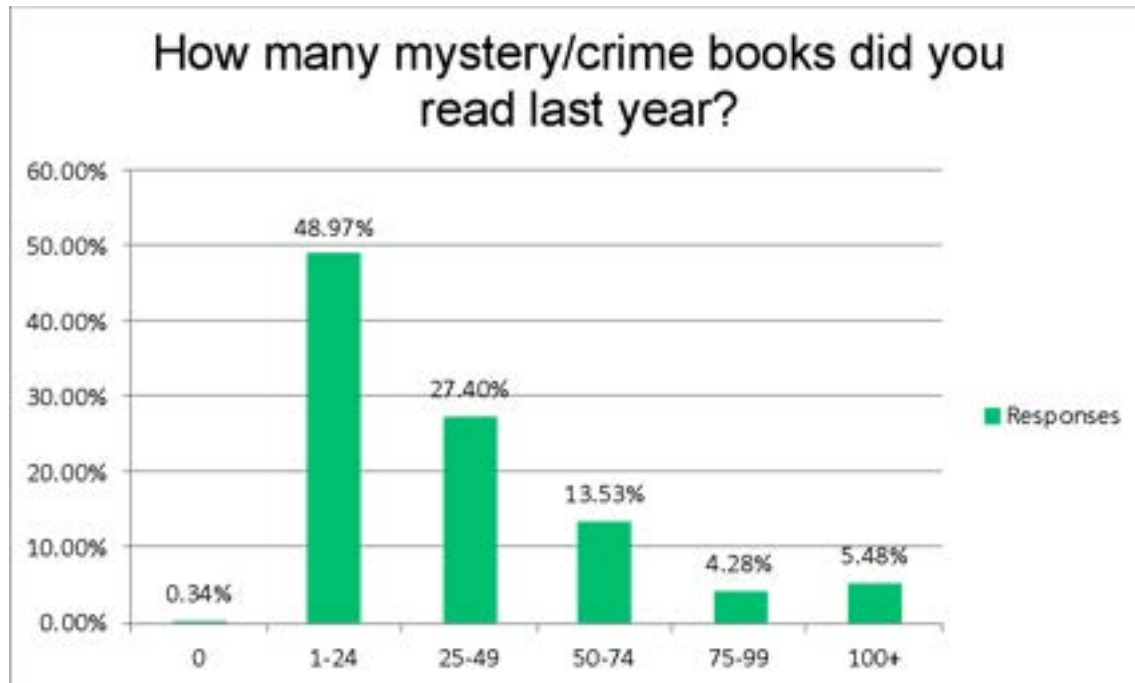
As in 2022, Amateur Sleuth, Detective, and Private Investigator were the top three most read genres in 2023. However, Amateur Sleuth just edged out the Detective genre as *the* most popular genre, with 72% of respondents declaring it as a genre they read, while 70% read books that fall in the detective genre. Books featuring private investigators fall somewhat behind as a most read genre at 58% reading. Because the total number of responses in these three categories exceeds the total number of individual respondents to the survey, we know that many readers read across all three of the top genres.



The survey also asked which categories members read. Similar to last year, nearly all respondents told us they read adult mystery/crime novels (99%). The number reporting that they read young adult mystery/crime novels fell slightly from 23% to 21%, but respondents answering that they read middle grade mystery/crime novels rose from 7% to 10%, indicating an increase in interest in middle grade mystery/crime books. Readers' interest in children's mystery/crime novels held steady at approximately 4% reporting they read in this genre.

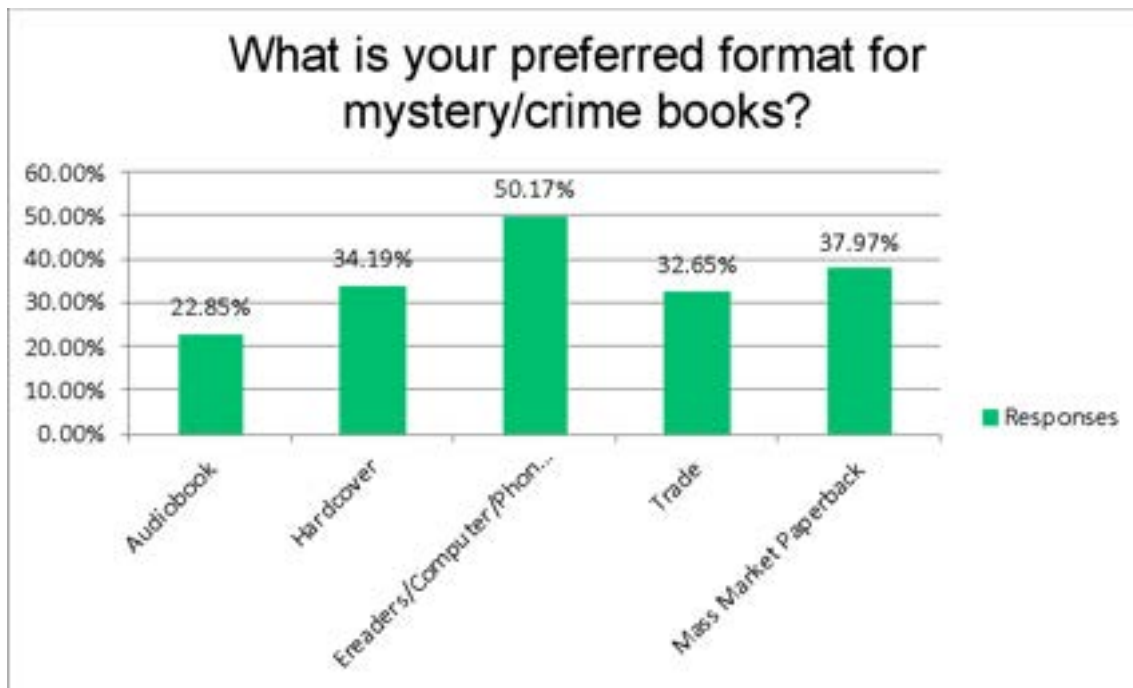
## Number of Mystery/Crime Books Read in 2023

It comes as no surprise that SinC members are voracious readers. Nearly a majority of respondents tell us that they read between 1-24 mystery/crime novels in 2023 and another 27% stated they read between 25 and 49 novels in the year.



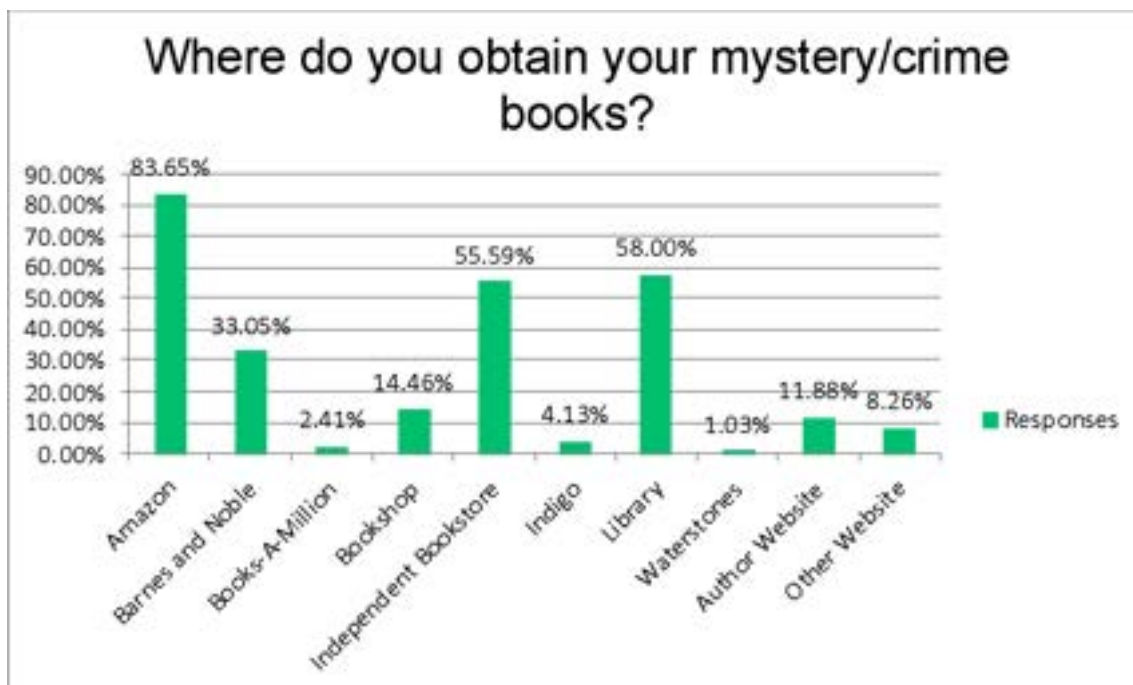
## Preferred Format

Respondents indicated that their most preferred format for reading these books was via electronic means (ereaders/computers/phones/tablets) at 50%. This is a change from last year where 66% of respondents preferred paperback books. However, the format of our survey question changed slightly in 2023 to separate trade paperback books from mass market paperbacks. When the number of readers who prefer trade paperbacks and mass market paperbacks are looked at together, we see that 77% of respondents still prefer print softcovers, handily beating out the other formats.



## Where Mystery/Crime Books Are Obtained

Respondents' preference for where to obtain their crime/mystery novels remained largely unchanged from 2002 to 2023. Amazon remains the clear preference, followed by the library and independent bookstores. Again, members could choose more than one option, so the percentages exceed 100%.

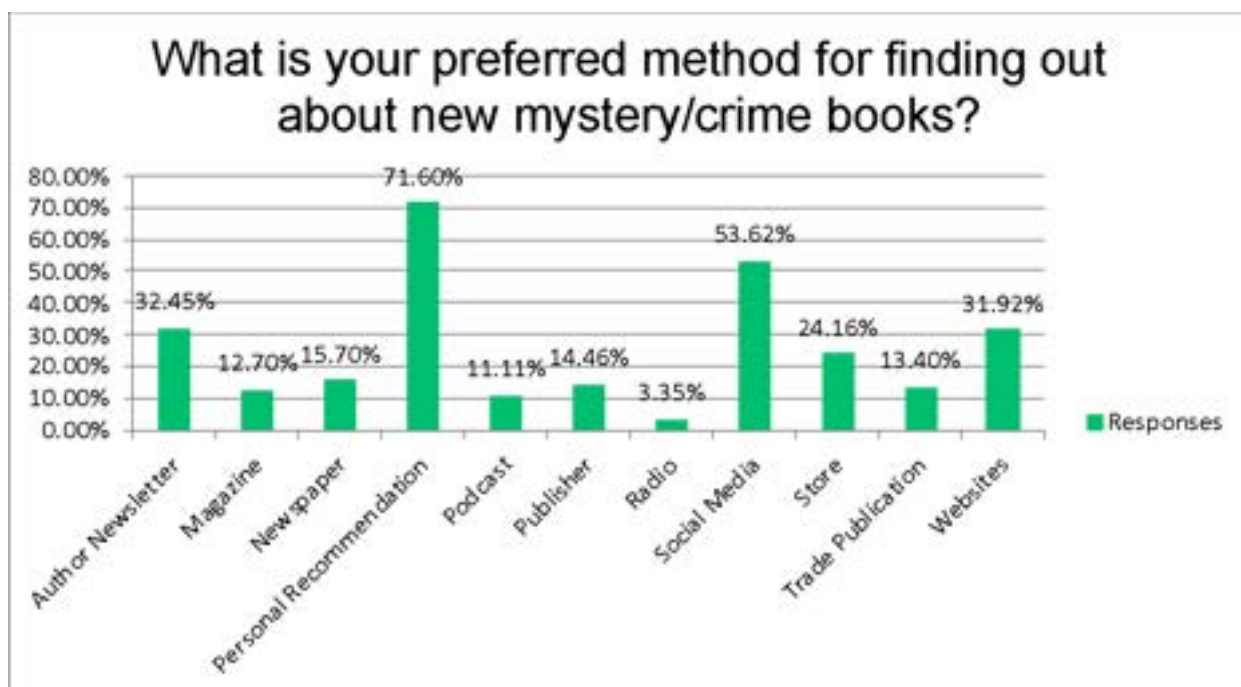


## Author Outreach

Engagement with authors remained strong in 2023. 78% of respondents stated that they read author newsletters and 61% stated they read author or multi-author blogs. 64% of respondents replied that they participate in author groups on Facebook.

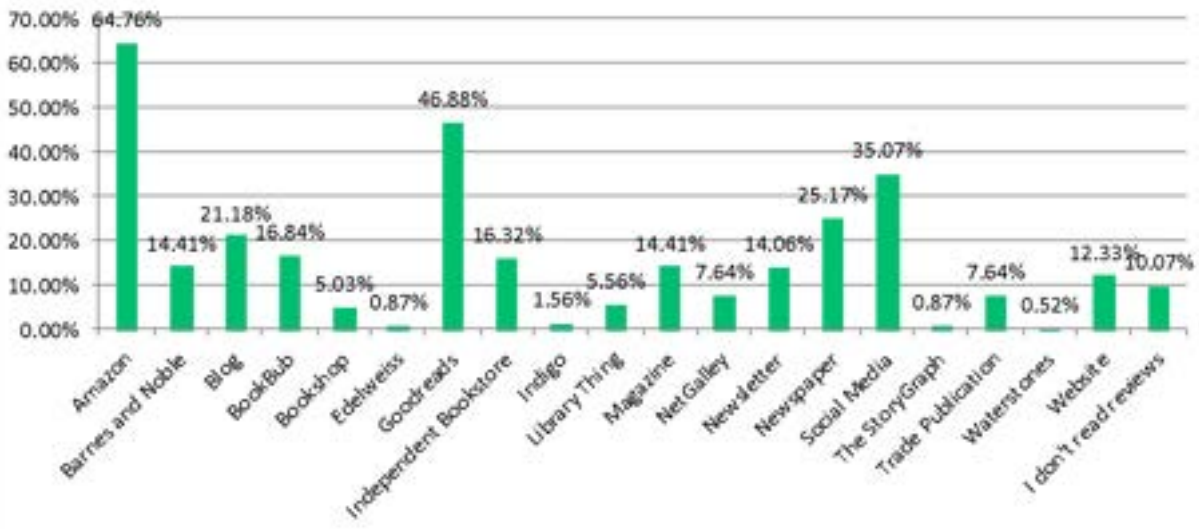
## How Members Find and Review Books

The most popular preferred methods for discovering new mystery/crime novels remained unchanged from last year, with 71% of respondents learning about novels from personal recommendations followed by 53% who learned through social media.

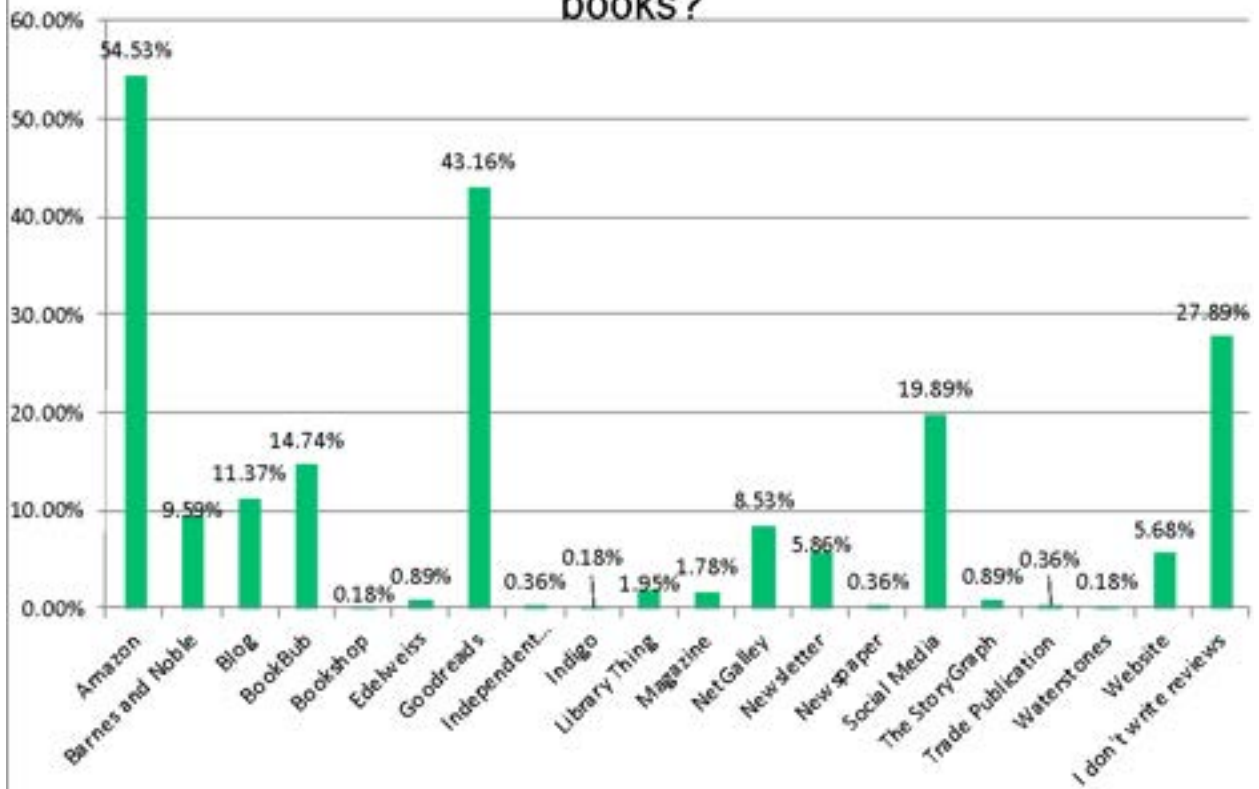


Where members read reviews remained largely the same from 2022 to 2023. Far and away, members read Amazon and Goodreads reviews the most, with 65% and 47% of respondents relying on these two platforms, respectively. Similarly, respondents write reviews predominantly on these two platforms. 54% of survey respondents say they post reviews on Amazon, and 43% post on Goodreads. Notably, the number of SinC members stating that they post reviews on social media ticked up slightly from 17% to 20%.

## Where do you read reviews of mystery/crime books?



## Where do you write reviews of mystery/crime books?

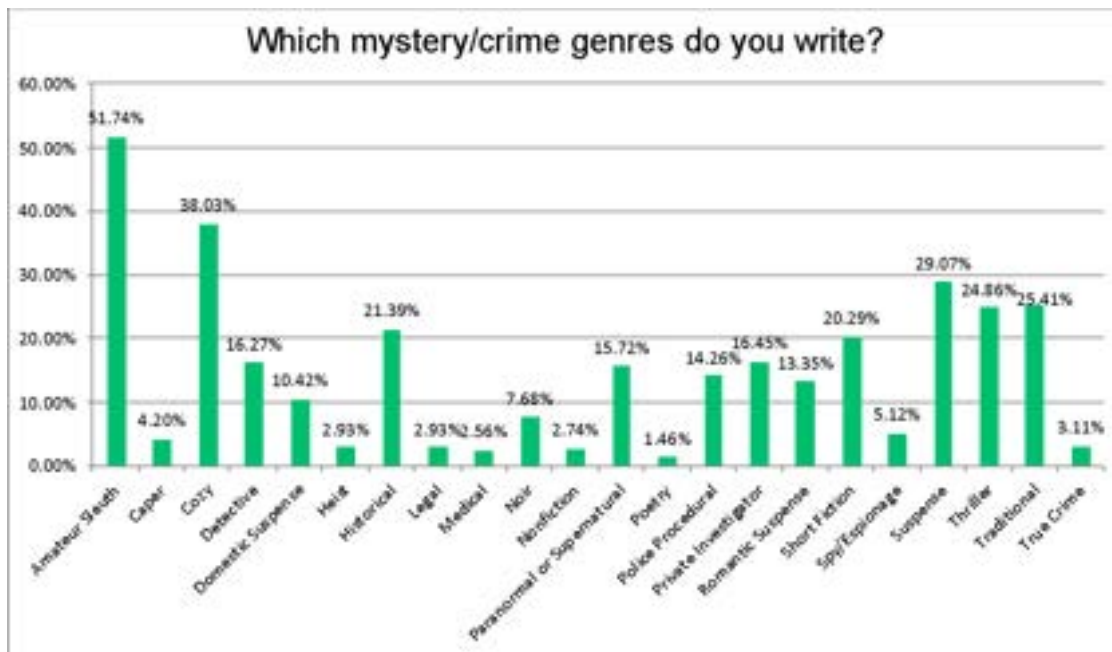


## (2) Writing Activities in 2023

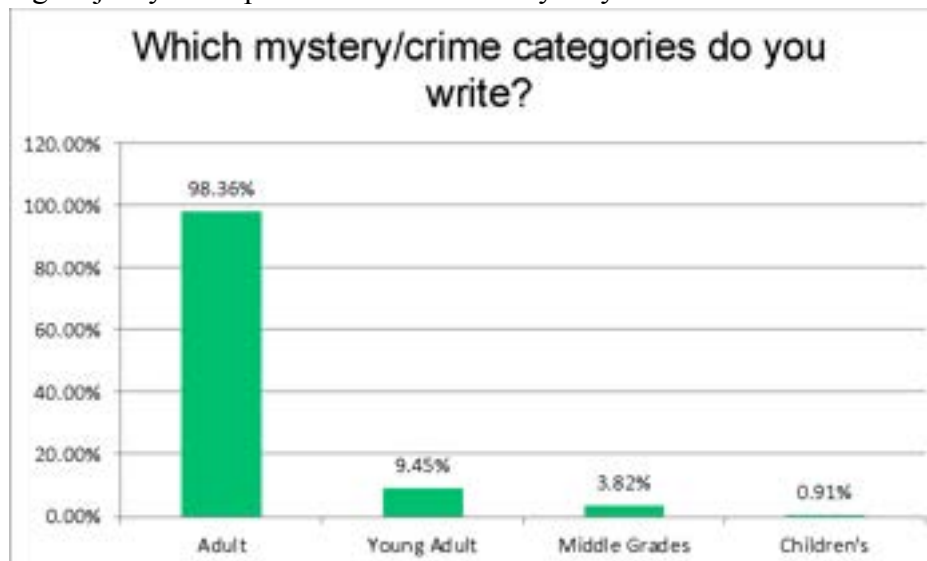
### General Writing Activities

95% of respondents reported that they were writers at some stage of the writing process included, but not limited to, writers of articles, essays, short stories, novellas, novels, collections, or book-length true crime.

A slight majority of authors report that they write in the amateur sleuth genre, with the next most popular genre for writer-respondents being cozy mysteries.

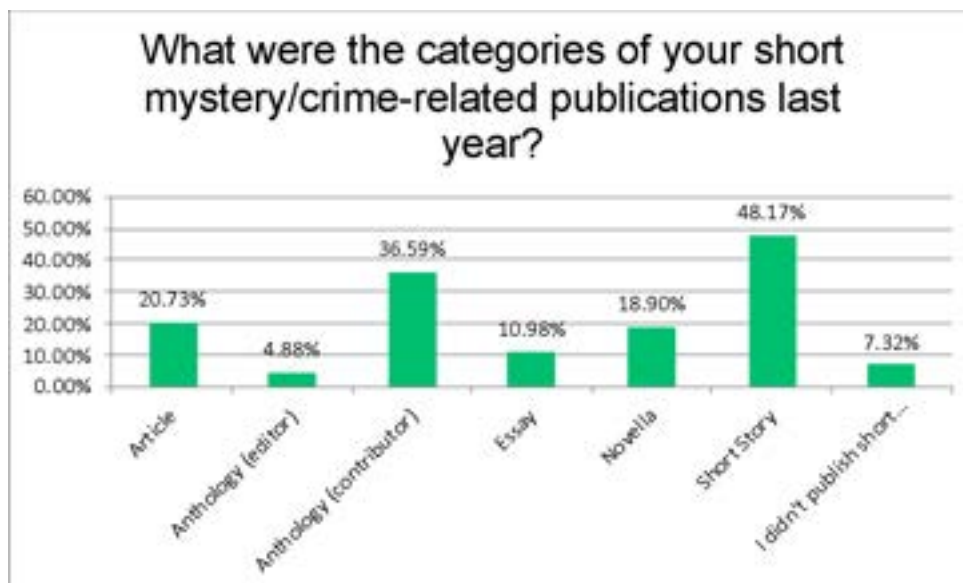


The overwhelming majority of respondents write adult mystery/crime fiction.

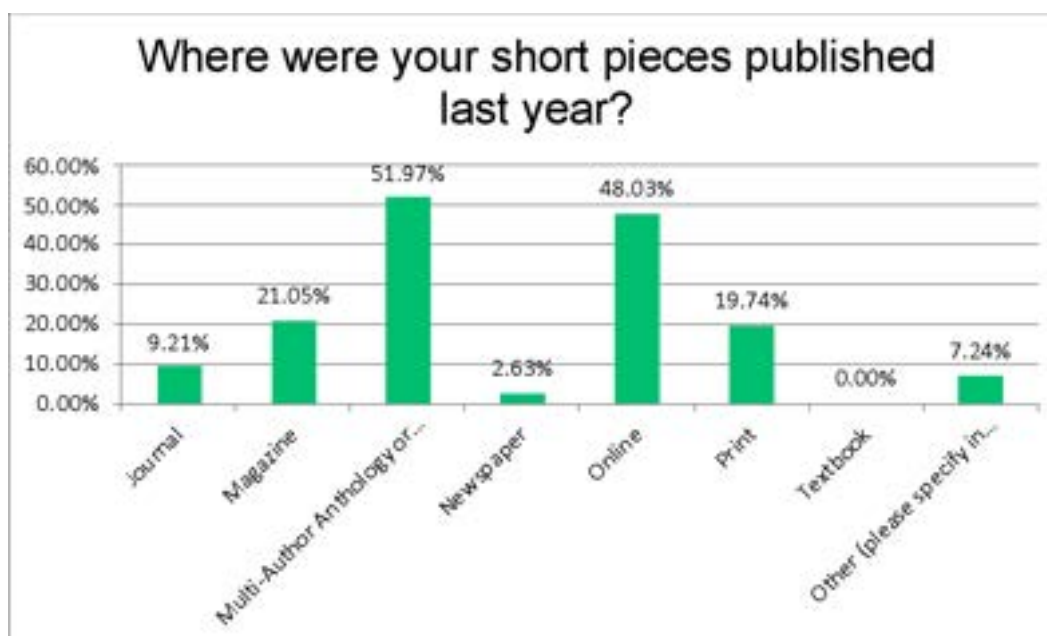


## Short Fiction and Nonfiction Publications

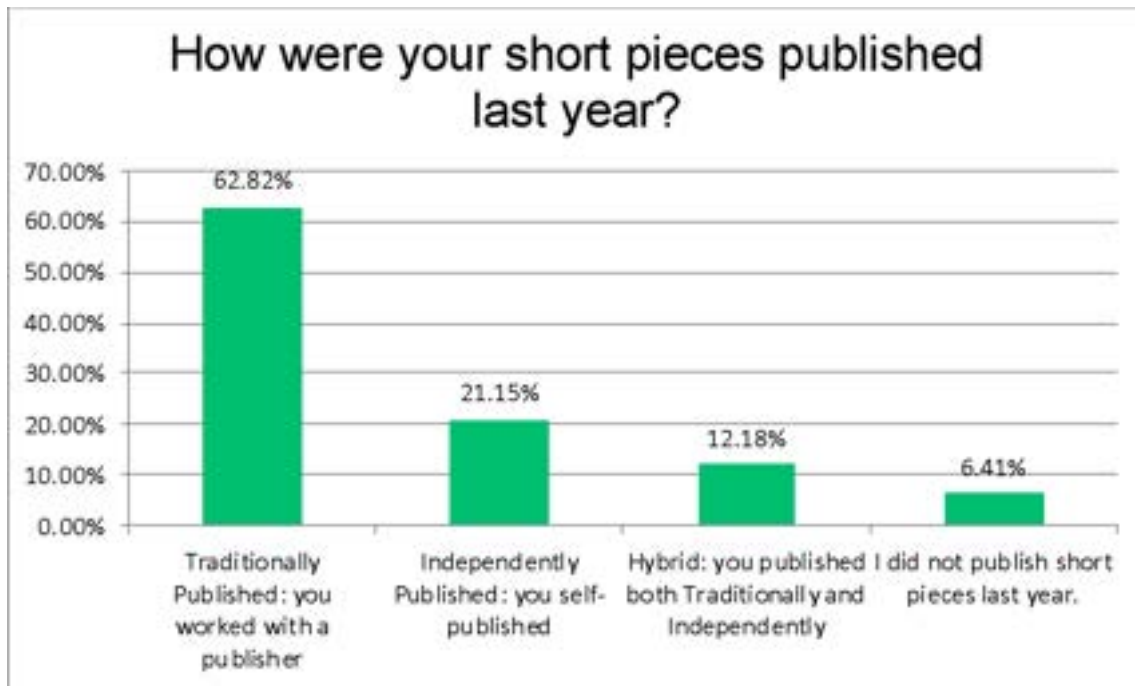
We asked survey takers what kinds of short mystery/crime-related fiction and nonfiction they published in 2023. For our purposes, short fiction and nonfiction includes non-book-length articles, anthology contributions as an editor or a contributor, essays, novellas, or short stories. 48% of respondents answered that they published at least one short story in 2023, followed by 37% that contributed to an anthology. There is likely a significant amount of overlap between these two categories, as short stories are often published in anthologies.



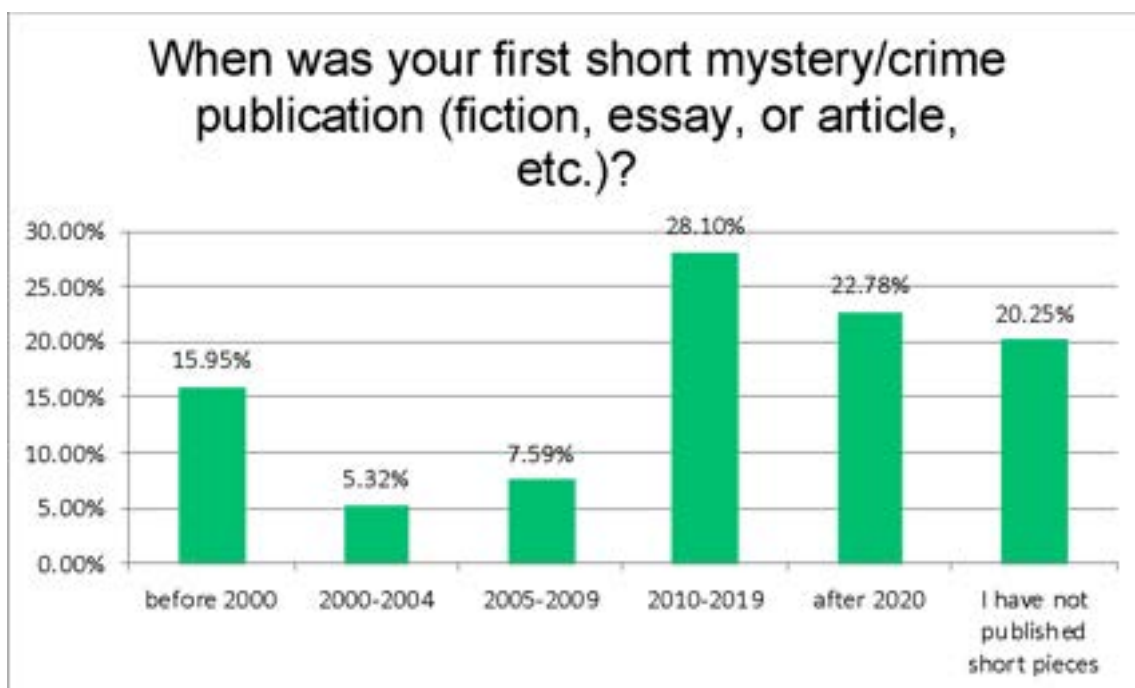
52% of respondents published short works in multi-author anthologies in 2023. It should be noted that 48% of respondents indicated they published short works online but that many journals, magazines, newspapers, etc are online exclusively, so the same author could have chosen multiple answers for this question.



Authors with short mystery/crime-related works were published traditionally, independently, and hybrid. Still, the majority of authors, 63%, were traditionally published in 2023. 80% reported that they published between one and five short works last year.

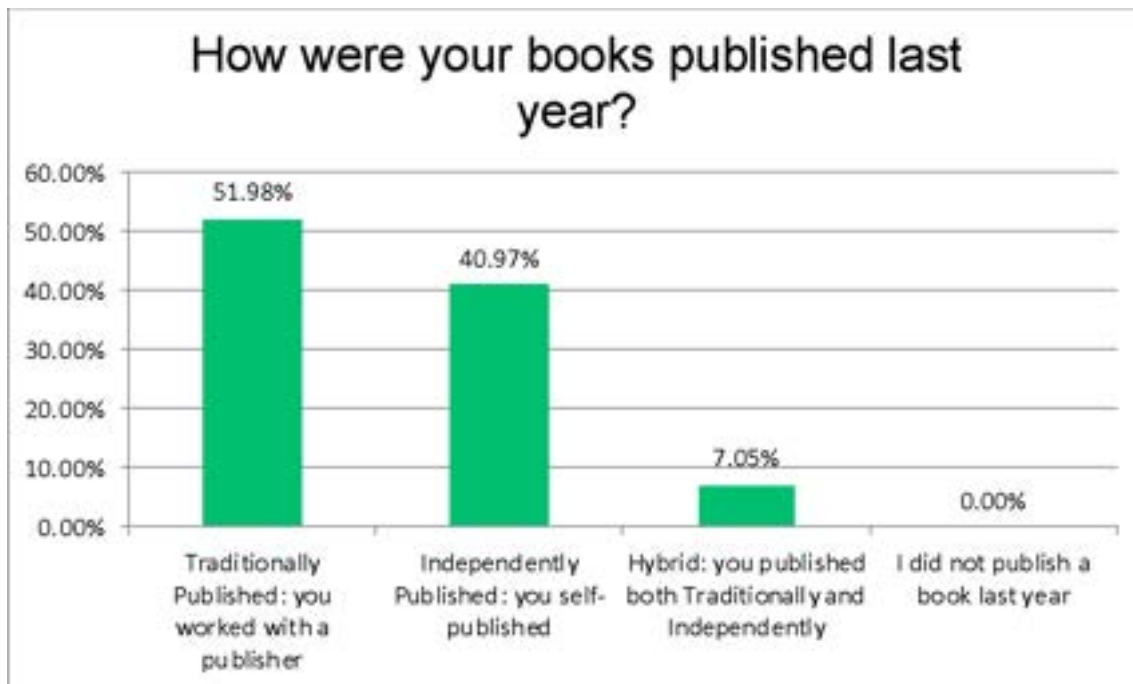


42% of respondents report they have published a total of between one and five short mystery/crime publications over the course of their career, with 28% stating that their first short work was published between 2010 and 2019, followed by 23% who reported first publishing a short work after 2020.



## Book Length Publications

We asked respondents about their book-length publications. 94% responded that they published at least one book length mystery/crime fiction related publication in 2023. 42% of respondents reported that their book length mystery/crime publications were traditionally published, while 41% were independently published. The remainder of respondents answered that they were hybridly published in 2023.

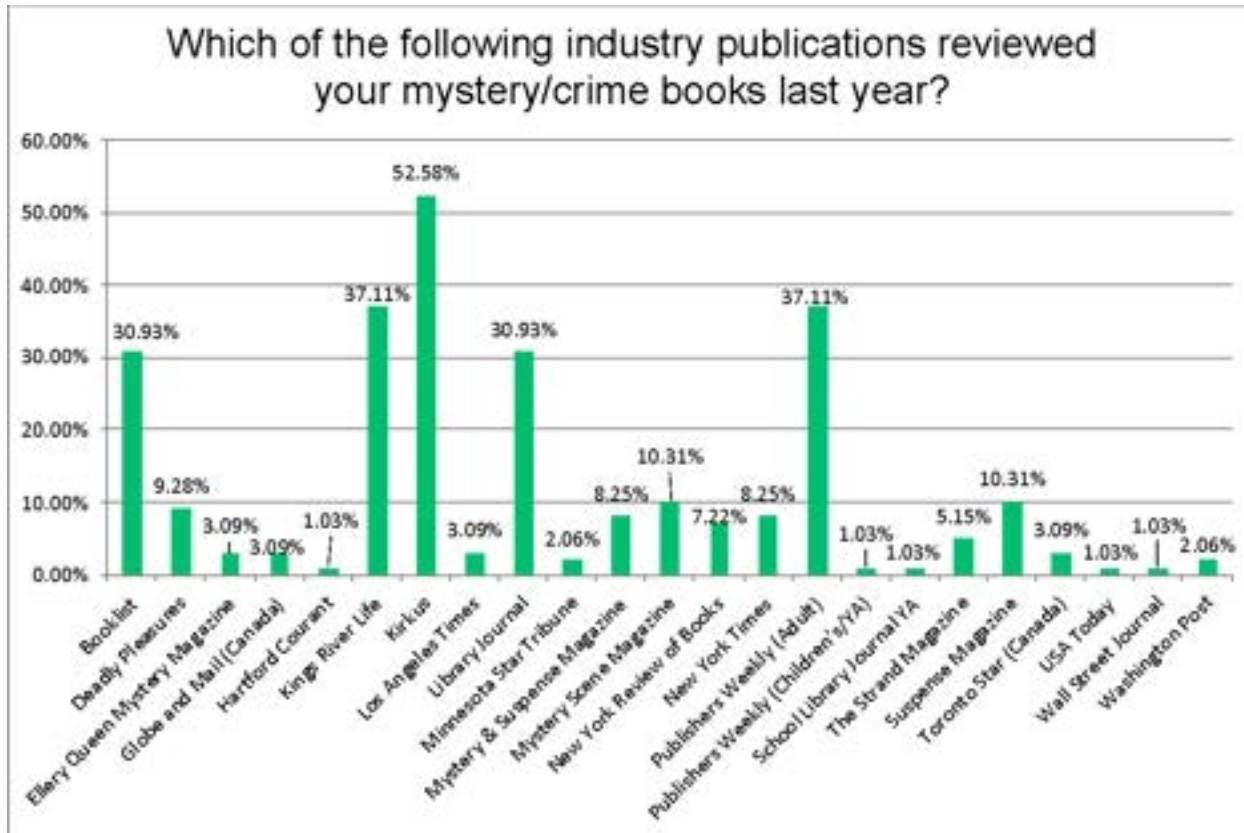


Respondents continue to be published by publishers of various sizes. 43% of respondents were published by a small press, while 36% and 25% respectively were published by mid-sized and large publishing houses.

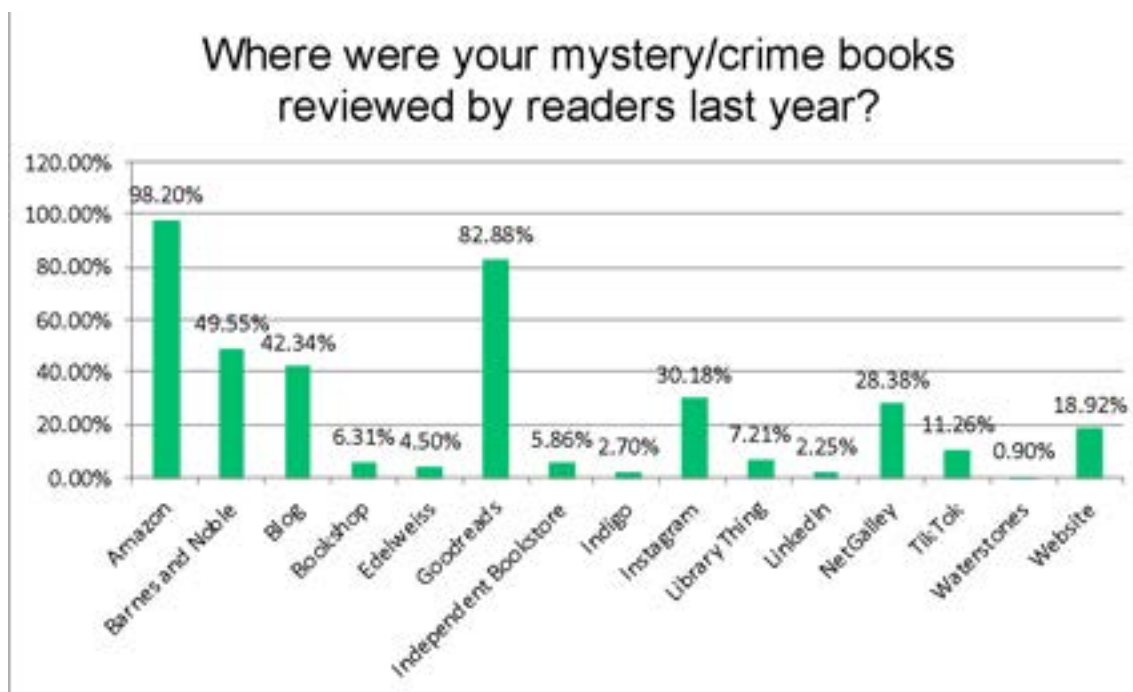
Interestingly, 56% of respondents who published book-length mystery/crime work also published at least one short work in 2023.

Delays related to the pandemic appear to have abated. In 2022, 12% of respondents answered that their book length publication had been delayed for pandemic-related reasons. In 2023, only 7% of respondents answered this question in the affirmative.

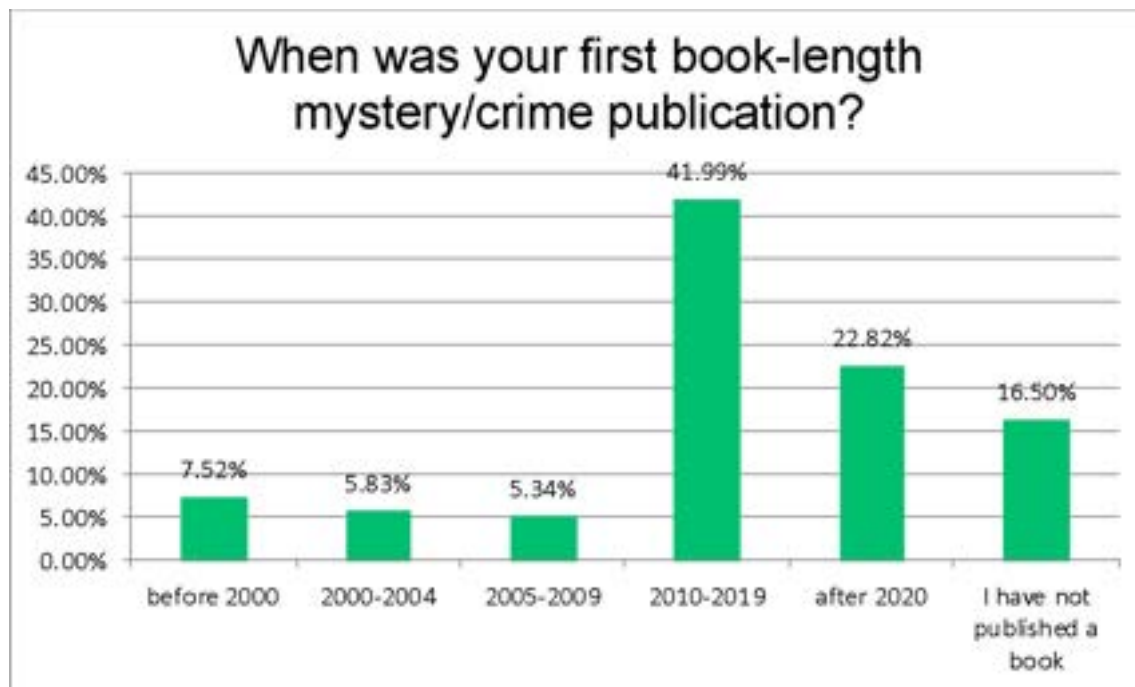
Reviews remain an important part of the industry. Respondents had their books reviewed in several widely known industry publications.



Of those respondents whose publications were reviewed last year, 94% report that they received between one and nine reviews. Almost all the respondents reported that their books received reviews on Amazon and Goodreads as well as several other platforms.



41% of respondents have published between one and five book-length mystery/crime publications. 42% of the respondents published their first book length mystery/crime work between 2010 and 2019, followed by 23% that report first publishing book length mystery/crime works after 2020.



### (3) Author Activities in 2023

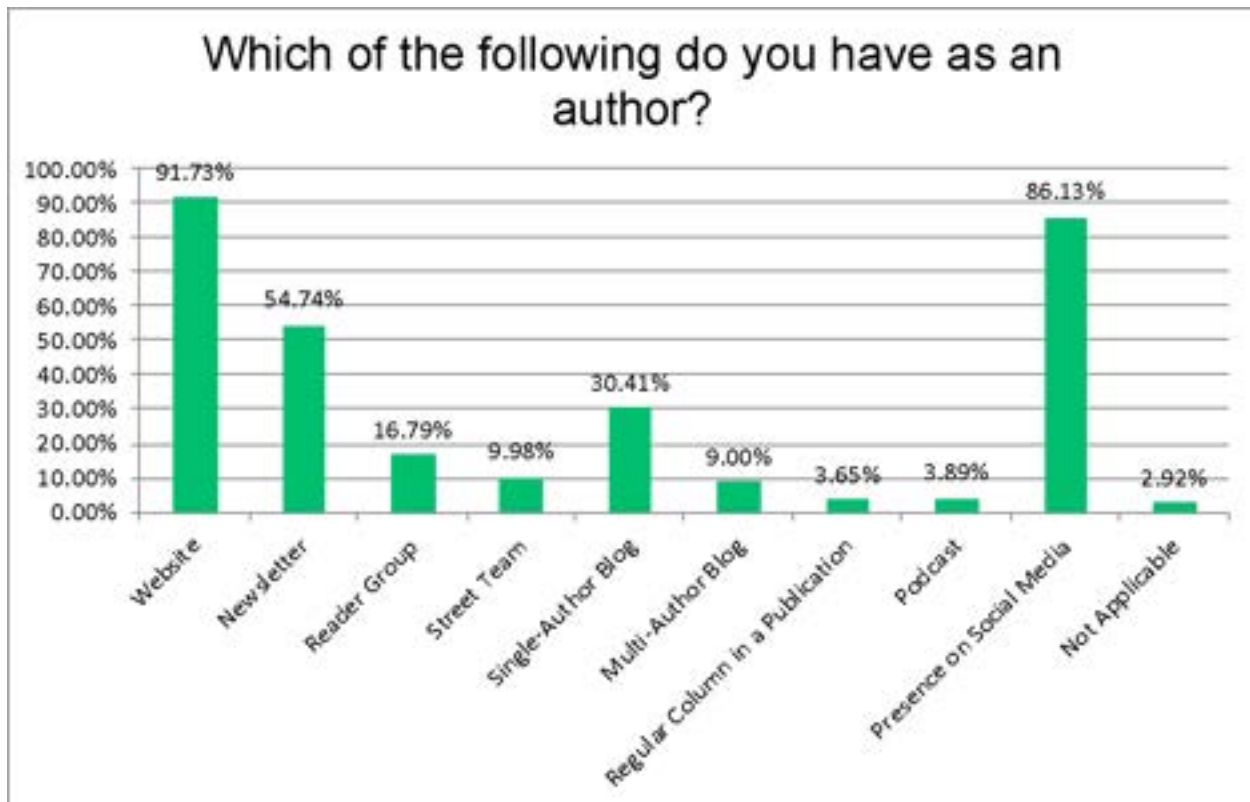
This section of the survey asked questions about money, marketing, agents, and more. When appropriate, some of the data was broken down by published or pre-published writers.

#### Author Names and Publications

Most respondents, 79%, publish under their own name, while another 24% publish under a single pseudonym. 3% of respondents publish under multiple pseudonyms. These results indicate that some respondents publish both under their own name and at least one pseudonym.

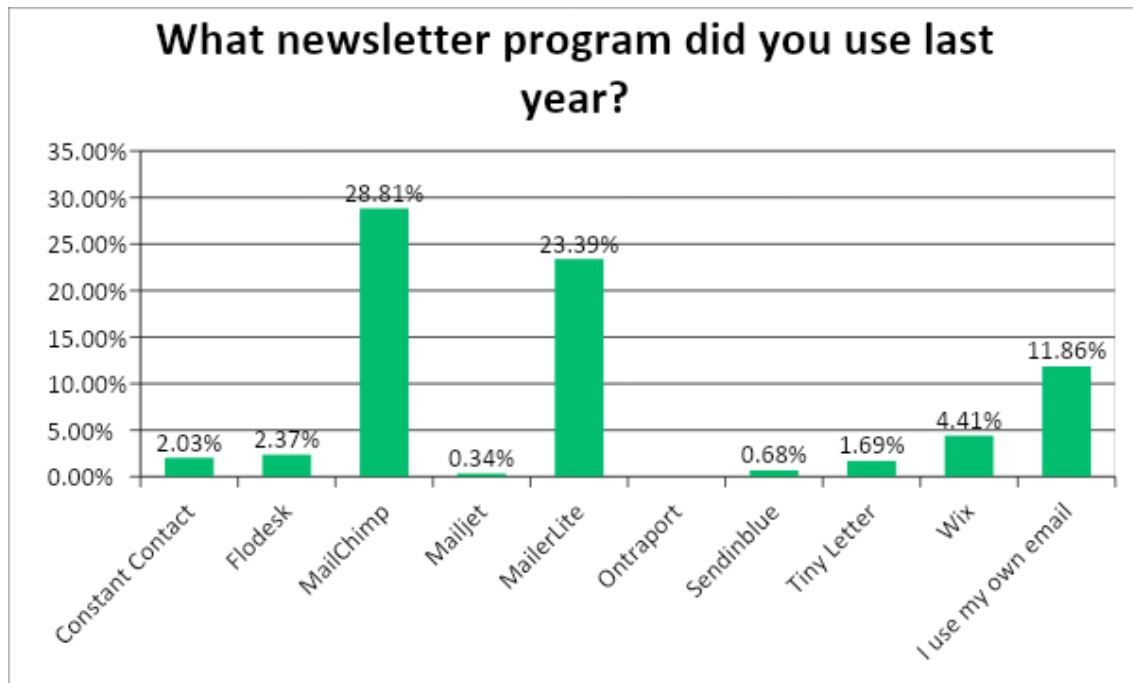
#### Marketing & Social Media

Respondents' answer to the survey question regarding public outreach and marketing efforts show active engagement with readers. 92% of respondents reported having a website, 86% maintain a social media presence, and 55% stated they publish their own newsletter.

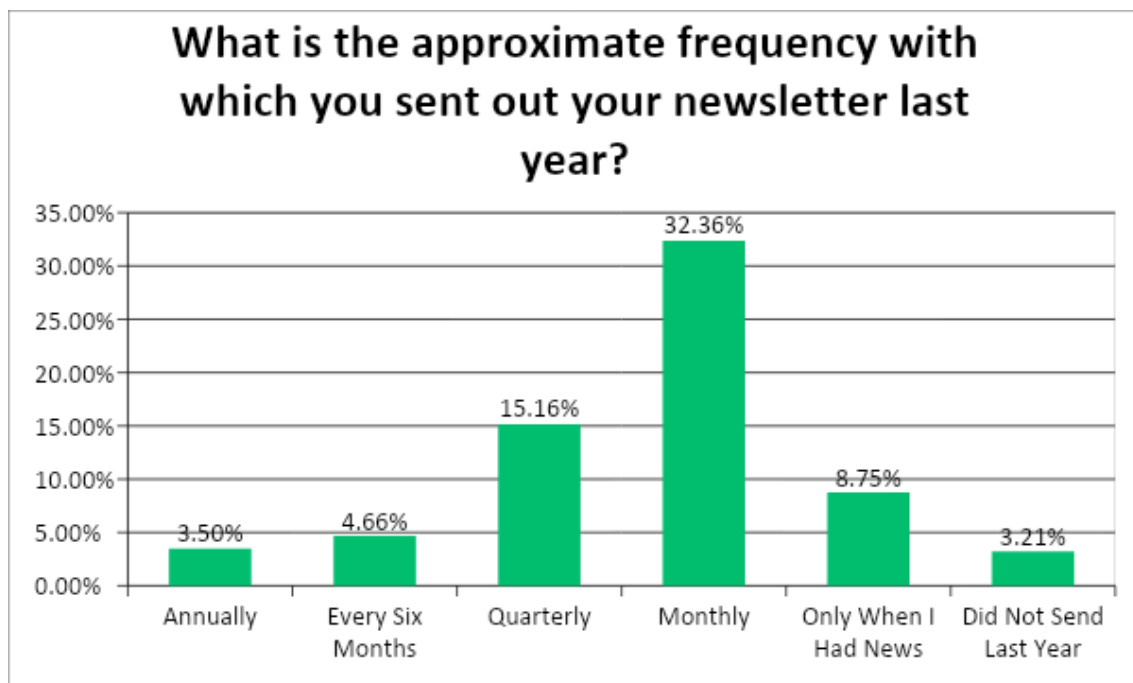


## Newsletters

Most respondents who send out a newsletter use MailChip, followed by MailerLite.

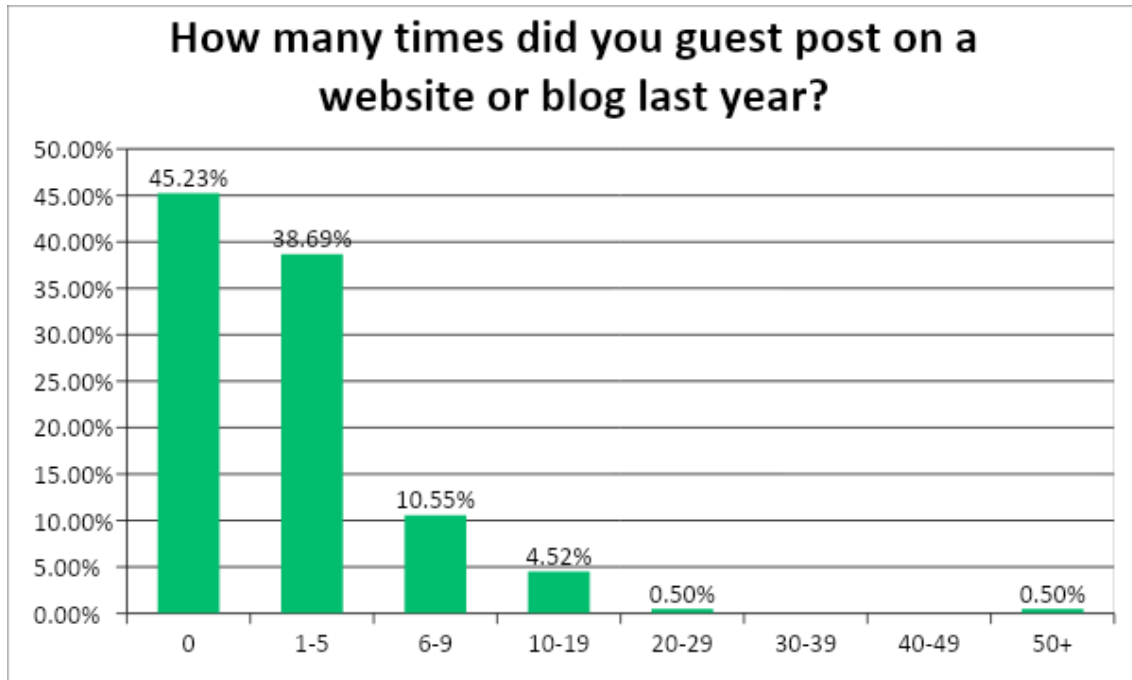


Most respondents send a newsletter monthly. 37% of authors stated that they have 1-499 subscribers to their newsletter, but the second highest response came from authors who have no subscribers.

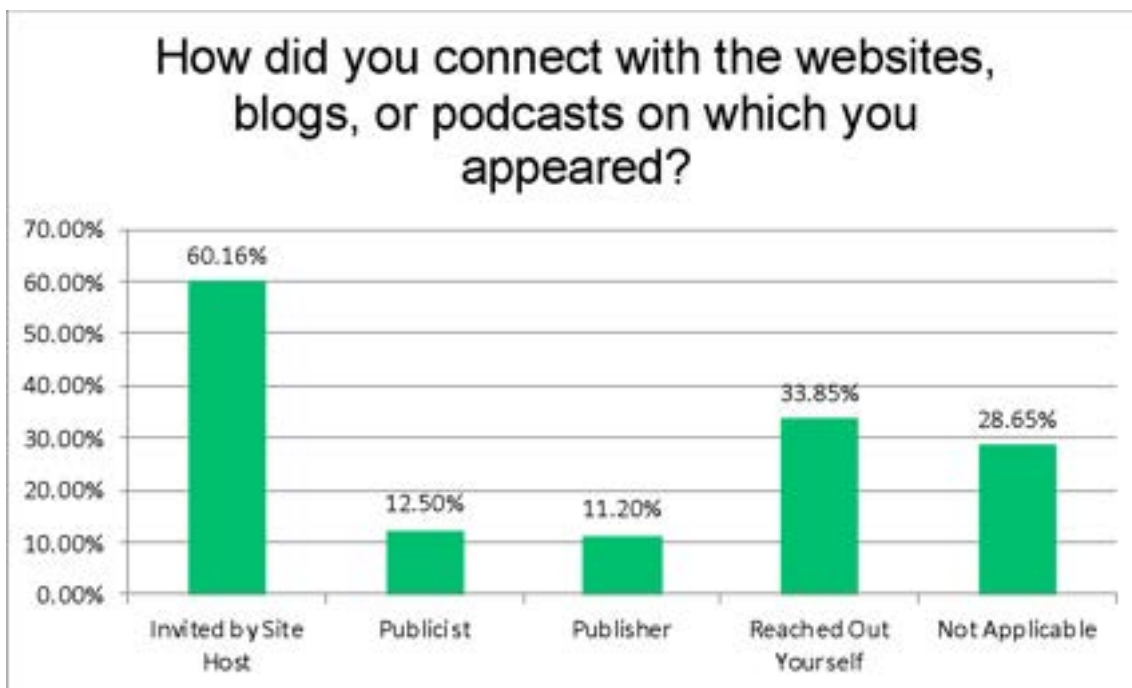


## Blogs & Podcasts

Many respondents did guest posts on websites or blogs that were not their own in 2023. 48% responded that they had been guest on a podcast during the year.

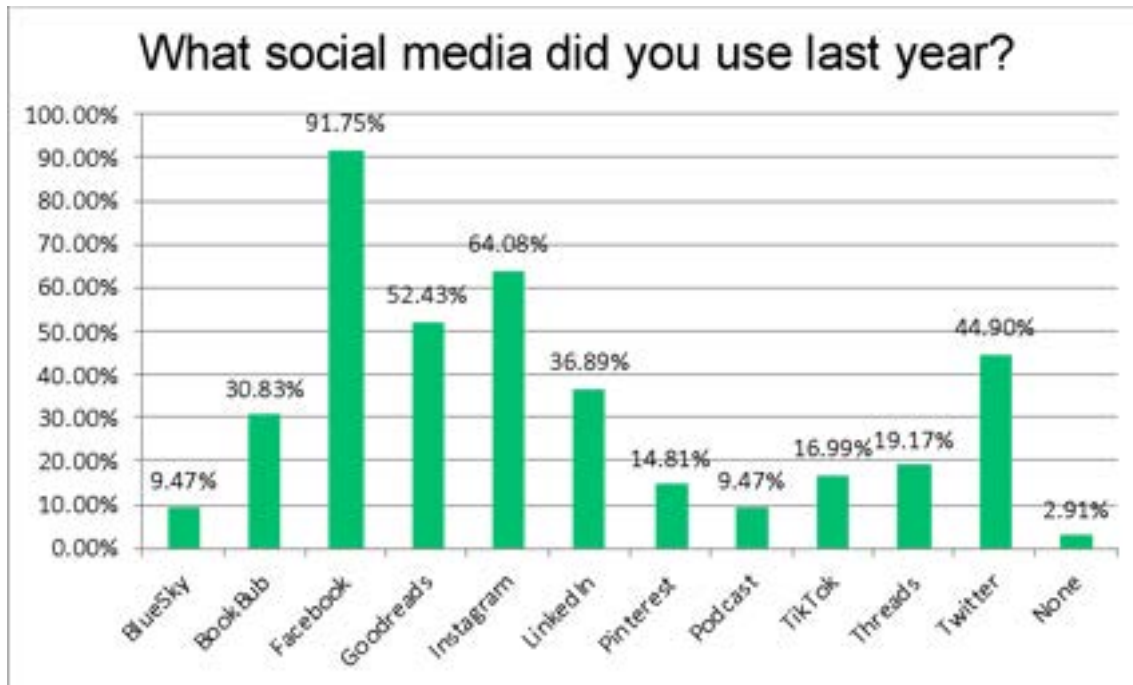


Most authors connected with website, blog, or podcast managers via invitation. However, a significant number secured their blog or podcast spot by reaching out themselves.



## Social Media

Facebook remains the favorite among authors, followed by X (Twitter).

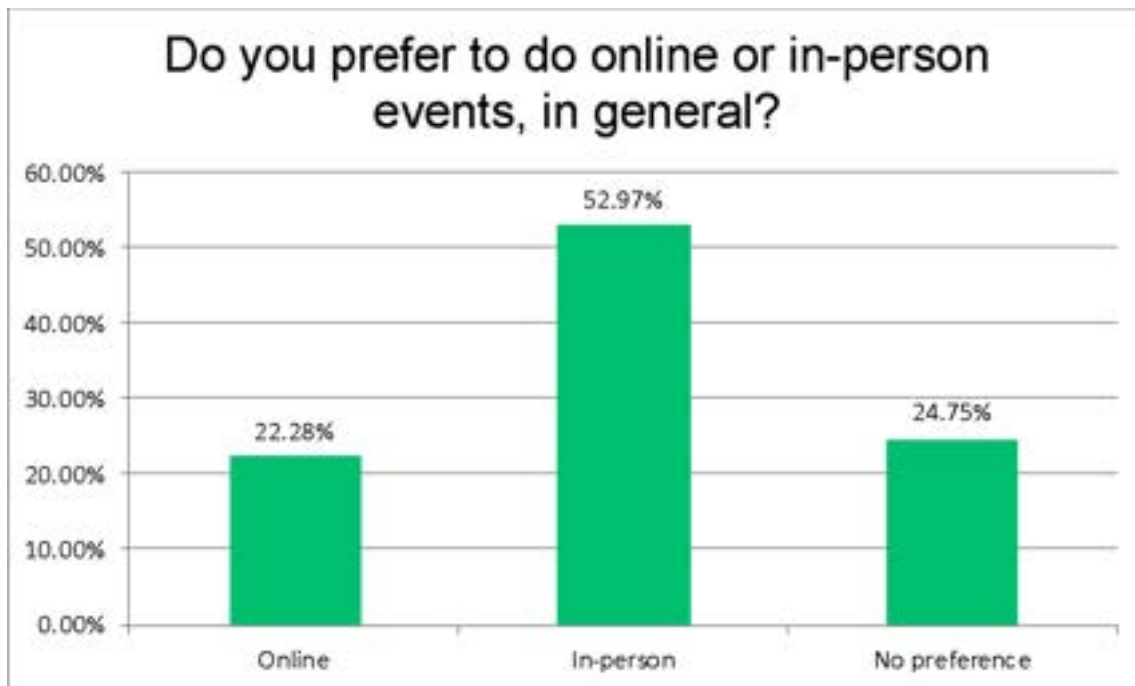


## Conferences & Events

Most respondents reported that they did not attend a mystery/crime-focused conference in 2023. Of those who did attend events, Bouchercon was the most popular conference, followed by in-store author events.

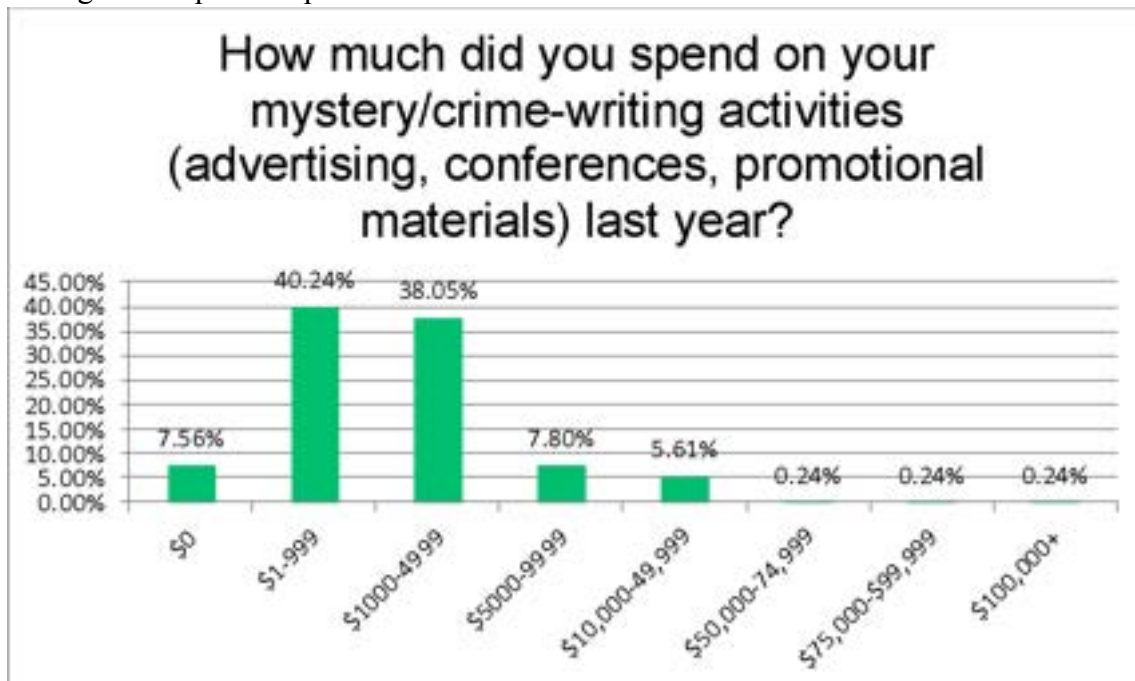


Most respondents reported a preference for in-person events and conferences over online events and conferences.



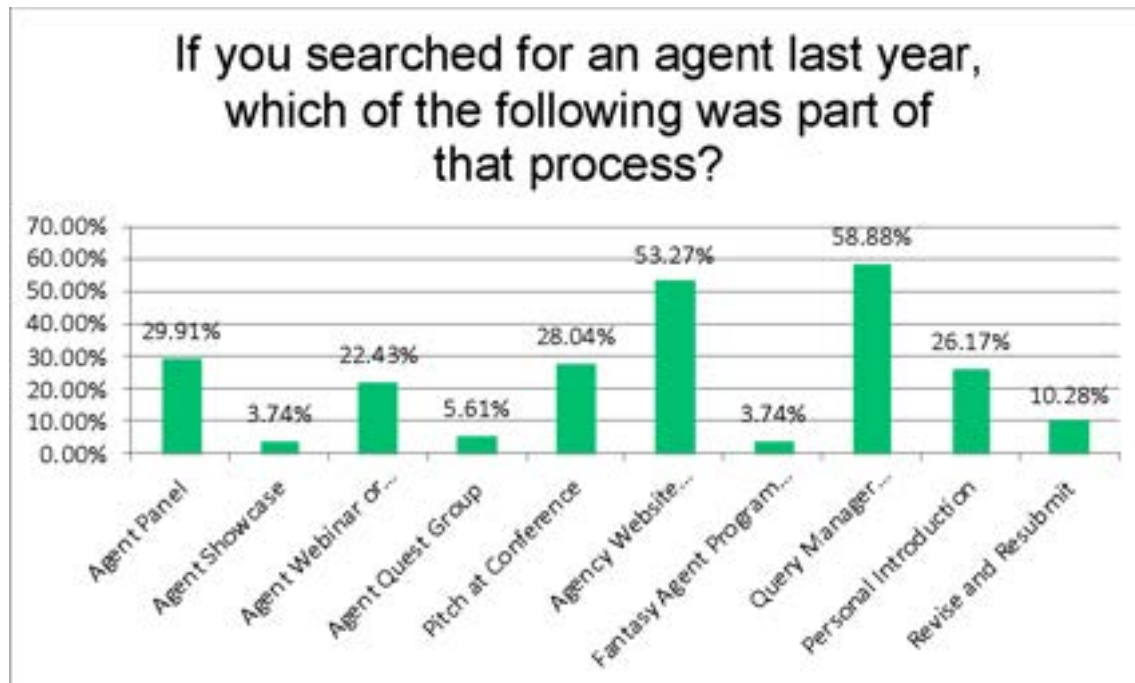
## Publicists

40% of respondents report spending between \$1-999 on advertising, conferences, and promotional materials related to their mystery/crime writing activities. Most, 79%, did so without the aid of a publicist; however, 10% reported working with a publicist paid for by their publisher, while another 11% reported hiring an independent publicist.



## Agents

The percentage of authors reporting that they worked with an agent in 2023 fell from 34% to 28%, but 69% of those who responded reported wanting to work with an agent. Of the respondents who searched for an agent in 2023, the most common method was querying the agency via Query Manager, followed by querying directly through the agency website.



## Money

How much was your last advance per book (amount promised upon signing a contract)?

	2021	2022	2023
\$0	49%	49%	51%
\$1-999	7%	8%	10%
\$1000-4999	15%	15%	14%
\$5000-9999	10%	7%	9%
\$10,000-49,999	12%	12%	10%
\$50,000-74,999	1%	2%	1%
\$75,000-\$99,999	1%	1%	1%
\$100,000+	1%	3%	2%

What was your approximate income as a mystery/crime writer last year?

	2021	2022	2023
\$0	12%	11%	14%
\$1-999	40%	38%	34%
\$1000-4999	18%	20%	20%
\$5000-9999	7%	7%	9%
\$10,000-49,999	14%	15%	14%
\$50,000-74,999	3%	3%	3%
\$75,000-\$99,999	0%	1%	2%
\$100,000+	5%	6%	4%

## (4) Member Identities 2023

A complete picture of who our members are provides us with vital information about how to best support them. We asked members to identify across multiple areas: age, race, gender, sexuality, disability, and employment. The membership information changed a little from last year.

### Highlights

While SinC's membership remained steady in 2023, the number of members who responded to the survey was down 20% over the number of members who responded to the 2022 survey. As was the case in the last several years, the majority of our responding members are white, cisgendered women over the age of 50. SinC leadership has initiated several initiatives designed to reach out to younger, diverse potential members who write and read in a variety of mystery subgenres, and we hope to see those efforts reflected in the survey responses in the coming years.

### Disability

22% of respondents reported some form of disability. This is an increase from last year's 20%. The number of members reporting an invisible disability increased slightly, from 7% to 8%. The number of members reporting a physical disability fell from 13% to 11%.

### Sexual Orientation

The percentage of respondents identified as belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community remained steady at 10%.

### SinC Equity Project Survey

For more information about our membership, the SinC Equity Project did a 2024 survey, and the results are here: [https://www.sistersincrime.org/page/2024\\_Equity\\_Project\\_Survey](https://www.sistersincrime.org/page/2024_Equity_Project_Survey)