

R E S E A R C H R E P O R T

to tell  my story

A study of practising professional
Indigenous writers of Australia

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PREFACE

The research team would like to express its thanks to the Indigenous writers whose participation was essential to its success. Many generously gave their time on the telephone and in focus groups, and completed the survey with great care. We know that many more who responded to the survey would have liked to participate further if time, distance and circumstances had allowed. We thank each writer, and hope that this study will be of interest and of use.

The research team would like to express its thanks to the many organisations and individuals who assisted in this study by posting out hundreds of surveys through their mailing lists. In particular we would like to thank Magabala Books for their particular help in the initial testing of the survey.

We acknowledge with gratitude the staff of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board, Warren Woodward, Senior Research Officer in the Policy, Communication and Planning Division of the Australia Council, and Lisa Moutzouris of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' National Centre for Cultural and Recreation Statistics in Adelaide, for the time and care they took at each stage of this study.

We trust that the information contained in the study will assist the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council in their commitment to maintain and improve the grants program for Indigenous writers. We thank them for their interest in and support of this study.

The research team consisted of Judi Cooper, principal researcher and author of the study; Dr Helen Molnar, who provided additional research; Christine Morris (an Indigenous writer) who was principal adviser for the study and is a Research Fellow with the Griffith University, Australian Key Centre for Culture and Media Policy; and Mark Colbert, a specialist in statistical research into the production and use of media and culture, who provided the statistical analysis of the data. And finally, our thanks to Carol Dettmann and Hilary Shrubbs for their help in preparing the report for publication.

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INTRODUCTION

Indigenous writing has been supported by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council since it was established in the 1970s. For more than 25 years the Board has been providing grants to individual Indigenous writers as well as assisting and funding organisations which promote and encourage Indigenous writing.

In recent years the Board has allocated about 15% of its annual grant funds (more than half a million dollars each year out of a total of about \$4.1 million) for writing and the promotion of Indigenous writing.

This research project set out to collect reliable information about the Indigenous writer in Australia which could be used to help the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board and the Australia Council in policy development and grants programs. The study focused on the employment and economic circumstances of the Indigenous writers as well as exploring other pertinent issues such as access to publishing and the motivations of the writers.

The Council has previously commissioned surveys of practising professional artists working in Australia. These surveys have been highly regarded and copied in many other countries. In 1983 the Australia Council published the report *The Artist in Australia Today*. This was followed by *When Are You Going To Get a Real Job?* in 1989 and *What Do You Do for a Living?* in 1994. Though writers were represented in these studies, there was no particular emphasis on Indigenous writers.

This study focuses only on Indigenous writers and is the first such study to do so. Our report presents the findings of the study in a form that is intended to be useful not only to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board and the Australia Council, but to arts organisations and funding bodies of all kinds and to the Indigenous writers themselves.

The key topics of the survey of Indigenous writers included:

- characteristics and geographic distribution;
- education and training;
- working conditions and employment;
- financial circumstances;
- career development and conditions of professional practice;
- achievements and output;
- the situation of women writers; and
- grants and the role of the Australia Council.

The first step in carrying out this study was to define the target group of practising, professional Indigenous writers. This terminology was consistent with the previous studies cited above, but needed to be further defined in order to ensure the study was as inclusive as possible of all writing in the Indigenous community.

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1. WHO IS WRITING?

The guiding principles in identifying Indigenous writers for the purposes of this study were that the writer:

- had been working as a writer or had been published during the past three to five years;
- had been published in some form (including print, broadcast or performance); and
- was recognised as such by their community or more broadly; and/or had received a grant to work as a writer.

The study covered writers who received all, some or none of their income from writing; there was no requirement for specific occupational status of the writers.

The study was primarily conducted through a self-administered questionnaire. In addition, six focus groups of about 40 writers were held in Adelaide, Port Augusta, Alice Springs, Darwin, Sydney and Melbourne and about 50 phone interviews were conducted.

The questionnaire was developed over a two-month period of consultations and testing with Indigenous writers. With feedback from the Australia Council and individual Indigenous writers from different parts of Australia, the clarity and scope of the questionnaire was improved. It was also decided to include in the questionnaire three categories of writing which had not been included in previous Australia Council studies, but which were considered to be particularly significant for this survey:

- family history/oral history writing;
- oratories; and
- story-telling (radio and television).

The questionnaire was sent out through more than 50 Indigenous and cultural organisations as well as to individual Indigenous writers. Advertisements and an interim report were published in *The Koori Mail* to ensure that as many writers as possible were aware of the study.

In total, 1000 questionnaires were sent out over a period of 10 months. Unfortunately, an estimate of the total number of Indigenous writers in Australia could not be made, since it was impossible to know the degree of duplication of names across the various lists.

Inevitably, due to the budgetary and logistical constraints of this study, there may be some groups of writers or writing genres which are under-represented. In particular, we believe that writers living in remote communities, particularly where English language skills are weak, may be underrepresented. Traditional story-tellers may belong to this group.

Broadly, however, our coverage of the population and the genres appears to be representative. Not every question was answered by each respondent, although most questions were answered by at least 85% of respondents. There were some categories of response where the sampling size was too small to draw any conclusions. Generally, these have been omitted from the results of this study. There are minor exceptions to this, particularly in relation to responses regarding the use of traditional Indigenous languages – each Indigenous language that a writer said they had used in their writing has been noted in this report (Table 5.5).

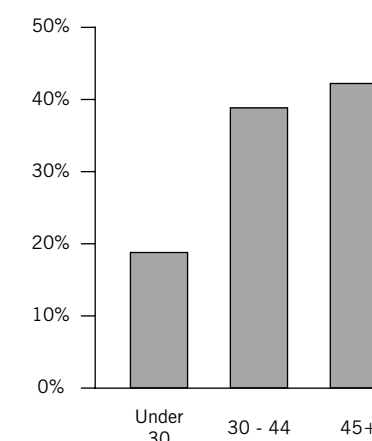
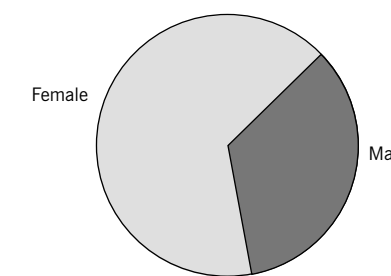
In the following chapters we look at the characteristics of the writers and their writing, at their motivation, and at their self-definition as professionals. We also discuss the issues surrounding the Australia Council, publishing, intellectual property and, of course, access to grants.

This chapter considers the profile of the Indigenous writer population. In building a picture of the writer population as a whole, we consider such factors as gender, age, location, occupation, educational attainment, further training in writing, the degree of disadvantage suffered by Indigenous writers and family circumstances. We have not attempted to estimate the size of the writer population. Our concern is with practising, professional Indigenous writers, but, as noted in the Introduction, there are on-going ambiguities with the definition of writers, particularly those living in rural and remote communities. Also, as will be seen elsewhere in this report, the majority of writers do not earn their living by writing (see Chapter 3). As a result, some writers may not define themselves as a ‘practising professional’; others may see writing as their main or most important occupation, although there is no apparent appreciable difference in their objective circumstances as writers, such as income or access to publication.

GENDER

Figure 1.1: Gender balance of writers

Two-thirds of the respondents were female. The only categories of writing where there was a significant gender difference were the screenplay, TV and video writing categories which had a greater proportion of males. (See Chapter 2.)



AGE

Most Indigenous writers are under 45. Of those writers under 45, the average age is 30.

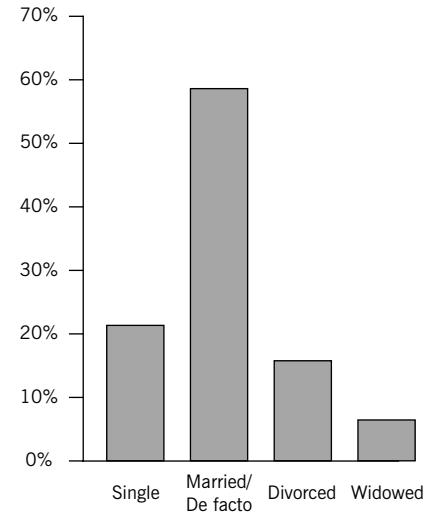
Figure 1.2: Age of writers

Most of the writers under are thirty between 25 and 29 years old. Only 7% of the writers are 65 or older.

FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

Figure 1.3: Marital status

Over half the respondents are married or have a partner. Half the respondents have dependants, with an average of 2.6 dependants each.



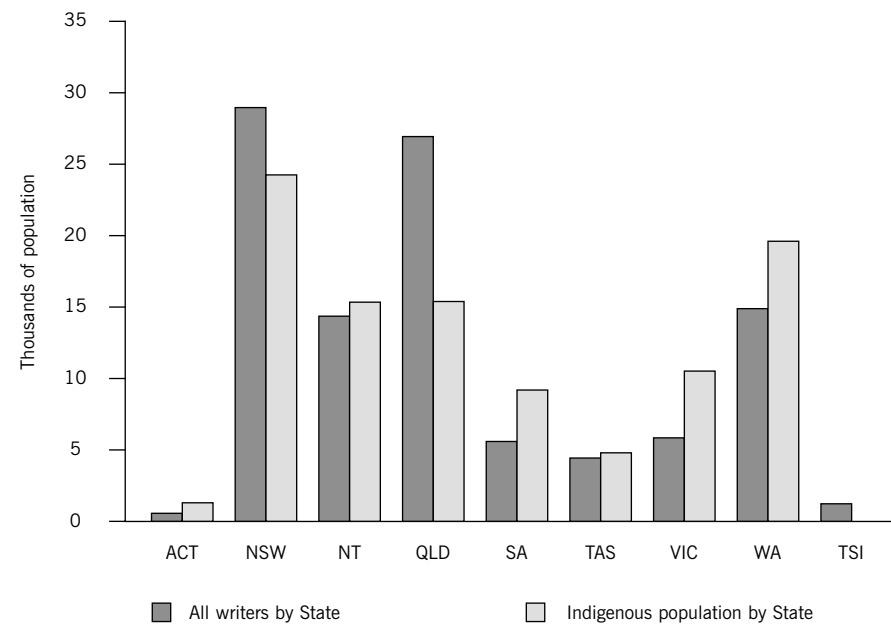
RESIDENCY PATTERNS

The majority of writers surveyed live in urban areas (though this may reflect the difficulty of reaching writers in rural and remote communities). About half the respondents live in cities, a quarter in towns, 11% in rural areas and 9% live in rural and remote areas.

The States/Territories with the largest writing communities were New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory. This corresponds to the overall population distribution of Indigenous people in Australia.¹

¹ ABS Population Distribution, Indigenous Australians - 1996

Figure 1.4: Residency of writers by State



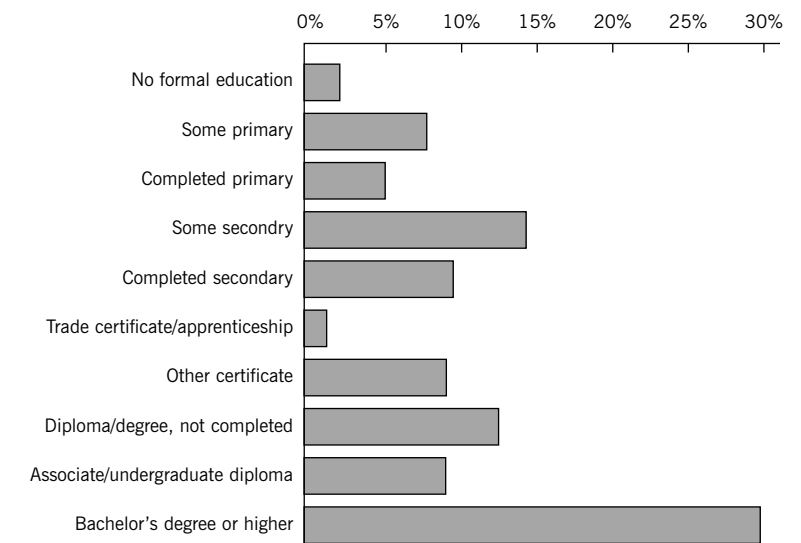
EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Indigenous writers have attained higher levels of education than the Indigenous population as a whole². Half of all respondents had some tertiary education (compared to 4% of the general Indigenous population); about a third of the writers had a degree (compared to 2% of the general Indigenous population).

A third of all respondents had undertaken secondary or post-secondary education. Sixteen per cent had either received no formal education or had only attended primary school.

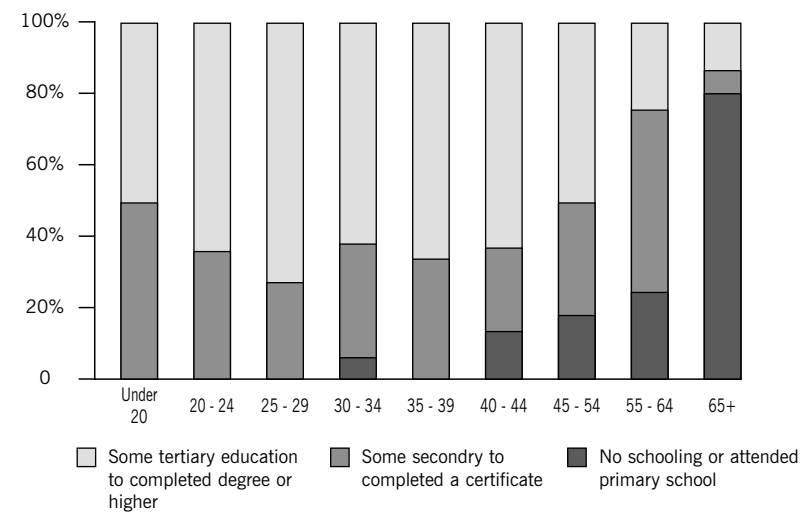
² ABS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People - 1996

Figure 1.5: Educational attainment



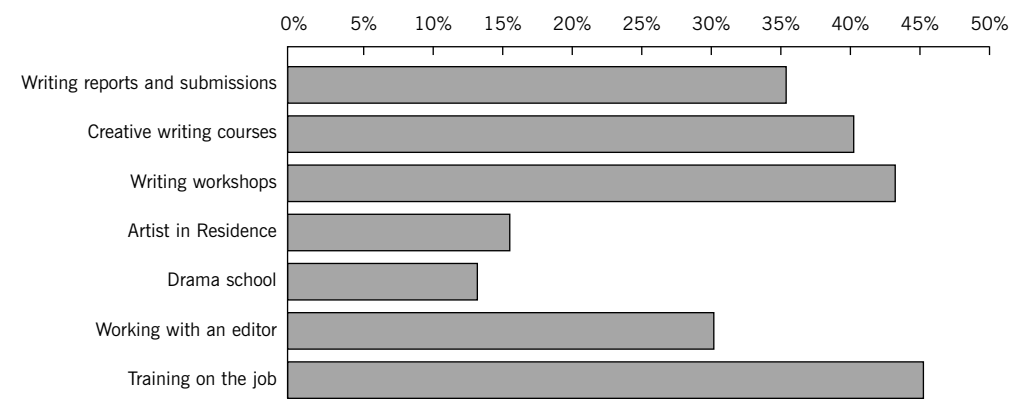
However, as can be seen from Figure 1.6 (over page), there are marked differences in respondents' educational attainment when age is taken into account. A high proportion of writers between the ages of 20 and 54 had undertaken tertiary level studies. Few writers aged 55 and over had undertaken tertiary education.

Figure 1.6: Writers by age and educational attainment



In addition to their formal education, 69% of the respondents had engaged in further training specifically relevant to their writing activities. Figure 1.7 shows a high proportion of respondents who had engaged in informal training, such as training on the job (46%), working with an editor (30%) and writing workshops (42%).

Figure 1.7: Types of further training undertaken



In the focus group responses, many of the writers expressed a need for more informal training specifically aimed at Indigenous writers. Although this raises the question of the availability of accessible and attractive formal education and training for Indigenous writers, individuals in almost every focus group raised the need for informal training in the form of regular local meetings, workshops and information networks.

JOBS, OCCUPATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Ninety-two per cent of all respondents had jobs or were engaged in training at some time in the two years before the study.

Between a third and a half of all respondents who had participated in secondary education or higher are involved in arts-related occupations. A generally lower but still significant proportion is involved in further training.

The respondents with no formal education had no paid work of any kind except their writing. However, this group had the highest proportion of any of the educational groups of people studying or training in the arts at the time of the survey.

Table 1.1 Proportion of respondents engaged in work or additional training according to their educational attainment

Types of jobs done in the past two years	No formal education	Primary education	Completed secondary education	University diploma/degree or higher
	%	%	%	%
Job, training or voluntary work outside the arts area	0	76	75	87
Writer	75	53	65	53
Work connected to the arts (administration teaching, etc.)	0	24	30	49
Creative work in arts field other than writing	0	29	65	47
Voluntary work associated with the arts	25	53	25	40
Studying or training in the arts	50	6	30	27

Ten years ago I was unable to read or write. My wife taught me and now I attend Sydney University. Most of the writing I do is with my wife – it's a team effort. I teach several subjects at TAFE and I am now teaching other Indigenous people how to write both creatively and academically. - This respondent began writing when he was 40 years old.

DISADVANTAGE AND DISCRIMINATION

More than half of the respondents said that they had suffered professional disadvantage as a writer because they are Indigenous. Most of these writers said that they suffered this disadvantage very frequently or at least some of the time.

Forms of discrimination listed by the writers were:

- generally more work available to non-Indigenous people;
- difficulty for Indigenous people to become well known as writers;
- a bias against Indigenous people in some sectors;
- Indigenous people excluded from some forums;
- lack of educational opportunities; and
- a small number of writers felt that community and family responsibilities made pursuing their writing difficult.

The most common kinds of disadvantage mentioned were finding it difficult to become well-known and bias or exclusion from some forums.

In addition to the forms of disadvantage listed above, lack of education was often nominated as a serious disadvantage for Indigenous writers.

This questionnaire was filled out by the ghostwriter who assisted with the author's life story – now at press. The author has continued to study and improve her literacy skills and is now composing poetry without assistance. – Note on questionnaire form.

WHAT IS NEEDED NOW?

The theme of commitment to further training and education in writing was strong throughout all the responses.

A number of the participants in each of the focus groups emphasised the need for informal meetings and workshops for Indigenous writers. Indeed the comment on the need for community-based, open-access training and networking was marked, compared to any other comment on education and training for writers.

There is no outlet [where I live] where [people can meet] one night per month – a poetry/song-writer night – specifically for Indigenous people.

I need to practice – when I went to school I could not understand the language. My grammar is still backwards...I write in Aboriginal English, but the editor says my grammar is wrong. But I was writing it as I understood it in my language. I have to change my whole thought pattern when I'm writing. You need training to understand writing for your own community. There is a conflict of philosophies.

Conferences are good but too expensive to get to. Also some workshops say people have to have qualifications to get to, or you need a lot of money, [and] yet they are for Indigenous people. Why have it in a capital city? Why not go to the communities [and] have an open entry?

[There] is a need to set up local writers' groups in communities – training is important.

In terms of formal education for Indigenous writers, the IAD/Bachelor College writing course was acknowledged as very important, but in terms of other courses at tertiary institutions around Australia:

Too many people have to go away [for writing training and education] – that's harsh. People have to leave the things they want to write about.

A number of people wanted to record their own experiences – but need help with workshops in research and writing.

Evening yarnning from the older people is missing now – TV, video is stealing this time and [story-telling] is getting lost. Children don't think [the story-tellers] are important because they are not doing this.

[There need to be] workshops for Aboriginal people to work with writers' groups on a regular basis. There are lot of writers here that won't step forward. Also, [there is a need] to expose people to what other people are doing.

There is no avenue to develop as a writer... Nowhere for writers to go – you write on your own [but there's] not enough support for development.

I always wanted to be part of an organisation (perhaps like Gadigal³).

There needs to be cross-cultural workshops [in arts institutions].

[There needs to be] better utilisation of community-based arts organisations for older people to talk their stories, younger people to write and sing their stories.

³Gadigal Information Services was set up specifically to manage Koori radio in NSW. Under this umbrella it runs a number of other services including writing, literature and multimedia. Radio remains Gadigal's main focus.

2. WHAT IS BEING WRITTEN?

This chapter considers the types of writing being done by Indigenous writers, and associated factors which impact on the writers and their writing.

Table 2.1: Types of writing ever done

Type of writing	Ever done by respondents
	%
Family history	65
Report writing	55
Short story	55
Poetry	54
Academic writing	47
Newsletter article	42
Non-fiction writing	34
Song writing	27
Journalism	26
Children's writing	25
Print feature	20
Screenplay	21
Novel	19
Scriptwriting for radio	19
Story-telling on radio	19
Scriptwriting for TV	18
Play for theatre	18
Scriptwriting for video	16
Oratories	14
Multimedia	13
Story-telling on TV	7

Table 2.2: Types of writing done most frequently

Type of writing	Done most frequently by respondents
	%
Family history	28
Poetry	27
Short story	22
Report writing	21
Academic writing	16
Non-fiction writing	13
Screenplay	12
Play for theatre	10
Scriptwriting for TV	10
Newsletter article	7
Scriptwriting for radio	7
Print feature	6
Oratories	5
Scriptwriting for video	5

More than two-thirds of respondents had written a family history at some time in their writing career and many respondents are still writing family histories. Poets, short-story writers and report writers are the next largest groups.

Nearly half of those who have ever written a family history, a novel, poetry, a play for theatre, or scripts for TV say that that form of writing is the one type of writing that they do most frequently these days. A quarter to a third of writers who have ever written in most of the other genres still devote most of their writing to that genre. The most notable exceptions are for newsletter writing, screenplay writing and story-telling on radio. In these cases just under a fifth of the respondents have remained within these genres.

Not surprisingly, there are patterns within the range of genres which evolve into three main groups. Writers move within ‘literary’ genres: family history writers, novelists, short story writers, song writers, poets, playwrights, children’s writers and story-tellers (electronic media). The non-fiction writers are involved in academic writing, report writing, newsletter writing, general non-fiction, journalism and multimedia writing. Screenplay writers and writers for television and video form a third group.

WRITING AND GENDER

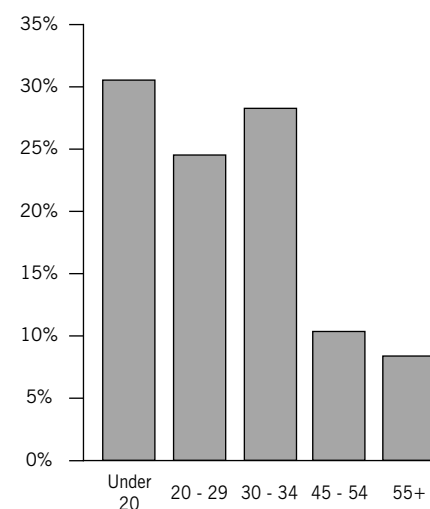
Family history is the most common of all genres of writing with 58% of males and 68% of females having written a family history. Poetry and report writing are the other two genres in which more than half of both males and females write.

The only major difference between males and females in the types of writing preferred were for songwriting, screen writing and writing for TV and video where almost twice as many males are writing in these genres. On the other hand, women tended to dominate traditional oratory. The only respondent who wrote for comics was a male.

WRITING AND AGE

The median age respondents started writing is 33, and the average age is 30 years old.

Figure 2.1: Age started writing



More than half the respondents began writing before they were 30 years old. Just under a fifth began writing between the ages of 30 and 44, with a further fifth starting after they were 45.

Table 2.3 shows that certain genres of writing are preferred and more frequently done by different age groups. Nearly half of all writers of family histories are in the 55+ age group. This is a particularly important observation since family history has been identified by respondents as one of the most important genres in Indigenous writing (see Chapter 5). This is also the age group with the lowest levels of educational attainment.

At the other end of the age scale, half of all the journalists are in the 30–45 age group, with nearly 40% under 30. This may be or can be explained by the rapid growth of Indigenous media and Indigenous media training, particularly radio, over the past 15 years.

Table 2.3: Types of writing distributed by age

Type of writing done most frequently by respondents	20 - 29 years ⁴	30 - 34 years	45 - 54 years	55+ years	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
Family history	9	35	13	43	100
Novel	19	38	33	10	100
Short story	10	49	20	21	100
Poetry	21	35	29	13	100
Song	24	57	14	5	100
Plays for theatre	20	57	15	8	100
Journalist	40	52	4	-	100

⁴ This table excludes all respondents under 20.

WRITING AND LOCATION

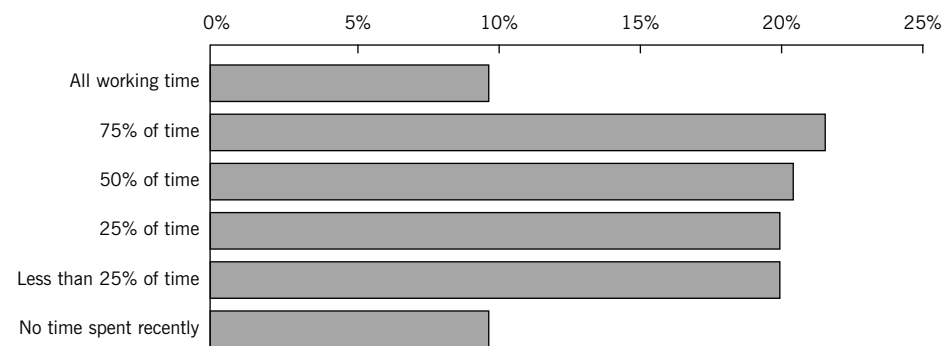
Only academic writers and non-fiction writers tend to be more concentrated in cities. There were no major differences when comparing the other writing genres and geographic location.

TIME SPENT WRITING

Very few writers are able to make a living from their writing (see Chapter 3). Yet, a comparison of income from writing with time spent writing demonstrates a significant commitment by Indigenous writers.

When considering their whole year, nearly a third of the respondents said they wrote for three-quarters or more of their working time; just over a third wrote between a quarter to a half of their time; and nearly a third wrote for less than a quarter of the year. Less than 10% wrote full-time, or had done no writing in the previous year.

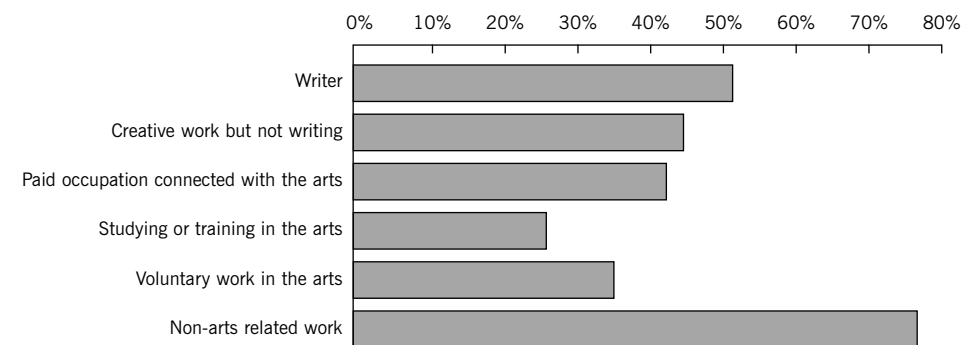
Figure 2.2: Proportion of time spent writing



OCCUPATIONS OF WRITERS

Respondents were asked to nominate jobs or occupations that they had been involved in at any time over the past two years. Over half of the respondents had worked as a writer at some time in the past two years. Between a third and a half of the writers have been involved in arts related work or activities over the past two years.

Figure 2.3: Occupations of writers



A quarter had been involved in studying or training in the arts and a third in voluntary work in the arts. Nearly half of the respondents have been involved in creative work other than writing or in a paid occupation in connection with the arts.

Many of the respondents had a variety of jobs, with three-quarters involved in non-arts related jobs and activities in addition to their arts related activities.

On the whole, however, writers did not focus on their day-to-day occupations when talking about their writing.

3. HOW MUCH ARE WRITERS EARNING?

Very few Indigenous writers are making enough income from their writing to live on. Over half the respondents said that they had worked as a writer at some time in the past two years, with nearly half having also worked in some other creative field.

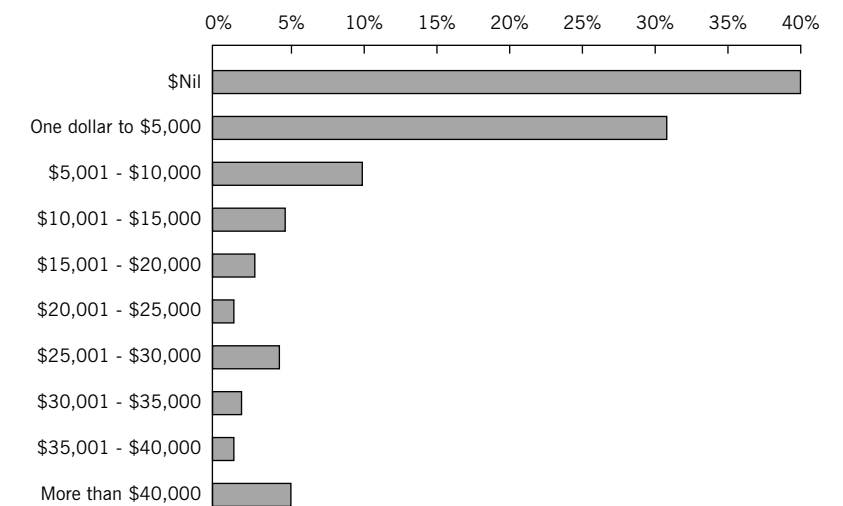
Of all respondents 42% were employed in some arts related field such as teaching or administration.

The average (mean) annual gross income of writers from their writing is approximately \$6,500.

INCOME LEVELS

Respondents were asked what their total income from writing had been in each of 1996 and 1997. The results were similar for the two years. In 1997, 40% of all respondents earned nothing from their writing. A further 30% earned between \$1 and \$5,000. Nearly 85% of all respondents earned somewhere between nothing and \$15,000.

Figure 3.1: Income levels over 1997

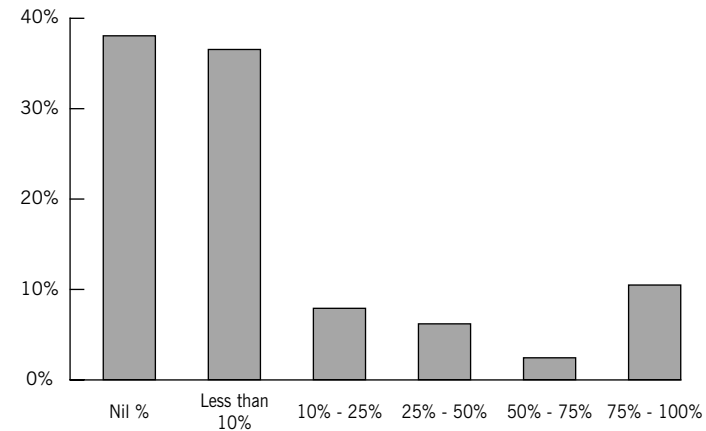


Predictably, 87% said that they did not earn enough for themselves and their families to live on. As mentioned in Chapter 2, 50% of the respondents have dependants, the average number being 2.6.

PROPORTION OF INCOME EARNED FROM WRITING

More than two-thirds of respondents said that their income from writing represents less than 10% of their total income. For 5% of writers, writing provides between a quarter and half of their total income. Just over 11% earn between three-quarters and all of their income from writing.

Figure 3.2: Proportion of total income earned from writing



Over half the respondents had received a pension, Abstudy or CDEP⁵ income, and one fifth had received unemployment benefits in the two years prior to this study. In these instances, a relatively low income earned from writing could represent a relatively high proportion of total income. It is in this context that some members of the focus groups suggested that writers and funding bodies might benefit from closer cooperation with the CDEP program.

⁵ CDEP: Community Development Employment Program. Commonwealth work-for-the-dole scheme for Indigenous people, administered by ATSIC.

Table 3.1: Respondents' total income earned from writing as a proportion of their total income⁶

Amount earned from writing, 1997	Less than 10% of all income	10% - 25% of all income	25%-35% of all income	50% - 75% of all income	75% - 100% of all income
NIL	12	-	-	-	5
One dollar to \$5,000	73	50	9	-	-
\$5,001 - \$10,000	9	22	46	-	19
\$10,001 - \$15,000	4	14	18	17	5
\$15,001 - \$20,000	1	7	9	-	-
\$20,001 - \$25,000	-	-	-	17	5
\$25,001 - \$30,000	-	-	-	33	19
\$30,001 - \$35,000	1	-	-	17	5
\$35,001 - \$40,000	-	-	-	-	9
More than \$40,000	-	7	18	17	28
Wouldn't say	-	-	-	-	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100

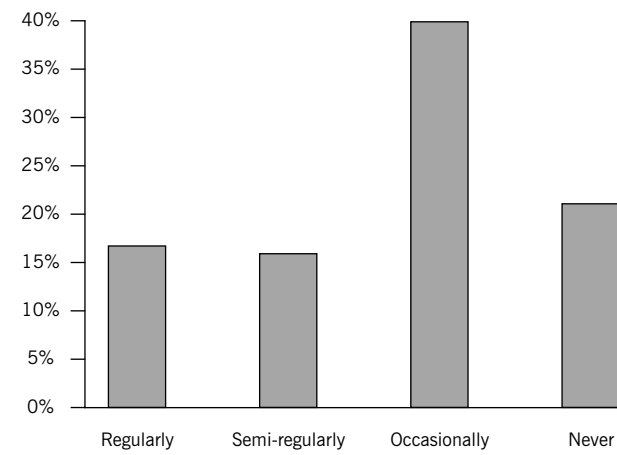
⁶ 73% of all respondents fell into the two categories where income earned from writing was nil or under 10%. Thus the raw number of respondents who fall into the higher percentage of total income categories are small. 10%-25% of income: 7%; 25%-50% of income: 6%; 50%-75% of income: 3%; 75%-100% of income: 11%. Thus some caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions from these figures.

Table 3.1 shows the proportion of the writers' total income represented by earnings from their writing. Nearly three-quarters of all those writers whose income from writing represented less than 10% of their total annual income, earned \$5,000 or less from their writing. At the other end of the scale, 28% of all those writers whose income from writing represented three-quarters or more of their total income, earned in excess of \$40,000 from their writing. About a fifth of respondents, whose income from writing was between a quarter and a half of their total income earned between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

REGULARITY OF INCOME

One third of respondents had received income from their writing regularly or semi-regularly, with two-thirds of writers receiving only occasional income or none at all.

Figure 3.3: Regularity of income over the past two years



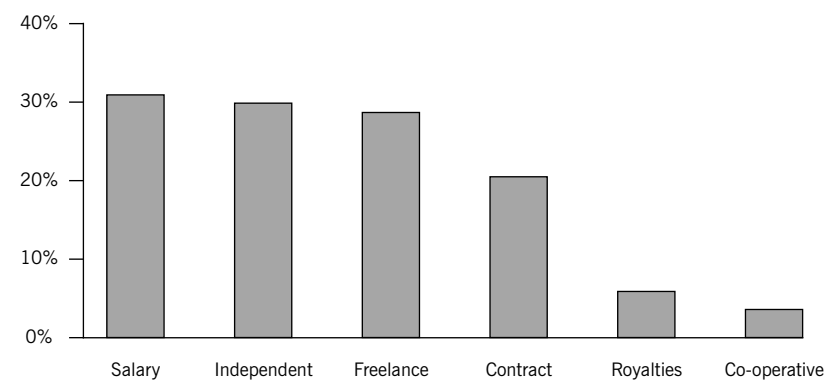
GENDER BALANCE BY INCOME

There is not a significant gender disparity in earnings from writing. In the most significant income bracket – those earning between \$1 and \$5,000 from their writing – both men and women are represented in equal proportion. Of those earning no income from their writing (40% of all respondents) women are somewhat over-represented.

FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT

Writers were asked how they had earned their income from writing over the past two years or what forms of employment had been most common for them. Some writers said they had earned their income from writing using more than one form of employment.

Figure 3.4: Forms of employment

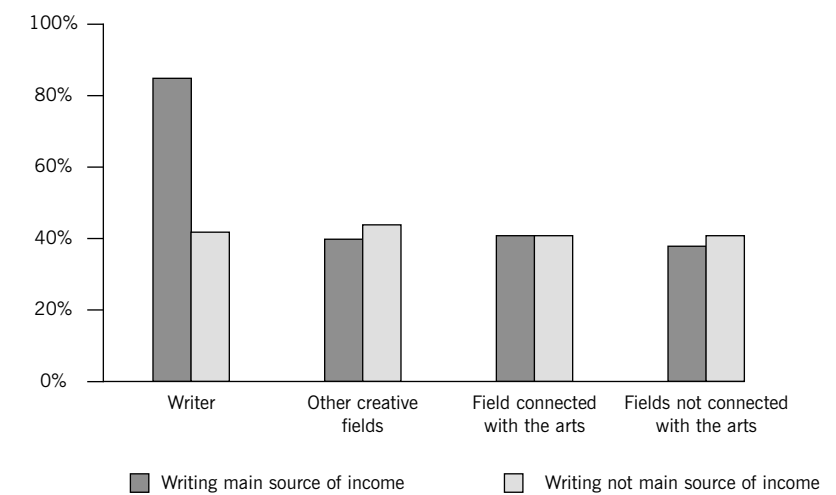


A third of the writers earned their money from writing whilst on salary, nearly 30% worked freelance and another 30% worked independently. Only 6% of the writers earned royalties over the past two years.

TYPES OF JOBS WORKED IN RELATION TO INCOME FROM WRITING

Of those who said that writing was their main source of income, 85% had a job as a writer at some time in the past two years. Of those who said that writing was not their main source of income, 45% had also held a writing job in that same period.

Figure 3.5: Writing main source of income as a proportion of kinds of jobs



About a quarter of the respondents were working at their writing independent of any relationship with an organisation, agent or publisher.

FURTHER DISCUSSION

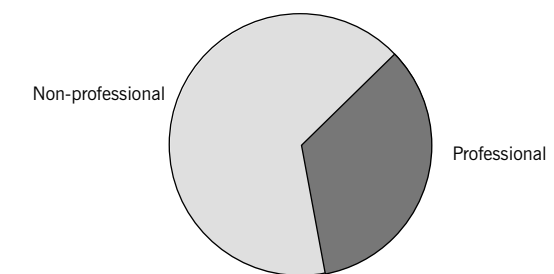
Questions on levels of income from writing did not stimulate much discussion in the focus groups, except in relation to the education system. A number of writers expressed a strong desire to write for Indigenous children in the school system, and felt that it would be possible to make a full income from this kind of writing. These comments were usually expressed during discussion on the wish to pass on Indigenous culture through the school system, and the lack of appropriate materials available to teachers of Indigenous children.

4. WHAT MAKES A PROFESSIONAL WRITER?

This chapter considers some of the issues surrounding the self-identification of Indigenous writers as professional or otherwise. Just under one-third of the respondents identified themselves as professional writers (see figure 4.1).

The reasons for identification as a professional writer cannot clearly be ascribed to any single group of factors identified in the following tables. Many of the respondents who did not identify as professional writers seem to have the same profile across a number of categories as those who identify themselves as being professional. This chapter seeks to identify the range of factors that contribute to Indigenous writers identifying themselves as professional.

Figure 4.1: Self-perception as a 'professional writer'



IS IT BEING PUBLISHED?

In the past five years, 91% of all respondents have published at least one work in the categories listed in Table 4.1, with an average of two types of works published per respondent. However, as indicated in Table 4.4, having work published is not a clear indicator of self-identification as a professional writer.

Respondents were asked which of a list of 20 types of writing they had published in the past five years (see Table 4.1). This shows, for example, that a quarter of respondents had a short story published in the past five years. The writers also indicated if they regarded themselves as professional or non-professional writers. Of the short story writers, over half considered themselves to be professional writers.

Table 4.1 Works published in the past 5 years by self-identification as a professional writer

Types of works published	Proportion published by category	Proportion identifying as a professional writer
	%	%
Newsletter article	43	39
Journal articles	39	41
Poetry	34	35
Broadcast on radio	31	41
Report	30	42
Short story	25	53
Broadcast on TV	21	40
Non-fiction writing	20	50
Family history	16	39
Video script produced	15	34
TV script produced	14	52
Radio script produced	14	37
Traditional story	12	22
Play workshopped	12	56
Song	10	57
Multimedia	10	55
Screenplay produced	8	53
Children's book	8	31
Play produced	7	54
Novel	6	75

Although only 7% of the respondents had a play produced, more than half of those playwrights consider themselves to be professional writers.

Half or more of published songwriters, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, non-fiction writers, screen writers and writers for television and multimedia tended to identify themselves as professionals.

Only one-third of respondents who were published writers in the other genres saw themselves as professional.

Three-quarters of those who had published a traditional story did not see themselves as professional writers.

IS IT EARNING A LIVING?

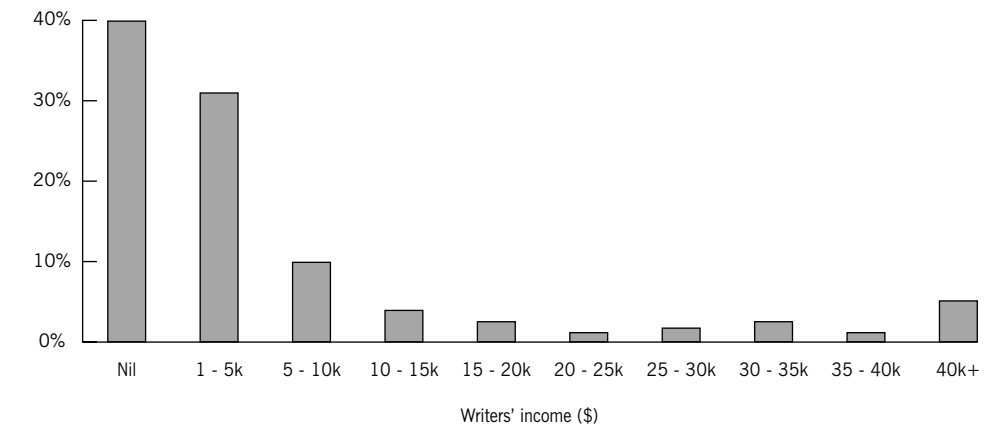
I do not consider myself a professional writer because it does not provide my full-time income. - This writer works on commission. He has never applied for or received a grant for his writing. His full-time occupation is as a senior arts administrator.

I've written poems and songs. I'll never have enough money to do anything with them for myself, for my family or for my people. I am a fully accredited NAATI⁷ interpreter/translator. I cannot get people to pay me what I'm worth or what they are paying other people in my field.

⁷ NAATI: National Association of Accredited Translators and Interpreters. This writer is one of the very few professionally accredited interpreter/translators in an Indigenous language. The 'other people' referred to interpret in languages other than English, but not Indigenous languages.

As discussed in Chapter 3, very few respondents received an income from writing which was adequate to support themselves and their dependants. The few that did tended to come from academic or broadcasting backgrounds. As indicated in Figure 4.2, 81% of writers earned \$10,000 or less from their writing in 1997 and half of these earned no income at all.

Figure 4.2: Income levels earned from writing in 1997



Income earned from writing appears to have some influence on identification as a professional writer.

Table 4.2: Income from writing by self-identification as professional writer

Income level \$000	Proportion earned from writing 1997	Proportion identifying as professional writer	Proportion not identifying as professional writer
	%	%	%
\$0	40	18	81
\$1 - 5	37	63	
\$5 - 10	10	47	53

One-fifth of those writers who earned nothing from their writing saw themselves as professional writers. As respondents earn more from their writing, they are more likely to consider themselves professional writers. About half of the 10% of writers who earned between \$5,000 and \$10,000 consider themselves professional.

The trend towards self-identification as professional as income rises continues, but this represents such a small number of respondents it is difficult to be conclusive.

IS IT TIME SPENT WRITING?

Time spent writing appears to be a slightly better indicator of identification as a professional than the level of income earned from writing.

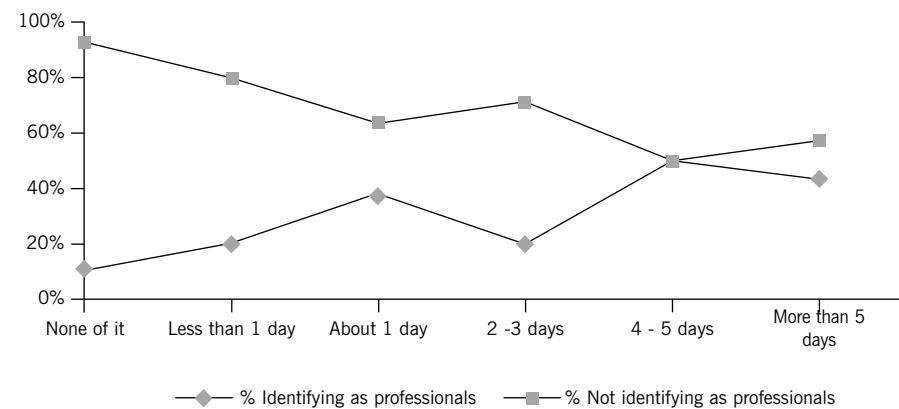
Table 4.3: Time spent writing by self-identification as professional writer

	Proportion of week spent writing	Proportion identifying as a professional writer	Proportion not identifying as a professional writer
	%	%	%
None of it	11	10	90
Less than 1 day	13	19	81
About 1 day	15	33	67
2-3 days	28	29	70
4-5 days	25	50	50
More than 5 days	8	44	56
TOTAL	100		

About 40% of all respondents spent a day or less per week writing. The majority of this group did not consider themselves professional. About two-thirds of those who spent about half their working time writing did not consider themselves professional.

About one-third of all the respondents worked full-time at their writing, and about half of these consider themselves professional writers.

Figure 4.3 Time spent writing by self-identification as professional writer



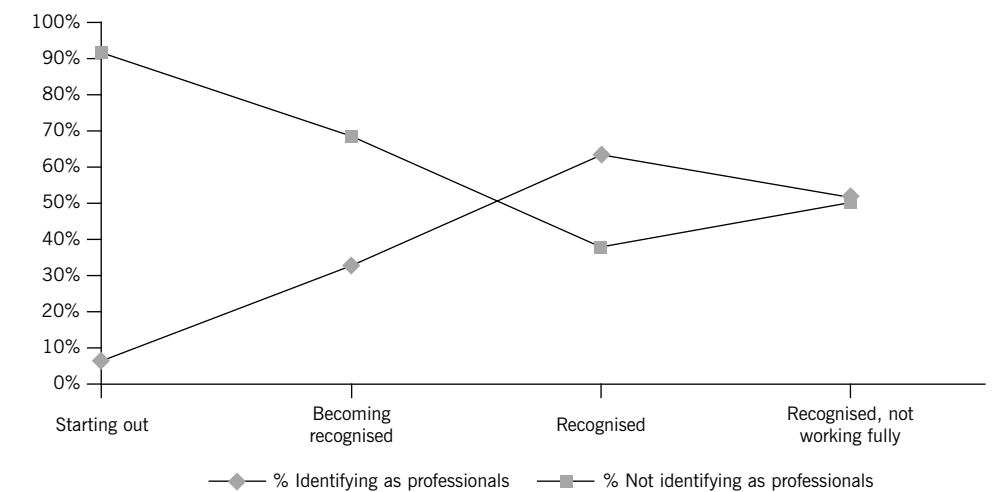
The more time the respondents spent writing, they more likely they were to consider themselves professional writers. However, the proportion of those who spent between half and all their working time writing and who considered themselves professionals is low.

Many of those who spent most or all of their working life writing include journalists, media professionals, academics and those who spent a significant amount of their time writing reports or newsletters as part of their employment.

IS IT RECOGNITION?

Levels of recognition by others appears to be the most important of all the indicators for Indigenous writers identifying as professional.

Figure 4.4: Recognition as a writer by self-identification as professional writer



As indicated in Figure 4.4, the greater the level of recognition as a writer, the more likely writers were to identify themselves as professional.

Predictably, of the third of all respondents who indicated that they were starting out, 92% did not consider themselves to be professional writers. But it is also interesting that one-third of those who consider themselves recognised writers regarded themselves as non-professionals.

Overall, two-thirds of the respondents see themselves in the early stages of their writing careers.

Table 4.4 Recognition as a writer by self-identification as professional writer

Level of recognition (measured by self-identification)	Proportion of those at this level	Proportion identifying as a professional writer
	%	%
Beginning/starting out	34	7
Becoming recognised	32	33
Recognised	13	64
Recognised but not working at full capacity	21	51

Many of the writers who identify as professionals were not earning a significant income from their writing, nor were they spending most of their working week writing. Thus for Indigenous writers, recognition becomes an important indicator of professional status as a writer.

However, this begs the question of recognised by whom and why? Thus writers' motives for writing (see also Chapter 6) and the question of their target audience for became an important question to be explored in the focus groups.

As indicated in the discussion below, this recognition is most significant when it comes from those for whom the writers are writing. The focus groups clearly indicated that the Indigenous communities are the target audience for the majority of writers.

REASONS FOR WRITING

The story has to be told from the roots up as the Aboriginal people see it. I get up early in the morning and I wish I could write poems – I'm looking for the rhythm in the words. My only wish is that I could write the whole history of the past and now and the future – I want to write. My mind races. I'm a speaker, I just get up and speak. It's ready to burst out of my mind, down through my hands – [but] I pick up a pen and I can't write. - This writer is a published poet living in a traditional community in Western Australia. He cannot read or write and identified himself as a professional writer.

You have got to be very clear about what a writer is – not someone who just wakes up one day and says they're a writer! The cut-off point is the art form called writing. To be a writer you have to be a reader...The difference between becoming a writer is taking it a little more seriously – we can all call ourselves writers but we have to take an interest in the art of writing. There's a lot of raw energy in writing combined with the theory of writing which has to be learned. - A prominent writer who also identifies as a professional writer.

Between these two views of who is and who is not a professional writer lie the views of most of the respondents. There is very little difference in the genre or quantity of writing (published or otherwise) and the commitment to writing of most of these respondents. However, there are respondents who come from the same kind of background as the two writers quoted above, and who have just as many works published and claim just as much recognition, who do not identify themselves as professional writers. Thus the critical focus here is not on who may or may not be called a professional according to the commonly accepted 'mainstream' criteria (a high degree of literacy, a large range of publications, a comfortable income, widespread mainstream recognition and the like), but rather on the motivations of Indigenous writers and the target audience for their writing.

This question of who is or who is not a professional was not a key concern of the great majority of participants in the focus groups. Their expressed concern was with the motivations for writing, demonstrated in the selection of comments below. There was a negligible focus on writers wanting to be recognised as artists or writing for 'art's' sake. The vast majority of respondents' motivations clearly rested with a commitment to the personal, social, cultural and political history of the Indigenous peoples of Australia. According to the majority of respondents in the focus groups, these writers are first and foremost speaking to themselves, their families and communities.

I'm showing white Australians that we have a talent of our own, that we've got our own story...I want to express for other Aboriginal people who can't read and write – so the people who can read and write should do it. My first responsibility is for our own people and then to educate the whites. - Poet

I write for an Aboriginal Audience – the way I am with my own family... We are from a community of artists, we always talked and sang. - Playwright

To me it's a form of healing...

It's a powerful tool – really powerful – to change people's views... - Radio journalist working for an Indigenous community station

I love to write oral history, especially about the old people. I want to record the lives of my grandparents.

I would like to aim all my writing towards schools, doing stories, telling stories for that will give me a great feeling – happiness that I have done my duty as a writer, [as an] Aboriginal writer I have achieved my goals.

For most of those writers who identified themselves as professionals, developing Indigenous writing as a recognisable genre, with recognisable, non-stereotypical characters, was the main concern. There was a strong feeling expressed by all the respondents that Aboriginal writers have a lot to say and that a unique Indigenous writing culture is being developed. Not one writer who contributed to this discussion, including all the members of the focus groups, said they were primarily concerned with developing themselves as writers divorced from their identity as Indigenous writers. These writers are

not interested in the quirky or introspective, nor in writing which experiments with genre for its own sake, as some described European writing. While there were a range of motives (from recording personal histories, to establishing an 'Australian Indigenous voice' in writing, or addressing the issue of stereotyping Indigenous people in mainstream writing), all were focused on establishing themselves as Indigenous writers.

When you look at writing we mimicked the white coloniser/oppressor and you think you're own style isn't any good. But it isn't the same as Australian writing. The Irish didn't change their writing to be English, African-Americans the same....

I'm sick of us being 'the other'. I wonder how we as writers are going to be seen in 100 years time – as Australia's best writers who happen to be Indigenous and shout our blackness from the tree-tops, rather than Australia's best Indigenous writers – writing in our ghetto, always 'the other'.

5. WHY WRITE?

*It's a powerful tool - really powerful - to change people's views...
Us writers are very dangerous people!*

Reasons for writing are central to respondents' self-definition as professional writers, their chosen genre and their sense of their 'audience' for their writing. The factors which motivate Indigenous writers are considered here.

THE REASONS FOR WRITING

The factor nominated most often by the respondents as the motivation to start and to continue writing was the desire to share Indigenous culture and to achieve reconciliation. Two-thirds of respondents felt this was and continues to be important. The desire to share Indigenous culture was also the most persistent theme articulated in all the focus groups.

I'm showing white Australians that we have a talent of our own – we've got our own story.
- Poet

We're writing mainstream drama with positive and authentic images of Aboriginal people.
- Screenwriter

After the desire to share culture, the two most important factors that motivated respondents to write were the related factors, 'the need to tell their life's story' and 'support from family and friends'. In each of the later two categories close to half of all the respondents nominated these two factors as important.

Table 5.1: Factors currently contributing to advancing writers' careers

Kind of motivation	Proportion of writers motivated by this over the past 5 years
	%
Desire to share culture/desire for reconciliation	61
Support from family or friends	48
A need to tell your life story	43
Encouragement from respected elder	35
Being part of an organisation or group	30
Support from community or clan	29
Encouragement from community	28
Called upon to write reports	28
Your general education	27
Support from an organisation or group	24
Financial assistance at a critical time	19
Identifying a market need	17
Additional training in the writing field	13
Support from a teacher	11
A 'lucky break'	7

I want to tell my life story – too many of our people are committing suicide. We don't have the role models for our children...I want to be a role model. My grandfather was a lawman...I dream...I go back there...We've come from a beautiful environment and they've thrown us in the concrete jungle...I want my children to know the hunt...because we didn't have our parents there – we didn't have our parents.

A significant proportion of the writers said that support or encouragement from the community, encouragement from a respected elder, being part of an organisation, general education and training in writing were more important when they were starting out as writers than they are now, although they remain significant factors.

Table 5.2: Factors that helped writers to start out

Kind of motivation	Proportion of writers ever motivated by this in their writing careers
	%
Desire to share culture/desire for reconciliation	70
Support from family or friends	57
A need to tell your life story	53
Being part of an organisation or group	47
Support from an organisation or group	47
Called upon to write reports	45
Your general education	45
Encouragement from respected elder	42
Support from community or clan	41
Encouragement from community	35
Support from a teacher	28
Additional training in the writing field	23
Identifying a market need	22
Financial assistance at a critical time	21
A 'lucky break'	20

Financial assistance at a critical time was nominated by a fifth of the writers as important in enabling them to write. Similarly, one fifth of the respondents found a lucky break had been important to them in starting out, but far fewer considered that a lucky break was significant in helping them to continue with their work.

It is also noteworthy that being called upon to write reports and submissions motivated 45% of the respondents to begin writing, but was less important as a motivating factor for writers to continue their writing.

Gender had very little impact on those factors identified by writers as important to their starting or continuing to write.

WRITERS' GENRES

Table 5.3 shows some of the key things which motivated writers of two of the more popular genres where there was a marked difference in the degree to which writers attributed outside motivations. The contrast between family history writers and other writers was particularly marked.

Table 5.3: Motivations of writers by writing genre

Types of writing ever done	Proportion encouraged by family and community affiliations	Proportion who wish to share life story, culture/reconciliation	Proportion being called upon to write reports or submissions	Proportion encouraged by education or training undertaken	Proportion assisted by financial assistance at a critical time
	%	%	%	%	%
Family history	73	78	60	57	85
Journalism	30	23	37	38	29

Although only a fifth of the all the writers felt financial assistance at a critical time had been important to motivate them to begin writing, 85% of family history writers nominated this as an important factor.

Journalists, on the other hand, put a relatively higher emphasis on ‘being called upon to write reports and submissions’ and their ‘education’ as important factors for starting to write.

In this context it should be remembered that the majority of family history writers belong to the 55+ age group whereas the majority of journalists are under 44 years old. A small number of respondents nominated political motivations as important in getting them to start writing.

DOES INCOME CHANGE THE STORY?

I don't want the money – I want the book. - Family history writer

In 1997, 70% of all respondents earned somewhere between nothing and \$5,000 from their writing.

Table 5.4: Motivation for writing by income

Kind of motivation	Proportion of those writers earning nil income from writing	Proportion of those writers earning \$1 to \$5,000 from writing
	%	%
Support from family or friends	58	40
Desire to share culture/reconciliation	57	68
A need to tell life story	52	43
Encouragement from respected elder	33	38
Support from community or clan	30	24

Generally speaking, income appears to have little or no impact on the motivations of the writers for their writing. Table 5.4 shows the five most important motivators for 70% of respondents and the income they earn. For further details on writers’ incomes see Chapter 3.

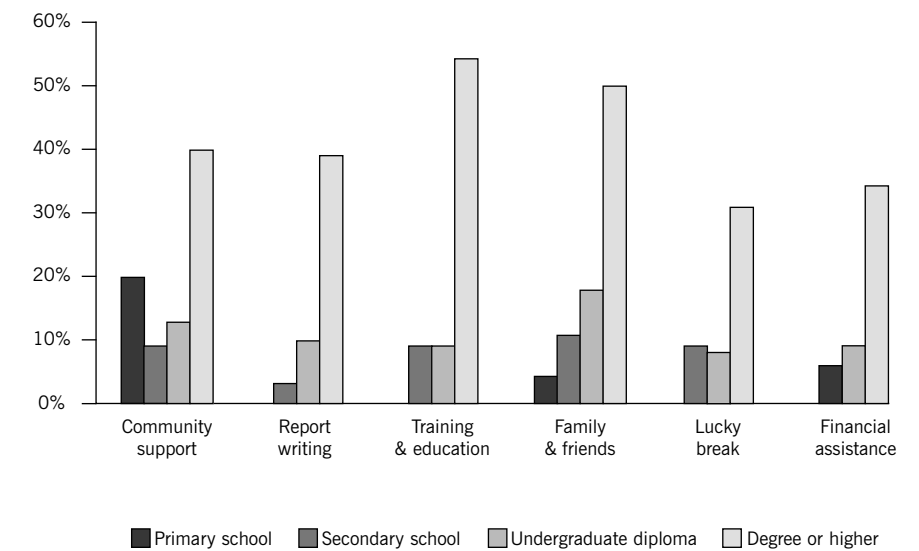
Writers earning between \$5,001 to \$10,000 identified receiving financial assistance at a critical time and support from an organisation or group as important. It is possible that this financial support or perhaps some form of in-kind support from an organisation assisted these writers in generating income from their writing.

DO EDUCATION AND TRAINING HELP?

Educational attainment has a significant impact on the ability of writers to take advantage of opportunities to further their writing.

Writers who completed tertiary education or higher nominated the whole range of opportunities substantially more than any other group. They even seemed to attract ‘a lucky break’ more often than others! It seems that, on the whole, the higher the writer’s educational attainment, the more likely they are to attract opportunities or support of many kinds.

Figure 5.1: Educational attainment compared to motivations



Over half the university graduates cited ‘support from family and friends’ as an important factor that kept them going with their writing over the past five years. Only a third of respondents who had completed any other level of education cited this as an important factor.

However, community support seems to have been more generally important across all educational attainment levels, and particularly for those who only attended primary school.

Ten per cent or less of those with a secondary school certificate or lower were able to take advantage of the opportunities described in Figure 5.1, and even those with post-school but not university qualifications comprised 15% or less of the respondents able to take advantage of these opportunities.

PRESERVING AND SHARING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AS A MOTIVE

I do dictionaries and curriculum – collecting information from people because we need to keep the languages continuing and not lose the languages. - Linguist and writer

While 94% of the respondents said that they write in English, 28 Indigenous languages were reported as being used in the writing of the respondents. Seventeen per cent of respondents write in Aboriginal English.

The importance of traditional story-telling and language was stressed by many respondents, both in the questionnaire returns and in the focus groups. The link between language and writing may seem obvious to most writers in Australia, but with most or all Indigenous languages endangered, this is an important issue for many Indigenous writers. It also makes the use of broadcast media particularly important.

There is a need to draw stories out of Indigenous people, to nurture people to become creative writers – even where literacy skills or background education is not strong.

[There should be] support for recording oral story-tellers who are the key to our history and distinct Indigenous narrative threads.

A critical focus for many of the respondents is the recording of the cultural roots of Indigenous writing, the narratives, the forms of story-telling and the languages in which they are told:

There is a tremendous need for people to record old people's stories.

I love to write oral history, especially about the old people. [Agreement around the table] I want to record the lives of my grandparents. - Journalist

I started telling my kids stories...then I put them on tape. The kids loved it. Years later when I was asked to put my stories on paper, [I] tried to promote and encourage our people to write more, especially from the top end. [To] record their stories, to put them on tape...I learnt from the stories being told to me [and] did the same thing to my children. That was the natural way of our people.

On Crocker Island the story would start – it would take the form of songs as well as dancing...You have to include the stories in its many forms – dancing, singing, telling and writing.

The numbers of people writing in traditional Indigenous languages is too small to report as a proportion of all the respondents. Some of the languages listed below had been thought to be 'lost' or almost lost, and some are at this time only partly recovered or recorded. Others have relatively large speaking communities. For some, morphologies and dictionaries are still being developed by Indigenous communities so that they can be used in writing and teaching. All Indigenous languages are endangered languages, and each one that has been cited in the survey as being used by a respondent is quoted in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Indigenous languages used by respondents

Number of writers	Indigenous language	Number of writers	Indigenous language
12	Nyoongah	1	Alyawarra
11	Creole	1	Ngaanyatjarra
7	Arrente	1	Walmajarri
5	Bundjalung	1	Marrathiyel
4	Yorta Yorta	1	Burarra
2	Kala Laqua Ya	1	Gurindji
2	Warlpiri	1	Larrakia
2	Adnyamathamia	1	Wathaurong
2	Wongatha	1	Nunungar
2	Najarrindjeri	1	Wngutha
2	Wikmunkan	1	Woirrung
1	Yolgnu	1	Wajarri
1	Kuninjku	1	Kaytetye
1	Pitjantjatara	1	A Torres Strait Island language
		10	unspecified

WRITING TO HEAL

Members of the focus groups, as may be expected, reflected a wide variety of motivations for their writing, points of view, backgrounds and approaches to their genres and their audiences. Nonetheless, there were themes expressed by all these groups and individuals that were consistent threads across significant differences in age, gender, educational background, geographical location, style and genre of writing.

Many of the writers expressed their love of writing, but always cited an additional motivation for their writing. Using writing as a form of cultural and personal healing was a strong theme with many of the respondents.

I love it – I've been writing since I was eight. I use it for healing. - Poet

I've always written but never looked on it as something I should focus on. When I was looking for my heritage I wanted to combine writing with work and with kids.

Black people can tell tragedy the next day as humour and people survived like that. I want to record those stories.

I'd never written before but 'P' got me going. We suffered in the sixties but now it comes from my heart – that's my suffering – I don't want anyone to change my writing.

I want to express for other Aboriginal people who can't read and write – so the people who can write should do it.

For others, the reasons were similar, but very personal:

I would really like to enjoy writing. I had to survive by being silent and unobserved and [now] I need to unblock.

When I was in prison I really enjoyed it [writing], it was exciting because I brought things to the surface in my writing, where as it is my thoughts would still be in my head; some of them are better out than in, if you know what I mean.

Anger got me to write. Anger got me to respond to this survey.

To me it's a form of [spiritual] healing. You can throw it out or keep it, you can play with your own feelings, you can chuck it away or laugh at it. - Poet

Some writers talked about their desire to write for children in schools. In these instances it was difficult to distinguish between the writers' motivations to teach Indigenous culture and encouraging Indigenous children to write through the education system.

I would like to aim all my writing towards schools, doing stories, telling stories – that will give me a great deal of happiness that I have done my duty as a writer. As an Aboriginal writer I [will] have achieved my goals.

I started writing as a teacher – there were no books for high school age boys who couldn't read.

For others again, the audience comes first. Overwhelmingly, that audience is Indigenous:

When I write an article, I think if other Aboriginal people can understand. I don't think of white people.

It's time to write for our own people. My first responsibility [is] for our own people and then to educate the whites. [To write] warts and all you see of the real people – if you gloss over it, it doesn't work.

There are too many stories that are getting lost – look you lot! I need 100 lifetimes and 700 people. There are really good people with incredible life stories. We take it for granted in the Territory but people here have lived heroic lives – this is guidance for young people.

I started writing because there was nothing around – no books I was reading reflected my own people's stories...there wasn't much published...and I wanted to see more Aboriginal stories. For years I wrote my own stuff, stored it and then wanted to come back [to it]. I took Literature as a major at university. Then I fell in love with playwriting – and that's where I stayed. I was lucky. My very first piece was bought and now I work on commission. I write for an Aboriginal audience – the way I am with my own family.

My priority is to educate our own. What happened to us caused the breakdowns – we had no way of dealing with these issues.

My own grandmother was too afraid to speak up – she thought that white men know everything. It will take seven generations.

Indigenous control of Indigenous culture and writing was a theme that was made explicit throughout all of the comments. However, for some it was the most important reason for writing:

I was really concerned about the linguists coming into our community and putting copyright on our stories and language – so I got into writing.

I did it out of a sense of control – I wouldn't trust anyone to tell the story I wanted to tell.

Some writers wanted to find a way of 'mainstreaming' Indigenous writing without compromising Indigenous narrative styles or a move towards an identifiable Indigenous writing, screen or theatre culture.

We're writing for TV – out of necessity trying to take the messages to a broader and more mainstream audience.

I've got something to say – I don't like the current [mainstream] stories – I don't think they say anything, they're very quirky and introspective. I want people to engage with people because of the trials of the human spirit and the lives are big enough for the whole world. I write about experience [and] the characters just 'happen' to be Indigenous. -

Screenwriter

6. PUBLISHING AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

I just want to get it published – I don't care by who – I don't want the money to get it published.

Getting published and establishing individual or community ownership of works was one of the most vexed issues raised in this study. There was not always agreement on what should be published or by whom, but there was universal agreement among the respondents on inadequate understanding of Indigenous protocols and ownership issues.

WHAT IS PUBLISHED AND WHAT IS NOT

Poets, radio broadcasters, newsletter and report writers and authors of articles had the most success in getting their work published.

Table 6.1: Types of writing published over the past 5 years by respondents

Type of writing	Proportion of writers with works published in the past 5 years
	%
Newsletter article	42
Journal article	39
Poetry	34
Broadcast on radio	31
Report	30
Short story	25
Broadcast on TV	21
Non-fiction writing	20
Family history	16
Script for video	15
Script for TV	14
Script for radio	13
Traditional story	12
Workshopped play	12
Song	10
Multimedia	10
Screenplay	8
Children's book/story	8
Produced play	7
Novel	6

One-third of respondents had a poem published and one-quarter of respondents had a short story published in the past five years. Forty per cent of respondents who had

written for a newsletter and who had written an article had been published; nearly one-third of respondents had broadcast on radio.

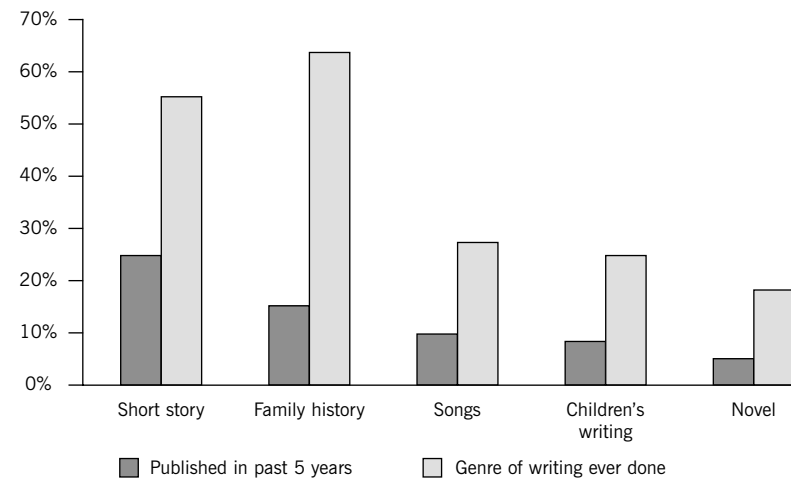
The cost of getting published seems to be a more important factor in being published than the relative importance attributed by Indigenous writers to various kinds of work they produce. For example, about two-thirds of writers identify family histories as a genre in which they have written and nearly 30% are still writing in this genre. Yet just 16% of writers have published family histories in the past five years.

Novels show a similar pattern where one-fifth of the respondents identify this as the genre in which they have written (and half of these are still writing novels) but only 6% have had work published over the past five years.

Getting published was a major area of frustration for the writers. A significant proportion of Indigenous writers are not writing for its own sake. More than 60% saw sharing culture and reconciliation as significant motivators for their writing, and up to half of the respondents said some form of community connection had motivated them to write.

Those genres which writers found hardest to get published, such as such as novels and plays, are those that are time-consuming and expensive, and need to be marketed after publication.

Figure 6.1: Comparison between types of 'expensive' writing ever done and those published

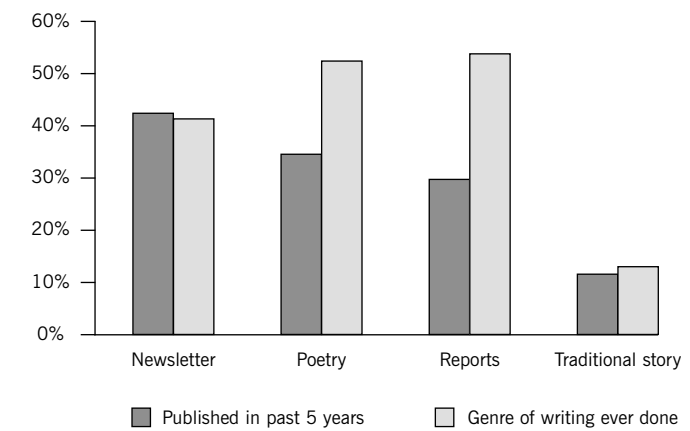


Playwrights are working in a genre where there is an intermediate means of getting the work 'out there', namely workshopping. Nearly one-fifth of all respondents had written a play and over half of these had had their play workshopped, but only 7% of respondents had had their play produced. The barrier to having a play workshopped is clearly far lower

than for having the play produced. Screenplay writers show a similar pattern of publishing to playwrights.

By contrast, Figure 6.2 shows four genres which are much less expensive to publish: newsletters, traditional story-telling, reports and poetry. Newsletter articles and reports are usually purpose written for a specific publication or on commission. Respondents reported that nearly all the articles they had written for newsletters had been published. Poetry can be published in newsletters, newspapers and magazines as well as in the more expensive forms of publication like anthologies. The same is often true for academic writing and journalism in all media.

Figure 6.2: Comparison between types of 'less expensive' writing ever done and those published



Traditional oratory, or story-telling, is an important genre where a high proportion of work has been published. Focus group discussions indicated that this genre is often published in magazines, on radio and in other more easily accessible media. The writers in the focus groups often identified traditional story-telling as the source of Indigenous narrative threads and culture, and as important for the future of young writers. This is a genre in which 14% of the respondents say they have worked and nearly all these writers have published in this genre.

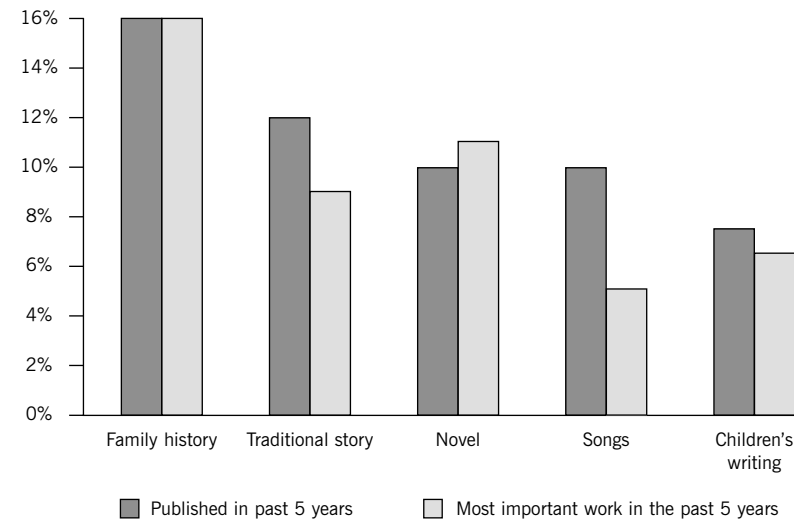
The same high ratio between those who have written in the genre and those who have been published applies to broadcasters, non-fiction writers, writers of articles (all including journalists and academics), and multimedia writers.

Many find the atmosphere of publishing houses alien and alienating. There are very few Indigenous publishing houses and a number of writers complained of long waiting lists. Some have waited up to two years to get any response to a manuscript. Others expressed concern at the lack of Indigenous editors and still others spoke of having to 'mainstream' or 'homogenise' their style in order to be considered by publishers.

There is however, a high correspondence between works published and the authors identifying them as their most important work (see Figure 6.3). The survey results indicated that when a work is published, the writers attribute greater importance to it than to the other works they may have written. This is an interesting outcome in light of the frustration many writers expressed in getting their work published and criticism of the publishing industry from the focus groups.

The biggest problem is that the [publishing] industry is controlled by non-Aboriginal people – there’s a fear of experimenting and [that creates] more ignorance. If they think it won’t make money, they [the publishers] will stay home [that is, not publish the work].

Figure 6.3: Comparison between works published and their importance to the writer



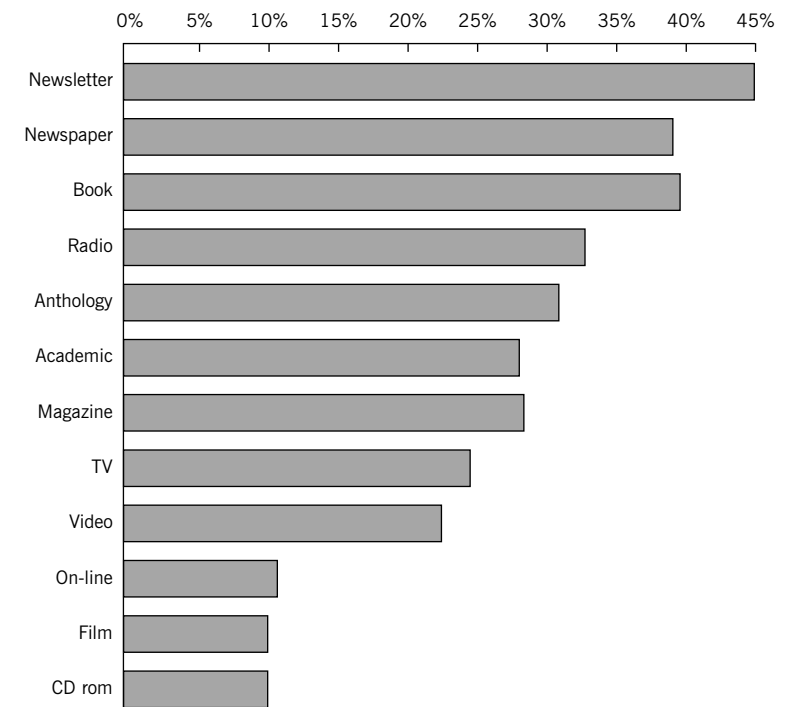
GENDER

Only TV scriptwriters and multimedia writers show significant gender differences. Of those who have written scripts for TV, 11% of women have been published, compared with 21% of men. Of those who have written for multimedia, only 5% of women have been published compared to 19% of men.

TYPES OF MEDIA IN WHICH WRITING IS PUBLISHED

Books, newspapers, newsletters and radio are the most common forms of media in which writers are publishing their work, closely followed by anthologies, academic publications and magazines. Television and video come next with about one-quarter of the respondents saying they have been published in these media.

Figure 6.4: Media in which writing has been published



Indigenous radio has seen significant growth over the past ten to fifteen years, while Indigenous television stations such as *Imparja* have created opportunities for Indigenous writers, especially journalists. Video is used for community information and to record community events.

COPYRIGHT

Protection of copyright is a serious and unresolved problem as reflected by the comments in both the focus groups and in the surveys. The comments can be divided into two groups:

- those who felt unaware of copyright issues and ill-equipped to protect their own intellectual property; and
- those involved in family history, story-telling, film-making and broadcasting. Here, ownership was often seen as shared by the family, community or clan. A number of respondents reported feeling angry with their experiences.

I was paid \$80 for the right to put my writing, once, into a [display] panel in the museum. I was not told about the launch of the exhibition and I did not give them the right to republish [the piece] in a book. Now I won't sell rights [to my work] to publishers.

Instances were cited of non-Indigenous writers and academics coming into the area to gather stories and information, publishing this and claiming all copyright on the work:

She was only interested in the money and the reputation.

My grandmother spent 20 years putting together a dictionary [of her language] but it's not published. A white linguist's orthography is [now] being published, but it's unrecognisable to the local speakers.

Protocols haven't been discussed in the community – there's nothing to protect group knowledge.

There is no understanding of protocols and [there is] a general attitude of 'trust me!'.

WHAT IS NEEDED?

There was general agreement that there are far too few Indigenous publishing houses to cater for the number of writers, too few Indigenous editors and a belief that Indigenous publishing houses are under-resourced for the work they need to do.

IAD should be subsidised by the NT Government like Magabala is by the Western Australia Government.

There was strong general agreement in all the focus about publishers' lack of awareness about Indigenous writing and writers. In the view of the Indigenous writers, this has led to works not getting published for lack of understanding of Indigenous writing or excessive timidity on the part of editorial panels and (non-Indigenous) editors.

Publishers don't know Indigenous people, so they pick up pre-published work and re-publish it.

Work is homogenised [to get TV broadcast]. We are writing a script for SBS – they're not going to understand what we're saying – what to do? Time references, for example, are specific to Indigenous people. Story-telling is not linear, but the pressure is huge to change to mainstream editing.

One cultural magazine [asked me to submit some of my work but] didn't say what they wanted, so I sent some poems on land rights. I got a call from the editor (which is unusual) to apologise for not publishing my work and for there being no Indigenous representation in that issue. Yet I know that several Indigenous people were invited to contribute and they all got rejected.

Publishing – or rather the difficulties faced by Indigenous writers in getting published in a form which they believe maintains the integrity of their work, and returns a reasonable remuneration – generated comment which touched on almost every aspect of publishing.

I got frustrated. I nearly gave up until I remembered why I write.

We want our own publisher – very local.

The issue of the lack of non-Indigenous editors was raised many times. The need to find ways of encouraging Indigenous writers to become editors and the education and training support necessary for that were often repeated. The lack of positions made available by publishers for Indigenous editors was also raised. A number of writers noted with some satisfaction and optimism that Magabala Books had just appointed a young Indigenous editor.

The publishers have to have a commitment to having an Aboriginal person alongside the white editor and with a proper time frame [and] with an idea that there is no set [that is, European] way to write.

Editing is an issue for traditional story-tellers. The publishers must understand the protocols. [For example, the writer says] "there were 24 children", but names 20. The reasons why, the protocols must be well understood [by the publishers].

The role of literary agents and how they market Indigenous writers was also raised as an issue needing attention.

The difficulties in dealing with State-based arts bureaucracy and issues of recognition that require writers to have formal qualifications or prior publications was a matter of some concern for all the focus groups and mentioned in a number of the comments on the questionnaire.

We went to the State Arts Council. We were sent to the Youth Arts Fund but there were no Indigenous workers in there, no one to talk to that we understood. So we left. [My daughter] sees that no one cares. She doesn't understand the hurdle of bureaucracy.

[Publishers ask] Have you got a certificate? Are you a linguist? [But] if you can put something on paper – that's your qualification.

There was some disagreement within the writer community about the appropriate forms of publishing, depending on the kind of writing and its purpose.

You don't have to publish to write – that's another important level.

There should be community-based publishing.

Self-publishing doesn't look serious or attractive – I want to be heard with good quality publishing.

Finally, several writers reported that when they did get published, they found that the royalty-based income didn't cover their direct costs to write and publish the book.

7. ROLE OF GOVERNMENT GRANTS

Without financial assistance, writing is not possible.

One-third of the respondents had received a writing grant from a State or Territory government arts funding authority time in their writing careers.

Acknowledging the important role of government funding of individual artists and their work, the respondents also emphasised the value of non-financial assistance (that is, support not given directly to the writer) for Indigenous publishing houses, for non-formal training, for awards, for networking and access to facilities.

There should be more [literary] awards for Indigenous writers.

There's no outlet where Indigenous writers can get together – say, one night a month.

There need to be venues for performance, regional writers' festivals that have involvement from local people and cross-cultural training for decision-makers.

Large, national events did not receive the same support from many of the respondents as they were seen as expensive and divorced from the local writing and writers. They thought local and regional events gave greater opportunities for writers in all genres - especially for poets, songwriters and story-tellers – to meet and to develop a local writers' culture.

This idea of local networking was often linked to the need for a local venue that not only provided a space for writers but also had facilities such as computers and libraries of Indigenous writing.

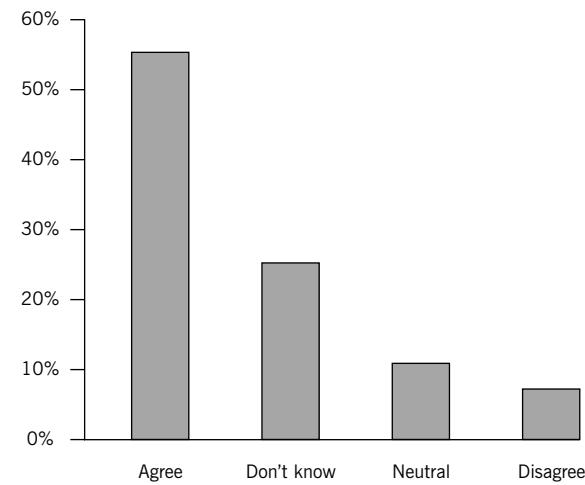
We need a library system locally, to access Indigenous literature, and tools we can hire like computers and cameras.

WRITERS' OPINIONS OF THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL

There is a high level of recognition of the Australia Council with 81% of all the respondents having heard of it before this survey. Nearly one-third of these had applied for a grant for their writing from the Australia Council or another grants body in the past two years.

Many respondents gave strong endorsement to the work that the Australia Council has been doing to support their writing.

Figure 7.1: The Australia Council is a positive force in Indigenous writing



Over half the respondents believe that the Australia Council has been a positive force in developing Indigenous writing and only 7% disagreed.

I believe that the Australia Council is highly instrumental in the making of a better Australia.

It's good what they [the Australia Council] do – I hear about it from the high-end writers. I think professional development grants are good – I'm thinking of applying for one of those.

Australia Council support for the maintenance of Indigenous languages was also acknowledged in this context:

The Australia Council is making an effort to get stuff out in languages.

Nearly half of the respondents agreed that the Australia Council provided adequate and useful information and only 15% of the respondents disagreed.

The Australia Council's Indigenous unit was really helpful on the phone.

Over half of the respondents felt neutral or didn't know 'if the Australia Council is too bureaucratic.' Just over one-quarter of the respondents felt that the Australia Council was too bureaucratic, but 11% felt that it was not.

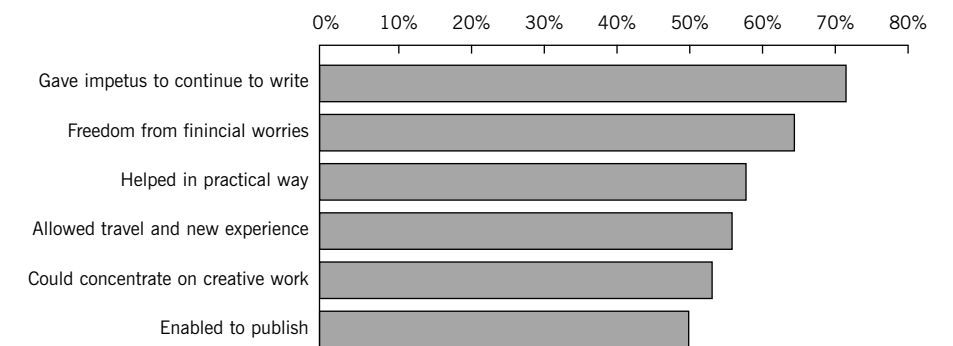
One tenth of respondents said that they had not heard of the Australia Council before this study.

IMPACT OF GRANTS

Over half the respondents felt that Australia Council procedures were satisfactory. Only 8.3% thought that the procedures were poorly organised.

About one-third of the respondents had received grants from the Australia Council for their writing. About one-quarter of the writers had received writing grants from other funding bodies. This group reflected a strong positive response to the impact the grants had on their work and usually nominated several of these factors in their responses.

Figure 7.2 Effects of grants



Of all writers who had received a grant, nearly three-quarters felt that this had given them the impetus to continue writing. Two-thirds of the writers felt that receipt of the grant had given them freedom from financial worries thus allowing them to concentrate on their writing. Half of the writers said that the grant had enabled them to publish their work. Given the consistent comment on the difficulties of getting published noted in both the questionnaire and the focus groups, it may be that the grant recipients had less difficulty in bringing their work to publication than other writers. Only 7% of the grant recipients found that winning the grant had created difficult family or community pressures.

Of those writers who had difficulty with grants procedures, pre-qualification for receiving a grant and anxiety over acquittals procedures attracted some comment.

I am a relatively unknown writer still building a reputation, but feeling a Catch-22 situation exists where you need a reputation, or recognition, to qualify for funding. Yet it is so difficult to establish yourself without assistance in the first place.

Community people need recognition to develop as writers.

First-time writers need more assistance. The Australia Council needs to take risks and give young writers opportunities and support. Their writing may not be strong but their ideas are strong.

The size of grants also came in for some comment. Writers pointed out that the expenses for Indigenous writers were often higher for them than other writers because of some

special factors. Some writers prefer to work with a co-writer, others need to work with a translator:

Everything is double...Grants are too small to cover the story-teller, or constructor of the stories, and the assistant editor/ghost writer.

AUSTRALIA COUNCIL FUNDING

Slightly more than half of the respondents believed that the Australia Council did not get enough funds to do its job properly. Only 3% believed the Australia Council was adequately funded.

Some writers suggested co-operative arrangements with other bodies to enlarge the funding 'cake' and to assist with the co-ordination of existing community facilities. Among the bodies mentioned were Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the Australian Film Commission (AFC) and Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS), the Cultural Ministers' Council and State and Territory arts funding authorities.

Although a significant proportion of respondents said that they didn't know if either the Australia Council or Indigenous writing were adequately funded, many of these writers also said that they didn't know the organisation well enough to respond.

OTHER FUNDING ISSUES

A number of respondents wished to raise other issues on funding priorities that had not been covered in the questionnaire. The writers in the focus groups, almost without exception, raised the issue of finding more funding for traditional story-tellers and community-based writers. Some respondents to the questionnaire raised the same issues. These comments were directed to all arts funding bodies.

There needs to be support for recordings of oral story-tellers who are the key to our history and distinct Indigenous narrative threads.

Traditional story-telling should be a funding category – if you're not supporting the story-tellers you're not supporting the cultural links that are the source and inspiration for contemporary writing.

There were also general comments on the focus of funding for writers.

Grants should have a publishing component and help with awareness on how to find a publisher.

There was some comment that Indigenous arts policy research projects like this survey should be awarded to Indigenous artists, thus broadening the support base and recognition for their work.

This survey should have gone to Indigenous writers. The funding authorities should broaden their vision of supporting Indigenous artists by employing them on projects such as this study.

As noted previously, there was comment in most focus groups on the need to set up mechanisms by which writers can network with each other, usually at the local level.

[Organisers think that when they've] got one Aboriginal at a writers' festival that they've got their 'quota' of blacks. [They also] like to invite people who are 'safe'. Many festivals don't have Indigenous people.

In this context, a number of writers noted that it was difficult to get contact information for Indigenous writers.

Indigenous writers are invisible. There are a lot of older people (40s, 50s and 60s) writing now, but their names aren't known and they don't get invited to festivals.

It's hard to get contacts [of Indigenous writers] to invite for festivals.

Many writers talked about the cultural difficulties and misunderstandings that arise between funding organisations and Indigenous writers. These comments were directed to a range of cultural organisations, particularly state-based arts bureaucracies.

In every arts board there must be at least two Indigenous creators [not just bureaucrats].

It's OK if we're making a program about Indigenous people for white people. But, if you want a program for an Indigenous audience, it gets 'ethnicised', 'multi-culturised'. We can listen to American gangster rap but not to an Indigenous writer.

There should be cross-cultural exercises...Some of these [exercises elsewhere in the bureaucracy] have been like flogging a dead horse because everyone knows 'what to say'. But there are ways of doing it that can work.

SUMMARY

[I write] to have the past history survive, knowledge, experience and to encourage other people to write. Writing is a lifetime, it's a thing after life too, it'll go on forever, it'll never die out...Say in 100 years, that book will still be there – history and knowledge will be passed on. There's a lot to it – how you survive very hard times between death and starvation to the present time when you've got better living standards, but need history, language and culture. Instead of someone coming to write the book for you, you'd better write it yourself!

The story has to be told from the roots up as the Aboriginal people see it. I get up early in the morning and I wish I could write poems – I'm looking for the rhythm in the words. My only wish is that I could write the whole history of the past and now and the future – I want to write...

These two writers summarise the overwhelming response from Indigenous writers, whatever their chosen genre, their age, or the length of time they have been writing.

A primary finding of this study, as with *What Do You Do for a Living?*, is that the majority of the writers surveyed earn very little from their writing. Writers who earned \$5,000 a year or less from their writing represented 70% of those surveyed.

The need for continued financial support of writers is manifest. Financial assistance at a critical time was nominated by a fifth of the writers to be of ongoing importance in enabling them to write.

Nearly 30% of respondents said they spent three-quarters or more of their working time writing and 40% spent between a quarter to a half of their time writing. Also, between a third and a half of the respondents have been involved in arts related work, occupations or activities over the past two years, with three-quarters involved in non-arts related work or training. Writers spend a significant proportion of their time working in occupations other than their writing to earn a sufficient income.

The writers themselves also highlight the need for access to other methods to help sustain their writing. They often mentioned a desire to increase their opportunities to network at a local level with other Indigenous writers and artists. Many expressed a desire for local bureaucratic support for Indigenous writers in places such as local libraries and in state-based cultural organisations.

This study revealed a relatively young community of writers active across a wide range of writing genres and involved in the broader arts communities through their work, paid or voluntary, and through education and training. It is also this younger group that shows a significantly stronger educational background, which becomes stronger as the age range goes down and weaker as it goes up. The importance of training and education (formal and informal) as well as the broadcast sector is apparent when considering the relatively large numbers of respondents active in these sectors

APPENDIX 1: STATISTICAL TABLES

This study also raised the issue of the need to focus on copyright issues for Indigenous writers. Copyright is a difficult area at the best of times, but is particularly difficult for writers who have strong links to their communities and whose source for many of their ideas and writing is in those communities.

Publishing, or rather difficulties in getting published – always an important issue for writers – is brought into sharp relief in this report. For Indigenous writers who want to record and make available family histories and Indigenous culture, the importance of getting published goes beyond an immediate desire to see their work recognised.

The writers appear to share patterns of interest in particular genres dividing into roughly three groups:

- family history writers, novelists, short story writers, song writers, poets, playwrights, children’s writers and story-tellers (electronic media);
- academic writers, report writers, newsletter writers, non-fiction writers, journalists and multimedia writers; and
- screenplay writers and writers for television and video.

The most common types of writing were family history writing, novel writing, short stories, poetry, songs, plays and journalism. Newsletter writing and academic writing were also identified as important genres.

The writers’ interest in this report has been manifest. More than half of the respondents said that they were prepared to participate in a focus group and wished to receive a report of this study when it was completed. The assistance that the researchers received from many organisations to reach Indigenous writers also confirmed the importance attached by these organisations to Indigenous writing.

This, as mentioned previously, is the first ever study of its kind. It is hoped that the results will assist all those involved with Indigenous writing and Indigenous writers.

1. AGE

1.1: Age distribution

Age range	Proportion of respondents	
	%	
Under 20	1	
20 - 24	6	
25 - 29	12	
30 - 34	12	
35 - 39	14	
40 - 44	13	
45 - 54	18	
55 - 64	18	
65+	7	

1.2: Age started writing

Age group	Proportion	
	%	
Under 20	30	
20–29	24	
30–44	28	
45–54	10	
55+	8	

2. RESIDENCY

2.1: Regional residency patterns by State

Region	NSW	Western Australia	Queensland	Northern Territory
	%	%	%	%
City	64	57	47	30
Town	21	24	29	46
Rural area	11	7	15	9
Remote area	4	12	9	15

2.2: Residency of writers by State

Residency	NSW	WA	QLD	NT	VIC	SA	TAS	ACT	TSI
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
State of residency of Indigenous population	29	15	27	13	6	6	4	1	1
State of residency of writers	24	20	16	15	10	9	4	2	0
State of birth of writers	19	22	22	12	11	6	4	1	1

3. TIME SPENT WRITING

3.1: Proportion of time spent writing

Time spent writing	Proportion of respondents
	%
All working time	9
75%	21
50%	21
25%	20
Less than 25%	20
No time spent recently	9

3.2: Time spent writing

Number of days spent writing	Proportion of respondents
	%
Every day or nearly every day	35
At least some time in every week	31
At least some time in every month	21
Less often than once each month	12
Nil	2

3.3: Proportion of week spent writing

Number of days spent writing	Proportion of respondents
	%
5 days or more	9
4 – 5 days	25
2 – 3 days	28
One day	14
None	11

4. TYPES OF WRITING

4.1: Types of writing ever done by respondents

Type of writing	Type of writing ever done	Type of writing	Type of writing ever done
	%		%
Family history	65	Print feature	20
Report writing	55	Novel	19
Short story	55	Scriptwriting for radio	19
Poetry	54	Story-telling on radio	19
Academic writing	47	Scriptwriting for TV	18
Newsletter article	42	Play for theatre	18
Non-fiction writing	34	Scriptwriting for video	16
Song writing	27	Oratories	14
Journalism	26	Multimedia	13
Children's writing	25	Story-telling on TV	7
Screenplay	21		

4.2: Types of writing now done by respondents

Type of writing	Type of writing now done	Type of writing	Type of writing now done
	%		%
Family history	28	Play for theatre	10
Poetry	27	Scriptwriting for TV	10
Short story	22	Newsletter article	7
Report writing	21	Scriptwriting for radio	7
Academic writing	16	Print feature	6
Non-fiction writing	13	Oratories	5
Screenplay	12	Scriptwriting for video	5
Novel	11	Multimedia	5
Song writing	11	Story-telling on radio	4
Children's writing	11	Story-telling on TV	2
Journalism	11		

4.3: Types of writing done most frequently⁸

Type of writing ever done	Proportion still writing this genre	Other genres also being written these days	
	%		%
Family history	44.0	Poetry	31
Newsletter article	13.8	Report writing	36
Report writing	34.2	Academic writing	22
Academic writing	31.6	Report writing	30
Oratories	33.3	Short story	33
Novel	47.4	Poetry	32
Short story	34.8	Poetry	34
		Family history	33
Poetry	47.7	Family history	28
Song writing	41.5	Poetry	38
Playwright for theatre	52.8	Poetry	33
Screenplay writer	21.4	Scriptwriter for TV	36
Scriptwriter for TV	43.6	Screenplay writer	44
Scriptwriter for radio	32.6	Report & academic	28
Scriptwriter for video	24.2	Screenplay writer	42
Story-teller on radio	17.5	Family history	33
Story-teller on TV	26.7	Academic writing	
		Short story	} 33
		Scriptwriter for TV	
		Story-teller on radio	
Children's writing	40.7	Poet	40
Non-fiction writing	32.4	Family history	} 27
		Report writing	
Journalism	39.3	Academic & scriptwriter for radio	23
Print feature	31.7	Journalist	37
		Report writing	34
Multimedia	32.1	Report writing	32

⁸ This table describes those writers who have written previously in a particular genre and are still writing in that genre and their next most frequently used genre. For example, 44% of those who had ever written a family history are still writing family histories and 31% of this group are also writing poetry these days.

4.4: Types of writing by gender

Types of writing ever done by respondent	Types of works by men	Types of works by women	Types of writing ever done	Types of works by men	Types of works by women
	%	%		%	%
Family history	58	69	Scripts for radio	22	19
Short story	50	58	Plays for theatre	17	18
Poetry	54	55	Story-telling on radio	22	18
Report	63	51	Print feature writing	24	18
Academic writing	43	49	Oratories	10	17
Newsletter article	44	41	Screenplays	31	16
Non-fiction writing	39	31	Scripts for TV	26	14
Children's writing	24	27	Scripts for video	24	11
Song	38	21	Multimedia	18	11
Journalism	28	26	Story-telling on TV	8	6

4.5: Works published

Type of writing	Proportion of writers with works published in the past 5 years	Most important work of writers of writers published in the past 5 years
	%	%
Newsletter article	43	14
Journal article/s	39	14
Poetry	34	31
Broadcast on radio	31	16
Report	30	15
Short story	25	14
Broadcast on TV	21	6
Non-fiction writing	20	13
Family history	16	16
Script for video	15	7
Script for TV	14	7
Script for radio	14	6
Traditional story	12	9
Workshopped play	12	23
Song	10	27
Multimedia	10	6
Screenplay	8	6
Children's book/story	7	7
Produced play	7	9
Novel	6	6

4.6: Types of media in which work has been published

Type of media	Proportion of respondents published
	%
Newsletter	45
Book	39
Newspaper	38
Radio	33
Book anthology/collection	32
Academic publication	27
Magazine	27
Television	24
Video	23
On-line	11
Film	9
CD-ROM	9

4.7: Patterns of writing in key genres by location

Writing Genre	City	Remote area	Town	Rural area
	%	%	%	%
Family history	68	70	61	59
Short story	58	55	50	55
Poetry	57	50	50	55
Newsletter	44	40	46	27
Songs	30	15	24	27
Journalism	29	25	26	14
Novel	21	20	17	14
Plays	20	15	13	18

5. EMPLOYMENT

5.1: Forms of employment

Forms of employment	Proportion employed
	%
Employment on salary or on wages	33
Worked independently of any employer, agent, client or representative	28
Worked as a self-employed or freelance writer; writer whose work is handled by a representative such as an agent or publisher	27
Employment on contract	20
Worked as part of a cooperative or partnership	4

5.2: Types of employment

Types of employment	Proportion of respondents doing these things
	%
Working as a writer	54
Working at creative work in an arts field other than writing	46
Working at another paid occupation, connected with the arts	42
Working at paid work, not connected with the arts	41
Voluntary work associated with the arts	36
Studying or training in the arts	26
Voluntary or unpaid work outside the arts area	23
Studying or training in non-arts related areas	20

6. INCOME

6.1: Adequacy of income

Response	Writing the main source of income	Income from writing is adequate
	%	%
Yes	20	13
No	80	87

6.2: Frequency of income

Frequency of payment from writing	Proportion of respondents
	%
Regularly	17
Semi-regularly	16
Occasionally	40
Never	27

6.3: Income from writing

Proportion of income earned from writing	Proportion of respondents
	%
Nil	38
Less than 10%	36
10 – 25%	7
25 – 50%	6
50 – 75%	3
75 – 100%	11

6.4: Incidence of non-employment related income

Response	Income from pension or allowance	Income from unemployment benefits
	%	%
Yes	54	19
No	46	81

6.5: Income distribution, 1997

Income in 1997	Proportion of respondents
	%
Nil Income	40
\$1 - 5000	32
\$5001 - 10,000	10
\$10,001 - 15,000	4
\$15,001 - 20,000	2
\$20,001 - 25,000	1
\$25,001 - 30,000	3
\$30,001 - 35,000	2
\$25,001 - 40,000	1
More than \$40,000	5

7. MOTIVATIONS FOR WRITING

7.1: Factors contributing to advancing writers' careers

Kind of motivation	Helped respondent to start writing	Helped respondent continue writing over the past 5 years
	%	%
Desire to share culture/desire for reconciliation	70	62
Support from family or friends	57	48
A need to tell your life story	53	44
Being part of an organisation or group	47	31
Your general education	45	28
Called upon to write reports	45	29
Encouragement from respected elder	42	35
Support from community or clan	41	29
Encouragement from community	35	28
Support from an organisation or group	32	24
Support from a teacher	28	11
Additional training in the writing field	23	13
Identifying a market need	22	17
Financial assistance at a critical time	21	20
A 'lucky break'	20	7

7.2: Factors contributing to advancing writers' careers by gender

Key motivators to begin writing	Proportion of males citing this reason	Proportion of females citing this reason
	%	%
Encouraged by family and community affiliations	100	100
Wishing to share life-story, culture or reconciliation	98	100
Encouraged by education and training undertaken	33	45
Called upon to write reports or submissions	22	32
Assisted by financial assistance at a critical time	22	19

7.3: Factors contributing to advancing writers' careers by genre written

Types of writing	Encouraged by family and community affiliations	Wish to share life story, culture/ reconciliation	Being called upon to write reports or submissions	Encouraged by education or training undertaken	Assisted by financial assistance at a critical time
	%	%	%	%	%
Family history	74	78	60	57	85
Short story	67	65	58	68	71
Poetry	62	62	48	56	62
Journalism	30	23	38	38	29
Songs	26	31	17	27	18
Novel	23	24	10	22	38
Plays	17	17	8	18	21

7.4: Factors contributing to advancing writers' careers by genre published

Types of writing	Encouraged by family and community affiliations	Wish to share life story, culture/ reconciliation	Being called upon to write reports or submissions	Encouraged by education or training undertaken	Assisted by financial assistance at a critical time
	%	%	%	%	%
Family history	23	24	16	15	31
Song	9	13	5	9	7
Poetry	47	47	24	38	48
Novel	9	9	8	9	28
Short story	34	36	16	28	52
Play	22	18	11	15	24
Script for TV or radio	32	24	34	30	28
Article	56	46	63	60	59

7.5: Degree of recognition

Writers' assessment of recognition as a writer	Proportion of respondents
Beginning or starting out	34
Becoming recognised	32
Recognised but not working at full capacity	21
Recognised	13

7.6: Factors contributing to advancing writers' careers by income

Kind of motivation	Nil income from writing	\$1 - 5,000	\$5,001 - 10,000
	%	%	%
Desire to share culture/reconciliation	57	68	67
A need to tell your life story	52	43	39
Support from family or friends	58	40	39
Encouragement from respected elder	33	38	33
Support from community or clan	30	24	39
Being part of an organisation or group	28	32	33
Encouragement from community	21	24	33
Support from an organisation or group	19	21	44
Financial assistance at a critical time	12	21	39
A 'lucky break'	5	7	6

7.7: Discrimination against Indigenous writers

Types of discrimination	Level of discrimination		
	Very frequent	Some of the time	Hardly ever
	%	%	%
Difficult for Indigenous people to become well known	16	34	2
Bias against Indigenous people in some sectors	16	39	3
Indigenous people excluded from some forums	14	32	0
More work available to non-Indigenous people	12	23	4
Community & family responsibilities make it difficult	12	28	2

8. THE ROLE OF THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL AND OF GRANTS

8.1: Summary of writers views of the Australia Council's role in Indigenous writing

Opinion of Australia Council	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Don't know
	%	%	%	%
The Australia Council is a positive force in Indigenous writing	56	7	12	24
The Australia Council provides adequate and useful information	47	17	11	21
The Australia Council does not get enough funds to do its job properly	47	17	11	21
Indigenous writing gets too small a share of Australia Council funds	46	1	9	42
The Australia Council is too bureaucratic	29	11	21	35

8.2: Ways in which grants have affected artists' work

Impact of grants	Proportion of respondents
	%
Gave impetus to continue writing	72
Freedom from financial worries	65
Helped in practical ways	56
Travelled and gained new experience	54
Able to concentrate on creative work	52
Enabled writer to publish	49

8.3: Proportion of writers who have applied for or received grants for writing

Grant applicants/recipients	Proportion of respondents
	%
Writers who have applied for a grant from the Australia Council in the past 2 years	27
Writers who have ever received a grant from the Australia Council	32
Writers who have ever received a grant from other funding bodies	26

8.4: Reasons for dissatisfaction with Australia Council grants procedures

Reasons for dissatisfaction	Proportion of respondents
(43% of total respondents found the grants procedures unsatisfactory)	
Too elitist	58
Long winded procedures	54
Forms too hard	50
No feedback on outcome	46
Writers' needs not understood by the Australia Council	42
No one to explain the procedures	42

APPENDIX 2: METHODOLOGY

The study of Indigenous writers of Australia was developed from the guidelines provided by the Australia Council which defined the scope of the project and the topics to be covered. The study aimed to collect a range of statistical information to help the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board and the Australia Council with policy development and grants programs. This study complements the Australia Council's other surveys of practising professional artists, notably the 1994 study *What Do You Do for a Living?* and covers similar topics. It focused on the employment and economic circumstances of the Indigenous writers as well as exploring other pertinent issues such as access to publishing and the motivations of the writers.

The key topics of the survey of Indigenous writers included:

- characteristics and geographic distribution;
- education and training;
- working conditions and employment;
- financial circumstances;
- career development and conditions of professional practice;
- achievements and output;
- the situation of women writers; and
- grants and the role of the Australia Council.

The study was primarily conducted through mailed questionnaires. Respondents were asked to fill out the questionnaire and return it in a reply-paid envelope. A number of writers were also contacted by phone and gave their responses to the questionnaire over the phone. Others contacted the researchers by phone and email to clarify their responses.

About 40 writers were invited to focus groups held Adelaide, Port Augusta, Alice Springs, Darwin, Sydney (see below for more details). Up to 50 individuals in Western Australia and other States and Territories talked about their writing and their key concerns by phone to the researchers.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The key tasks involved

Definition of the target group of practising, professional Indigenous writers

Definition of the target group was developed in discussion with the Australia Council and through consultation with Christine Morris and some Indigenous organisations and individuals involved in writing. The definition 'published works' included broadcasts on electronic media and public performance in the case of playwrights and song writers. This

allowed the inclusion of writers whose first language was not English, traditional story-tellers and those who worked with co-writers. It was decided to ask the writers to self-identify as 'professional' or otherwise and to define their own level of recognition as a writer.

The preparation of a set of questions to be asked

A self-enumeration questionnaire was developed in consultation with the Australia Council, the Australian Bureau of Statistics NCCRS⁹ Unit, with advice from Christine Morris. This initial questionnaire was then sent to a number of representative Indigenous writers to complete and comment on the suitability, clarity and ordering of questions. Members of this test group were largely located in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. The assistance from Magabala Books was particularly appreciated in this context. An improved version of the questionnaire was sent out to Indigenous writers on another occasion for testing and response.

As a result of the feedback, questions were further clarified and their order was adjusted. Some questions that had been included to provide parallel information to *What Do You Do for a Living?* were dropped on advice from the test group as not applicable to our target group. Instructions were improved, response categories were kept to a minimum and some categories of information were added or deleted.

⁹ NCCRS: National Centre for Cultural and Recreation Statistics

Three categories of writing which were not included in other Australia Council surveys were considered particularly significant for this survey:

- family history/oral history writing;
- oratories; and
- story-telling (radio and television)

The questionnaire was written in English, despite the researchers' awareness that English is not always the first language of Indigenous writers and sometimes not a strong language. However, this study did not have the considerable resources that would have been necessary to take into account language speakers in (often remote) communities. There was no evidence that this disadvantaged the responses to the questionnaire. The under-representation of community-based story-tellers in this study involves issues beyond the issue of the language used in the survey.

The questionnaire was also used to identify some people willing to participate in the focus group.

Identification of Writers

Compilation of lists

The questionnaire distribution list was compiled by contacting publishers, media

organisations (metropolitan, rural and remote), state and federal film and television funding agencies, theatre groups, relevant state and federal government departments, Indigenous community organisations, Indigenous cultural centres, the Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, music producers, universities and institutes of TAFE.

Many organisations, including the key Indigenous publishing houses, have extensive lists of Indigenous writers, but in order to protect the rights and privacy of Indigenous writers, a number of organisations preferred to send out the surveys to the writers on their lists. All such organisations approached by this study were able to send out the questionnaire in this way.

This necessarily meant that some writers received the questionnaire from several sources, particularly writers who worked or published through several organisations or in more than one genre. The following list is of those organisations through which we received completed questionnaires. There were some other organisations that sent out questionnaires, but from which no completed questionnaires were received.

2.3 List of Organisations through which questionnaires were distributed

ABC Indigenous Unit	Harry Nanya Cultural Tours
Aboriginal Independent Media	IAD Press
Aboriginal Studies Press	Koori Arts Collective
AFTRS	Koori Centre, La Trobe University
Arts SA	Koori Mail
Arts Tasmania	Koori Research Centre
Arts NT	Magabala Books
Arts Victoria	Milli Milli Wungka
Australian Society Of Authors	Miriaback Nations
Batchelor College (Broadcast Unit)	MOB FM
Batchelor College (Noonjook Publications)	Newcastle Community Arts Centre
Big Eye Productions	Noongar Warda
CAAMA Productions	Queensland Writers Centre
CAAMA Radio (8 KIN FM)	Songlines
Cape York Land Council	Storytellers Guild Of NSW
CINCRM (Northern Territory University)	TEABBA
City Of Port Phillip	Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute
Deadly Vibe	Tranby College
Department Education And Training	TSIMA
Elephant Press	Umeewarra Media
FATSIS (Northern Territory University)	University of Queensland Press
Film And TV Institute (WA)	WAAMA
Fremantle Arts Centre Press	Yamaji News
Gadigal	

Distribution

The Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Arts Board wrote a covering letter which was included with the survey, along with an explanatory letter from the researchers.

Two advertisements were placed in the national Indigenous newspaper *The Koori Mail* notifying Indigenous writers about the survey and how they could obtain a questionnaire. An interim progress of the survey was also published in *Koori News*, with advice to writers on how to participate in the study, if they so wished.

The surveys were posted to over 50 organisations or Indigenous units within organisations. Bundles of surveys with the reply-paid envelopes were sent to these organisations and they posted these out, in some instances with a covering letter from the organisation about the survey. In addition, over 200 individuals were posted surveys. This latter list was made up of unaffiliated writers as well as individuals whose names had been passed on to the researchers by organisations that preferred to do that rather than distribute the survey themselves, or by other individuals, writers and members of community organisations. Previous recipients of Australia Council awards were also sent questionnaires. These were contacted through Australia Council publications, including the Annual Reports.

In total, 1000 questionnaires were sent out over a period of 10 months. Unfortunately no estimate can be made on the number of Indigenous writers in Australia, since it is impossible to know the degree of duplication of names across the various lists.

By using this method of distribution, organisations with databases of Indigenous writers ensured that all writers on their lists received a survey and some offered to follow-up slow returns. Some of the larger organisations, such as Magabala Books and IAD, devoted considerable resources to assisting the study to distribute the survey.

It should also be noted that although some effort was made to reach as many story-tellers in communities as possible, this group is under-represented. This study did not have the resources necessary to visit the community-based writers.

Questionnaire follow-up

A number of follow-up procedures were put in place to ensure that as many Indigenous writers as possible, from all areas of Australia, received the survey and returned it.

However, for internal reasons, some organisations did not immediately distribute the surveys, extending timeframes by several months. The researchers relied on the good will and ability of the organisations to follow up the late returns, as well as advertising, phone calls and writing reminder letters to individual writers. An interim report on results of the study was also published in *The Koori Mail*.

While these follow-up procedures significantly increased the length of time of the survey, they ensured a broad mix of responses and gave Indigenous writers from all over Australia the opportunity to take part in the survey.

The follow-up procedures included:

- reminder letters sent by publishers and other organisations to writers on their lists;
- additional questionnaires sent to organisations and writers because surveys had gone astray;
- the second advertisement placed in *The Koori Mail* encouraging writers to return their questionnaires and ensuring Indigenous writers knew how to receive a questionnaire if they did not have one;
- telephone calls to organisations and to individual writers;
- telephone interviews: a number of writers preferred to answer the survey questions over the telephone and their answers were noted on the questionnaire. This was particularly useful for elderly writers; and
- the article in *The Koori Mail* about the survey and its initial findings, with a final reminder to respond to the questionnaire if interested.

Responses

In total, 228 responses were received, of which 13 were not counted in the final outcome for various reasons. These included some non-Indigenous responses, which mostly came from lists (provided by publishing houses) of people who had written on Indigenous subject matters. Usually such people called the researchers to check if they should return the questionnaire and, as a result, did not.

On the whole the proportion of respondents on a state-by-state basis matched the Indigenous proportion of population in each state quite well. The exception was Queensland. It should also be noted that, although there were no receipts from the Torres Strait Islands (TSI), a number of Torres Strait Islanders living on the mainland responded to the questionnaire.

*Response by State*¹⁰

Proportion of Indigenous people by State	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	TSI
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Indigenous population by State	1	29	13	27	6	4	6	14	1
Indigenous respondents by State	2	24	15	16	9	4	10	19	0

¹⁰ ABS Population Distribution, Indigenous Australians - 1996

Focus groups

Focus group meetings were held in four States and Territories: South Australia (Adelaide and Port Augusta), Northern Territory (Alice Springs and Darwin), NSW (Sydney) and Victoria (Melbourne). Phone interviews were held with writers in Western Australia

(Perth and Broome), as well as in the States and Territory of the focus groups. Altogether, about 40 writers were involved.

The aim of these groups was to:

- extend the range of issues discussed where it had been decided that such issues could not easily be included in the questionnaire;
- add depth or clarification to issues raised in the questionnaire; and
- allow for issues to be raised spontaneously.

As many writers as possible who had indicated in the questionnaire that they were interested in participating in the focus groups were contacted to ascertain their availability in the time frame available. The locations for the focus groups were based on those responses.

The focus groups each ran for approximately two to three hours. They were based on a range of discussion points, listed below. The researcher raised a specific set of issues and encouraged conversation between the participants. As far as possible, this ensured that the interviewer did not intrude into the sessions, thus encouraging a free flow of ideas. Participants were encouraged to raise other issues they felt were relevant.

The key issues discussed or raised were:

- aspirations of the writers;
- discussion about forms and genres of Indigenous writing;
- ideas about definitions of professional Indigenous writers;
- relationships to publishers, the community, co-writers and issues surrounding ownership of writing;
- experiences as writers and the issues arising from these;
- perceptions of the Australia Council and other cultural institutions;
- nature and size of grants and the funding bureaucracy; and
- issues concerning gender, educational background, disadvantage, writing styles and income and employment.

Survey Analysis

The responses were entered into a database and statistically analysed, as reflected in Chapters 1 to 8.

The data was cross-tabulated as relevant, responses were analysed by percentages, averages and medians. In some instances, for the sake of brevity, data has been grouped into larger classifications than in the questionnaire. For example, where the questionnaire suggested nine age categories, the graph in the Introduction amalgamates this data into only three categories. Appendix 1, however, presents the full range of data.

This data is presented as tables and graphs as well as in the narrative. Where relevant, the data was compared to equivalent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

As the number of responses to each question varied, percentages have been calculated as a percentage of respondents for each question.

Comments on the questionnaire by respondents were noted, and included as part of the general analysis as appropriate. They were usually taken together with the focus group responses.

Focus group discussions were noted verbatim and used in the analysis of various issues in the appropriate chapters.

APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONNAIRE

1998 INDIGENOUS WRITERS' SURVEY

To fill in this questionnaire please tick the box next to the answer which most accurately applies to you or write your answer on the dotted lines.

Please try to fill in and return the survey within 7 days of receiving it. Use the addressed, reply-paid envelope to post your completed form back to us.

The survey is confidential. Responses will be collated and no individual details will be released. All forms will be shredded at the completion of the study. The aim of this study is to provide information to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council about the experiences and requirements of Indigenous writers so that grants can be distributed in the most appropriate manner.

If you receive more than one copy of this survey, would you please:

- complete one questionnaire and return it in the supplied envelope; and
- for any additional questionnaires, complete the section at the end and return them in the supplied envelopes.

The purpose of this is to register your form as returned and prevent reminders being sent to you.

To protect your privacy, we have asked organisations such as publishers who have the names and addresses of writers to mail out the questionnaires. By using this procedure, you may receive more than one questionnaire if you are associated with more than one organisation that we have approached. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.

This is important since we are attempting to ensure as close to 100% response as possible and in this way we will know that you have already responded.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council wants to improve its grant programs to Indigenous writers and to make the grants program as fair as possible. The information collected in this study will enable the Board to improve its service to all Indigenous writers in future.

Section A: Your activity as a writer

Q1a. In the last year (1997), what was your normal level of activity with your writing?

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| everyday or nearly everyday | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |
| working at writing at least sometime in every week | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |
| working at writing at least sometime in every month | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| working at writing less often than once a month | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 |

other (please write in) 9

Q1b. To get more detail on this, if you had to sum up a normal week in 1997, about how much of it would you have spent on working at your writing?

- none of it or close to none of it 1
 less than one day in the week 2
 about one day out of the seven 3
 two or three days 4
 four or five days 5
 more than five days 6
 other (please write in) 9
-

Q1c. So, over the whole of 1997, about how much of your total working time did you spend on your writing?

- all of my working time 1
 about three quarters of my working time 2
 about half of it 3
 about a quarter of it 4
 less than a quarter 5
 none 6
 other (please write in) 9
-

Q2a. Below is a list of types of writing. In the first column tick all the types of writing you have ever done?

Q2b. In the second column tick which one of these types of writing are you doing most these days?

Types of writing	Q2a.	Q2b.
Family history / oral history writing	<input type="checkbox"/> 01	<input type="checkbox"/> 01
Newsletter writing	<input type="checkbox"/> 02	<input type="checkbox"/> 02
Report writing	<input type="checkbox"/> 03	<input type="checkbox"/> 03
Academic writing	<input type="checkbox"/> 04	<input type="checkbox"/> 04

Oratories	<input type="checkbox"/> 05	<input type="checkbox"/> 05
Novelist	<input type="checkbox"/> 06	<input type="checkbox"/> 06
Short-story writer	<input type="checkbox"/> 07	<input type="checkbox"/> 07
Poet	<input type="checkbox"/> 08	<input type="checkbox"/> 08
Song writer	<input type="checkbox"/> 09	<input type="checkbox"/> 09
Playwright for theatre	<input type="checkbox"/> 10	<input type="checkbox"/> 10
Screenplay writer for film	<input type="checkbox"/> 11	<input type="checkbox"/> 11
Scriptwriter for TV	<input type="checkbox"/> 12	<input type="checkbox"/> 12
Scriptwriter for radio	<input type="checkbox"/> 13	<input type="checkbox"/> 13
Scriptwriter for video	<input type="checkbox"/> 14	<input type="checkbox"/> 14
Story teller on radio	<input type="checkbox"/> 15	<input type="checkbox"/> 15
Story teller on TV	<input type="checkbox"/> 16	<input type="checkbox"/> 16
Children's writer	<input type="checkbox"/> 17	<input type="checkbox"/> 17
Non-fiction writer	<input type="checkbox"/> 18	<input type="checkbox"/> 18
Journalist	<input type="checkbox"/> 19	<input type="checkbox"/> 19
Print feature writer	<input type="checkbox"/> 20	<input type="checkbox"/> 20
Writer for multi-media	<input type="checkbox"/> 21	<input type="checkbox"/> 21
Other writing (please write in)		

Q3a. How old were you when you began working as a writer?

years old

Q3b. Do you describe yourself as a professional writer?

- yes 1
 no 2

Other (please write in)

Q4a. Below is a list of things which may have helped you to start writing. In the first column tick which of them have been important in your working life as a writer at any time.

Q4b. In the second column tick those which have been important in keeping you going with your writing in the past five years.

	Q4a.	Q4b.
Your community wanted you to do it	<input type="checkbox"/> 01	<input type="checkbox"/> 01
Encouragement from a respected elder	<input type="checkbox"/> 02	<input type="checkbox"/> 02

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Felt a need to tell your life story | <input type="checkbox"/> 03 | <input type="checkbox"/> 03 |
| Support from community or clan | <input type="checkbox"/> 04 | <input type="checkbox"/> 04 |
| Being called upon to write reports and submissions | <input type="checkbox"/> 05 | <input type="checkbox"/> 05 |
| Desire to share culture / reconciliation | <input type="checkbox"/> 06 | <input type="checkbox"/> 06 |
| Being part of an organisation or community group | <input type="checkbox"/> 07 | <input type="checkbox"/> 07 |
| Your general education | <input type="checkbox"/> 08 | <input type="checkbox"/> 08 |
| Some additional training in the writing field | <input type="checkbox"/> 09 | <input type="checkbox"/> 09 |
| Support from a teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |
| Support from family or friends | <input type="checkbox"/> 11 | <input type="checkbox"/> 11 |
| A "lucky" break | <input type="checkbox"/> 12 | <input type="checkbox"/> 12 |
| Financial assistance at a critical time | <input type="checkbox"/> 13 | <input type="checkbox"/> 13 |
| Support from an organisation or group | <input type="checkbox"/> 14 | <input type="checkbox"/> 14 |
| Identifying a market need | <input type="checkbox"/> 15 | <input type="checkbox"/> 15 |
| Other factors (please write in) | | |
-

Q5a. Which of the following best describes your level of recognition as a writer?

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Beginning / starting out | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |
| Becoming recognised | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |
| Recognised | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| Recognised but not working at full capacity | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 |
| Other (please write in) | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
-

Q5b. In the past two years, which languages have you been using in your writing?

Section B: Employment and Promotion

Q6. As a writer, how have you made your money over the last two years? (excluding any non-writing income you may have received).

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| employed on a salary or on wages | <input type="checkbox"/> 01 |
| employed on a contract | <input type="checkbox"/> 02 |
| work as part of a "co-operative" or partnership | <input type="checkbox"/> 03 |
| work as a self-employed or "freelance" writer whose work | |

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| is handled by a representative such as an agent or publisher | <input type="checkbox"/> 04 |
| work independently of any employer, agent, client or representative | <input type="checkbox"/> 05 |
| other (please write in) | <input type="checkbox"/> 99 |
-
-

Q7a. Looking at the list below, tick in the first column if you have done any of these things in the past 5 years.

Q7b. Write in the second column how many times in the past five years have you done these things.

Q7c. And tick in the third column which of these things you think are your most important works over this five year period.

- | | Q7a. | Q7b. | Q7c. |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Had a family history published | <input type="checkbox"/> 01 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 01 |
| Had a traditional story published | <input type="checkbox"/> 02 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 02 |
| Had a song published | <input type="checkbox"/> 03 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 03 |
| Had a poem published | <input type="checkbox"/> 04 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 04 |
| Had a newsletter article published | <input type="checkbox"/> 05 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 05 |
| Had a report published | <input type="checkbox"/> 06 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 06 |
| Had a novel published | <input type="checkbox"/> 07 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 07 |
| Had a short-story published | <input type="checkbox"/> 08 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 08 |
| Had a play workshopped | <input type="checkbox"/> 09 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 09 |
| Had a play produced | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |
| Had a screenplay produced | <input type="checkbox"/> 11 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 11 |
| Had a script produced for TV | <input type="checkbox"/> 12 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 12 |
| Had a script produced for radio | <input type="checkbox"/> 13 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 13 |
| Had a script produced for video | <input type="checkbox"/> 14 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 14 |
| Broadcast on radio | <input type="checkbox"/> 15 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 15 |
| Broadcast on TV | <input type="checkbox"/> 16 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 16 |
| Had a children's book/story published | <input type="checkbox"/> 17 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 17 |
| Had non-fiction writing published | <input type="checkbox"/> 18 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 18 |
| Had article/s published | <input type="checkbox"/> 19 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 19 |
| Published in multi-media | <input type="checkbox"/> 20 | ___ | <input type="checkbox"/> 20 |
| Other (please write in) | | | |
-
-

Q7d. In which of the following media have you been published?

- Book 01
 - Book anthology/collection 02
 - Academic publication 03
 - Newspaper 04
 - Newsletter 05
 - Magazine 06
 - Television 07
 - Radio 08
 - Video 09
 - Film 10
 - CD-ROM 11
 - Online 12
 - Other (please write in)
-
-

Q8. During the last two years which of these types of jobs have you been doing at any time?

Arts jobs

- (i) working as a writer 01
- (ii) working at creative work in an arts field other than writing 02
- (iii) working at another paid occupation connected with the arts, eg. teaching, administration etc. 03
- (iv) studying or training in the arts 04
- (v) voluntary work associated with the arts 05

Non Arts jobs

- (i) working at paid work not connected with the arts 06
 - (ii) studying or training in non arts related areas 07
 - (iii) voluntary or unpaid work outside the arts area 08
 - Other (please write in) 99
-
-

Q9a. Do you believe you have suffered professional disadvantages as a writer because you are an Indigenous person?

- very frequently 01
 - some of the time 02
 - hardly ever 03
 - never 04 **go to Q10a**
 - don't know/can't say 05 **go to Q10a**
-
-

other (please write in) 99

Q9b. Which of these sorts of disadvantages do you believe you have you faced?

- Just generally more work available to non Indigenous people 01
 - Difficult for Indigenous people to become well known in this area of work 02
 - There's bias against Indigenous people in some sectors 03
 - Indigenous people are excluded from some forums 04
 - Community and family responsibilities make it difficult 05
 - other (please write in) 99
-
-

Section C: Your financial situation

(Please remember that none of your personal income information will be passed on)

Q10a. Does your writing provide you with your main source of income?

- yes 1
 - no 2
 - other (please write in) 9
-
-

Q10b. Is the income you receive from your writing enough for you (and your family) to live on?

- yes 1
 - no 2
 - other (please write in) 9
-
-

Q10c. Thinking of the last two years, would you say that you have received income from your writing regularly, only semi-regularly or only just occasionally?

- regularly 1
 - semi-regularly 2
 - occasionally 3
 - other (please write in) 9
-
-

Q10d. What has been your total income (before any deductions for tax or other purposes) from writing in each of the last two years?

	1996	1997
\$ nil	<input type="checkbox"/> 01	<input type="checkbox"/> 02
in the range of \$1 - \$5,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 03	<input type="checkbox"/> 04
\$5,001 - \$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 05	<input type="checkbox"/> 06
\$10,001 - \$15,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 07	<input type="checkbox"/> 08
\$15,001 - \$20,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 09	<input type="checkbox"/> 10
\$20,001 - \$25,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 11	<input type="checkbox"/> 12
\$25,001 - \$30,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 13	<input type="checkbox"/> 14
\$30,001 - \$35,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 15	<input type="checkbox"/> 16
\$35,001 - \$40,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 17	<input type="checkbox"/> 18
more than \$40,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 19	<input type="checkbox"/> 20
other (please write in)	<input type="checkbox"/> 48	<input type="checkbox"/> 49

Q10e. In general, what percentage of your total income comes from writing?

% nil	<input type="checkbox"/> 01
in the range of Less than 10%	<input type="checkbox"/> 02
10% - 25%	<input type="checkbox"/> 03
25% - 50%	<input type="checkbox"/> 04
50% - 75%	<input type="checkbox"/> 05
75% - 100%	<input type="checkbox"/> 06
other (please write in)	

Q10f. Have you received any income from a pension, an Abstudy grant or a CDEP allowance at any time in the past two years?

yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
no	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Other (please write in)	<input type="checkbox"/> 9

Q10g. Have you received unemployment benefits at any time in the past two years?

yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
no	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Other (please write in)	<input type="checkbox"/> 9

Section D: Financial assistance and the role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council

Q11a. Did you know of the Australia Council before this survey?

yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
no	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 go to Q11g
Other (please write in)	

Q11b. Below is a list of things that people have said about the Australia Council and its relationship with Indigenous writers. Please indicate if you agree, disagree, feel neutral or don't know how you feel about each of the statements?

	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	don't know
Australia Council has been a positive force in developing Indigenous writing	<input type="checkbox"/> 01	<input type="checkbox"/> 02	<input type="checkbox"/> 03	<input type="checkbox"/> 04
Australia Council does not get enough funds to do its job properly	<input type="checkbox"/> 05	<input type="checkbox"/> 06	<input type="checkbox"/> 07	<input type="checkbox"/> 08
Australia Council is too bureaucratic	<input type="checkbox"/> 09	<input type="checkbox"/> 10	<input type="checkbox"/> 11	<input type="checkbox"/> 12
Australia Council provides adequate and useful information	<input type="checkbox"/> 13	<input type="checkbox"/> 14	<input type="checkbox"/> 15	<input type="checkbox"/> 16
Indigenous writing gets too small a share of total Australia Council funds	<input type="checkbox"/> 17	<input type="checkbox"/> 18	<input type="checkbox"/> 19	<input type="checkbox"/> 20

Q11c. In the last 2 years have you applied for a grant from the Australia Council?

yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
no	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 go to Q11g

Q11d. Regardless of the outcome of that application did you feel that the Australia Council's procedures were satisfactory or unsatisfactory?

satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 go to Q11g
unsatisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> 2

Q11e. In what way were they unsatisfactory?

- poorly organised 01
 - grants go to elitist projects 02
 - long winded procedures 03
 - no feedback on outcome of application 04
 - our needs are not understood by the Council 05
 - the application forms are too hard to complete 06
 - there was no one to explain the procedures 07
 - don't know/can't say 08
 - other (please write in) 99
-
-

Q11f. Have you personally ever received any grants for writing from the Australia Council?

- yes 1
- no 2

Q11g. Have you personally ever received any grants for writing from any other funding body?

- yes 1
- no 2

Q11h. If you have received any grants, how did they affect your work as a writer?

- gave freedom from financial worries to concentrate on writing 01
- allowed me to travel and gain new experience 02
- enabled me to publish 03
- gave me the impetus to continue a writing project 04
- could concentrate on creative work not just standard output 05
- helped my life in practical ways 06
- created difficult family or community pressures 07
- other (please write in) 99

Section E - Some questions about yourself

Q12. Are you Male or Female?

- Male 1
- Female 2

Q13. In which of the following age groups are you?

- under 20 01
 - 20-24 02
 - 25-29 03
 - 30-34 04
 - 35-39 05
 - 40-44 06
 - 45-54 07
 - 55-64 08
 - 65+ 09
 - Other (please write in) 99
-
-

Q14. Which of the following best describes the highest level of education that you have completed?

- no formal education 01
 - some primary school 02
 - completed primary school 03
 - some secondary school 04
 - still at school 05
 - secondary school certificate 06
 - trade certificate/apprenticeship 07
 - other certificate 08
 - diploma or degree course but did not complete 09
 - associate/undergraduate diploma 10
 - bachelor's degree or higher 11
 - other (please write in) 99
-
-

Q15. In addition to these education attainments have you or are you engaged in any of the following training courses?

- writing reports and submissions 01
 - creative writing courses 02
 - writing workshops 03
 - artist in residence/in the community 04
 - drama school 05
 - working with an editor 06
 - training on the job 07
 - other (please write in) 99
-
-

Q16a. From this list which applies to you?

- single 1
- married/de facto 2
- divorced / separated 3
- widowed 4
- other (please write in) 9

Q16b. How many other people are financially dependent upon your income? That is how many other people are you the main provider for on a regular basis?

please write in _____

Q17a. In which of these areas were you born and in which do you now live?

	born	now live
Australian Capital Territory	<input type="checkbox"/> 01	<input type="checkbox"/> 01
New South Wales	<input type="checkbox"/> 02	<input type="checkbox"/> 02
Northern Territory	<input type="checkbox"/> 03	<input type="checkbox"/> 03
Queensland	<input type="checkbox"/> 04	<input type="checkbox"/> 04
South Australia	<input type="checkbox"/> 05	<input type="checkbox"/> 05
Tasmania	<input type="checkbox"/> 06	<input type="checkbox"/> 06
Victoria	<input type="checkbox"/> 07	<input type="checkbox"/> 07
Western Australia	<input type="checkbox"/> 08	<input type="checkbox"/> 08
Torres Strait Islands	<input type="checkbox"/> 09	<input type="checkbox"/> 09
other (please write in)	<input type="checkbox"/> 19	<input type="checkbox"/> 20

Q17b. How would you describe the area you live in nowadays?

- a city 01
- a town 02
- a rural area 03
- a remote area 04
- Other (please write in) _____

All the information gathered will be collated and summarised in a report.

Your personal responses will remain confidential.

If you would like to receive a copy of this report please tick the box below and put your name and address in the space provided.

A small number of meetings of Indigenous writers will be held as the next stage of this study. If you would like to attend one of these meetings, to discuss your writing further, please tick the relevant box below and make sure your name and address details are filled in.

You may prefer to call reverse charges on (03) 95960719 or (03) 9428 4557

Name _____

Address _____

- I would like to receive copy of Report 1
- I would like to attend discussion meeting 2

Please return your filled in questionnaire in the enclosed reply-paid envelope to:
MC Media & Associates, 30 The Crofts, Richmond VIC 3121

Please check that you have completed all the questions and return the questionnaire in the reply paid envelope.

If you have already received a copy of this questionnaire

If you have already received a copy of this questionnaire, please fill out the details below and return this section in the stamped envelope supplied. We apologise for any inconvenience.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

