

Writers' Blogs: Who Reads Them and Why
A Survey of Readers and My Comments on
the Results

By
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Introduction

I conducted the Writers' Blog Survey in order to answer three questions:

1. Who reads writers' blogs? No matter the intended audience, who actually reads your blog?
2. Why do they read your blog?
 - a. What are blog readers looking for?
 - b. What do they expect from you, the blogger?
 - c. How does your blog affect your audience's buying decisions?
3. How can writers use blogs to communicate effectively with readers and other writers?

Though I make no claims to being anything like a professional writer or survey analyst, I think the questions that this survey asks and the way it asks them are subject to interpretation by any reasonably intelligent person. The survey itself is certainly flawed, and is not conducted in anything like a scientific manner. While this leaves the results open to interpretation, I think the data speaks for itself rather clearly.

Here are the results and my conclusions about them. Feel free to form your own opinion. My hope is to attempt to cast some light on a subject that I think is important but as yet poorly understood.

I plan to leave this survey operational for as long as I deem the results worthwhile and will update the charts as necessary. I will announce any changes or shifts in data or interpretations on [Noise in the Attic](#) as I deem appropriate.

Many thanks to all who have taken the time to respond. Your input has contributed to a better understanding of blogging for all of us. I also extend thanks and great appreciation to those who have helped promote this survey. Your assistance made my job a lot easier.

If you haven't taken the survey, why not take a moment and [do it now](#)?

Design

The survey design consists of nine questions and an opportunity for the respondent to offer comments. The questions were designed to provide data to address the three questions listed above. Questions 1 and 2 address the question of who is actually reading writers' blogs. Questions 3, 4, and 5 ask why the respondent actually reads writers' blogs and how they use the information they find there in making book publishing decisions. Questions 6, 7, 8, and 9 ask the respondent about their expectations of a writers' blog and of the writer who chooses to blog. Question 10 gives the respondent the opportunity to make any comments they feel are relevant.

Overview

I have actually found few surprises in the responses from the first two weeks of this survey. Some of the responses, especially the comments, may illuminate some issues regarding blogs. Some of the more interesting findings are:

- Nearly 95% of the respondents so far call themselves writers of some sort. Over 70% of respondents style themselves as "Aspiring" writers, which I take to mean people who are serious about having a career as a writer but have not yet achieved any significant success. While I would like to see more response from pure readers, i.e. non-writers, I am willing to accept that the current data might be accurate. At this time, it looks like our audience is mainly other writers, though they are largely readers, as well.
- Though about three-fourths of respondents indicated that a writer's blog influences their book purchasing decisions, the responses to Question 5 and the comments indicate that a writer's blog is not by any means the only influence on those decisions. Certainly, the blog is not the sole determinant in book purchasing decisions among most of a blog's readers.
- Blog readers expect the writer to be candid and honest. Blogging is generally considered a more intimate medium than Web sites or press releases. Blog readers expect the writer to be more open to them on a blog.
- Blog readers are far more interested in the writing than the person. While comments on personal issues, politics, etc. will not generally drive readers away, they are definitely more interested in knowing how a writer works and in getting information that may be useful to them in their own writing careers.

Raw data

Date	5/31/05	
Number of responses to date	164	
1.) Are you a writer?		
Full-time Professional	10	6.10%
Part-time Professional	13	7.93%
Aspiring	117	71.34%
Hobbyist	15	9.15%
Not a writer	9	5.49%
Not answered	0	0.00%
2.) Do you keep a blog?		
Yes	115	70.12%
No	49	29.88%
Not answered	1	0.61%
3.) Why do you read writers' blogs?		
To get to know them as people	117	71.34%
To get writing and publishing tips	125	76.22%
To get a feel for their writing styles	42	25.61%
To see how they cope with the writing life	139	84.76%
To get/give inspiration/encouragement	112	68.29%
Because they are well-written, thoughtful, witty, and entertaining	118	71.95%
To get their opinions on current events	34	20.73%
To get current or insider publishing news	61	37.20%
Other	7	4.27%
To scope out the competition	5	3.05%
Not answered	0	0.00%
4.) Do you make book publishing decisions based on what you read on a writer's blog?		
Yes	118	71.95%
No	49	29.88%
Not answered	1	0.61%
5.) If so, how important is the blog in influencing your decision to buy or not buy that writer's book(s)?		
Very important	8	4.88%
Somewhat important	82	50.00%
Neither important nor unimportant	46	28.05%
Somewhat unimportant	17	10.37%
Very unimportant	12	7.32%
Not answered	10	6.10%
6.) As a reader, how important is it to you for writers to blog?		
Very important	13	7.93%
Somewhat important	51	31.10%
Neither important nor unimportant	61	37.20%
Somewhat unimportant	37	22.56%
Very unimportant	45	27.44%
Not answered	2	1.22%

7.) As a reader, how important is it to you for writers to blog about:

Their writing process	143	87.20%
Their opinions of other writers' books	43	26.22%
Their personal lives	57	34.76%
Current events	34	20.73%
Publishing news	61	37.20%
Their successes and failures as a writer	123	75.00%
Other	12	7.32%
Not answered	3	1.83%

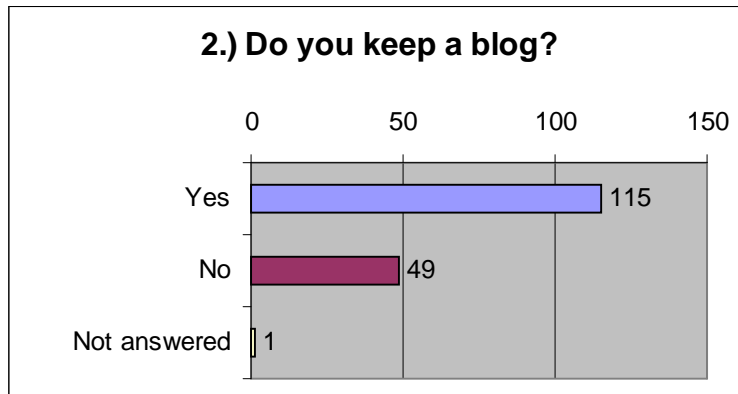
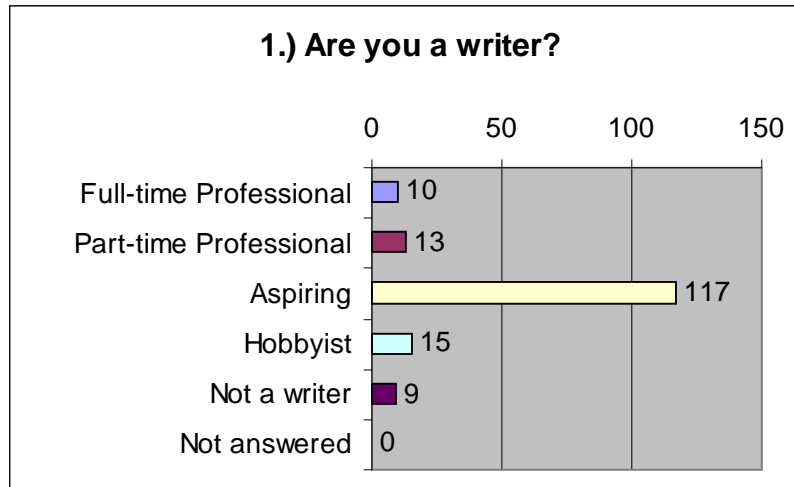
8.) How important is it for you to feel that the writer is being candid and honest?

Very important	125	76.22%
Somewhat important	31	18.90%
Neither important nor unimportant	4	2.44%
Somewhat unimportant	1	0.61%
Very unimportant	2	1.22%
Not answered	1	0.61%

9.) How important is it for the writer to allow comments or provide a contact e-mail address?

Very important	21	12.80%
Somewhat important	49	29.88%
Neither important nor unimportant	55	33.54%
Somewhat unimportant	16	9.76%
Very unimportant	21	12.80%
Not answered	2	1.22%

Who reads writers' blogs? (Questions 1 and 2)



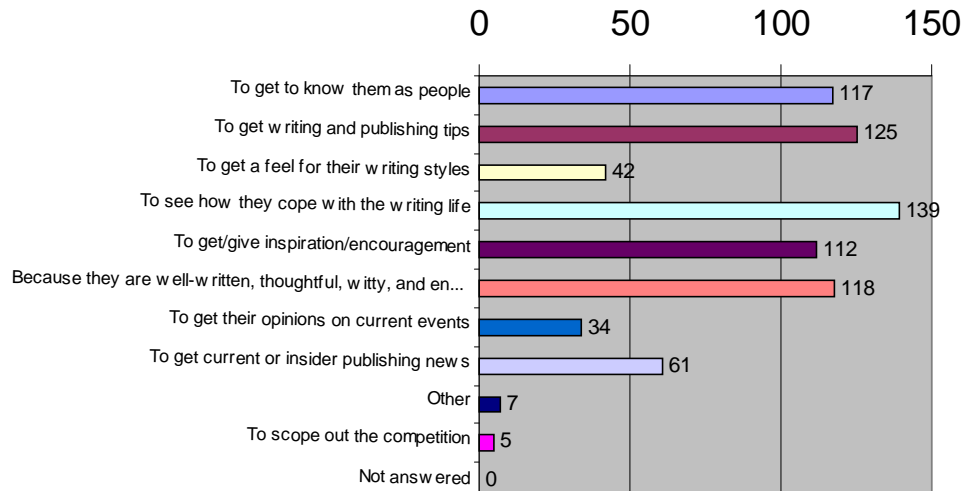
Over 71% of respondents indicate they are "Aspiring" writers. I would really like to see more responses from professional writers and non-writers in order to feel more confident in having a more accurate cross-section of blog readers.

70% of blog readers are bloggers themselves.

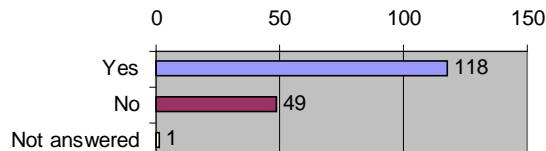
This data shows that the audience for a writer's blog tends to be people who are interested in writing and are at least somewhat technologically literate. This indicates to me that blog readers tend to be more discerning than the general readership. Fluff and hype will be counter-productive with this audience.

Why do they read writers' blogs and how does the blog affect their book-buying decisions? (Questions 3, 4, and 5)

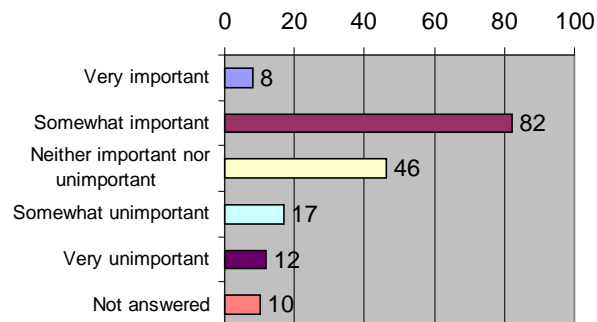
3.) Why do you read writers' blogs?



4.) Do you make book purchasing decisions based on what you read on a writer's blog?



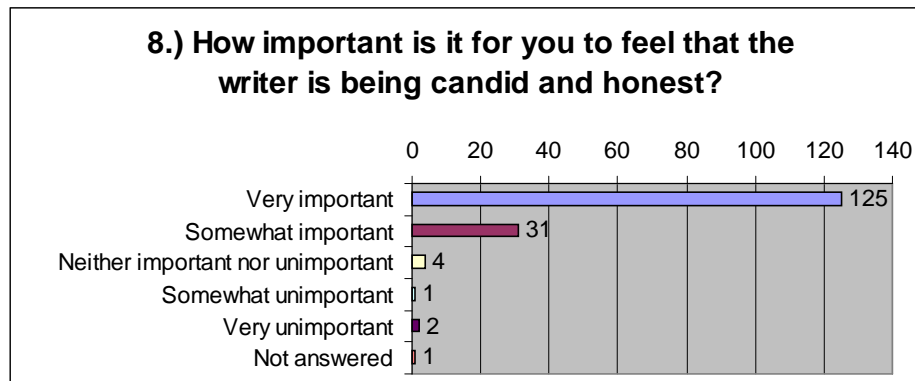
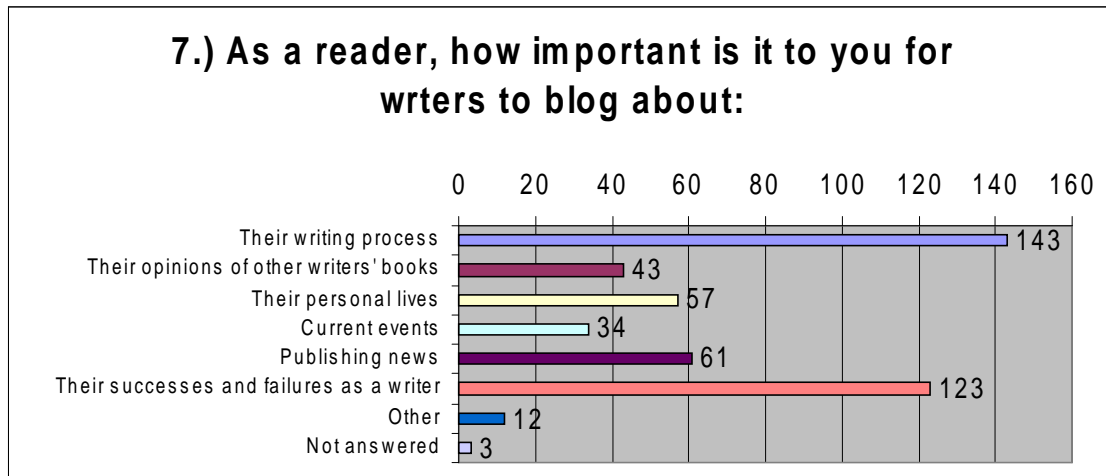
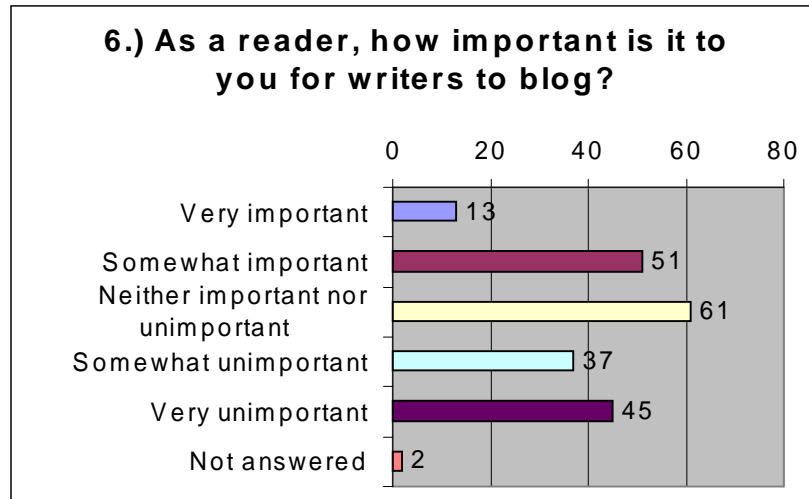
5.) If so, how important is the blog in influencing your decision to buy or not buy that writer's book(s)?

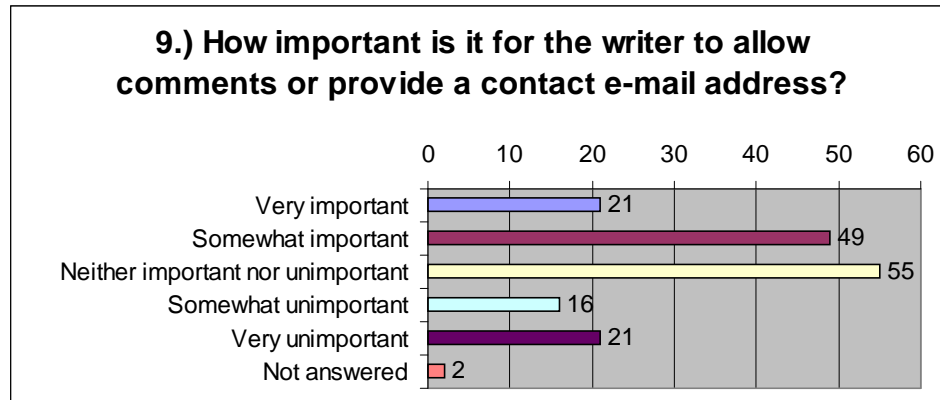


Your readers want to get to know the writer behind the books. While the responses to Question 7 show that your readers may not need to know much about children, pets, or other personal issues, they are very interested in you as a writer. They want to know how you cope with the day-to-day stresses of writing. They want to hear about any writing or publishing news that may be able to divulge. They want to know the person that sits at their desk and puts words on paper. How do you cope with deadlines? What are your concerns? What are your hopes and dreams? Most of all, they want to know what you are working on right now and what you have in the publishing pipeline.

Questions 4 and 5 work together to show how your readers make their purchasing decisions. The results clearly show that your blog is an important influence on readers' decisions to buy or not buy your books. On the other hand, your blog is not by any means the only factor influencing their decision. The chart for Question 5 clearly shows that your readers leave room for other considerations in making these decisions, as do the comments I received concerning this question. Several respondents stated that the quality of the writing was the most important factor and that they were fully capable of not buying your book based on that criterion alone.

What do blog readers expect from the writer? (Questions 6, 7, 8, and 9)





Readers are really somewhat indifferent overall about whether or not writers should keep a blog (Question 6). I think this means that a blog can be a benefit to you if properly handled, but is certainly not a necessity.

If you do keep a blog, what should you write about? Question 7 shows that your readers are not interested in dog-and-pony shows. They want to know what is happening in your professional life. How do you work? Do you outline or just wing it? How do you get from idea to product? They are also interested in how you deal with success and cope with failure. Everything else, while possibly interesting, is less essential.

You should also keep Question 8 in mind as you blog. The responses to Questions 1 and 2 show that your audience is knowledgeable about and interested in the craft and business of writing. Your readers will see through any smoke and mirrors that you put in front of them. They expect you to deal with them honestly and will leave if you don't.

Finally, Question 9 addresses an important and somewhat controversial issue: reader access to you. Your readers would like to have some means of access, either through comments or e-mail. While this is not overwhelmingly important to your readers, I think that being accessible in some way makes a positive impression. Appearing too standoffish can have a definite negative impact. You should certainly take this into account when weighing the pros and cons on this issue.

How can writers use blogs to communicate effectively with readers and other writers?

So what does all this mean?

In a nutshell, your audience is mostly other writers who want to get your insights and opinions on the art, craft, and business of writing for publication. They want to get the latest news on what is going on in the publishing world and what is being published when. They want to feel like they can have a candid, honest, and intelligent interaction with you.

In the end, it comes down to respect. Your readers want to respect you and expect you to respect them as intelligent human beings. Be honest about yourself as a writer, show your readers the person behind the name, share your knowledge and experience, however limited. Your readers will respect you for it.

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