



2026 WRITER SURVEY REPORT

What Writers Are Telling Us

A report from Unbound Authors on our annual Writing Lab survey, April 2026

81

Writers responded

15

Facilities represented

14

Questions asked

About This Report

Each year, Unbound Authors surveys writers across our Writing Labs to hear directly from the people the program serves. This year's survey closed in April 2026 and reflects the second year we have run this assessment, distributed through Lantern tablets rather than paper forms for the first time. Response volume grew substantially as a result, from 16 respondents in 2024 to 81 in 2026, roughly a fivefold increase.

The survey asked 14 questions covering how long writers have attended the lab, what motivated them to come, what the lab allows them to do, their experience with feedback and facilitators, how their relationship to writing has changed, and what they would like to see next. This report walks through every question asked and what writers said in response.

100%

would recommend the lab (n = 77)

4.48 / 5

average comfort rating (n = 60)

30 of 33

said the lab fits their learning style

A Note on What This Data Does and Doesn't Show

We could point to attendance alone: Unbound Authors delivered 332 sessions and served 696 individual writers statewide in 2025, real growth we track and report to the Colorado Department of Corrections and our funders. But attendance only tells us people showed up. This survey exists to ask a different question: not how many people came, but what happened to them once they did.

Quotes throughout this report are shared with writers' consent using first name and last initial only. Facility names have been withheld to protect respondents' privacy.

Every Question We Asked

1. How long have you been attending the Writers Mentoring Lab?

n = 81 responses

Answers ranged from a single session to over three years, spanning writers brand new to the lab and others who have been with Unbound Authors since our first year at Sterling in 2023.

2. What motivated you to attend?

n = 81 responses

Most writers cited a longstanding love of writing, a specific goal (publishing, improving a skill, preparing for release), or a friend's recommendation.

| *"I am a writer who lives to be surrounded by a community of writers."*

Antowyn B.

3. What does the lab allow you to do?

n = 78 responses

Writers consistently described the lab as a protected space to create, get feedback, and connect with other writers, distinct from anything else available to them.

| *"Get my voice out into the world, like I did with my art before I was incarcerated."*

James C.

4. Did anything surprise you about attending the lab?

n = 76 responses

The most common surprise was the depth of facilitators' knowledge and how much they genuinely cared, several writers used the word "humbled."

| *"The patience and passion of UA volunteers consistently leaves me humbled, grateful, and inspired."*

Matthew B.

5. Describe what you value about workshop facilitators.

n = 76 responses

Writers named facilitators' expertise, their willingness to give time without judgment, and the fact that they show up consistently, month after month.

| *"They express ZERO JUDGMENT! They show up!!!"*

Lawrence V.

6. Which writing prompts have you enjoyed?

n = 69 responses

Responses were wide-ranging, several writers said they enjoyed all of them, while others preferred working on their own independent projects over structured prompts.

7. If you've received resources, what's been most useful?

n = 63 responses

Honest, specific feedback was named more than any single resource type, several writers also cited books and craft tips shared by facilitators.

8. Describe your experience receiving written feedback from Unbound Authors.

n = 46 responses (writers who receive remote feedback via Securus or Lantern)

Writers described feedback as thoughtful, timely, and validating, several specifically contrasted it with the isolation of writing without any outside response.

| *"I was taken aback, at first, from the amount of feedback that I received. Then I sat back and thought about how this is exactly how great writers are made."*

Michael S.

9. How has receiving feedback shaped your writing practice?

n = 44 responses

Writers described feedback pushing them to revise more seriously, think about their reader, and take their own writing more seriously as a craft rather than a private habit.

| *"It pushes me to work harder and to objectively examine my work. I want to do better because someone cares enough to read and respond to my work."*

Adam G.

10. How have your feelings about writing, yourself, and sharing your work changed?

n = 74 responses

This produced some of the most personal responses in the survey, writers described growth in identity, confidence, and willingness to be vulnerable with their work.

| *"I realized I have something valuable to say that people want to read. I realized I don't just want to write, I need to."*

John C.

| *"I've actually begun to feel more confident in the gift I have been given. Before I was extremely hesitant to read my writing out loud. Now is a different story."*

Sonia A.

11. Would you recommend this lab to someone else? Why or why not?

n = 77 responses | 100% positive, zero declines

| *"I believe it helps aspiring writers to find their voice in a system that tries to remove that from us."*

Ian G.

12. What would you like to see in the future?

n = 75 responses

The most common requests were more in-person sessions, more publication and outside submission opportunities, and stronger connections to life after release.

| *"I would love to see how cultivated writers grow in meaningful ways because of this endeavor. This kind of initiative changes people from the inside out."*

Terry R.

13. Do you feel the lab accommodates your learning style?

n = 70 responses | 30 yes, 3 no, remainder answered with more nuance

| *"The live class definitely. The app is a great resource, but less personalized."*

Scott M.

14. How comfortable did you feel engaging in the lab? (1 to 5 scale)

n = 72 responses | average 4.48 / 5

41 of 72 respondents rated their comfort a 5, and 10 more rated it a 4, meaning over 70% of respondents rated their comfort at the top of the scale.

On What This Could Become

"I think that this model is a great thing to spread around the state and the entire country."

Michael S.

Looking Ahead

This survey is one part of a broader effort to understand not just whether people attend Unbound Authors programming, but whether they are growing because of it. In 2026, we are formalizing a more detailed engagement and advancement framework, designed in partnership with a currently incarcerated leader on our own team, to track this over time across Writing Labs, Lantern courses, and Mercury Mountain Media publications.

For more on Unbound Authors' 2025 program year, see our 2025 Annual Impact Report at unboundauthors.org.