
Science Blogging: 16 Tips from a Fellow

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Interested in science blogging but not quite sure where to start? I've put together a brief guide containing some general tips and suggestions, as well as some of my grammatical petpeeves. This guide was created drawing on my experiences and opinions, as well as some existing science writing guides, such as Katie Burke's [12 Tips for Scientists Writing for the General Public \(http://www.americanscientist.org/blog/from-the-staff/12-tips-for-scientists-writing-for-the-general-public\)](http://www.americanscientist.org/blog/from-the-staff/12-tips-for-scientists-writing-for-the-general-public).

As a disclaimer: this document is filled with my opinions and personal taste, which have developed over time and been influenced by my own writing mentors. I'm a bit old school. There may be things with which you fundamentally disagree (e.g., maybe you love ending sentences with prepositions!), so feel free to ignore me or consult other resources as you see fit. Also, I use many conventions from

APA format, but naturally this may vary as a function of your academic discipline.

Science Blogging Guide

- Start with a good hook to grab attention. In terms of hooks, I've noticed BuzzFeed titles, although sometimes irritating, can do a good job piquing your curiosity with a question or a framing that makes you want to click. The academic style of starting with the traditional broad statement about the topic may run the risk of making your reader think you have nothing interesting or new to say.
- Use good visuals. **Be sure they are marked free for reuse and give credit.**
- Remember that the beginning of every section could be used to draw someone back in who is skimming or losing interest, so use interesting topic sentences that introduce new ideas. You might also consider breaking up the paragraphs into shorter paragraphs.
- Anecdotes and concrete examples may not be data, but they are a powerful currency. Similarly, writing in the first person, and avoiding passive constructions can be more personal and less dry. Try to find a balance between writing too formally and too casually. Figuring out the right balance can be a challenge, and the appropriate level of formality may vary depending on the blog, the topic, and your personal voice.
- Use plain, clear language, and avoid scientific jargon whenever possible. If you must use jargon, or acronyms, explain them in plain language, and spell out any acronyms at the first use. With a technical subject, there is a balance between writing things accurately but too technically, and writing things in a way that is easily comprehended but may oversimplify. If a metaphor is useful to help simplify a complex issue, you can always include a caveat or disclaimer to that effect. At the same time, be sure you don't end up talking down to your readers.
- Avoid using a thesaurus to pick fancy, impressive sounding words when a small, simple word will suffice. Some of my pet peeves are using words such as: "utilize," "plethora," "myriad," etc. You may love some of these words! But really, what is "utilize" other than a semi-pretentious way of saying "use"? But of course, this is personal preference, and there are people who love these words.
- Cite your sources, but consider doing so with hyperlinks, or other ways rather than traditional academic style. A reader knowledgeable in the field may want to know who your references are, because it actually it actually tells you quite a bit—for example, whether you know and respect an individual researcher's methodology and results. But, but if you aren't someone who would recognize names in that area, a bulky citation just interrupts flow.
- Use a proofreader! No matter how many times you may read something over, your mind fills in with what you expect to read, and your eyes often skip over individual words. In fact, despite proofreading this document myself, I missed a couple things that my proofreader caught.

Grammar & Style Suggestions

- Use the Oxford comma because it's great. Not convinced? Check out [this article \(https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/16/us/oxford-comma-lawsuit.html\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/16/us/oxford-comma-lawsuit.html) about a lawsuit where the Oxford comma mattered.
- Use any grammatical construction sparingly. Especially semicolons!
- Be cautious of using "while" as a synonym for "whereas" or "although", as "while" is really only appropriate in temporal contexts.
- Be cautious of using "since" to mean "because." Outside of informal contexts, "since" is only appropriate to refer to time.

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- Do not use a hyphen or an 'en' dash to convey an interrupted thought when an "em" dash (the long one) is correct. Also, no spaces should be used between the em dash and the words.
 - That/which distinction: If you use "that", there is no comma before it, and it's because whatever comes after the "that" is something essential to the meaning or structure, whereas "which" is used after a comma, and when the thought afterwards is extra or nonessential.
 - Less/fewer distinction: Use "less" to refer to a continuous amount (e.g., less water, less money), and "fewer" to refer to countable items (e.g., fewer cups of water, fewer coins).
 - Distinction between *e.g.*, and *i.e.*: *e.g.*, is appropriate when you are referring to one example of many, whereas *i.e.*, translates to "that is," or "in other words." Note that a comma follows each. In using *e.g.*, you do not use etc. at the end of the list because it is redundant.

Happy blogging! If you have any additional suggestions, or want to debate with me about the Oxford comma (or any other aspect of my guide), just let me know. But if you try to tell me the word "data" is singular, those are fighting words! :)

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