

Dear researcher,

Thank you for your interest in www.wtnschp.be! Wtnschp.be is an online science communication platform. We put science and research in the spotlight by translating it to a broad non-expert audience. This way, we aim to bring science and society closer together. Today more than ever, now that we're heading towards a 'post-truth' world, it's important to give science and scientists an authentic, positive and relatable voice. And who knows, we might even plant a tiny seed in the reader's mind, which might sprout and grow to be part of the scientific foliage of tomorrow ...

Although any contribution or suggestion is welcome, we generally feature blog articles, interviews and photo-reportages of our researchers. Currently more than 100 experts and researchers contribute to the website, including top researchers at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Erasmushogeschool Brussel.

To get you started, we would like to give some 'tips and tricks', based on the most common feedback on popular science articles. This document is a work in progress and will be updated as time goes by. Your input and feedback is always welcome.

Choose your message. If you think your subject or research is too specific, you can broaden the scope. Keep the societal relevance in mind: what does your research mean to the reader, which applications are there, is there a historic turning point which lead to this research, what does the future of your research field hold, is there other relevant research with a complementary approach ...? If your subject or research is too broad, or if the applications are numerous, you can either choose one particular topic, or go for a 'series' and write about different topics in different blog articles.

Work out a structure in advance that outlines the main parts of the article. This helps to build arguments in a logical way, holding the reader's attention. Experiment with different structures. Articles don't necessarily have to start from scratch and build towards a climax at the end. For example, you can put the key message in the first paragraph, proceed to supplementary but important information, and end with some interesting details. This structure, known as an 'inverted pyramid', works especially well for articles with news value (a recent discovery, recent research output).

Make it personal. Your blogpost comes from your pen. You are the one who gives the data, the research or the subject meaning, based on your expertise. Don't hesitate to use a personal writing style. People love to read your personal story. Rather than just presenting your research data, try to include stories or anecdotes about yourself and the nature of your work. Interesting things you encountered during a field trip, tricky questions after you presented your work at a conference, that one sleepless night when you came up with a breakthrough ...

Adapt the message to the audience. The reader always takes center stage. We write in function of them, because we essentially ask them to adopt our message. That might even mean that they will have to (temporarily) abandon their own views and opinions. If you have trouble keeping your message accessible, keep a 40-year-old without a scientific background in mind (or your grandma, you can take your pick), and write in a way he/she would understand. This means:

- **Don't assume something to be 'common knowledge'**. While a lot of concepts and processes may seem obvious to you, your colleagues or other scientists, they may not be so for someone who heard about it at school 30 years ago.
- **Clarify abbreviations and proper nouns** when you first use them. People that know Coca-Cola won't stumble over 'beverage company Coca-Cola'. On the other hand, people that don't know Coca-Cola will benefit from your clarification.
- **Avoid jargon and specific terminology** as much as possible. If you do use it, clearly define what you mean. Avoiding jargon is often more difficult than we might think. A model might be

a test animal for a behavioural biologist, or a climate predicting mechanism in the eyes of a geologist, but the reader will think of trendy clothing on a catwalk.

Use metaphors. Metaphors can work in different ways:

- They catch the attention of the reader at the beginning of the article.
- They present abstract concepts using familiar things in a way that readers can visualize in their mind.
- They give meaning and perspective to large numbers. For example: A standard 3x3 Rubix' cube has 43×10^{18} permutations. That number is meaningless, even when written out (43 000 000 000 000 000 000). To visualize this number, it might help if you write that we could cover the earth 275 times if we would make every possible Rubix' cube configuration and put them next to each other side by side.

... but don't overdo it. The message and the reader's attention remain the most important thing and it shouldn't be lost. The reader might lose interest if he loses track of whether he's racing down a three-dimensional hill as five rabbits in a two-dimensional soapbox, or floating through a cosmic noodle-less soup as three-and-a-half ladybugs past planets like giant meat balls.

Avoid large blocks of text. They discourage the reader. Pictures can help, preferably pictures of the research and if that is not possible, other relevant pictures. Figures or infographics can work too, as long as they don't get too technical. Ideally, the images speak for themselves and little clarification is needed. Don't hesitate to ask us for help finding the right image or infographic! We can search stock photo databases or pour your data into a clean visualization.

Quotes can split up large blocks of text too. Try to use subtitles that don't just break the text, but also help to clarify the structure. A summarizing sentence that contains the main thought of a paragraph makes the article easier to read and the message clearer.

Further tips ...

- Aim for **500-1000 words**.
- **Don't use long sentences.** Chances are that readers won't give long sentences a second glance. If a sentence takes up more than two lines, consider cutting it into two or three shorter sentences.
- If your article talks about **peer-reviewed publications**, don't hesitate to **link to them** and put the citation at the bottom of the article. This improves transparency and strengthens the link between your article and the scientific research.
- It's best to **choose your title at the end**. Maybe you used a suitable sentence somewhere, or you got inspired along the way.
- **We are here to guide you!** Can't think of a thrilling title? Having doubts about the structure or the accessibility of your article? Don't worry. We go through your text with an open and critical mind. Often your article goes back and forth several times with track changes and suggestions, before we actually publish it. And as an author, you always keep the last word.

Looking for additional ideas or feedback? Don't hesitate to contact us. And above all: enjoy writing!

Kind regards,

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