

# Science Communication: Online and Media Writing

## Frequently asked questions

### 1 Who is leading the online course?

The course is led by members of the [Science Communication Unit](#), University of the West of England, Bristol. The Science Communication Unit (SCU) is internationally renowned for its diverse and innovative activities, designed to engage the public with science. We are also known for the training offered in science communication. The SCU comprises a wide range of staff, with skills and research interests in all aspects of public engagement with science. Over the duration of the course, you will be working with the following Unit staff; [Andy Ridgway](#), [Emma Weitkamp](#) and [Ruth Larbey](#) as well as [Antony Hill](#), another lecturer within the University.

### 2 What will we study?

This training course is designed to build your skills in science writing for non-scientists. It comprises eight weeks of taught sessions, and two weeks of private study. During the course, we will cover: • The guiding principles of science writing, including the common themes of science stories that can be used to engage any potential reader. • How to spot a good science story. • Story structure. • Making your science writing clear and engaging without ‘dumbing down’. • How to identify the potential audiences for stories and how to write for different audiences. • Interpreting statistics and writing about statistics and risk. • Getting your writing noticed online, including the basics of search engine optimisation (SEO). • How to use social media effectively. • Writing an effective press release. • Tips on writing about different fields of science. In the final week, you will have an opportunity to reflect on your experience of the course and plan how you will get started or develop your science writing.

### 3 Who should take this course?

Anyone interested in developing their science writing skills. You might be a researcher, work in a funding organisation, science centre, museum or learned society. Or you might simply be someone who is completely new to science writing and science communication in general. No prior knowledge of science writing for non-scientists is expected, but you will also find this course useful if you already have some writing experience.

### 4 Do I need to meet any requirements to apply for the course?

It will be helpful if you already have an undergraduate degree. This can be in any subject area. Applicants without an existing degree, but with some relevant experience in the field, will also be considered. Although our training is primarily targeted for those interested in science communication, we regularly work with individuals who apply the same principles of communication to other subject areas. Applicants from other disciplinary backgrounds are welcome to apply. The

course materials and interactions with tutors will be in English. We don't require evidence of an English language qualification for this course but you should be a confident reader and writer in English in order to fully participate.

#### 5 I have a full-time job; will I still be able to do the course?

Yes, the course is designed so that you can fit it around your other commitments. Much of the study is based on independent learning and self-directed activities. For each weekly unit there will be approximately 10 hours of activities. With the exception of occasional student discussion forums and tutorial activities (for which you will be placed in groups that are relevant to your time zone) all other activities are self-directed and can be scheduled for times that work for you. A detailed timetable will be provided two weeks before the course starts.

#### 6 How will the course be run?

The course will run entirely online, using UWE's [Blackboard](#) Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Registered participants will have access to the VLE and will also have full Library access for the duration of the course through which you can access UWE's online books, journals and other resources. The course is divided into eight weekly taught units and two private study weeks. Each unit will have opportunities for independent and directed learning, including online lectures, group activities and self-assessment opportunities. In addition, there will be online tutorials. Online tutorials will provide you with an opportunity for online discussion with a tutor. Some will be scheduled to run synchronously and others will be asynchronous. In the asynchronous sessions, you will be able to leave questions and comments about a particular topic for the tutor to pick up and comment upon soon after. The synchronous sessions will be 'live'.

#### 7 Will I be able to ask questions?

Questions are encouraged! Participation in student discussion forums and tutorials will be important for you and your fellow students' learning, and we consider this to be an essential part of gaining your certificate of completion. For some units, engagement with student discussion forums will be compulsory. Students who do not participate in any student discussion forums or tutorials will not receive the certificate of completion at the end of the course. Throughout the course, you will be able to contact the course administrator and tutors if you have questions or queries.

#### 8 Can I use other university facilities?

For the duration of the course, you will have online access to the UWE Library, which will enable you to have access to online books, journal papers and other related material.

#### 9 Can I keep the course materials for future use?

You may keep the course materials for personal reference, only. You may not distribute the course materials to others as these remain our intellectual property.

#### 10 Can I attend in person?

No, this course is conducted entirely online. If you are looking for a face-to-face course, you might want to look at our annual [Masterclass in Science Communication](#), [PGCert in Practical Science Communication](#) or [MSc Science Communication](#).

#### 11 How will the course be assessed?

There will be no formal examinations or other assessments for this course. You will receive feedback on your progress from the tutors and your fellow students. You will receive a certificate of completion, subject to your full participation in all elements of the course.

#### 12 What equipment will I need?

You will need a computer with appropriate Blackboard [system requirements](#) (minimum specification Windows 7, Mac OS x v 10.6.6 or later) and access to the Internet. Some course materials may also be accessible through a smartphone or tablet. For some online tutorials, a microphone and webcam would be useful – having a microphone is particularly helpful. Many computers have their own integrated microphone, so it's worth checking this if you're not sure.

#### 13 What software will I need?

You will not need any specific software.

*Please send any other questions to [science.communication@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:science.communication@uwe.ac.uk)*