

Blogging Best Practices

1. **Why are you blogging?** Before you start blogging, think about your audience. Is it peers? Grad students? Local stakeholders who care about your research? Successful science blogs tend to focus narrowly on one or a few topics and become go-to sources of information and commentary for readers.
2. **What do you want to write about?** Different types of posts include rapid response (being the first to discuss a hot news item), analysis (your take on a topic you find interesting and to which you can add a new angle), lists (Top 3 ways to...), editorials (thought-pieces or commentaries, which can be persuasive and hard-hitting), reviews of movies or books, interviews with interesting people...or just about anything else you can think of. Putting a unique spin on a topic will make your post stand out, even if others are writing about it too. You could include a personal story that relates to the topic, focus on the science angle of a bigger issue, or zero in on what your particular field or expertise can contribute.
3. **Check your facts.** Posting misinformation is bad for your credibility both as a scientist and a blogger, so do your homework before hitting submit. If you make a mistake, acknowledge that mistake and add a correction (but don't just delete the mistake without acknowledgement; the Internet doesn't like that).
4. **Know your audience.** If you're writing for an audience that includes non-scientists, avoid acronyms and jargon, and omit details that are only of interest to scientists. You're not "dumbing down" the material, you're *making it clearer*.
5. **Tell a good story.** Why should people care about your posts? You only have about 5 seconds to get your reader's attention before he or she moves on to another web page. Get to the point in the first few sentences so they invest in your post. Draw the reader in with a story; it can shock them, upset them, or make them question something they thought they knew, but it should make them want to keep reading.
6. **A snappy headline can make or break your post.** Most readers will decide whether or not to read your post just based on the headline, so make it attention-grabbing, but also make it clear what the post is about. Funny (or punny) headlines work well with some audiences, and surprising statistics or headlines that tease the reader with a question can also pull in readers. Lists also interest people and make content more digestible by breaking it down. After you write your post, write at least five headlines, and pick the best. You might also want to learn a little about Search Engine Optimization, or SEO: the process of how search engines create a list of website results based on search terms. Search engines prioritize what's in a post's headline, so make sure your headline includes key words people might be searching for.
7. **Use images to enhance, not confuse, your point.** A complicated graph from a scientific paper might not be appropriate to use in a blog, depending on your audience. Stick with simple charts and pictures that illustrate your point without needing much further explanation. For more general audiences, emotive pictures are great.
8. **Keep it short and sweet.** For guest blogs through the [Science Network Voices](#), we recommend sticking to 400-800 words. In web writing, less is more.

9. **Cite your sources and check the copyright.** When referencing papers, statistics, and generally quoting other sources, hyperlink back to those sources (this also helps with the aforementioned SEO). This goes for images as well—many images on the Internet are copyrighted and shouldn't be used without permission. Use images that are under a creative commons license instead, and follow the attribution rules set by the image creator. One resource to find images is search.creativecommons.org.
10. **Check the copyright.**
11. **Let your personality shine through.** A blog is not a scientific paper, so have a little fun with it—tell a personal story, throw in a pop culture reference, link to a silly Youtube video if you want to. People want to know the person behind the blog post as much as if not more than they want to read the content.
12. **Share!** If people don't know about your post, they can't read it. Share with your network on social media, email it to friends and colleagues, ask organizations and professional associations that you belong to if they will share or cross-post. Many bloggers put just as much time into writing their posts as they do sharing them. Make sure you're really sharing, too, and also highlighting content others produce.

As an example, check out Tom DiLiberto's post, "[Staying Ahead of the Storm: The Case for Funding Weather Forecasting](#)." The introduction has a personal touch, and the post is organized with clear sub-headings to help with flow. The ending highlights why and how scientists and experts can have a valuable contribution to advancing solutions. Overall the piece is readable, offers a personal connection, and gives a sense of looking forward. Full disclosure: Tom is the spouse of UCS Lead Analyst Gretchen Goldman.