

Science Writing Tips

I became a freelance science writer after finishing a graduate degree in the sciences. This list is a compilation of tips and tricks I wish someone had told me when I was starting out.

1. If you spot a potentially interesting looking piece of research, be fearless about contacting the scientists and asking them for a 15-minute phone interview. You'll gain insights, hopefully good quotes, and practice interviewing.
2. Invest in a voice recorder and use it often. Make it a habit to record your interviews—even informal ones. Try to jot down important quotes during an interview (note the time on the recording for later reference) but don't worry about transcribing the entire conversation.
3. Get a notepad and label the front with your name, phone number, and address. If you're interested in doing investigative journalism, print out the Associated Press' summary of terms* ("On the Record," etc.) and paste it in your notepad for reference.
4. Keep an eye on your local convention center for science conferences passing through town. Email the conveners and request a press pass. You shouldn't have to pay if you're a member of a media.
5. If you do go to a conference, read the program carefully beforehand and plan out which talks you'd like to attend. This pre-planning takes time, but it makes for a much less stressful (and more efficient) conference experience.
6. Visit local colleges or universities and meet with a member of their media staff. Introduce yourself and explain that you're a local science writer looking for story ideas.
7. Set up a few Google Alerts with key phrases about topics you're interested in. You'll get occasional emails about news that might lead to story assignments.
8. Don't be shy about reaching out to other science writers for advice/mentorship. We're a small community, and we're generally pretty nice. You can start with me:

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*<https://www.ap.org/about/news-values-and-principles/telling-the-story/anonymous-sources>