

Popular Science Writing Workshop

Science is an important part of our society, our future and our values. It can influence broad topics such as governmental and corporate decision-making or directly impact the consumer through personal, economic or environmental risks and benefits that influence a person's willingness to adapt to new technology. Effective and engaging written communication between the scientist and the nonscientist is critical to influencing the perception of science.¹

This assignment will introduce you to the writing genre, "popular science writing". This is a type of scientific writing for a popular audience that takes scientific findings and translates them into a form both comprehensible by and captivating to a general audience of non-specialists. Sometimes written by scientists, historians, biographers, or journalists, among others, this genre de-mystifies the results of scientific research.²

Part I: Read Pelger's "Popular Science Writing" (click on the link to read) and take notes as needed.

<http://awelu.srv.lu.se/genres-and-text-types/writing-in-academic-genres/popular-science-writing/>

Part II: Dissecting a popular science article

Choose one of the following popular science blog articles (click on the link to read) and write a short answers to the questions listed below. Come to the Week 2 Weekly Wrap prepared for a group discussion on the elements of style and content of the blog.

<http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/2015/05/15/bamboo-mathematicians/>

<http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/artful-amoeba/wonderful-things-ferns-eject-their-spores-with-medieval-style-catapults/>

- 1) What is the article you chose about?
- 2) Who is the audience? In other words, who could read this article and understand it? Who would benefit from reading this article and who would it interest?
- 3) Is a plant the focus of this essay or is this a personal story featuring a plant?
- 4) Consider either popular science article in light of Pelger's "Popular Science Writing" article. Note specific ways that the popular science article follows Pelger's guidelines and advice, and specific ways it does not (if any).
- 5) Is this piece of writing trying to convince or persuade you of something? Is the author trying to inspire or educate others?
- 6) What has the writer paid particular attention to in crafting this article?
- 7) What makes this article compelling to the reader?
- 8) After looking over the other popular science writing blogs listed on your "Plants Moving Fast or Slow" Project Guidelines, what other writing techniques might you use to engage your audience?
- 9) Out of the example blogs provided, what blog style (template) did you find most visually pleasing and why? What template did you find less effective, and why?
- 10) What were the elements of the blog (photos, videos, hot links, etc) that the different blogs used and how effective were they in engaging you?

¹ Adapted from <http://nisenet.org/sites/default/files/catalog/uploads/Science%20Writing%20Workshop%20Lesson%20Plan.pdf>

² Adapted from http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/assets/science_pop.pdf