

Journalism's RISK-y Future

Description

In the weeks since Science Online 2013, a lot of discussion has been taking place over how exactly science is communicated to the public and how we (as scientists, journalists, reporters, etc!) can improve it.

Imagine the game of RISK, the game of world domination, where warring fractions of different colours try to conquer the world through brute force and military strategy. The same can be said to showcase how some people think of the future of journalism.

See, the people in Print Town believe that "print is king," while the denizens of the Online Realm believe theirs is the fastest and therefore superior method of getting a message across. The citizens of Radio-ville think their way of communication sounds superior, while the folks in TV Land believe they look the best.

Everyone is fighting everyone else for which area is the best and which will be able to survive the longest.

But who is right? Who is wrong? And is there a middle ground?

The short answers are, at least from my perspective: Everyone. No one. And yes

I used to identify myself as a "text monkey," just science writer extraordinaire [Ed Yong](#) stated proudly during the conference. And I still mostly do, as I work in print and have had some success in that realm. However, I took a course during my Masters program that introduced me to online journalism "a field where I blogged, Tweeted and Facebooked regularly, but didn't give much journalistic credence to.

But I quickly fell in love with it.

A professor once described online journalism as the great mixing pot, taking the best (or sometimes worse) of each discipline and displaying it all for people to see. And I quickly became proficient in it, even doing my Masters thesis in multimedia. I was able to use print, but also radio and TV to supplement what was written, and the resulting product was quite impressive.

I was still ever the resident of Print Town, but my allegiance was quickly shifting.

Despite my reservations about which medium I wanted to use in my future career, I knew exactly what field I wanted to go into "science journalism.

Science journalism, however, is an all-together different beast than straight-up news. Every genre of writing has jargon, experts and a certain amount of background knowledge to understand "but science also has a distinct stigma as being extremely complicated, hard to digest and simply, I hate to say it, boring.

Thatâ€™s not to say it cannot be done well!

There are plenty of examples of good science writers out there â€” just look at the work from the [Scientific American Blog Network](#) (especially [Scicurious](#) and [Kate Clancy](#), who blow my mind on a near-constant basis), as well as [Maryn McKenna](#), [Deborah Blum](#), [Maggie Koerth-Baker](#), [DeLene Beeland](#), [Cara Santa Maria](#), [Brian Switek](#) and the list goes on and on and on. Everyone listed here and the countless others I did not name are doing fantastic things in print, radio and multimedia. Every time I read something of theirs, it makes me realize how far I have come and strive to go even farther.

But with the good, there is also the bad.

Iâ€™ve given lectures in the past on how to communicate and write about science effectively for the general public. In so doing, Iâ€™ve read through countless good and bad articles with the goal of helping advise researchers, public relations people and more on how to avoid common problems associated with science writing. Recalling these lectures naturally lead me to my store of examples, one of which I will share.

This here (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/the-lay-scientist/2010/sep/24/1>) is a piece from The Guardian, which magnificently lampoons traditional science journalism.

What Martin Robbins does so expertly is show how shoddy and Mad Libs-esque science journalism can be when it is done poorly. Take practically any science piece in your local newspaper and you will various methods Robbins described in full view for all to see.

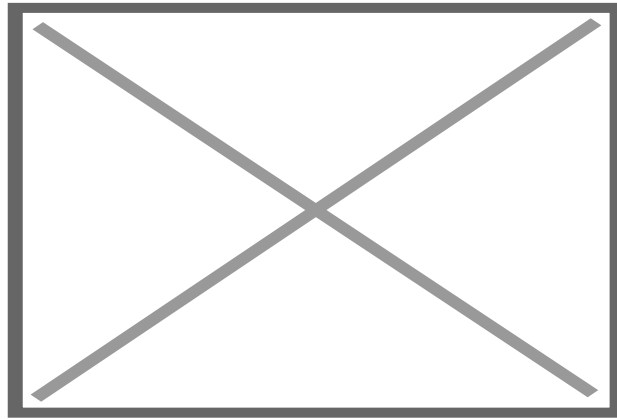
There are a large number of people that struggle for a career in this industry (myself included), and every bad piece placed on the news, read in the paper or put online tarnishes what hard-working writers are trying to achieve.

How can this be solved?

I am no expert, but supporting good science writing and communication is a great way to start. The same can be said for pointing out when science (or really any discipline) is tortured on the rack of bad reporting or writing. Read and share good articles with others, be aware of what constitutes good writing and/or reporting and never stop discussing about the fantastic science that is constantly going on around you.

Take a breath, relax and think to yourself â€” is this worth the effort?

If so, donâ€™t be afraid to roll the dice and take the risk.



Is the juice worth the squeeze? [Source](#)

Category

1. Journalism
2. RISK
3. Science Journalism
4. Science Online 2013

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