

# Write all about it

## Nina Notman *finds out how chemists with a nose for news may enjoy life as a science writer*

If you have a passion for science and a flair for storytelling, a career as a science writer might appeal to you.

After finishing university, James Mitchell Crow started working for the Royal Society of Chemistry and quickly worked out that life as a science writer appealed to him. 'I got as involved as I could in writing news articles for *Chemistry World*,' he says. Writing a feature article for the magazine in his spare time (and for free) gave him more experience and improved his chances of landing a job. 'When a reporter role subsequently came up with *Chemistry World*, I was in a really good position to get it,' he says.

### Science reporter

'Being a reporter involves keeping your ear to the ground, making as many contacts as possible, to spot interesting developments relevant to the chemistry community,' James explains. 'Then talking to people about the subject, and finally writing the article.'

James eventually left *Chemistry World* to join the features team at *New Scientist*, which was quite a change. 'The audience is very different to *Chemistry World*; *New Scientist* readers are typically not professional scientists,' he says, which means explaining the science in much simpler terms.

James now lives in Australia, where he is a freelance science writer. Freelancers are independent, self-employed writers that work for lots of different publications. Freelancing gives James total control over the work he does, because he can choose when to work and what he wants to write. 'As long as you can find an editor you can interest in a subject, then you can write about whatever you like, because you are not limited by the remit of a single publication,' he explains.

### Take a course

Another path into science writing is a university science communication course. Andrew Turley took the science communication masters at Imperial College London – a course that provides a broad overview of science communication, through a mixture of seminars, project work and work experience. For Andrew, the work experience is one of the most valuable parts of the

course. His own placement involved procuring front news matter for the World Health Organization's journal *The Bulletin*.



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While doing this, Andrew applied for additional work experience – sending off his CV to various different publications. Soon after, he landed his first science writing job at the magazine *Chemistry and Industry*.

Andrew currently works for *Chemistry World*. 'My role here is to cover what happens in the chemical and pharmaceutical industries globally. In practice that means writing and commissioning news items, as well as longer feature articles,' he explains.

### Be proactive

Andrew and James' careers both demonstrate that being proactive is the key to breaking into this industry. For James, it was writing for free; for Andrew, it was speculative applications. But other routes include writing for student newspapers or doing student radio, and going online offers opportunities such as blogging or recording podcasts or videos. '20 years ago as a student if you wanted to do some writing you had to do it through the student newspapers,' says Andrew. 'Today, there are so many opportunities that come with the web.'

### Are you a good communicator?

Pick something you learned at school and try to explain it to your family or friends. See if they have any questions. Can you answer them?

### Find out more

If you're interested in science communication, you could try entering the RSC's Bill Bryson Prize for science communication (see opposite).

Science communication is about making science exciting and easy to understand. The University of Nottingham's periodic table of videos is a great example of this:

[www.periodicvideos.com](http://www.periodicvideos.com)