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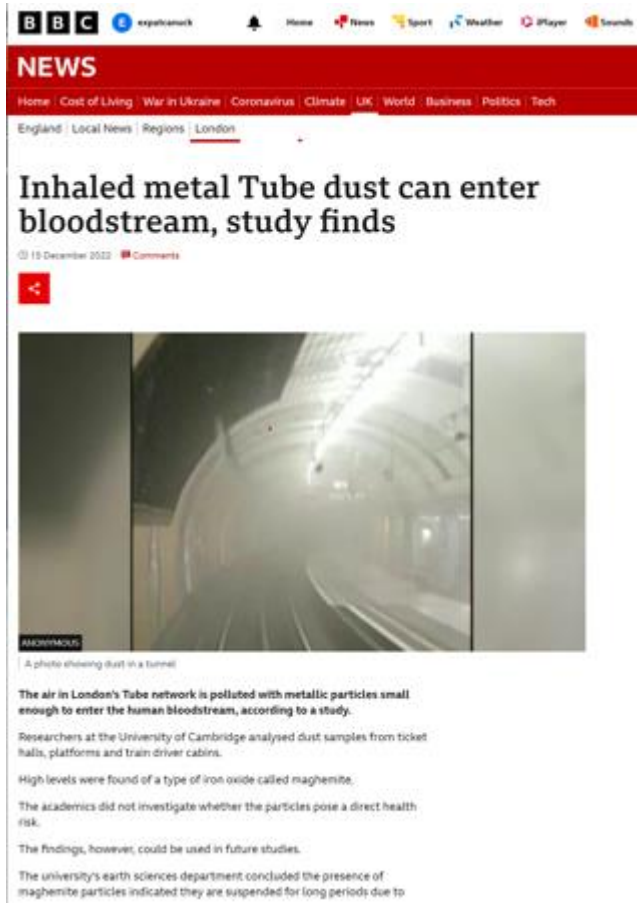
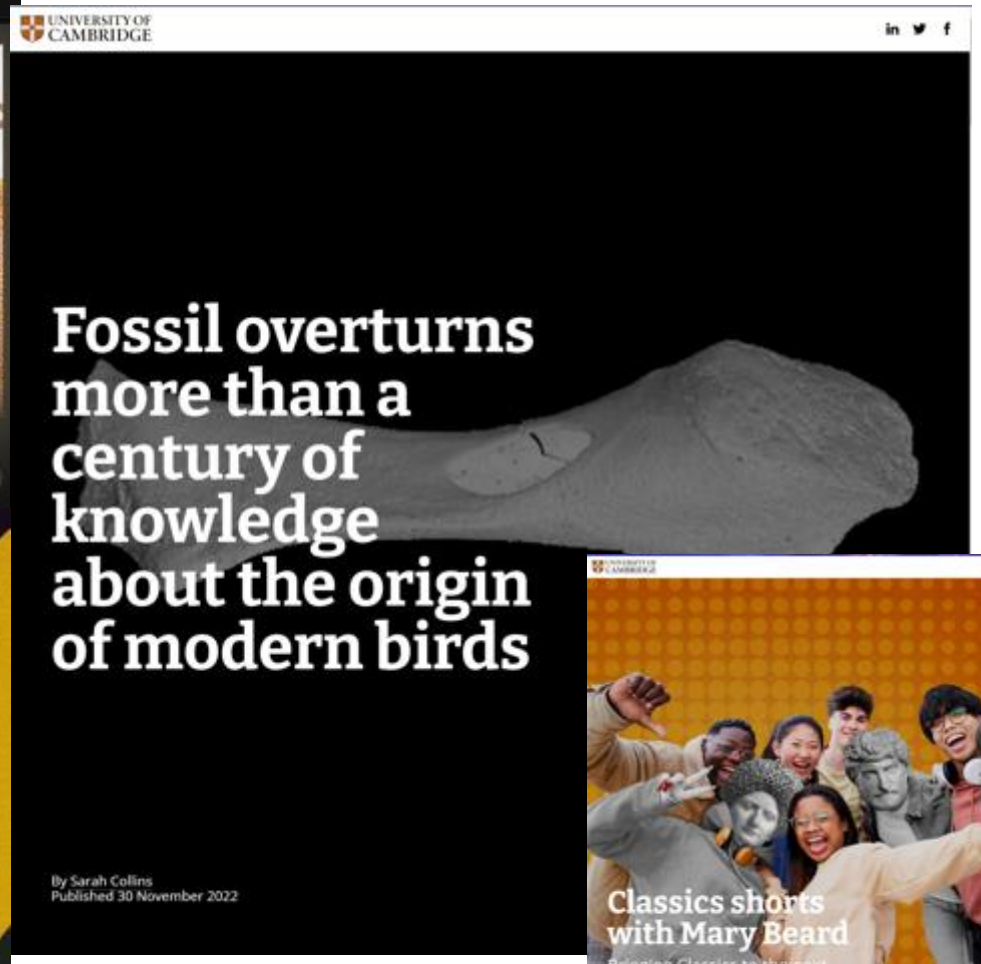
Communications – why do it?

Sarah Collins
Communications Manager (Research)
@se_collins

Research Communications at Cambridge





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Why bother, Part I

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Why bother, Part II

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- **Antidepressants can cause ‘emotional blunting’, study shows**
- **Just one day of work is enough to give a mental health boost**
- **Cambridge University significantly cuts carbon emissions after taking lamb and beef off the menu**
- **UK’s first Early Cancer Institute is launched in Cambridge**
- **First hominin muscle reconstruction shows 3.2 million-year-old ‘Lucy’ could stand as erect as we can**
- **'Bawdy bard' manuscript reveals medieval roots of British comedy**
- **T-Cells captured on film fighting (and beating) cancer cells inside the body**

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What makes a story newsworthy?

- Brand new research
- Relevance to people's lives
- Human interest
- Topical / Fits news agenda
- Biggest, fastest, most expensive…
- Surprising / Controversial
- Quirky
- Strong images or video

Does it pass the 'so what?' test?

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How we choose stories or, how to keep your press office happy

We have at least five working days' notice
We can embargo the release (i.e. we can send it out before it's published)
The first and/or last author(s) are from Cambridge
The story is likely to be covered in national and/or international media
The research has or is likely to have meaningful impact
Strong videos or images are available
The content is of strategic importance (e.g. a major grant or donation)
The content fits into a particular OEAC campaign

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Turning a study into a story

Effects of ventilation on the indoor spread of COVID-19

The REACH radiometer for detecting the 21-cm hydrogen signal from redshift $z \approx 7.5–28$.

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Plants in the UK flower a month earlier under recent warming

Ulf Büntgen[1,3,4,5], Alma Piermattei[1], Paul J. Krusic[1,6], Jan Esper[4,7], Tim Sparks[2,8] and Alan Crivellaro[1,9]

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Global temperatures are rising at an unprecedented rate, but environmental responses are often difficult to recognize and quantify. Long-term observations of plant phenology, the annually recurring sequence of plant developmental stages, can provide sensitive measures of climate change and important information for ecosystem services. Here, we present 419 354 recordings of the first flowering date from 406 plant species in the UK between 1753 and 2019 CE. Community-wide first flowering advanced by almost one month on average when comparing all observations before and after 1986 ($p < 0.0001$). The mean first flowering time is 6 days earlier in southern than northern sites, five days earlier under urban than rural settings, and one day earlier at lower than higher elevations. Compared to trees and shrubs, the largest lifeform-specific phenological shift of 32 days is found in herbs, which are generally characterized by fast turnover rates and potentially high levels of genetic adaptation. Correlated with January–April maximum temperatures at −0.81 from 1952–2019 ($p < 0.0001$), the observed trends (5.4 days per decade) and extremes (66 days between the earliest and latest annual mean) in the UK's first flowering dataset can affect the functioning and productivity of ecosystems and agriculture.

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The interview: things we will likely ask you

- What did you do?
- How did you do it?
- What did you find?
- What's new about this?
- What does it mean? (Why should I be interested?)
- Was there anything that surprised you?
- What excites you the most about this research?
- What are your next steps?

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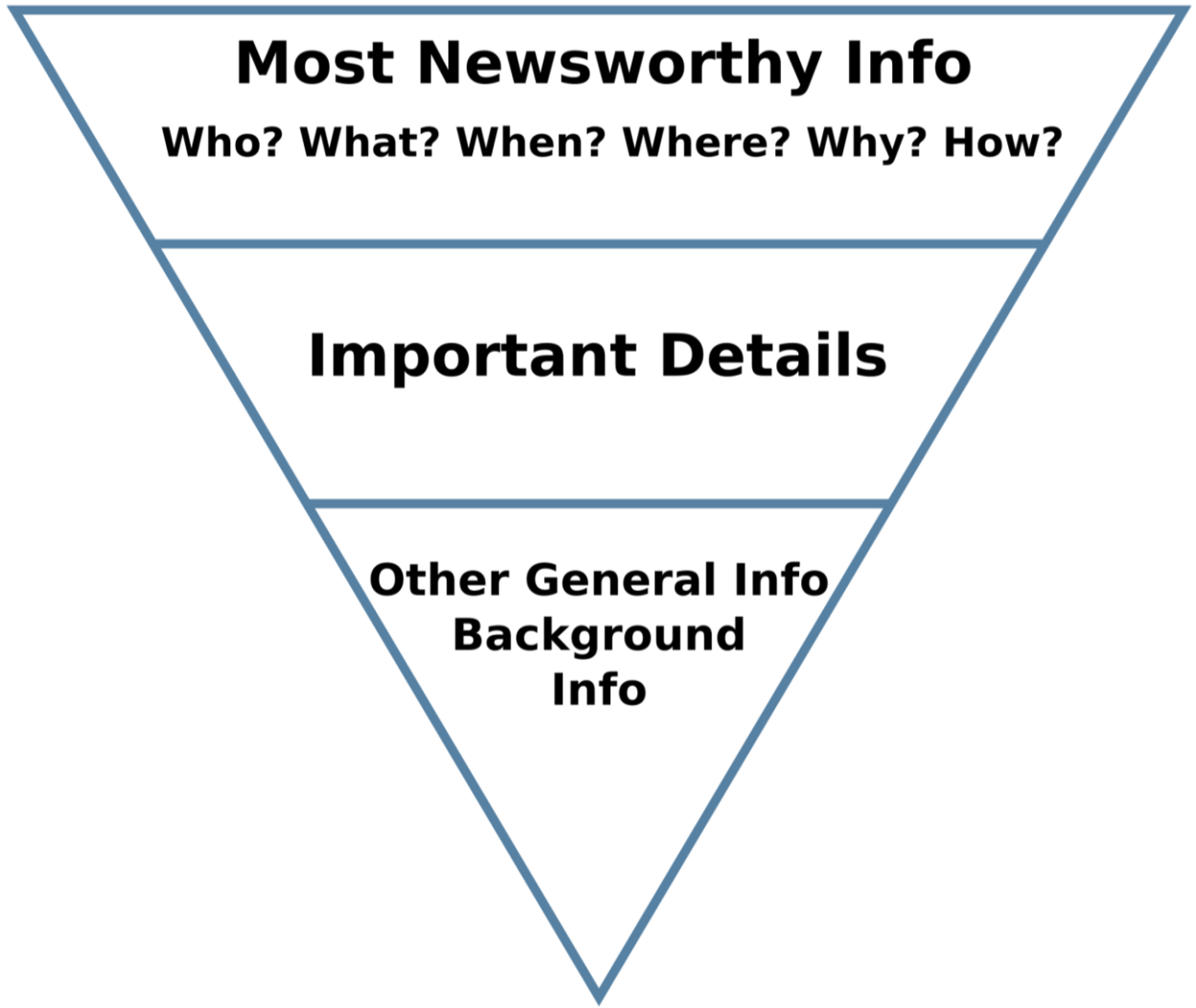

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PRESS RELEASE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 UK TIME ON WEDNESDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2022

A copy of the paper is available to download at:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1YthikUlc9uPkLYffW5ncngm5XDnpETTq?usp=sharing

UK plants flowering a month earlier due to climate change

Climate change is causing plants in the UK to flower a month earlier on average, which could have profound consequences for wildlife, agriculture and gardeners.

Using a citizen science database with records going back to the mid-18th century, a research team led by the University of Cambridge has found that the effects of climate change are causing plants in the UK to flower one month earlier under recent global warming.

The researchers based their analysis on more than 400,000 observations of 406 plant species from Nature's Calendar, maintained by the Woodland Trust, and collated the first flowering dates with instrumental temperature measurements.

They found that the average first flowering date from 1987 to 2019 is a full month earlier than the average first flowering date from 1753 to 1986. The same period coincides with accelerating global warming caused by human activities. The results are reported in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*.

While the first spring flowers are always a welcome sight, this earlier flowering can have consequences for the UK's ecosystems and agriculture. Other species that synchronise their migration or hibernation can be left without the flowers and plants they rely on – a phenomenon known as ecological mismatch – which can lead to biodiversity loss if populations cannot adapt quickly enough.

The change can also have consequences for farmers and gardeners. If fruit trees, for example, flower early following a mild winter, entire crops can be killed off if the blossoms are then hit by a late frost.

While we can see the effects of climate change through extreme weather events and increasing climate variability, the long-term effects of climate change on ecosystems are more subtle and are therefore difficult to recognise and quantify.

"We can use a wide range of environmental datasets to see how climate change is affecting different species, but most records we have only consider one or a handful of species in a relatively small area," said Professor Ulf Büntgen from Cambridge's Department of Geography, the study's lead author. "To really understand what climate change is doing to our world, we need much larger datasets that look at whole ecosystems over a long period of time."

The UK has such a dataset: since the 18th century, observations of seasonal change have been recorded by scientists, naturalists, amateur and professional gardeners, as well as organisations such as the Royal Meteorological Society. In 2000, the Woodland Trust joined forced with the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and collated these records into Nature's Calendar, which currently has around 3.5 million records going back to 1736.

"Anyone in the UK can submit a record to Nature's Calendar, by logging their observations of plants and wildlife," said Büntgen. "It's an incredibly rich and varied data source, and alongside temperature records, we can use it to quantify how climate change is affecting the functioning of various ecosystem components across the UK."

For the current study, the researchers used over 400,000 records from Nature's Calendar to study changes in 406 flowering plant species in the UK, between 1753 and 2019. They used observations of the first flowering date of trees, shrubs, herbs and climbers, in locations from the Channel Islands to Shetland, and from Northern Ireland to Suffolk.

The researchers classified the observations in various ways: by location, elevation, and whether they were from urban or rural areas. The first flowering dates were then compared with monthly climate records.

To better balance the number of observations, the researchers divided the full dataset into records until 1986, and from 1987 onwards. The average first flowering advanced by a full month, and is strongly correlated with rising global temperatures.

"The results are truly alarming, because of the ecological risks associated with earlier flowering times," said Büntgen. "When plants flower too early, a late frost can kill them – a phenomenon that most gardeners will have experienced at some point. But the even bigger risk is ecological mismatch. Plants, insects, birds and other wildlife have co-evolved to a point that they're synchronised in their development stages. A certain plant flowers, it attracts a particular type of insect, which attracts a particular type of bird, and so on. But if one component responds faster than the others, there's a risk that they'll be out of synch, which can lead species to collapse if they can't adapt quickly enough."

Büntgen says that if global temperatures continue to increase at their current rate, spring in the UK could eventually start in February. However, many of the species that our forests, gardens and farms rely on could experience serious problems given the rapid pace of change.

"Continued monitoring is necessary to ensure that we better understand the consequences of a changing climate," said co-author Professor Tim Sparks from Cambridge's Department of Zoology. "Contributing records to Nature's Calendar is an activity that everyone can engage in."

The research was supported in part by the European Research Council, the Fritz and Elisabeth Schweingruber Foundation, and the Woodland Trust.

-ENDS-

Reference:
Ulf Büntgen et al. 'Plants in the UK flower a month earlier under recent warming.' Proceedings of the Royal Society B (2022). DOI: 10.1098/rspb.2021.2456

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https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/uk-plants-flowering-a-month-earlier-due-to-climate-change

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Three things a good press release should do.

1. Grab a journalist's attention, quickly.
2. Anticipate and answer any reasonable questions a journalist will have.
3. Written like a news story, so a journalist could take your name off it and put their name in. (This is good for press officers, less so for news consumers.)

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University of Cambridge scientists make novel, groundbreaking discovery

An interdisciplinary team of University of Cambridge scientists, funded by a very important foundation, have reported a novel discovery in the high-impact journal Nature.

The team was led by Professor Galaxy Brain from the Department of Paradigm Shifts, and included researchers from Abertay University, Aberystwyth University, Anglia Ruskin University, Aston University, Bangor University, University of Bath, Bath Spa University, University of Bedfordshire, University of Birmingham, Birmingham City University, Bishop Grosseteste University and the University of Bolton.

“I am delighted with this discovery, as it truly demonstrates the interdisciplinary nature of our work and the global impact of Cambridge research,” said Professor Brain.

”I am delighted with this result, as it echoes our world-leading results in the last REF,” said co-author Professor Genius Smith.

“I am delighted with this result too, and I definitely said this sentence out loud,” said co-author Professor Jane Mastermind.

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The researchers have cured cancer.

-ENDS-

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The media is interested in my research.
Now what?

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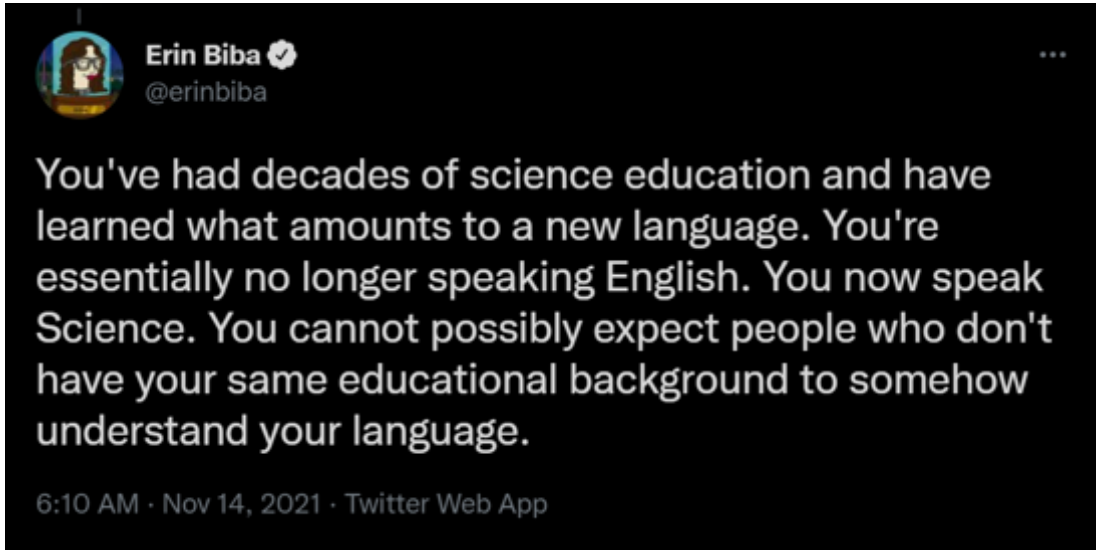
Know Your Audience

A bit about ‘dumbing down’



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Frequently asked questions

- Will the media contact me?
- Can I get back to the journalist tomorrow?
- Do I *really* have to speak to the Daily Mail?
- Can I ask for the questions in advance?
- Can I speak ‘off the record’?
- Can I say what I want once the interview is over?
- Will I see the article before it’s published?
- What happens if I’m misquoted or the article is wrong?

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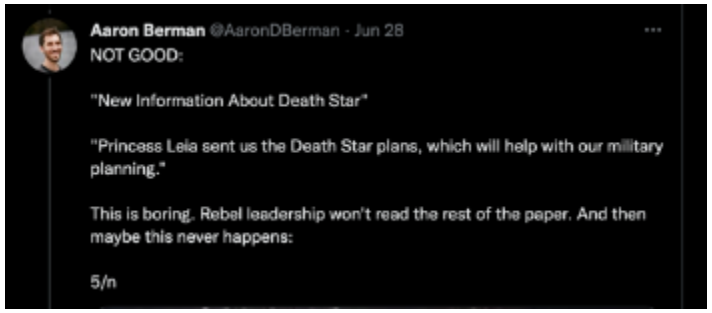
Clarity is everything

- https://twitter.com/AaronDBerman/status/1541576231891525633
- https://twitter.com/AaronDBerman/status/1544727628480802817



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What you’re aiming for

- Get your point(s) across
- Stay in control
- Make your work relevant to your audience
- Say something memorable (in a good way)
- (Get in touch with us if you want to do a practice interview)

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What will I be asked?

- Think ahead of time what questions you might be asked
  - How will you answer them?
  - You're unlikely to be told in advance
  - **Do not** learn your answers by rote – even if you are told in advance what you will be asked
- Most questions will be friendly, focused, expected and standard…
- …But what's **the worst question** you might get asked?

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Answering difficult questions

- **DON'T stonewall** – use your answer to get out another key message
- Give a short answer to close off the issue and **bridge** to shift focus
- Don't speculate if you're uncomfortable
- Don't repeat negative phrases
- Don't attack people personally, but say why actions, inactions or viewpoints they've taken are unproductive

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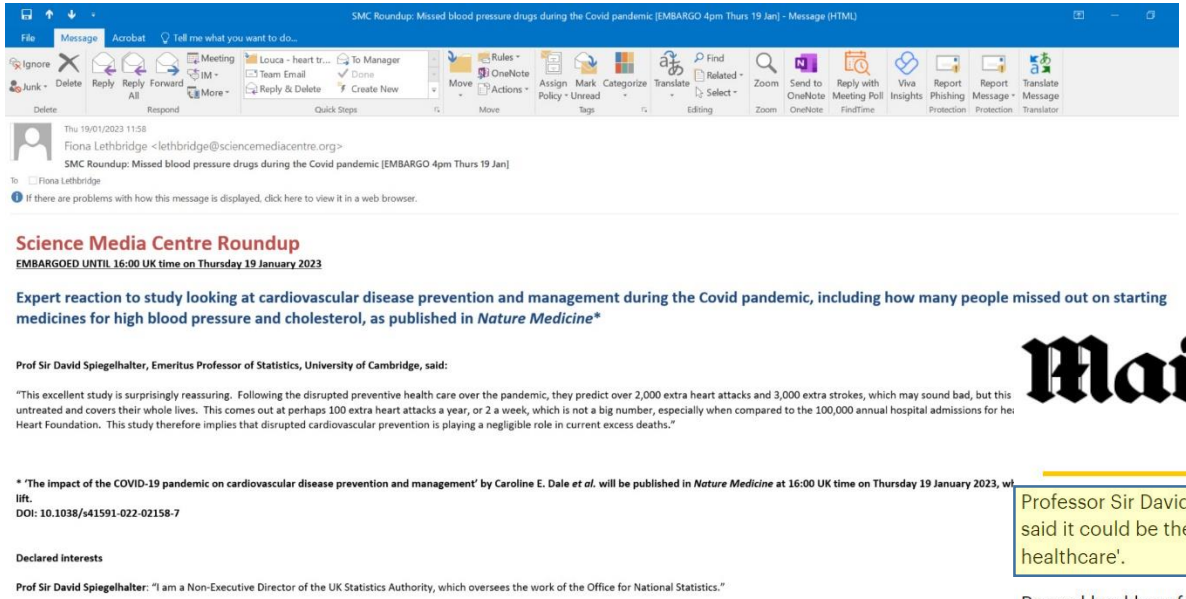
Expert comment



SMC Roundup: Missed blood pressure drugs during the Covid pandemic [EMBARGO 4pm Thurs 19 Jan] - Message (HTML)

Thu 19/01/2023 11:58
Fiona Lethbridge <lethbridge@sciencemediacentre.org>
SMC Roundup: Missed blood pressure drugs during the Covid pandemic [EMBARGO 4pm Thurs 19 Jan]

If there are problems with how this message is displayed, click here to view it in a web browser.

Science Media Centre Roundup

EMBARGOED UNTIL 16:00 UK time on Thursday 19 January 2023

Expert reaction to study looking at cardiovascular disease prevention and management during the Covid pandemic, including how many people missed out on starting medicines for high blood pressure and cholesterol, as published in *Nature Medicine**

Prof Sir David Spiegelhalter, Emeritus Professor of Statistics, University of Cambridge, said:

"This excellent study is surprisingly reassuring. Following the disrupted preventive health care over the pandemic, they predict over 2,000 extra heart attacks and 3,000 extra strokes, which may sound bad, but this untreated and covers their whole lives. This comes out at perhaps 100 extra heart attacks a year, or 2 a week, which is not a big number, especially when compared to the 100,000 annual hospital admissions for he Heart Foundation. This study therefore implies that disrupted cardiovascular prevention is playing a negligible role in current excess deaths."

* 'The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cardiovascular disease prevention and management' by Caroline E. Dale *et al.* will be published in *Nature Medicine* at 16:00 UK time on Thursday 19 January 2023, wh lift.
DOI: 10.1038/s41591-022-02158-7

Declared interests

Prof Sir David Spiegelhalter: "I am a Non-Executive Director of the UK Statistics Authority, which oversees the work of the Office for National Statistics."

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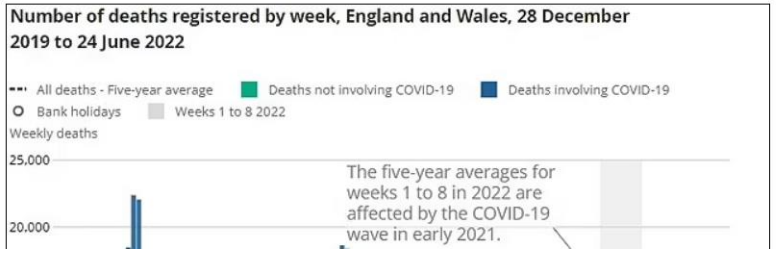
Mail Online

health

Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter, an eminent statistician from Cambridge University, said it could be the 'impact of measures against the pandemic and the disruption in healthcare'.

Record backlogs for routine treatment and soaring A&E waits, also a symptom of the pandemic, could also be to blame, according to Professor Paul Hunter, an infectious disease expert at the University of East Anglia.

Throughout the pandemic, scientists warned shutting down society and cancelling operations could cause the worsening of other conditions like cancer, diabetes and heart disease.



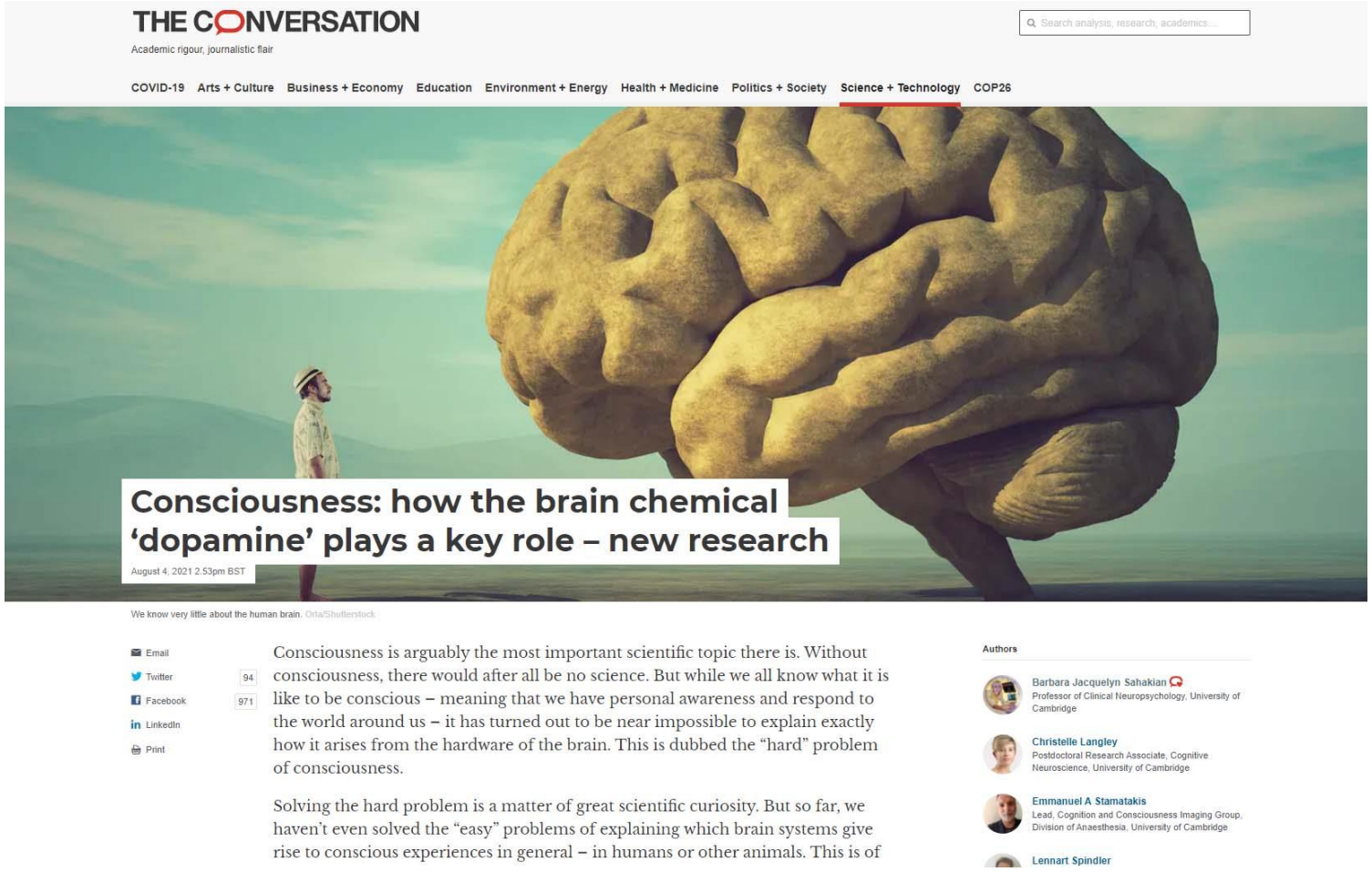
grow over why it took cops almost 48 hours to find five young revellers i...

EXCLUSIVE 'It's hard to love yourself when the world doesn't love you back': GGBO's Laura Adlington discusses her body image struggles

Britain wakes up to snow today after country is blasted by heavy overnight showers, sparking fears of road and rail chaos - as forecasters warn that up to 15INC...

Emeralds are a girl's NEW best friend! The low-down on this year's hottest engagement ring trend
AD FEATURE

The Conversation



THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair

Search analysis, research, academics...

COVID-19 | Arts + Culture | Business + Economy | Education | Environment + Energy | Health + Medicine | Politics + Society | Science + Technology | COP26

Consciousness: how the brain chemical 'dopamine' plays a key role – new research

August 4, 2021 2.53pm BST

We know very little about the human brain. Orla/Shutterstock

Email
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Consciousness is arguably the most important scientific topic there is. Without consciousness, there would after all be no science. But while we all know what it is like to be conscious – meaning that we have personal awareness and respond to the world around us – it has turned out to be near impossible to explain exactly how it arises from the hardware of the brain. This is dubbed the "hard" problem of consciousness.

Solving the hard problem is a matter of great scientific curiosity. But so far, we haven't even solved the "easy" problems of explaining which brain systems give rise to conscious experiences in general – in humans or other animals. This is of

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Lennart Spindler

Pitch to them here

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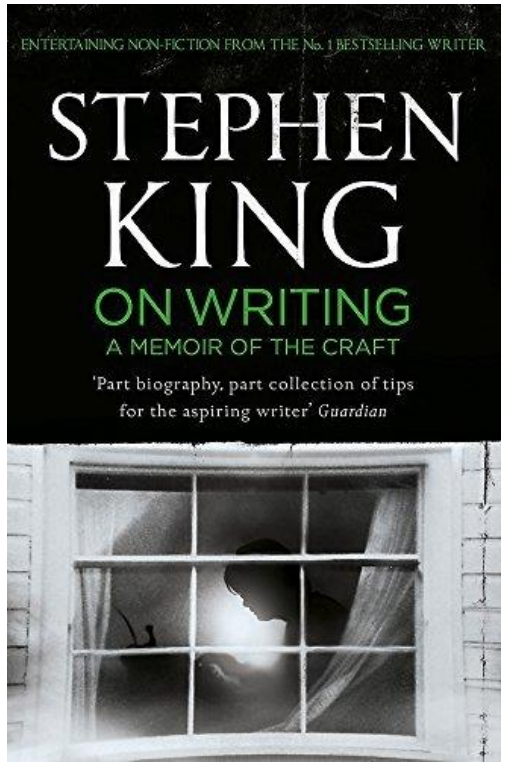
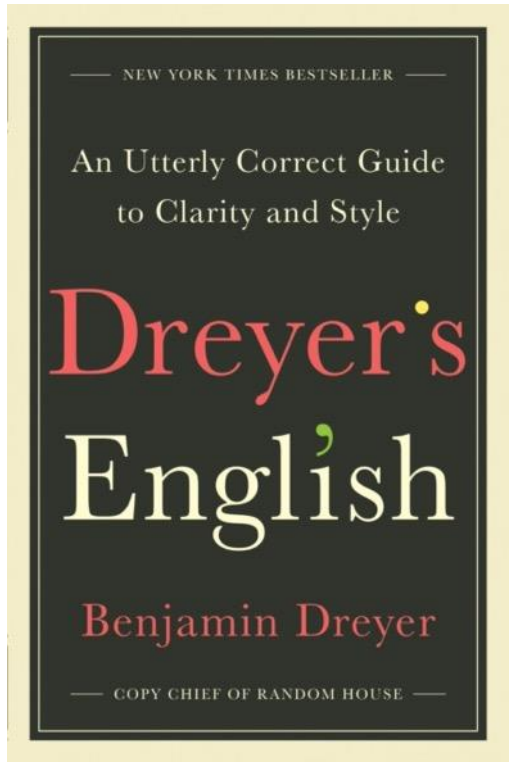
Some useful resources to aid your writing:

[The Guardian style guide]





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Some SciComm Resources:

Association of British Science Writers: http://absw.org.uk

British Interactive Group (BIG): https://www.big.uk.com/

Association for Science Education: https://www.ase.org.uk/

STEM Ambassadors: https://www.stem.org.uk/stem-ambassadors

SCOTPEN (Scottish Public Engagement Network): https://www.scotpen.org

World Federation of Science Journalists: http://wfsj.org/v2/

Public Communication of Science and Technology: https://pcst.co/

(via https://www.notion.so/Scicomm-Tips-afe532e0c5f6421fa51b600b972c8f31)

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