

800 Words by Noon Today, Plus Photos

Science writing for fun and profit

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Making the change

When?

1993: Freelancing on the side
1995-1996: Freelancing full-time
1996: Full-time staff writer/editor

Why?

Job instability in my lab research career
Multiple relocations

How?

Long-time interest and talent for writing
Career counseling
ACS career resources
Volunteer work

ACS Resources for the Change

Career consultant program

CEN-chemjobs.org

Volunteer work, ACS local section

Regional, national meetings

What's out there?

Writing

- Documentation, regulatory reports
- Trade magazines
- Front sections for journals
- Newsletters
- Corporate reports
- Consumer media: print, web, TV, radio, books
- Products for kids
- Public affairs

Editing

- Copy editing and proofreading
- Research, fact checking
- Technical or substantive editing
- Acquisitions and Management

Where the science degree helped

Scientific concepts, methods, terminology

Research skills

Evaluating the evidence

How do they know that?

What are their (and my) biases?

Evaluating uncertainty

Early-stage research, ambiguous results

Where industry experience helped

Consistency of style

Precise terminology

Integrating writing by several authors

Know your audience

In-house technical group reports

Executive summaries for management

Presentations outside the company

Multitasking and good-enough results

Things I had to learn

Writing to spec

Length, deadlines, assigned topics, assigned angles

Engaging your audience

Chemists, lawyers, grocery store guy, first graders

I'm not the expert

Locate and contact experts, ask them open-ended questions, don't assume you already know the answers

Beyond "science stenography"

Social and political impacts, public perception, the limitations of the scientific approach

Trying it out

Report on this ACS National Meeting

The local angle

The interest group angle

Newsletters for ACS local and regional sections

Write a magazine piece about your research

Check their author's guide for instructions

Start a blog

Starting in earnest

Science writing degree programs

UC Santa Cruz, Johns Hopkins

Workshops and short courses

Santa Fe Science Writers Workshop, Edward Tufte's seminars, ACS Effective Tech Writing

A Field Guide for Science Writers (NASW)

Professional societies and listservs

NASW, SEJ, SPJ

Local societies

DCSWA, SWINY et al.

Questions?

Did I mention that my notes are posted at
www.wordchemist.com?

Getting the story

Get to know the PAO
and other sources of information

Where can you go to find things out quickly?

What sources give you the most reliable info?

What are their assumptions, agendas, biases?

He said what?

Interviews

Getting source to talk to you

Preparing your questions

Recording and note-taking

Extracting quotes

Author verification: how much control?

Framing the issue

Red-pencil surgery

Editing

Preserve the author's voice (don't insert yours)

Diplomatic skills

Driving the deadline

Fitting the space

Copyrights and permissions

Evaluating pitches

Works well with others

Working with artists

Concrete visuals for abstract topics

Conveying your idea to the graphic artist

Is this graphic necessary?

How literal should you be?

Rights and permissions

Working with advertisers

Know your editorial/advertising divide

Know your ad department's boundaries

Reuse, recycle, repurpose

Writing the same story for several publications

Tech sheets

Press releases

Science magazine articles

Newspaper articles

Blogs

Op-ed pieces

**Each one of these is a distinct product
with its own audience, focus, and format**

Truth, truthiness, spin

What's your angle?

Straight reporting

Publicity

Promotion

Crisis communications

What are your restrictions?

Pushing the company line

Avoiding controversial or sensitive issues

Classified or proprietary information