

Popular science writing for researchers, 3,0 credits (P000096)

Education cycle: postgraduate level

Grading scale: pass/fail

Language: English

Entry requirements

Enrolled as a PhD student in Biology or equivalent competence. The course is intended for PhD students at SLU but postdocs and external PhD students may apply if there are vacant positions.

Examination formats

Pass / Failed. In order to pass the course, course participants will need to attend a set number of group sessions as well as submit a number of written assignments, the last of which will be published through the official course blog.

Objectives

There is a pressing need to engage more researchers in direct conversation with the public in order to provide the necessary context when new scientific discoveries are reported in news media. Succinct and honest science communication can literally mean the difference between life and death when it comes to contentious issues such as outbreaks of infectious disease, human nutrition, sustainable food production and climate change. Science communication is also an effective way to inspire young people to choose a career in science. While communicating science to a lay audience can take many forms (public lectures, school activities, podcasts, video), popular science writing remains the foundation of science communication.

This course is targeted at researchers who are interested in developing as science communicators and honing their skills in popular science writing “beyond the press release”.

After completing the course, participants should be able to:

- discuss the societal importance of popular science writing.
- identify what distinguishes good popular science writing from bad.
- develop ideas for popular science texts.
- critically evaluate published material outside their area of expertise.
- perform basic interviews with other researchers outside their own field.
- reflect on some of the ethical issues relevant to science communication.
- construct a science communication portfolio and public online profile.
- design and maintain a personal science blog.

Content

The course trains students to not just communicate their own research but that of their entire research field – and possibly even adjacent fields. The course will encompass an array of topics relating to popular science writing as well as ethical and practical issues.

- Why write popular science?
- What makes good popular science writing?
- Finding and vetting source material outside your field of expertise.
- Ethics in science communication.
- What do popular science editors want?
- The importance of public outreach.
- The role (if any) for artificial intelligence in creative writing.
- Practical issues when running a science blog including the use of copyrighted text and images. Understanding Creative Commons licenses.

Additional information

The course is divided into five group sessions spaced one or two weeks apart as specified in the course schedule. The course will be conducted entirely online via Zoom (or equivalent video conferencing platform).

The course is organized by Tomas Linder on behalf of the SLU graduate schools Organism Biology, Focus on Food and Biomaterials, and Ecology. The course will also feature guest speakers in the areas of public outreach and popular science publishing. Maximum 10 students per course occasion.

The course is specifically designed to minimize overlapping content with the postgraduate course “*To communicate science*” (POG0086, 2 credits). Course participants are not expected to have taken course POG0086 prior to taking this course. Because of their complementary content, taking course POG0086 before or after this course is expected to further benefit students’ overall skills in science communication.