

EUSci Writer's Guide

EUSci is a place for creativity, experimentation and learning: we want to publish articles that express the diversity of student ideas on science and science communication across the University of Edinburgh. So, please use this guide to help structure your writing process, but do not feel limited by it. Most articles in EUSci will broadly fit into three categories.



Reviews: stories looking at the history of science and broad topics of research. These generally draw on a wide range of sources to summarise the debates and discuss wider societal implications.

Research: stories focussing on specific, recent developments in research. These will often communicate the ideas in a single academic paper in an accessible manner and discuss why its results are important.

Opinions: essays on topics surrounding science, technology, education and research in which the author takes an explicit ethical, political or intellectual stance.

Before starting, decide if you are aiming to write within one of these three categories, as this will help you structure your article and style your writing. If you want to try something completely different, just let us know!

Step 1: Follow your interests

Start by exploring a line of research or scientific debate that captures your attention. Gather some sources, make some notes, and start thinking about *why* you find it interesting.

Step 2: Narrow your scope

Science stories can be complicated, and you want to make sure your article is entertaining and readable *without skipping the nuances* of your topic. That means you need to filter the content down to a manageable amount. For a one page article (c. 700 words) this probably means selecting *one main idea* and for a two page article (c. 1400 words) selecting 2-4 *central ideas*.

Step 3: Find your angle

Science is often seen as 'cold' and unemotional. For your article to engage readers, you need to inject the facts with some intrigue, excitement and relevance. Try to identify what it is that makes your topic worth writing about:

- Is it groundbreaking?
- Will it make a significant impact on people's lives or change the way we need to think about something?
- Is there an interesting schism or disagreement on the topic?
- Has there been a common misunderstanding?
- Is it something new that readers will not have come across elsewhere?
- Is there an amusing, relatable or emotional aspect to the story?
- If you are writing an opinion piece: how does it make you feel personally?

Step 4: Submit your blurb and references

Once you have chosen your key ideas and the angle you want to take on them, identify all of the pieces of information that the reader needs to understand the story. Organise the information in a logical order that will bring the reader smoothly and directly to your conclusion. Sometimes it is easiest to write down the conclusion first, and then work backwards.

Keep working until you have a list of single-sentence bullet points that somebody else could read and understand the structure of your article. Once you have gotten to this point, you have done the majority of the hard work!

Before submitting this 'blurb' version to EUSci, attach your main references. As a science writer, it is important that your work is grounded by peer reviewed, academic papers that have been through the rigours of scientific publishing. For a review article, we would expect at least three academic references, while a research article needs at least one. For opinion articles, at least three references are expected, although they might not necessarily be from peer-reviewed journals.

Send your blurb and references to the magazine editors, and they will provide feedback on your story.

Step 5: Create a killer first sentence

Once you and the editors are happy with your plan, you can begin to flesh it out.

Your introduction should start with a surprising, attention-grabbing sentence that makes the reader stop flicking through the pages. It should then make it clear what your article is about – do not be afraid of giving spoilers, as it is much easier to read a story if you know roughly where it is going.

Step 6: Link the paragraphs

The main challenge now is to take each bullet point from your blurb, fill in the finer details to create paragraphs, and link them seamlessly together. Keep paragraphs short for readability, and try reading the 'linking sections' - i.e. the two sentences on either side of paragraph breaks - on their own to check how well they flow.

Incorporate your own style and flair as you go, but check every now and then with somebody else that it does not become too distracting or confusing.

As you go, ask yourself if an image, chart, drawing or diagram could better convey any of the information in your article. If you need help with producing one, get in touch with EUSci and we will provide the necessary support.

Step 7: Hammer home the key point

A good conclusion is vital. Your final paragraph needs to recap everything in your article, without incorporating any new information, thus leaving the reader with a sense of fulfilment and completion. Repeat your 'take home message', and finish with a sentence that has a sense of gravity and assurance.

Check out these [12 tips from the American Scientist on writing about science for the general public, including links to loads of great examples.](#)

Step 8: Fact check yourself

The art of good science journalism is to make science accessible and entertaining, *without distorting or over-extrapolating from the evidence*. Is it clear from your article exactly what the evidence is and how it was obtained? Have you given a fair indication of the uncertainties involved? If you have included your own opinions, have you made it obvious that they are separate from the science?

If you are unsure about any of these questions, note down your concerns and include them when you send the article to the magazine editors.

Step 9: The Editing Process

Send your work to EUSci as a Google Doc with the following format:

[Title] *Your working title.*

[Byline] *One or two sentence summary of your article.*

[Body] *Text*

[Word count] *about 700 (1 page) or 1400 (2 pages)*

[Author info] *Your name, what you study and your research interests.*

[Pull-quotes] *Some exceptional sentences you would like to be highlighted.*

[Image(s) — send files separately] *Provide filenames (send separately), captions and credits.*

[References] *List of sources, with hyperlinks for ease of access.*

Your article will then go through a two-stage editing process. During *sub-editing*, you will work collaboratively with EUSci volunteers to hone the structure, content and style of your story. After this stage, your work will be done and the text will be sent for *copy-editing*, where another set of EUSci volunteers will check the grammar, spelling and punctuation as well as fine-tuning the word count ready for the layout team.

At EUSci we try to support as many writers as possible to write their best possible work and have it published. However, due to page limits and time constraints, we do have to reject some articles. To ensure this does not happen to yours, please double check the following before making a submission.

- Your article must be clearly about **scientific** findings, methods, institutions or practices.
- Unless you have arranged otherwise with the editors, your article must be linked to the **theme** of the upcoming issue.
- You must have time to **communicate** with the EUSci team throughout the editing process.

Above all, we encourage you to give it a go, be creative, and have fun. Good writing is a crucial skill for *any* scientist, and we hope that your involvement in EUSci helps you to hone that skill while fostering your interest in the varied and wonderful world of science. Good luck!