

The importance of accessibility

The ability to communicate research results to a non-specialist audience in a clear and concise manner is a skill that should not be overlooked.

One of the key ingredients of *Nature Photonics* is its News & Views section, which strives to explain the latest developments and research findings in the field, including those reported within our own Letters and Articles, in a highly accessible form. The value of communicating research to a broad audience via a general-interest piece designed for non-specialists should not be underestimated. We firmly believe that it is unhealthy for scientists to limit the scope of their reading to only technical papers in their own research area. Browsing News & Views articles is an excellent way to keep abreast of research activity throughout other areas of optics. After all, innovation is often inspired by 'cross-fertilization' as a result of hearing about new ideas, technologies and techniques from other fields.

Although most scientists are comfortable with formally documenting the findings of their research in the form of a manuscript in a peer-reviewed journal, perhaps less are familiar with how to write a general-interest summary of their work. Here are few words of guidance in case you are ever invited to do so by *Nature Photonics*.

The first piece of advice is to remember that you are not writing for a fellow specialist in the field. Do not fall into the trap of assuming that the reader will be familiar with the principles and terminology commonly used in the area of research being discussed. It is wise to avoid the use of technical jargon and acronyms wherever possible, while also being careful to explain new concepts as they are introduced.

Second, be sure to explain the motivation and rationale for the particular area of research in question. Although these details may be firmly ingrained in your mind, most



CHRIS GILLOCH

readers will be unfamiliar with the field and therefore require detailed explanations before they can appreciate certain facts, such as the need for particular capabilities, the history of long-standing debates or future applications of the work. Ensure that the key finding of the work is made clear. What is new, innovative and important about the latest research? How is it different from previous work in the area? How was it accomplished? What are the consequences?

Don't try to provide a comprehensive account of all earlier work in the area as this will cloud the focus of the piece. Please also avoid the use of hype and superlatives in an attempt to make the results sound more interesting — readers will decide for themselves if something is interesting or not. Be sure to mention any limitations of the work, such as a restricted temperature of

operation, as this will provide readers with a fair and balanced account. It is also worth pointing out future avenues for the research. What ways can the work be extended and further explored? What challenges need to be overcome?

A picture is worth a thousand words, and this is especially true when writing for a general audience. Often, illustrating your article with a simple diagram or schematic will aid the visualization of complex concepts and techniques. The key idea here is to keep the figure simple; don't include too much information at the expense of clarity.

When you've finished writing your piece, it's a good idea to show it to a friend or colleague — ideally someone that is unfamiliar with the findings — so that they can provide feedback on its clarity, prior to submission. □

Final Technology Focus

This month says a fond farewell to our Technology Focus supplement.

This issue of *Nature Photonics* is the last to feature our Technology Focus supplement, which has been running since the launch of the journal in 2007. A steady rise in the number of primary research manuscripts

and Focus Issues published in the journal has increased the competition for page space, and we feel that now is an appropriate time for change. We know that our readers appreciate applied and industry-orientated content, so

we will be increasing our coverage of these areas within our News & Views section. Personal subscribers to the Technology Focus will be offered a subscription to *Nature Photonics* at a discounted rate. □