



Hit, miss or maybe

Each month we select articles to showcase in our Research Highlights. Here, we share how we choose which articles to feature.

At *Nature Reviews Chemistry*, we publish 2–3 [Research Highlights](#) every month, in which we try to summarize the major findings of some recently published research. Our aim is to provide the latest developments within the broader chemistry context that is appropriate for our audience, such that ‘the forest can be seen for the trees’. In many ways, it is somewhat similar to the journal clubs that many researchers take part in within their research groups. Here we hope to shed some light on our approach to selecting the articles we write about.

We try to pick out recent articles that are exciting and interesting within the scope of chemistry. Since chemistry is a broad church, we seek to provide content that attracts all of our readers. And, of course, we try and identify something that is exciting. Inevitably there are more articles that we could highlight than we can actually cover (more on this later). To find these stories, we regularly get updates with the press releases across some of the major scientific publishers. We also follow RSS feeds that include journals that fall within our scope, and we use social media to track what the chemistry community is talking about. The latter opens the window to the more informal discussions that can sometimes offer us far more insight. For instance, tweets can share how researchers formulated a research question, or opinions about recent discoveries from others working in their field. These discussions don’t always lead us to a specific article, but they help to keep us abreast of the developments that are important to our community. As a small team, we need to learn from you (our readers) about where we need to grow and how best to cover select topics. For example, a well-received highlight might ultimately inspire us to commission a longer form article.

We browse through the above-mentioned resources for articles that catch our attention, and try to shortlist 2–4 that we would like to write about. Each of us are scientists too, with our own specific areas of expertise, which inevitably brings some bias to the subjects we get excited about. In order to ensure articles outside the expertise areas of the team get highlighted, we have a couple of strategies to ‘spread the love’. For instance, we often invite other chemists who work across the journals within the Nature Portfolio to write research highlights

for us as guest writers. We also aim to choose articles that fall inside different core areas of chemistry (or more specific research areas) than those we highlighted in the previous month. For example, if we highlight a new NMR method in one month, we might then try to avoid covering an NMR method (or an analytical method depending on what’s published) in the next month’s round of research highlights. Sometimes such plans are not so clear-cut, but we try to bring variety to our coverage and will avoid (where we can) covering articles that have been widely discussed elsewhere. Though we frequently find ourselves highlighting work published in the broad chemistry journals with which most of our readers will be very familiar, it is satisfying to highlight work from lesser-known titles and even that in journals that may not naturally attract a chemistry audience.

Armed with a personal shortlist, we discuss among the editorial team and explain why these articles have caught our attention. Then we share our opinions about each other’s lists, including thoughts about what articles could be important to highlight. What is key, and probably not so obvious for readers, is some topics are harder to write about than others — particularly those we are less familiar with, as the key details and advances may not be so obvious to the casual reader. For these latter cases, we often reach out to the authors with some questions that might provide us with more insight. Sometimes we even quote an author in our final highlight. If we are pressed for time though, we start writing and design an image that incorporates the major point(s) we discuss or one that is more playful and/or eye-catching. Once published, we of course share the article on Twitter and try to tag in all contributing parties to ensure all are in the loop for re-tweeting, and so on. Overall, we’re keen to learn from our audience and will happily engage in discussion about the latest advances.

As for those articles we don’t end up writing about, we’ve decided that we should still share them in the hope they may start some further discussions and interactions with our community. Using #ResearchHighlight #nearmiss tags on Twitter, we hope our growing following can get a closer look at what has caught our attention recently and we welcome you to share what has caught yours too!