

THE **C**ONVERSATION

**Taking research
beyond researchers**

The Conversation is:

- The world's largest publisher of original research-based content (source: [Altmetric](#))
- Non-profit, independent source of news analysis and expert opinion, written by academics working with professional journalists
- 10 editions operating in 14 countries worldwide
- Funded by 500+ universities and other sector partners

We offer:

1. Collaborative editorial support for academics
2. Media training for academics
3. Readership metrics to demonstrate reach and engagement with research

1. What we do: bring expertise to the public

- **Expert pieces written swiftly**

Analysis: 800 words on current affairs or new research, published in a few days to a week

Insights: long reads of up to 4,000 words on unpublished investigatory research of public interest, or compelling stories

Podcast: The Conversation Weekly, The Anthill (series podcast)

- **We make it easy**

Editorial support from the start.
Training sessions to help authors get to grips with it

- **Author approval**

Pieces must be signed off by the author



- **All content is open access, Creative Commons licensed**
Free to read, and free for others to republish. Syndicated through PA and Reuters news agencies

Lifecycle of a story

- Editor approach or author pitch
- Agree brief and commission
- Write and edit
- Approve and publish
- Republishing in other media leads to further traction
- Audience recorded on dashboard
- Post-publication engagement/impact recorded

The collage illustrates the lifecycle of a story through several stages:

- Initial Article:** A screenshot of a draft article titled "Don't panic: the northern lights won't be turning off anytime soon". The text discusses the northern lights as a natural phenomenon caused by solar activity, mentioning that they are more frequently witnessed from the polar regions and that the UK and other places on similar latitudes are lucky enough for the aurora borealis to occasionally grace their night sky.
- Editorial Process:** A screenshot of a draft article titled "The sun's activity is changing, and the Northern Lights will change as well. Here's why" from the World Economic Forum. It features a large image of the northern lights and a sub-headline "The Conversation".
- Published Article:** A screenshot of the final published article, "Don't panic: the northern lights won't be turning off anytime soon", dated September 6, 2017. It includes social media sharing icons and a list of related articles.
- Post-Publication Dashboard:** A screenshot of a dashboard showing post-publication activity. It includes a "Post Publication Summary" with 3 engagements, a "Readers" graph showing a sharp increase in readership starting in 2017, and a "Country / Territory" pie chart showing the distribution of readers across different regions.

Red arrows indicate the flow of the story from the initial article through the editorial process to the published article, and finally to the post-publication dashboard.

Audience

In 2023 the UK edition saw:

117 million
reads

recorded Jan–Dec

3.1 million
monthly unique users

5.6 million
monthly page views

9.6 million
monthly readers of
UK edition content

including republication

- Around 80% of readership is outside UK and Ireland
- Anglosphere (US, UK, Canada, Australia, NZ, South Africa) makes up main audience
- Asia: India, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia
- Europe: France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Russia
- 18-34 age group makes up one third of readership

Engagement and impact

Articles in The Conversation lead to follow-up for authors:

63%	were contacted by the media
18%	were contacted by NGOs, charities or campaigners
19%	were invited to or asked to speak at conferences
14%	contacted by policy makers, or asked to submit policy briefs
13%	were contacted by business or industry
18%	saw increased research citations
36%	used the article for teaching students
54%	discussed the topic with the public or colleagues

Liverpool John Moores University academic wrote *'Stranger danger' in the online and real world*

→ **contacted by the NSPCC, she ran workshops for charity to enhance its policies**

University of Reading academic wrote *The best time to water your plants during a heatwave*

→ **UK water regulator Ofwat asked him to write advice pages on water conservation**

Staffordshire academic wrote *The major source of ocean plastic pollution you've never heard of*

→ **trade association Plastics Europe saw repub in Newsweek, contacted her for consultancy on pellet management and pollution reduction**

Sheffield academic wrote *Greensill collapse may kill off a form of financing vital to global economy*

→ **invited to give evidence to MPs on Treasury Select Committee, and his expert commentary then appeared in committee's final report**

Ways to get involved

Direct commission

We will contact you for your expertise

Pitch your ideas

Tell us about your new research, comment or explain current affairs

Respond to the expert request or monthly call-out

Let your press team know you're keen

Use your press office

They can help you sharpen your ideas or pitch on your behalf

2. What you do: the news value of expertise

Good starting points

- **News:** insight/analysis of current affairs, or new angles on current or old stories



What 12 ancient skeletons discovered in a mysterious tomb in Petra could tell us about the ancient city

Claire Isabella Gilmour, University of Bristol

These burials could help answer the enduring mystery of the Khazneh, the most recognisable building in Petra.



Liam Payne: the death of a favourite celebrity can be painful – but collective grief can help

Sam Carr, University of Bath and Chao Fang, University of Liverpool

Early experiences with a favourite star can become deeply embedded in a person's identity, acting as enduring sources of comfort, inspiration, and self-expression.



News analysis, comment, opinion

Comment or analysis of topical issues:

Identify a topic, debate or question present in the news and offer greater detail or a new perspective on the issue. (440,000 reads)

Led by events:

Respond to news stories, events, anniversaries to provide insight into story and its context. Easy to plan in advance. (167,000 reads)

THE CONVERSATION
Academic rigour, journalistic flair

COVID-19 Arts • Culture Business • Economy Cities Education Environment Health Politics • Society Science • Technology Podcasts



Face masks: what the Spanish flu can teach us about making them compulsory

Published: May 1, 2020 4:03pm BST

Red Cross nurses in San Francisco, 1918. Wikimedia

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When Christmas was cancelled: a lesson from history

Published: November 13, 2020 11:15am GMT

Christmas in 1665 was cancelled and the usual drunken merriment was banned. Wikimedia

Explanation

Show how something is done:

The author explains tips and techniques for deriving pleasure from something perhaps we know we should like but don't know how.

(54,000 reads)

The screenshot shows the top of the website with the logo 'THE CONVERSATION' and a search bar. Below the logo is a navigation menu with categories: COVID-19, Arts, Culture, Business, Economy, Cities, Education, Environment, Health, Politics, Society, Science, Technology, and Podcasts. The article title 'How to read Shakespeare for pleasure' is prominently displayed, along with the publication date 'Published April 21, 2020 8:12am GMT'. A large black and white portrait of William Shakespeare is featured on the left. On the right, there is an 'Author' section for Emma Smith, a 'Disclosure statement' section, and a 'Partners' section featuring the University of Oxford logo. At the bottom right, there is a Creative Commons license notice and a 'Republish this article' button.

Explainers:

A straightforward explanation of, for example, specialist terminology, processes, or current events in greater detail. (110,000 reads)

The screenshot shows the top of the website with the logo 'THE CONVERSATION' and a search bar. Below the logo is a navigation menu with categories: COVID-19, Arts, Culture, Business, Economy, Cities, Education, Environment, Health, Politics, Society, Science, Technology, and Podcasts. The article title 'The Johnny Depp libel trial explained' is prominently displayed, along with the publication date 'Published November 3, 2020 3:32pm GMT'. A large photograph of Johnny Depp is featured on the left. On the right, there is an 'Author' section for Alexandra Antoniou, a 'Disclosure statement' section, and a 'Partners' section featuring the University of Essex logo. At the bottom right, there is a Creative Commons license notice and a 'Republish this article' button.

The news value of academic expertise

Good starting points

- **News:** insight/analysis of current affairs, or new angles on current or old stories
- **Research:** discuss your new findings, or comment on other people's research



Happy songs: these are the musical elements that make us feel good

Michael Bonshor, *University of Sheffield*

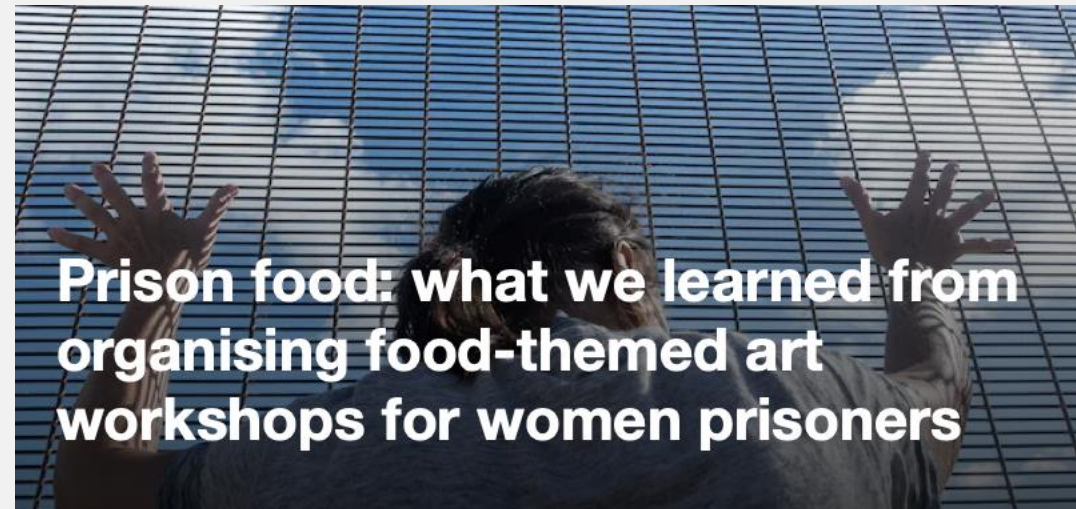
'Happy' music is usually written in a major key with a bright tone, featuring instruments with a bright timbre, such as trumpets or electric guitars.



We asked Sikh men in Britain what the turban means to them – here's what they told us

Mona Moufahim, *University of Stirling* and Anoop Bhogal-Nair, *De Montfort University*

The Sikh men we spoke to explained how wearing the turban signalled their observance to Sikhism and the life choices this entails, such as the protection of and service to others.



New research

Topical new research:

Explain new findings, put them into context, and provide expert insight into why it's important or interesting. (143,000 reads)

(Insights piece, written up by The Times with a leader and apology for the newspaper's actions a century earlier.)



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Charles Dickens: newly discovered documents reveal truth about his death and burial

Published: February 3, 2020 11:52pm GMT

Dickens after Death, John Everett Millais, June 10 1870; Charles Dickens Museum

New insights from interesting fields:

This introduced new research findings about happiness and how we feel about work, with insight into why it's important. (73,000 reads)



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Pandemics from Homer to Stephen King: what we can learn from literary history

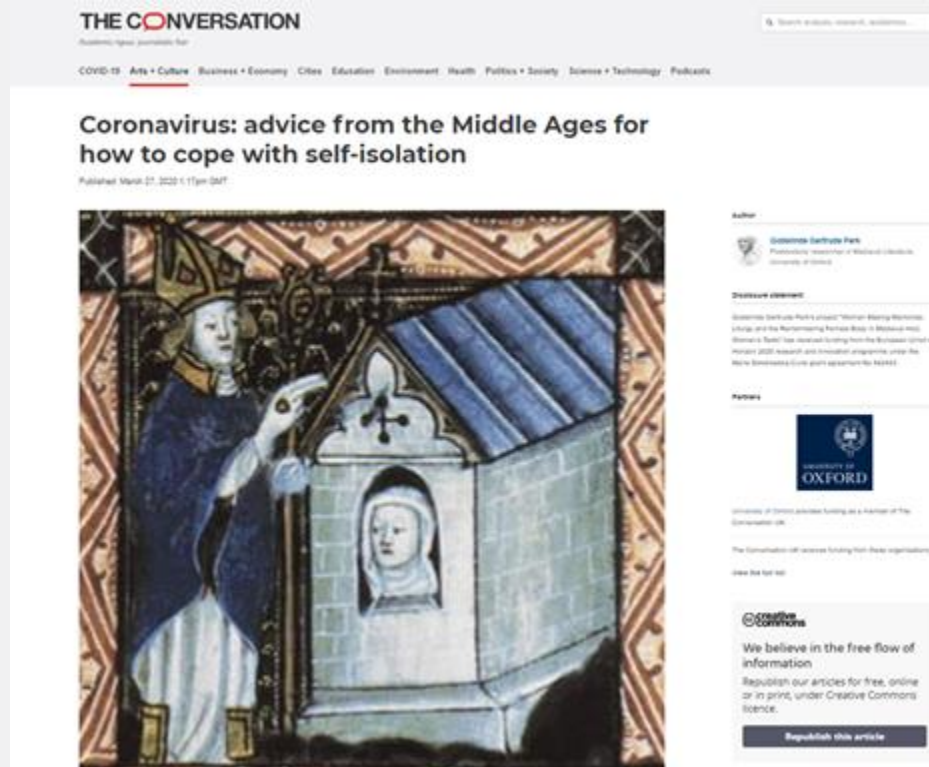
Published: March 16, 2020 1:18pm GMT

The Banquet in the Pine Forest, one of a number of pictures derived from tales in Boccaccio's Decamerone. Sandro Botticelli

New research

Use a news story to introduce your research:

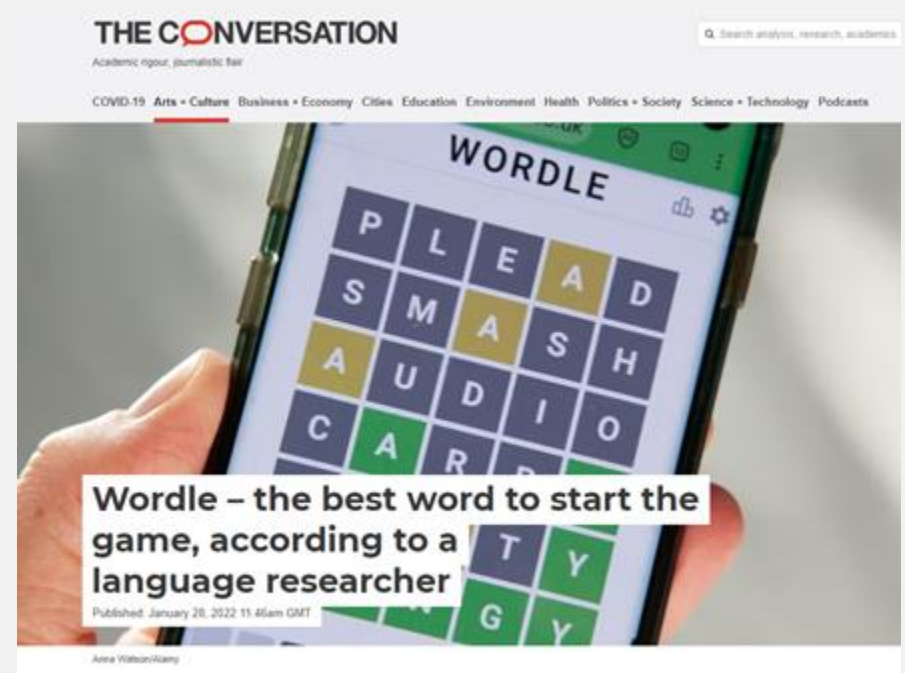
Experience of and interest in the effects of coronavirus presents an opportunity to introduce the author's research in an interesting way. (48,000 reads)



The screenshot shows the top of a news article on 'THE CONVERSATION' website. The header includes the site name and a search bar. Below the header is a navigation menu with categories like COVID-19, Arts, Culture, Business, etc. The main headline is 'Coronavirus: advice from the Middle Ages for how to cope with self-isolation', published on March 27, 2020. The article features a medieval-style illustration of a man in a blue robe and a woman in a white headscarf. To the right of the illustration is the author's information: 'Gustavo Carrillo-Park, Professor of Research in Medical Education, University of Oxford'. Below this is a 'Disclaimer statement' and a 'Partners' section with the University of Oxford logo. At the bottom, there is a Creative Commons license notice and a 'Republish this article' button.

How-tos or expert advice:

Readers are always interested in expert advice based on research findings. (915,000 reads)



The screenshot shows the top of a news article on 'THE CONVERSATION' website. The header includes the site name and a search bar. Below the header is a navigation menu with categories like COVID-19, Arts, Culture, Business, etc. The main image is a close-up of a hand holding a smartphone displaying the game 'WORDLE'. The game board shows a grid of letters: P, L, E, A, D; S, M, A, S, H; A, U, D, I, O; C, A, R, I, O. A text overlay on the image reads 'Wordle – the best word to start the game, according to a language researcher'. Below the image is the publication date: 'Published January 26, 2022 11:41am GMT' and the author's name: 'Anna Wilson/Alamy'.

The news value of academic expertise

Good starting points

- **News:** insight/analysis of current affairs, or new angles on current or old stories
- **Research:** discuss your new findings, or comment on other people's research
- **Timeless:** tell a story, answer a question, dive into an interesting topic

Were there gladiators in Roman Britain? An expert reviews the evidence



Simon Esmonde Cleary, *University of Birmingham*

The Colchester vase contains the remains of a male of about 40 years of age and not of local origin. Could he have been a gladiator?



Why ghosts wear clothes or white sheets instead of appearing in the nude



Shane McCorristine, *Newcastle University*

The issue of ghost clothes is interesting for historians of the supernatural because, like a loose thread, pulling at it starts to unravel some of the assumptions about matter in spiritualism.

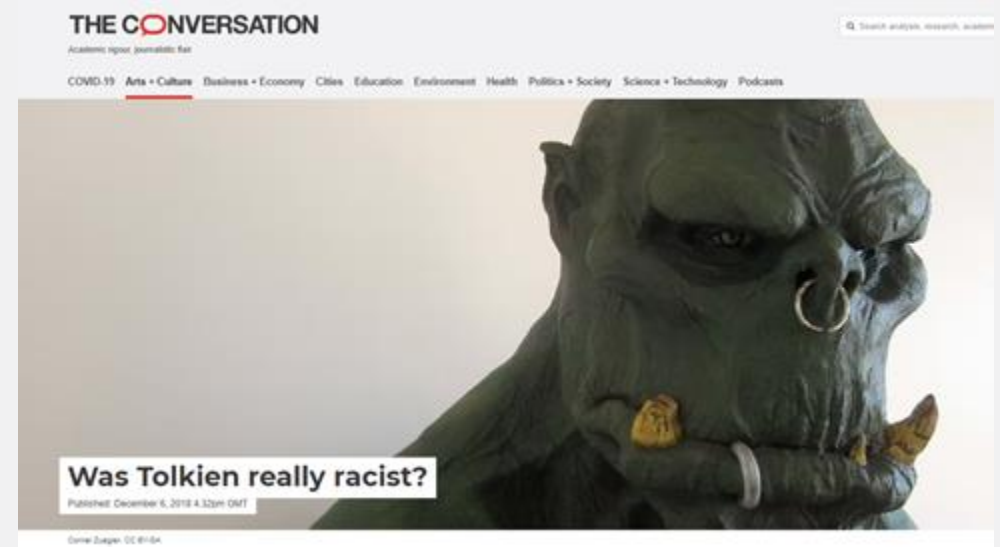
Timeless stories, questions

Tell an interesting story, defend a contrary position, explain something little-known:

Research can lead to uncovering interesting stories that can be told any time. (132,000 reads)

Answer an interesting question:

Tackle a question that the reader might have considered, or which is discussed in the media by those with dubious expertise. (190,000 reads)



The news value of academic expertise

Good starting points

- **News:** insight/analysis of current affairs, or new angles on current or old stories
- **Research:** discuss your new findings, or comment on other people's research
- **Timeless:** tell a story, answer a question, dive into an interesting topic
- **Surprising,** counterintuitive, contrary

From Roald Dahl to Goosebumps, revisions to children's classics are really about copyright – a legal expert explains

Cathay Smith, University of Oxford

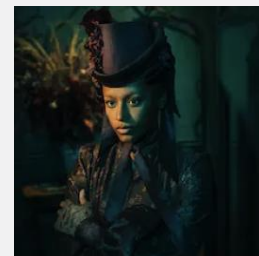
Sensitivity edits benefit copyright holders, who wish to keep less tasteful elements of the works they control out of the public eye.



How Playboy cut ties with Hugh Hefner to create a post-#MeToo brand

Daisy McManaman, University of York

As Playboy approaches its 70th anniversary, an expert in the brand asks – is there a place for Playboy in the post #MeToo world?



Great Expectations: why it's not historically inaccurate for a Dickens character to be black

Jenni Ramone, Nottingham Trent University

There were around 5,000 black Georgians and more black Victorians so black Dickens characters are historically feasible.

Unusual, counterintuitive, contrary

Using an odd and attention-grabbing trend as the headline, this piece unpicks social survey data to explain the cultural trends behind it. (19,000 reads)

Pose a head-scratching question that may have occurred to others and use expertise to answer it. Best with questions that have unpredictable answers. (151,000 reads)



The news value of academic expertise

Good starting points

- **News:** insight/analysis of current affairs, or new angles on current or old stories
- **Research:** discuss your new findings, or comment on other people's research
- **Timeless:** tell a story, answer a question, dive into an interesting topic
- **Surprising,** counterintuitive, contrary
- **Personal stories,** human interest

Rutland Roman villa: how we found one of the most significant mosaics discovered in the UK

John S Thomas, University of Leicester

Rutland's Roman villa caused a media storm when it was first discovered in 2020 – now researchers have returned to uncover even more surprises.



I dug for evidence of the Rosetta Stone's ancient Egyptian rebellion – here's what I found

Jay Silverstein, Nottingham Trent University

We uncovered evidence of a rebellion so significant, that events such as Cleopatra's affairs and the rise of Christianity may not have come to pass without it.



Wulf and Eadwacer: why I think I've solved the mystery of this Old English poem

Ian Shiels, University of Leeds

Here, possibly four centuries before women are given a significant voice in heroic poetry in Germany and Scandinavia, a queen speaks out in an English version of a Gothic story.



Personal stories

Personal stories of your own:

Insights from your own life, or those from your research can be a way into a topic. (84,000 reads)

Voices drawn from your research:

Drawing on people from fieldwork offers other voices to the reader. (226,000 reads)

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Academic rigour, journalistic flair

Search analysis, research, academics

COVID-19 Arts + Culture Business + Economy Cities Education Environment Health Politics + Society Science + Technology Podcasts



My book Tell it to the Bees was made into a film – but they changed the ending for a straight audience

Published: July 19, 2019 10:25am BST

Anna Paquin and Holiday Orange star in Tell it to the Bees. Vertigo Releasing

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Academic rigour, journalistic flair

Search analysis, research, academics

COVID-19 Arts + Culture Business + Economy Cities Education Environment Health Politics + Society Science + Technology Podcasts

Honouring the slaves experimented on by the 'father of gynaecology'

Published: October 20, 2020 2:20pm BST



Author
Hazel Doan
Associate Screening Curator for Health, Queen Mary University of London

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The Conversation UK receives funding from these organisations

View the full list

The 1852 painting by Robert Thom is the only known representation of Lusty Anthonie and Selkey. Museum, Southern Cross University School of Medicine

The news value of academic expertise

Good starting points

- **News:** insight/analysis of current affairs, or new angles on current or old stories
- **Research:** discuss your new findings, or comment on other people's research
- **Timeless:** tell a story, answer a question, dive into an interesting topic
- **Surprising**, counterintuitive, contrary
- **Personal stories**, human interest
- **List format:** "Five things you don't know about...", "Ten reasons why..."

Five classic concept albums that will take you on a sonic road-trip across America

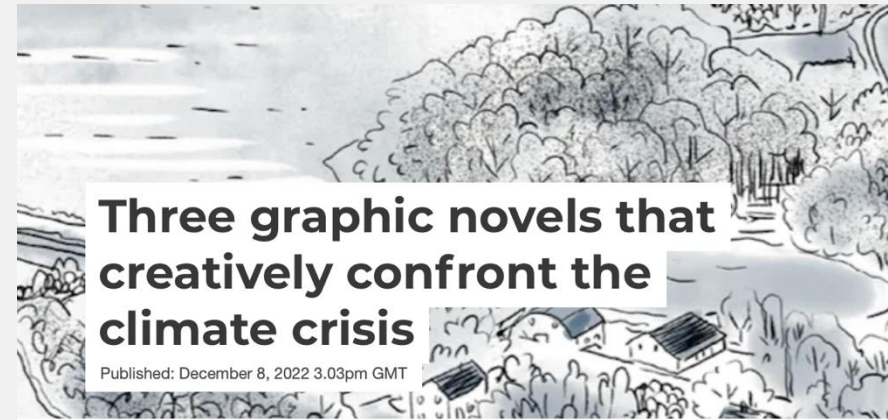
David Scott, *University of the West of Scotland*

These albums are often about American music as much as they are about America.



Three graphic novels that creatively confront the climate crisis

Published: December 8, 2022 3.03pm GMT



Six ways to holiday like an old-school travel journalist – without using the internet

Masood Khodadadi, *University of the West of Scotland*

Before GPS, maps weren't just functional – they were part of the adventure.



The list approach

List headlines promise bite-sized pieces of information that appeal to time-poor, attention-challenged readers, but the 800 words that follow are no less rigorous for it. (630,000 reads)

The list approach also works well with articles that explain techniques or approaches, or offer advice and guidance. (136,000 reads)



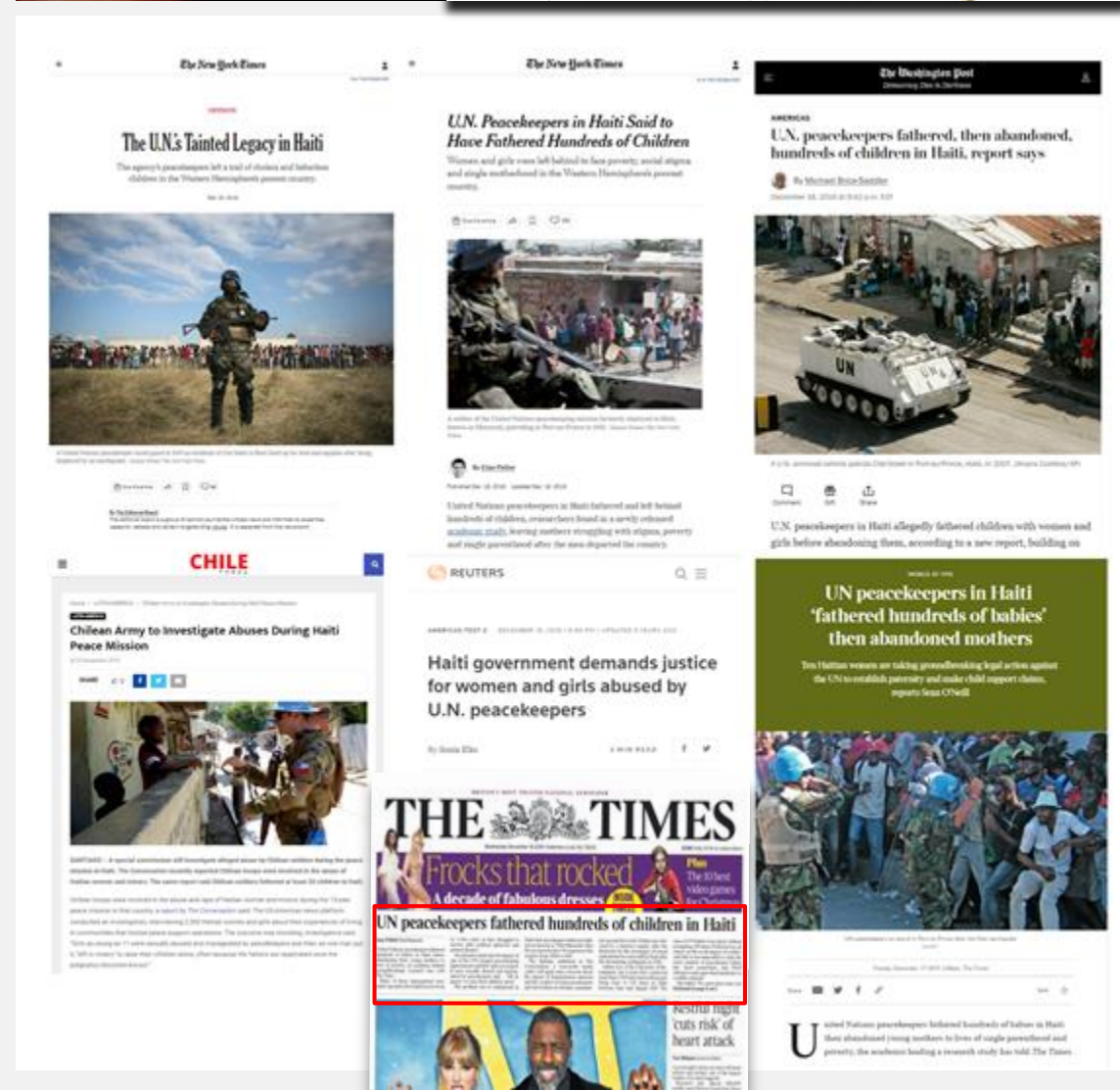
Insights

Long reads of up to 4,000 words.
Has to be a story that can hold the reader over the full length.

- Yet-to-be-published investigative research with news lines that are of strong public interest
- Human stories with compelling narrative arcs and case studies that grab readers' attention
- The 'inside story' of a researcher's journey, including personal ups-and-downs

Insights is run by journalists
Paul Keaveny and Mike Herd

insights@theconversation.com



3. A journalistic approach

Think about your audience:

- What do they want?
- What interests them?
- In what style and tone are they expecting to be spoken to?

Think about your subject:

- What is it about this subject that would most interest the reader?
- It may not be what is most *academically* interesting
- Structure the story to focus on that element (the story's "angle")
- How do I answer or preempt their question: "SO WHAT?"

The 'top line' test

- You know you've got a good story if you can summarise it in one sentence
- Identify the most important or interesting aspect *to your readers*, and focus on that
- Make a point or two – not all of them. Get used to leaving things out
- What is it about the story that is **new, interesting, relevant, timely, unusual, surprising, counterintuitive?**
- Tell me something I don't know...
...and show me why it matters

= *why should I care about this?*

Now you try the ‘top line test’

“Doomsday scenarios surrounding a robot apocalypse abound in popular science fiction, from Battlestar Galactica to Terminator. But working with machine intelligence in the lab can uncover innovative designs that can help humanity and enable us to learn how our own intelligence came about.

“My recent work included designing a ‘mother’ robot that can manufacture its own ‘children’ without human intervention. In the process it uses principles from nature including natural selection to produce incrementally superior generations that improve in performance on a specific task.”

**How we built a robot that can evolve –
and why it won't take over the world**



Now, your turn!



Style and tone

- **Get to the point!**

Start at the end: latest events, findings, implications, conclusions.

- **Battle for the reader's attention**

from the opening sentence.
Get important elements in early on

- **Be clear, be direct, be concise**

Use active sentences, not passive.
Cut words ruthlessly

- **Polish your intro and payoff**

Write and re-write your opening and final lines until they sparkle, and speak directly to the subject – never “*more research is needed*”

- **Use plain English**

Get a feel for the informal – how you'd explain to a friend in the pub, or to a teenager

- **Offer examples**

Make the abstract concrete

- **Your piece should answer more questions than it poses:**

who, what, where, when, why – sometimes how

- **The reader does not know the subject like you do**

Explain (or avoid) technical terms. Don't assume the reader's knowledge

4. How to pitch editors

- **What's the story?**
In a nutshell, what are your conclusions or findings, or the takeaway for the reader? **Be succinct, be clear, be bold**
- **Why should the reader care?**
Why is it interesting or significant to readers that aren't specialists in the field?
- **Why now?**
What is it relevant to – breaking news?
A broad topic of current interest?
A recently published paper? A future event you're pitching in advance of?
- **The key points** of your argument (briefly)
- **Why are you the person to write this?**
What expertise informs your view?
What can you bring to the story?

A good pitch is written like a good story

A strong headline to interest the reader, opening lines compelling them to read on

The same rules apply

Be clear, be succinct, no jargon, don't assume the reader knows the topic

Convince us why what you want to write is important and interesting

Try to convey in your pitch some of the enthusiasm you have for your work

If you can make us like the story, together we can produce a piece that readers will like too.

Ready? Head to:

<https://theconversation.com/uk/pitches>

News, by experts

theconversation.com/uk

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