

Episode 9 transcript

Hi everyone and welcome to the SciComm Toolkit podcast. The show for scientists and science communicators to gain all the tools they need to bring their science stories to life. I'm Soph aka Soph talks science and I am here to not only help you gain your scicomm confidence, but here to be your scicomm cheerleader as you put everything into action.

Now I don't think there are many of us who do science communication who don't have an aim of trying to reach more people. Whether it is gaining more YouTube subscribers, more views on your science news story or getting more people to your event, I think a lot of us want to grow in one way or another. There are loads of ways that you can do this, but for today's episode I wanted to talk about two things that you should start thinking about if you have any kind of digital science communication - whether that is a website, blog, podcast, social media, YouTube channel and so on. They are having an irresistible headline and search engine optimisation aka SEO.

In this episode I talk to journalist turned blog and podcast coach Michelle Gately about how you can create scroll stopping headlines. And I'm not just talking about news headlines. There are so many other places you can use them for your science communication which will all be revealed. When it comes to SEO, there is a lot to learn, but here we talk about the very basics of what you can start thinking about now to gain better results in the future. The goal is to get your videos, or blogs etc cropping up when we all do our Google searches. SEO is going to help you do that. Your headlines are then going to get people from the search results page onto your site. This is that crucial first step that I want to talk a little bit more about today.

Over the past year, I have joined Michelle's content bootcamp workshops and her headline workshops and she had so so so much advice and practical tips to share. I also get so much value from her blog, Instagram posts and podcast and I am thrilled that even though she doesn't have a science background that she agreed to join me on my little podcast project. While on this podcast, I want to share my experiences and lessons of scicomm, and also learn from other science communicators, I also think there is so much we can learn from others who work outside of our scicomm bubble and how we can apply that to what we do as science communicators. So, let's get to it. I am delighted to welcome Michelle Gately to the podcast.

I didn't realise there was a place that was like, however many hours and a half in front of us, I always thought it would just be like a whole hour.

Michelle

I know literally everyone said that. But it's just because I've ended up in Adelaide, and it's in the middle of the country. So they basically just put that in there to make sure that Yeah, I guess the sun isn't setting at a really random time.

Sophie

Just something new I learned today when the time such. Yeah, anyway. So I wanted to start off by just thanking you again for all the help and support you've given me with podcasting and everything over the last year, because I really don't think I would have been able to

move it from an idea to this actual thing, if it wasn't for your help and advice. So thanks for that.

Michelle

Well, it is a pleasure to be here. Like that is really nice. Like that's why I love doing this. So I'm really glad

Sophie

Yeah, so maybe you can start by telling everyone what it is you do now.

Michelle

Yeah. So I'm actually going through like a little bit of a little bit of a change. But basically help small business owners or content creators like yourself, who want to be quite intentional about their content, work on their content marketing systems, so blogging, podcasting, and more of that writing stuff. So you know, sometimes I will look at newsletters with clients and things like that as well. But my main focus is probably more on blogs and podcasts.

Sophie

Yes, I've mentioned how you've helped me with podcasting. But in this episode, I wanted to ask you more about the writing side of things. And that's because you were a journalist before, right.

Michelle

Yeah, yeah. So before we moved to the UK, two years ago, I was a journalist at a regional newspaper in Australia. And so that involves a lot of different tasks, a lot of different hats to be worn not unlike being a business owner. So yeah, I've got a lot of different writing skills.

Sophie

To kick off, I thought we'd start with what might be a bit more of a meteor topic and go into SEO or search engine optimization for anyone that doesn't know, I have a very, very basic understanding of it, or at least I think I do. But maybe you can elaborate a little more. So what is it? And who should be thinking about it?

Michelle

Yeah, so I tend to think that I have a bit of a basic understanding too, only because, you know, my background is in journalism, rather than marketing. So I come at it from that content creation point of view, and a lot of this stuff around SEO, I've sort of taught myself. So there are definitely more expert people out there. But, you know, at a very basic level, it is writing in a way that makes it easier for Google to find and present information that people are looking for. So when we type a question into Google, like, what's the best way to cook pasta? You know, it goes through all those millions of web pages and hopefully finds you the best answer. And the thing that actually answers the question. So search engine optimization, and writing in a way that incorporates those techniques just means like, I guess, basically just presenting things in a way that makes it easier for Google. Does that make sense?

Sophie

I think so. Because I have that vague understanding. But it's just kind of a way, it's almost like a way of getting yourself ranked through Google isn't if you are creating a blog post, for example.

Michelle

Yeah, definitely. And like, it definitely takes time to say get that ranking. But it is about ultimately getting ranked by Google so that more people come to your website for free. Because you know, when we use Google, and maybe next time we do a search, if this is the first time you're hearing about it, just take, you know, take a bit of a look at how things are presented. Because you'll get those like paid ad results. And then you'll get the organic results. So ideally, we would all like to be at the top of those organic results for ideal clients when they're searching things. So that we're getting more website traffic. And it's the idea that you are doing this for free, it's not a paid thing. That I think is what makes it such a key like marketing strategy for people. And in regards to, you know, like, who should be thinking about it, and sort of why we should be thinking about it. I think, if you are creating content, and you really do want to grow an audience, then it's something that you should be thinking about, really. And if you're a brand, and you're wanting to grow your business, then it is one of the best ways to like market your business for free and grow your audience that way.

Sophie

And you also mentioned that it can take a little bit of a time to to get ranked. So how long does that that take roughly? Oh, gosh, like,

Michelle

I would say absolute months. And, you know, again, this is just from my own experience, but for example, like, you know, blog posts that I wrote, nine months to a year ago, are only just sort of ranking. So that sort of gives you an idea of you know, you can't just look at it a week later or a month later and think oh, well, you know, I'm not on page one of Google. So that's it, it failed. You know, it is such a long term thing, but you will slowly start to see an increase in traffic from particular blog posts. And I guess the key is to just keep keep going really, obviously, as well, Google does sort of take into account how long your website's been around. So the sum of some websites if they've been around for years and years and years and have built up that authority with Google, they probably rank a little bit easier. But again, that is sort of straying into the territory that I'm not as familiar with. But yeah, it's there's a lot of different factors at play for, like how long things take. But I would say like, when you've started blogging, at least try and do it consistently for like, three months, you know, and start, like, tracking your results and trying to see what's working, because it will take time.

Sophie

What are like the basics, like, where can someone start if they want to try and start implementing this?

Michelle

Oh, okay. Um, so like, a good place to start is to just actually look at what's on your website at the moment. And to have a look at things like your site speed, there are a couple of sort of free analysis programmes, you can use that point out places that you can improve your site speed on your website, again, that strays into more of the technical stuff that I'm not as familiar with. But you know, I'm sure you can link to a few, a few things, as well, that will, that

will help with that. Because loading speed can be something that slows down the site, especially with a lot of us being on mobile these days. So that could be a good place to start. But then in terms of like, you know, actually looking at your content, have a look at what you've got already. So have you got a blog? And if you have, you know, what kind of content are you writing about? How are we writing that content? Are you writing it with your audience in mind, analysing that, and looking at that is a good place to start so that you can know where you can improve? What I would say is if you're sort of starting from scratch is sort of think about the topics that someone might be writing into Google that would give them your website result. Does that make sense? Yeah, yep. So for example, you can then create some content that starts trying to answer those questions. So let's take SEO as the example because it's on my mind now, if you were to write, you know, a blog post saying how to get started with SEO? You know, you're trying to answer a question for your audience. And I guess, it is sort of hard to know where to start, just in general, without knowing where people are, but I would say sort of starting to think about, okay, what, what are people searching that I can help them with? And what could bring them to my site? So for example, if you're selling like a product or something, you could, you could create content around that. And again, it's that like, Okay, what are people selling? So with science communication, what people going to be searching in my niche that I can help them with. And that's like, a really good place to start generating content ideas. And then in terms of actually writing in a way that's SEO friendly. Obviously, keywords do play a role. That's, again, like a whole other thing. But we're wanting to write in a way that sort of presents information in a really logical easy to understand why we want to break up the text with plenty of headings, because, you know, again, think about how you look at things on the internet. I know, I certainly from googling something I want the answer. So if people are coming to your website from Google, they want to be able to scan the page and find the information they need. So lay it out in a way that is user friendly, and also consider things like readability. So readability is how easy it is to understand the text. And one of the easiest way to sort of start looking at that online is to have shorter paragraphs. So for me, that would be like a couple of sentences, maybe maybe one sentence, maybe two or three. And it just makes that piece again, like more scannable online, it brings in some more whitespace. And it makes it less daunting for people. So those are a few places you can start with trying to start to look at implementing SEO at like a blog level.

Sophie

Yeah, I always feel with SEO, it's just like opening up a can of worms. Like there's no kind of, really, I guess there are some easy things to be doing. But there's always more and more and more and more.

Michelle

Yes, definitely. And, you know, I do find that it is a lot of small things that you can do and small steps that you can start to take but I think when you're starting it feels like this big overwhelming thing. And once you're into the habit of it, it feels a little bit less daunting and it feels a little bit like oh yeah, I just do this. Now this happens to help my SEO but it's just part of my routine. Whereas I think when you're starting and you're looking at those things like okay, what is site speed? And, you know, is my site fast and I found my images too big, all that sort of stuff that can feel quite daunting and quite overwhelming. And I do on the site, I put that off for so long, because quite quite an overwhelming topic to begin with.

Sophie

So I feel like keywords, which the name might suggest is quite, quite key. So they're kind of the one or two word kind of phrase that summarises the main topic of your blog post. Right?

Michelle

Yeah, and it's the sort of thing that the is what people are typing into Google, basically. So weaving that through your copy, indicates to Google that, you know, that is what this blog post is about. Now, like I said, there are people who do lots of keyword analysis. And you know, there's lots of paid tools and free tools and a lot of different things you can use to find keywords, but I tend to take a little bit more of a relaxed approach in that, you know, I might look up one or two key words, have them in mind, and then just try and write, you know, my blog post, maybe, as I naturally would. And I find that often, often that works, because otherwise, yeah, I think you can go down a rabbit hole of spending hours and hours and hours. And, you know, just over analysing keywords and things like that and trying to fit something in. Whereas, actually, you know, if you've got the content there, and it's quite clear in the content, what you were talking about, then it doesn't matter as much anymore that you have precisely, this key word or that key word. And yeah, when we do say key words as well, it can be a word or phrase. And there's like, people might see longtail keywords, that's more your like, questions maybe or the longer phrases, which I think we're tending to ask more on Google Now, especially with like voice searches, because we all tend to like, we tend to say it as if he was speaking to a person so we don't just say like, hey, Alexa, whether Rockhampton, you say like, what is the weather like in Rockhampton today, for example? So yeah, I think that those longtail keywords are sort of becoming something that we use a little bit more searches. But they definitely are less competitive than typing in just like a one word phrase, like if you were to just type in blogging, for example. But yeah, I definitely think when I started learning about SEO, I got caught up in like, Oh, my God, I have to get like in the right keyword. And I think it's, it's less important than it seems, at least to me, you know, that there could be other people who would say that I was absolutely wrong. But for me, it's important to try and get, you know, the content sounding right for your brand and presenting the right information in the way that you wanted. That that's because I'm coming from that content background, not the marketing background,

Sophie

I feel that like any researchers or science communicators listening to this would probably be more from the content side of things and wanting to grow that way, rather than the marketing side. But again, I might be wrong too.

Michelle

And I think with that, is just to like if you were talking about a topic or something, thinking about the way that people might phrase things, if they were searching it. So that again, sort of comes back to thinking about what your audience want from you. So if you're appealing to say, like other scientists, you're probably going to use different phrases and terminology. And if you're writing something for a more general audience, maybe you need to sort of use some different words and keywords there to give you different results. I think that's probably one of the main things that your audience is going to be grappling with there.

Sophie

And do you think it's just important to have like, one keyword or key phrase for a blog post? Or can you use a few throughout?

Michelle

Well, yeah, I'll be honest, I don't know what the like, precise answer is to this. But what I tend to do is find maybe like three or four phrases, and I write them down at the top of my blog post draw. So then as I'm writing, I tend to find that once I've done that I'm naturally including them in the copy. And I think that works a bit better as well because it doesn't sound so forced and that's what a lot of people are worried about when they think you're writing they think, Oh my God, I've got to make it sound like really robotic. And, you know, it doesn't sound like me, and I don't want it to sound like that. So, I find just having those phrases in my mind. I naturally bring them into what I'm writing anyway, and then when I go back in To over, I just see if there's any other places that I could maybe include a keyword. So yeah, I think that you could have like three or four that you're sort of aiming to work into the copy. But then you just pick one main one that you will also include in like the headline on your alt text, which is for your images, and in your, like, meta description, and all that sort of stuff. So you do need to narrow it down to one, but you can have a few others that you sort of have in your mind as you're writing.

Sophie

So if there was someone listening to this, who already had a blog, and has been doing it for a little while, would you recommend going back and updating them to be a little bit more SEO friendly? Maybe?

Michelle

Yeah, actually, this is a really interesting part of, you know, ongoing SEO maintenance of your site is going back and sort of refreshing those old blog posts, and that is looked upon quite favourably from Google as well, because, you know, they want to present the best information to their audience. And I think, especially with science communication, as well, it is more likely to be changing and in a bit of flux, then maybe, you know, lifestyle blogs and things. So, you know, if you are dealing with a topic, and you have like new information, that's a great time to like, go back and update an old blog post, even if it is to add a line saying, you know, since we published this, you know, this survey came out or, you know, this new finding came out. And you can read more about that here, and you put a new post up as well, for example, or it could just be things as simple as you know, I have a blog, a blog post about podcasting, and why you should start a podcast, and it's got a bunch of statistics in it. And every year, a new infinite dial report comes out. And that's where I got a lot of those statistics. So I just go back at the start of the year when that new report comes out, and just update it and just sort of put something at the top saying, you know, updated for 2021, or whatever. That can be a good way, if you're dealing with facts and figures that will change annually as well, just to update things. And you know, maybe when you do that you give it a fresh headline, for example. It just kind of helps to make sure that your site is as accurate as possible. And there's absolutely no harm in doing that. And I think that that's sort of heartening, really, because sometimes we can put pressure on ourselves to have the perfect thing. Right. At the start, right. Yeah. So knowing that it's actually a good thing to go back and change things later. Is is reassuring. Really,

Sophie

yeah. I'm hoping that would encourage people listening to this to just put out that blog post that they've been holding back on for a while thinking, Oh, my God, it needs to be perfect. Like right now. Like,

Michelle

yeah, yeah, just do it. And you can always come back to it later. Like, I'm sure if you're that worried about it, you've probably spent a lot of time doing it already. And if it's been sitting there for a while, and you're, you know, just worried about one or two little things, you just don't know whether it's as SEO friendly as it could be just it's put up and you can come back and tweak it later when you learn more things.

Sophie

Absolutely. If these things take a little bit of time to kind of kick in. And you mentioned that you kind of track the changes, what things should we be tracking? or looking out for to see if things are working?

Michelle

Yes. So this can be a bit tricky. And I'm you know, I'm by no means. As I said, I'm by no means a marketing expert, but I'm also not that great with numbers. So, you know, if anyone's listening to this, and I don't know, if you have used Google Analytics so far, that is not very user friendly?

Sophie

No,

Michelle

yeah, it is a bit of a minefield, right. So if you're using Google Analytics, the main things that I look at are the number of people who are coming to the website, and then of that, you should be able to see I think it's under acquisitions, the number of people who are coming just from organic search. So they are the people who are finding you through Google. And that's what we want to keep track of. Even if you're doing it on like a monthly basis. You I'm sure you will start to see that number rise once you start to implement these things. And like I said, for me, that took like six months to stand, it was a very slow, you know, going up in increments of a couple of dozen or whatever, but I could see slowly that it was getting better. And I think that was checking the stats was more of a comfort to me to just be like, oh, okay, it is working. It's it's slow, and it's not millions of people, but I can see them doing something right. And I can see that it was growing in the right places. So it was growing in the organic search. And then the other thing I would look at is time on page. And that can be it can be quite true. Key. So you know, mine doesn't look that great at the moment, which is telling me that people aren't actually staying in reading my stuff. But if you've got people who are engaged in reading your stuff, and that time on page will be, it'll be a couple of minutes. And that's great. So if you've got a really good time on page that tells you that, even if you don't have that many people coming, they are staying for a long time, which can be really reassuring, sometimes as well in your website host. So I'm with Squarespace. And I know, in the analytics there, I can look at some of the search terms and the most, the most popular content, that's another one that I would, I would look at as well. So what blog posts are working, what are people clicking on, because that's always a good one to you know, go and refresh and make sure you've got any if you know, if you've got an email sign up, or you've

got a course coming out or something and, and that is getting traffic, and that's a good place to make sure that you've, you've got that updated. And it can just be useful to see like, Okay, if that was, you know, how could I take that information and sort of do it in a new way? For example, is there something else on that topic that people are interested in that I could do a blog post on?

Sophie

Yeah, I think my website is hosted on WordPress. And I can also get some of those like search terms that people have searched for, to get onto my site as well, in case anyone is using WordPress as well.

Michelle

Yeah, I find that really helpful. And then actually the other thing that I would say Google Analytics is free. And the other thing that Google offers for free is Google Search Console. And this has some, I'm pretty sure you can do some site speed stuff and some SEO stuff with Google Search Console as well. So I would recommend signing up for Google Search Console, and claiming your website address. And what they will do then is sort of send you an email every month saying that, you know how many times you were appearing in searches? How often you were ranking on page one, how many people clicked through, it's especially good for I mean, this is a side note, but you know, if anyone has, you know, you have like a physical location for something, it can be really helpful, because Google Search Console will show you like how many people found you on maps, or how many people called you using like the call now button and stuff. So Google Search Console is amazing. And it's sort of like, the place to start if you look at Google Analytics, and just think that is way too overwhelming. For us. It is a nice email to get every month to be like you've you know, you've had this many this many hits, like oh, okay, that's nice.

Sophie

That sounds good. I haven't used that one too much. But yeah, Google Analytics is a lot there. And most of it is just you need to really pick and choose what, what is really meaningful to you. So I wanted to also talk to you today about headlines, because I think you've done a lot of or generated a lot of content about them recently. So why are they so important? So

Michelle

headlines are one of the most important things on your page, because like, quite simply, if your headline is bad, people are not going to bother reading the rest of your work, you know, we are bombarded with so many things on a daily basis on the internet. And we're making these decisions all the time about where we spend our time. And if your headline is not appealing, people aren't going to click through, they just aren't going to bother, because we've all got so much else going on, basically. So that's why they're one of the most important things. from an SEO perspective, it's another place to put your keyword as well. And it's the the headline is what comes up on Google basically. So you really want to sell it when people are scrolling through those Google results. Again, think about when you're scrolling through the judgments that you make based on just that sentence. And you'll see how important it is really.

Sophie

And we often think of headlines that just sit at the top of news articles and things. So from a communications content perspective, where else can we find them?

Michelle

Yes, so headlines are, you know, like you said, it's the news articles, but it's also your email subject lines, your blog posts, your podcast, episode titles, that your YouTube videos, they're all forms of headlines, and they're all really important, because without them again, like people aren't going to click on that result. Click on that podcast episode, click on that YouTube video. So yeah, those are all examples.

Sophie

And the same goes for kind of like subheadings in a blog post as well, right?

Michelle

Yes, exactly. Yes. Also a really important thing.

Sophie

So what goes into a scroll stopping headline,

Michelle

a really scroll stopping headline you want to be quite specific about the value that is offered. Now this can it can be kind of Funny thinking about value and stuff like that. But essentially, it is again, going back to what do people want to know, and making sure that it's really obvious what they can expect from the article in the headline. So we don't just want like my morning routine, we want like five things you can do in five minutes that will make your morning better. Essentially, it sort of comes back to the question of what's in it for me. So when you're scrolling, and you're making those micro second judgments of, I'm not going to be bothered reading that. You want people to look at it and think, oh, that's actually that could be something that can help me or that's something that I want to know about. So in terms of science, communication, it's again, knowing your audience and presenting the headline in a way that appeals to them and makes them want to know more. So knowing what matters to them, and what they care about as to why they might click through.

Sophie

Is it a good idea, then to when you're clicking on things, or stopping to read things to sort of question why you're doing that as well?

Michelle

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, that is a good place to start, if you've never really thought about this concept before. Yeah, take note of what makes you stop and have a look at the structure that they've used in the headline, there's a lot of different formulas, you'll start to see if you take notice, you know, question headlines and like, you'll see these phrases used over and over again, like, this is how you do this. And this is why you should do this. And I know this probably, maybe part of you, that's like, I want to be more creative than that. But the thing is, the reason that these formulas get used so often is because they work because they grab our attention, and they tell us what we need to know. So as much as we all want to be like, individuals and stuff. Yeah. Yeah, it can be quite good to stick to those formulas. I mean, that

was totally me before I was like, Oh, my God, no, I want to have like really cool blog titles and stuff. But then like 10, people saw my stuff, so

Sophie

it's not worth it really there, you can save your creativity for another place. Absolutely. What I say the three biggest mistakes that people tend to make when it comes to writing their headlines,

Michelle

I think definitely being really vague, or trying to be quite clever or like put upon in and things like that, because that just does not translate on the Internet at all. I would say the other one is that you aren't using any of those headline formulas, they do make your life so much easier. And the final mistake is as a bit of a classic with a lot of things is just going with the first thing that comes to mind and not actually going back in brainstorming and trying to be strategic about kicking headline that works for your audience, there's a tool that called their co schedule, headline analyzer that I recommend. And I tend to, you know, draft 10 to 15 different headlines and then run them through that analyzer and sort of see what's best, it will get quicker, the more you do it, you'll you'll get quicker at brainstorming. But I think that tendency to just be like, yeah, this is the last thing that I'm going to, this is the final touch, I've got pop on the blog post, I'm just going to put this on don't care what it is. And then I'll just publish it. That is just not enough thought and attention. So if you want to get really strategic, you need to spend a bit of time brainstorming and trying to pick something that works.

Sophie

So when it comes to picking your title, or do you just use? Do you just base it on the score that these tools might spit out to you? Or is there any other kind of thoughts that go on to say, yes, this is the one I should choose.

Michelle

So I tend to make my final decision based on the score usually and if I like it, so the headline analyzer works on like a traffic light system. So if it's, if it's green, and you're getting like those 70s and 80s you like yeah, this is this is this is good to go. The other thing that, you know, I tend to think about as well is what are people going to click on on Google versus on like the homepage of my website. And this is where having a play around with different types of headlines is really good because when we're looking at things on Google, we need to sort of put the, the keywords right up front, we need to Front Load the keywords and sort of grab attention straight away and possibly have a shorter headline, we can get away with a little bit of a longer headline on our website. And most whether you're using WordPress or Squarespace or Wix, you should be able to do a separate like SEO headline. And that will allow you to put two separate headlines on the table. So, sometimes I'll do something that's a little bit more creative. For my homepage, maybe it's a little bit longer, maybe the key word is at the end rather than the start. And then for SEO purposes, I'll do something where it's got a keyword like right at the front, for the SEO title.

Sophie

Yes. This is the difference between the title when you've clicked on the actual blog post compared to what it looks like on the Google search results, right?

Michelle

Yeah, yeah. So that little blue result that comes up, that's your like, SEO headline. And then once you click through, the headline that shows on the page could be different. And I mean, again, next time you're using Google, have a look at news websites, in particular will do this, have a look and see whether whether it changes when you click through, because for a lot of news websites, like Huff Post, for example, they will utilise an SEO headline. And we used to write separate SEO headlines and separate news headlines when I was at the paper as well. So it is sort of a helpful tool in that way.

Sophie

Is there a benefit for bloggers to do that? Or is it more of a institution news kind of level?

Michelle

It can be more of an institution and news kind of thing. But I think for me, sometimes if I have two quite high scoring headlines, I'll think, okay, I'll put them more like SEO, one, just for the SEO headline. And I might do something that's like a little bit less, you know, keyword heavy for the homepage, for example, because that's maybe where people are, they already know me, they're already on the website, or they've come through from another channel, whether that's like Pinterest, or Instagram or something. Whereas with the SEO headline, the people who are seeing that are going to want a specific answer to whatever they searched for. So emphasising that is really handy for any posts where you think, yeah, I really want to rank number one for this, it can be really helpful. And it's not something you have to worry about quite so much for, you know, just your general posts that that you're not specifically going out to optimise. So for example, if you were writing, say like a big explain a post on, I can't even think of any sciency things. If you were writing an explainer on something, and you know that you wanted to make that really SEO friendly, and really trying to bring in traffic through that, then that would be a good place to do two separate headlines about if you're just writing something quite quick and basic. And it's not for that purpose. It's more that brand building stuff. And you probably don't need to worry about it too much.

Sophie

How can we start writing better headlines now? Whether that's for like a blog post news article, or Instagram captions, for example?

Michelle

Yes, I think the first thing would be to have a look at some headline formulas and sort of look at what the strategy is around those and the sorts of words and phrases that are used. And then the next thing would be to challenge yourself to come up with like 20 to 30 different options when you're starting out and play around with the headline analyzer. So once you've got all those options, have different formulas, you know, try some questions, try some things with numbers, try different ways of presenting that information, run them through the headline analyzer and see what it says because you know, if you've never thought about it before, and you've never thought about it strategically, it's kind of again, it's that good, like baseline to find out where you actually are at the I just use the free version of the headline analyzer and I find that that actually gives quite a lot of good tips and suggestions for like, okay, is it too long? Is it too wordy? Is it too negative? Does it have like enough unique words in it and things like that because it will also highlight you know, power words and

emotional words and things like that. So it can be really good just to take something brainstorm and then run the analyzer over it and see what your like sort of baseline is.

Sophie

I've always wondered about those power and like emotional words and stuff how do you know what is a power word and an emotional words training? incorporate more of those? Yeah,

Michelle

so in this is what's good about the again to bang on about the headline on Elsa, and I only use the free version. And there's also I think it's like an emotional headline analyzer. But I think it's just looking for those sorts of unusual words or quite strong emotive words. Maybe the things that might annoy you as a news consumer, potentially where you are. Is this really amazing? Is this really hilarious or is it actually you know,

Michelle

Quite good to get SEO and stuff like that. So, you know, obviously you don't have to put anything in there that you really genuinely don't think is relevant. But I think again, the more you do it, the more you kind of get into the terminology that gets used frequently and stuff. And so you get quicker at brainstorming those ideas. So in short, I don't entirely know. But it is practice. Again, it's like the gym. It's like, start getting used to it and getting more confident with it as well.

Sophie

Would you use this headline analyzer tool to write your newspaper news article headlines, as well as blog posts, style ones as well,

Michelle

with news news, it doesn't necessarily work. But with more of those like lifestyle pieces and stuff, it can, but I worked for, I guess, what would be considered a very niche newspaper in that it was nice in terms of its location. So a lot of what we were doing wasn't really going to have a broader impact beyond our little region. So yeah, again, that's knowing your audience really. And knowing that what we were publishing on our website wasn't something like we needed to look at SEO, but not necessarily in the same way that I do. Now, for a global audience.

Sophie

When I've been writing about a scientists latest research and the latest paper that's come out, one of their concerns is that we don't want to sensationalise or even oversimplify what it's all about in a headline, whereas I know then posts like the like how tos or listicles, and so on, they tend to work well, for blog style pieces, but maybe they're not for the news and science news. So how would you approach writing a headline then? That doesn't sensationalised? Like hardcore news so to speak?

Michelle

Yeah, that is really tricky. And I think it definitely is, then more about using your own personal judgement of what you believe crosses that line or doesn't cross that line. And I do think that's something that you will develop, and I'm sure like the same way that journalists have

that sense, or I did any rate that, you know, also researchers and stuff, you will develop that sense of what are the appropriate words to use and stuff? I guess in that sense, it's thinking, Okay, well, what, what maybe like, if the audience has a general audience, what are the terms that they're going to use? And maybe it's, you know, pulling out a key phrase and saying, like, research says, or research finds or something, again, that straying more into news territory for sure. But I guess it's just using your judgement, the best way possible. And then, yes, running it through the headline analyzer as well. But I guess this is where actually knowing what goes into a headline is so important, because of course, like a headline analyzer is helpful, but it's not the be all and end all you still need to know. So I guess, again, it's being the most specific. For me, when I, if I think about as a journalist, it would be choosing an angle and pulling out potentially, what is the most interesting piece of that research that would make people click making that the sort of lead and then going into the rest of the information? So again, just sort of thinking, Okay, like, what would make people click, but is also an accurate representation of what they're going to get in this article? What are they going to learn from this article? Because you don't want them to be disappointed by clicking through and at the same time, you don't want them to be put off clicking through because it sounds more boring than it actually is.

Sophie

Yeah, I've always found it's quite a tricky balance, because like, there's one thing as, say, a communicator that I want the audience to get from it, or what I think they should take away from someone's research, but then the researcher obviously has different ideas themselves. So it's kind of having that that balancing act

Michelle

that is really tricky. And I think that's a really, it's a really unique situation to be in and I don't know if there's necessarily a right answer for that either. But I think just probably using your best judgement as as unhelpful and answer as that is.

Sophie

No, I thought it would be useful to get say, like, a journalist perspective that's outside of the world of science on that as well. So

Michelle

good. Yeah. Well, to me, in my day job, it was always like, Okay, what is the element? What is the thing that you know, what, what would I say to someone over coffee like, Oh my god, you're not gonna believe this. That sort of what I would sort of look for for my lead and then for the headline as well of like, what is going to make people if they see that on our homepage What's gonna make them want to know more information?

Sophie

So I also remember you talking about this recently, and I thought it would be good to ask you again as part of this to share with everyone who might be listening. And that's about the Curiosity gap. So what is the Curiosity gap? And how can it help us with blogs, podcasts, headlines and so on?

Michelle

Yeah, so it's basically the difference between what we know and what we want to know. And you've got to strike a fine line between telling people enough information that they do, in fact, want to know more. And this is I think the thing that we tend to struggle with with headlines is, we might think we're being like vague and coy, and that people want to know more, because we're being so mysterious, but actually, people will just keep scrolling. So it's about telling them enough information, that headline that they do have that reaction of, well, I need to know more. Now, with a TV show, for example, you are opening and closing those loops all the time. So you're always like, people are always having a reason to watch. And so for us as communicators, it's about without being clickbaity asking a question or presenting something that you then go on to answer in the content. And you can also do it like within your actual content, in a way of like, in this blog post, I'm going to tell you, this, this and this. It's a very educational sort of thing, where you can sort of allude to the fact in your introduction to your article, for example, and then give some background and then go back to the the key other key pieces of information, for example, it definitely is a bit harder to pull off in, like news and things like that. But it can still, it can still be done. And it's just about not giving away everything. Again, when I was at the newspaper, we would look at the ER, the headline, and the story is a bit of an equation. So we've got like the who, what, where, where, what, where, when, why. classic question. So if you look at it as a bit of an equation, what are people going to find out when they click? So if we're looking at, say, an emergency situation that's happened, if it's a car crash or something? Are we leaving out the location, so they have to click through to find out the location? But you know, our thing was, okay, how are we going to get people to read our newspaper, rather than just looking on Facebook, it's about telling them you have some information that you're going to give them. And then revealing that information, once they've clicked through. Actually a good example of where there was no curiosity, and people wouldn't want to click through. It was about your vision. My partner showed it to me, because it was to do with like the drug test thing. Said headline, his drug test comes back negative and Jack was like, Well, why I'm gonna quit. I don't even need to read that now. Like, I know the answer. That's a situation where it said like, the results are in for this drug test. And you have to click through to find out what it is. And you know, you see it on the news to where they say, like coming up after the break, we're going to do this and this. And this gives you just enough information to know whether that's something that you want to keep watching or not. And hopefully for them it is.

Sophie

Yeah, kind of like a movie trailer just knowing what might happen. But you don't actually know the actual events. Yeah, until you go and watch it. Exactly. So my final question to you then, is a bit of a random one. It's a one I kind of asked everyone at the end of every kind of interview I do. So apologies for the randomness, but my question is, where should I be travelling to on my next adventure when we can do safely Of course. So where would you recommend going to and visiting and why? Well, obviously, I'm going to say Australia. Obviously,

Michelle

I think you have to come to Australia, you know, just to see all our cool animals that we have all our native animals. And in particular, I would say that you have to see the quokkas in Western Australia because they are my favourite animal. I've personally never seen them yet. That is like a bucket list trip in the future, that they are the cutest animals. And you will have to include a picture in the show notes just to show you people they always look like

they have the cutest little smiles and the island that you go to see them I think it's rottnest Island. They're like so used to having tourists around and stuff they just kept and do little selfies with all the tourists and stuff that's so cute. But you know, like wombat and koalas and kangaroos and stuff like we do have. Yes, we have a lot of animals that can kill you. But we have some like

Sophie

it is on my bucket list because we want to go to New Zealand as well. So we're hoping to maybe like

Michelle

do I mean, you've got to do both, then you may as well say you're already coming this far.

Sophie

Yeah, if we're going to go to New Zealand, we can't not stop Australia. So I'm going to try and convince him that Thank you so much for giving up your time to chat to me today. As always, it's been a pleasure to chat. Thank you. Yeah, thank you. Thank you for sharing more tips and tricks with us. Maybe you can remind everyone where they can follow you or find you online as well.

Michelle

So you can find me on Instagram at unfinished bookshelf. And you can head to my website, which is the unfinished bookshelf dot com. And I have a podcast as well with more like content marketing tips, which is called content etc. podcast and that is back very soon. I mean, it might even be back by the time you hear this episode.

Sophie

Yeah, I'm very excited. I do love all the tips and tricks you share in your podcast, too. To be honest, I have your website bookmarked because like,

Michelle

Oh, see, that makes me so happy because like sometimes I will say when you're blogging, sometimes it does feel like you're just putting things out into the world. And like, you're like, oh, no one cares, or reads it. But that seriously makes my day. Thank you. Yeah, no, I'm,

Sophie

I'm literally there all the time. I think now even if I go into like the Google search bar, and just put in that it comes like yours comes up with the first. And then how can people work with you?

Michelle

Yeah, so at the moment, I am taking on new clients for one to one mentoring for either three or six months for like content marketing. And that's everything from you know, blogging, if you want to start a podcast, newsletters, Instagram, captions, all that sort of content ecosystem. And you can also do one off creative consultations with me as well. We can go over 1, 2, 3 like specific issues you're facing. There's a few different options there to work with me at the moment.

Sophie

And this is always the part of the interview where I feel really awkward because I don't know how to wrap things up. So maybe you can give us some advice from your interviewing experience about how you do that how you wrap up your interviews at the end.

Michelle

I have absolutely no idea. I just sort of let that trail off. Thank you. This is absolutely lovely

We have arrived at the DIY section of the podcast. This is almost like the workshop section of the podcast where I give you actual resources that you can download and access right now so you can take the next steps to improve your science communication.

Again today I have not just one resource for you but two! When it comes to SEO, you can spend a lot of money really taking a deep dive into it, but my fabulous guest Michelle has recently created an SEO-friendly blog post checklist that is completely free. I will add the link in the show description and the show notes so you can go and grab that now and add it to your scicomm toolkit.

The other thing I wanted to share with you is Michelle's irresistible headline workshop. It is an online training course that you can do in your own time around your other commitments. This is the workshop I did earlier this year and I cannot tell you how useful it was. I will again add the links in the show description and the show notes. It is £49 but it will help you take your science communication to the next level. And remember that headlines are just for news articles, they can help with your YouTube channel, podcast episode titles, Instagram captions and more. So hit the link and take a look at what you will get out of it.

And that is all I wanted to share with you in today's episode. I hope you found it useful and want to take advantage of these amazing resources that Michelle has created. I hope you come back next week for the final episode in season 1. I know. I cannot believe that I've made 9 episodes already, but I have another amazing guest next week that I know you will love and then I will be taking a short break over the summer prepping season 2 ready to return in a few months time.

You can get all the links to anything Michelle and I chatted about in this episode on my website. And all the resources and show notes and transcripts too. That is soph.talks.science.com/scicommtoolkit. You can also get all the resources for every other episode from the podcast there too. If you liked this episode, then please share and tag me on social media. I'm @soph.talks.science or you can tag the pod too @scicommtoolkit. If you could spare a few minutes to leave a review then you will make my day, but it also helps others to find the podcast and learn more as well.

Have a fantastic rest of your day whatever you are doing. If it is sunny, remember to wear sunscreen or you will end up looking like Rudolph like I do right now with a big shiny red nose. Talk soon. Bye.