

Manuela Callari, freelance science journalist and content specialist

By Ayisha Sharma

Before Manuela Callari entered the world of science writing, she was a researcher. Callari pursued a PhD in medical science at Western Sydney University, Australia, from 2013 to 2017. There, she spent her time designing cutting edge nanoparticles to encapsulate and deliver anti-cancer drugs. While she enjoyed her work, she didn't like that it was restricted to such a small niche.

"I was interested in taking a broader view of science and what scientists were doing, so I thought that science communication could be a good path for me," Callari says. She started following science journalists at the newspapers and magazines she read regularly, and eventually contacted them to ask for advice on breaking into the field.

"It was challenging because I didn't have their experience," Callari tells me. "I had experience of writing scientific papers, but that's very different from writing a piece of news or a feature story, so I kind of had to re-learn how to write about science." She kicked off her journalism career writing for Australian outlets, before expanding her work to encompass content writing as well.

Callari's career boasts a two-year stint as an editor at Australia's national nature engagement charity Remember the Wild. Since then, she has collected bylines in the MIT Technology Review, The Guardian and Cosmos, among other international publications.



Formerly a researcher, Callari broke into science writing to get a broader view of the subject. Image credit: Manuela Callari.

She has also written on a whole spectrum of science subjects, from eating disorders to artificial intelligence. We chatted more about the highs, lows and daily grind of being a freelancer with two job titles.

Journalism and content writing are very different things — in journalism, you need to follow very strict editorial policies when you look for and interview sources and put a story together, and there's a big emphasis on remaining independent and impartial," Callari explains. "With content writing, you can use the storytelling skills you have as a journalist, but you're producing a tailored piece of work for a specific client, and they ultimately need to be happy with your copy."

Callari currently spends half her time on journalism and half on content, but this split can shift depending on the projects that land on her desk. "Sometimes, I'll have a bigger feature

to write, so I'll dedicate more time to that and slow down with my client work," she tells me. "And sometimes, I'll have a bigger project with a client which means I may pitch a little bit less."

It's this variety in her workload that Callari relishes most as a freelancer. She enjoys switching up her routine and flexing distinct skillsets each time she works on a new story for a different publication. And while no two days look the same, they tend to follow a similar structure.

Callari starts her morning by checking her emails and making a list of what she needs to get done that day the good old fashioned way — with a pen and paper. She assigns a priority level to each task depending on which ones need to be completed first. Callari then devotes her mornings to what she calls "deep work," including in-depth research and writing news articles or content for clients.

The most difficult part of her job is sitting down to a blank page and drafting a piece of work afresh, Callari tells me. In an effort to preempt this challenge, she makes a habit of creating a file in advance containing relevant links or a rough outline of her story structure to help prompt her. "Even if it's just a few random words, at least there's something already there," she says.

While Callari tries her best to schedule her interviews for the afternoon, it doesn't always work out that way because her sources are often based in different time zones. "I sometimes have interviews very early in the morning, sometimes very late in the evening," she tells me. Either way, Callari tries to take a break from deep work in the afternoon.

In the evening, she returns to her drafts with a fresh pair of eyes and gives them a final edit before sending them off to editors or clients. "The most enjoyable part of the work is when I finish a story, and I can finally close the millions of tabs that I have open for that story,"

Callari says.

But ultimately, forging the right relationships has been the most important part of Callari's journey. She advises young science writers to find their tribe, whether it's reaching out to senior journalists who can act as a mentor, joining a group of fellow freelancers with whom to exchange ideas or working with editors who provide healthy constructive feedback. With a strong network, thick skin and perseverance, they will be well on their way.

About the author: Ayisha Sharma is a news reporter at Endpoints News — an FT Specialist publication focused on biopharma. There, she covers the latest developments in R&D, new drug approvals and industry corruption. She also has words in The Guardian, North West Londoner and WebMD.

Edited by Amin Sharifan

*The **Early Career Science Writer Network** is a global community of science media professionals within the first five years of a journalism career. The network offers training and development opportunities for its members and provides an informal space to chat openly with peers at the same level.*