

[BY JOVANA J. GRBIC]

Scripted Science

Albert Einstein famously noted that “to raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science.” Yet the words *creativity* and *imagination*, often siloed within the artistic trades, are too rarely associated with scientists or analytical people.

I grew up fully embracing my expressive side, pursuing the violin, painting, drawing, and writing. But I was also a math and science student, advancing toward first a bachelor's degree and eventually a Ph.D. in chemistry. Then, as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, Los Angeles, School of Public Health, I struggled with a desire to pursue a creative career. Enter ScriptPhD.com.

ScriptPhD.com started in 2010 as an entertainment blog. It covered the accuracy and ethics of science in television and film and included interviews with screenwriters and scientific advisers. At the time, a few blogs were analyzing the niches of science-related entertainment and media. My goal was to be comprehensive and to merge science and entertainment perspectives. The first posts to go up reviewed the sci-fi juggernauts at the time—*Battlestar Galactica* and the big-screen readaptation of *Star Trek*. My early readership is the same diverse readership I continue to enjoy today: scientists, techies, sci-fi and comics fans, and others eager to learn about science. Most of my colleagues and former advisers were skeptical of the site's prospects for success, mainly because I didn't know anyone in the entertainment or media field. These naysayers have since come on board as enthusiastic readers and supporters.

Today the blog's stories get several hundred thousand clicks per year, with three regular contributors and a slew of guest posters, including such notable science writers as Mark Changizi and Garth Sundem. As a measure of its influence, ScriptPhD.com provided commentary in a CNN article about the impact of the sci-fi hit *Fringe* and in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* about the increasing presence of women in geeky and sci-fi media, both as fan and subject.

Apart from a lack of access to publicists and other sources, typical challenges have included recognizing how long networking takes, accepting negative feedback, and balancing popular content with issues meaningful to me personally. By far the biggest thing I've learned is that big media loves science and that they really want to get it right. Conversations with screenwriters, showrunners (such as *Breaking Bad*'s Vincent Gilligan or *The Big Bang Theory*'s Bill Prady), and production advisers have made me realize that many in the entertainment industry idolize scientists and sincerely wish to portray them and their work in the best light possible. Scientists should not be intimidated by perceived walls between popular culture and science but rather should welcome opportunities for collaboration.

The blog may have started out as a fun outlet, but now I consider it a part of a network that informs and educates the public about science and its role in the world. When the public knows more about basic science, they make better-informed decisions whenever science, technology, and medicine affect their lives.

My work has brought many surprises, none greater or more rewarding than outreach work with graduate students and postdocs expressing interest in alternative science careers. Whether because of greater opportunities or a hypercompetitive and overpopulated scientific landscape, an increasing number of scientists are eager to learn about breaking into nontraditional fields. I advise students to aggressively network early in the Ph.D. process; take advantage of the university environment to explore classes, seminars, and symposia in other departments; and remain persistent. Many have e-mailed me to let me know they are considering jobs as technical



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writers or patent lawyers; a couple have even started their own blogs!

Former colleagues, mentors, and some current collaborators ask periodically if I still feel like a scientist, so far removed from the bench and wet-lab experiments. The answer is “yes, more than ever.” Being a part of the online popular science revolution is a responsibility I relish. I may no longer be *making* scientific discoveries and advances, but I have found a calling writing about them. ◉

Jovana J. Grbic is the editor and creative director of ScriptPhD.com and tweets as @ScriptPhD.