

Sort blog from the bad

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SCIENCE REPORTER

ANYONE can start a blog, but sorting the good from the bad can be a challenge for students. There's plenty of false or misleading information on the internet.

Reputable bloggers list references and offer links to the original sources. They share information, respond to comments and questions, and help raise the tone of the worldwide web.

University of Adelaide ecologist Corey Bradshaw readily acknowledges that blogging is a "form of shameless self-promotion" that he has signed up to (Conservation Bytes is at <http://conservationbytes.com>). But he adds that a good blog serves as a "powerful tool" in education.

"Some of my work has been used in the classroom to demonstrate a concept, because it has been simplified to the undergraduate level," he said.

A quick look at the list of keywords put to search engines that lead people to his site regularly reveals homework assignment questions as well as queries from scientists.

EducationNow shares with you some of the top science bloggers in Adelaide who enjoy sharing their knowledge and can't wait to post when they have discovered something new.



POPULAR: Blogger scientists James Byrne and Thomas Tu. **Picture:** BRENTON EDWARDS

DISEASE OF THE WEEK

<http://diseaseoftheweek.wordpress.com>

University of Adelaide PhD students Thomas Tu and James Byrne have teamed up to deliver a different disease every week in this fascinating, yet mildly disturbing, blog. They have tackled genital warts, rabies, malaria, puffer-fish poisoning and the plague, connecting tuberculosis to vampires and even pirates (beware Captain Skellet).

Both are students of microbiology and immunology and know their subject well. Writing about popular science provides some light relief from the long, hard slog that is a PhD.

Byrne steals five minutes here and there, filling in the downtime between experiments with writing and research on the web. Tu prefers to spend quality time on his posts, usually writing on the weekend.

Legionella disease (pictured) is an "adaptable little dude" that causes pretty big problems for people, despite the fact it would rather live outside our bodies.

Enjoy, but beware of Disease of the Week Syndrome: a lazy day on the web led to news that medical students can become transient hypochondriacs, depending on whatever they are studying in any given week.

But Byrne said he likes to think of Disease of the Week syndrome as "a collection of symptoms including extroverted character, know-it-all-ness, atrophy of the PhD and misplacement of the mind".

ASTROBLOG



<http://astroblogger.blogspot.com>

Dr Ian Musgrave is a biologist by day, amateur astronomer by night.

His "rough and ready" blog is a friendly tour of "pretty" celestial objects peppered with comment about "Life, the Universe and Everything". Students and teachers, in both primary and secondary schools, have been known to make good use of Astroblog.

"Teachers want to tell their kids where things are in the sky," Dr Musgrave said.

"There are few easily accessible resources for the Southern Hemisphere, so they go to my blog. "I also produce short programming scripts for freeware (free software available for download on the Internet). You can use (freeware) like Stellarium and Celestia to fly through the solar system, or demonstrate why the moon looks different in the Southern Hemisphere to the Northern Hemisphere. So an educator can download this free software, stick in the scripts and run demonstrations for various aspects of astronomy, which they're not going to get from other sources."

Dr Musgrave is a senior lecturer in the department of pharmacology at the University of Adelaide who studies Alzheimer's disease. He also writes for Panda's Thumb, a blog about evolution.

A SCHOONER OF SCIENCE

<http://aschoonerofscience.com>

Captain Skellet is the alter-ego of a bright, young rising star of science communication from Norwood with a degree in science (molecular and drug design) from the University of Adelaide. This year Captain Skellet is studying for a Graduate Diploma in Science Communication from the Australian National University in Canberra. Her blog, she says, is "a mix of fun science content, a smattering of pirate quotes and bits of pieces of my life".

"I love talking about science, but I don't get to do it very often in my day-to-day life," she said.

"I'm hoping this will help get me connected to some scientists out there, and some people interested in science, and possibly one day someone will read my blog and say 'wow, she could be our Science Communicator' and then I could talk about science all day long!"

Categories on her blog range from Just for Fun to Drugs, Poisons, and the most popular: Sex and Reproduction. Her page on the five most remarkable animal penises attracts more hits than any other.

"This stuff is pub-science, bits and pieces you can use in an alcohol-related setting to sound smart, impress (or bug) your friends, and pick up people," she said.



TIPS ON BLOGGING

BY CAPTAIN SKELLET

Blog: The catchy name for a "web log" of stories and pictures.

Set up a free blog: Try blogger.com or wordpress.com

Attract readers: Comment on other blogs, add blogs to your blog-roll and ask to be added on theirs.

Spread the word: List with blogcatalog.com, delicious.com and stumbleupon.com. Start a Twitter account and set it to automatically

tweet your blog posts (install the Tweetable plugin on Wordpress). Post links to your Facebook, MySpace, Bebo and LinkedIn etc.

Look sharp: Write catchy titles, use eye-catching pictures and write in small paragraphs. Internet users have a very short attention span - grab their attention quickly.

Manage comments: Install a spam filter such as Akismet on Wordpress, or enable word verification on Blogger. Check comments, delete spam, respond to people who write negative comments, but don't be rude.