



# To Blog or Not to Blog?

That is the Question



Him: I think I'll put a little something on my blog about this.  
All my fans are going to be very interested in my experience of having this shake.  
Her: You mean your mom?  
Him: (defensively) Well, yea, well, um, she's one of the readers.  
Her: I think she's THE reader.  
Him: Well, no, she promised to tell her neighbor about it, so...  
Her: (sarcastically) Oh! Your Mom's Neighbor!  
Him: Yea.



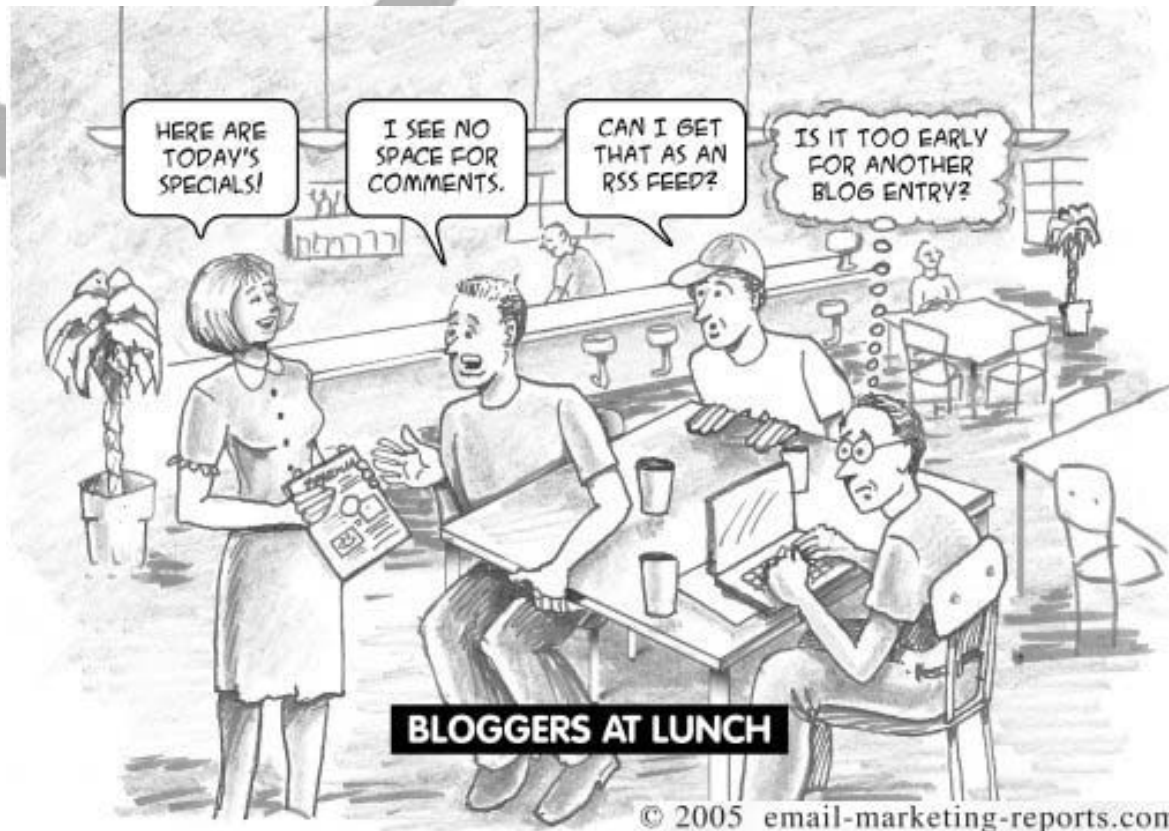
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*“Do I need to remind you that I  
have a huge Internet following?”*

Blogs have moved far beyond the “personal diary” model. They are now a critical component to the growing number of online offerings supplied by traditional media, which is moving towards full integration of multimedia formats.

EG: *Washington Post, New York Times, USA Today, etc.*



## The scientific media has also joined the trend:

- \* [SEED Science blogs](#)
- \* [Nature Network blogs](#)
- \* Wired (and Wired Science TV series)
- \* NPR's Science Friday
- \* Scientific American
- \* New Scientist
- \* Discover/Discovery News
- \* [Bloggingheads.tv's](#) Science Saturdays

And so have a few nonprofits! EG, Physics Central (an APS-sponsored Website) now has its own blog, Physics Buzz, and a section devoted to the physics blogosphere.

There is now an annual Science Blogging Conference held in North Carolina. And an annual self-published “Best of Science Blogs” anthology!



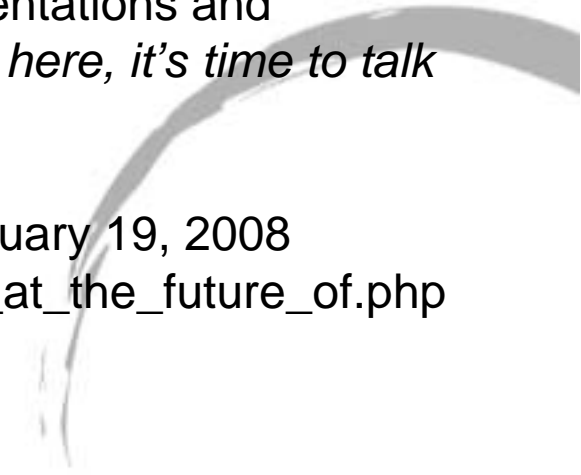


## Matthew Nisbet, Framing Science blog:

“The future will be online, in film and/or multimedia, merging reporting with synthesis, analysis, personal narrative, and opinion. The goal will be to inform but also to persuade and mobilize. And most importantly, it will be non-profit, sponsored by universities, museums, think tanks, foundations, professional societies such as AAAS, or government affiliated organizations such as NSF of the National Academies.

“However, the new forms, modes, styles, and sponsors for science coverage will mean that journalists will have to rethink their standard orientations and definitions of objectivity and balance. *The future is already here, it's time to talk about what it all means.*”

-- *An Early Look at the Future of Science Journalism*, February 19, 2008  
[scienceblogs.com/framing-science/2008/02/an\\_early\\_look\\_at\\_the\\_future\\_of.php](http://scienceblogs.com/framing-science/2008/02/an_early_look_at_the_future_of.php)



# What's all the fuss about?

Why are blogs such a powerful medium for communication?

- \* **Highly interactive.** Open comment sections where readers can critique, agree, or add elements to the discussion, and the author can in turn respond. (Traditional letters to the editor seem awfully dry in comparison.)
- \* **Easy-to-use** software/server platforms, many of them free. (EG, Blogger, Livejournal)
- \* **Highly flexible format** that can be tailored to the tastes and objectives of the blogger. Allows for optimal individual expression and creativity.



## A blog can be anything you want it to be!

EG, let's tour a random sampling of physics blogs:

- \* Technical discussions among professional physicists

[The N-Category Café](#) (John Baez)

- \* Amusing news items about the latest papers on arXiv

[The ArXiv Blog](#) (anonymous “KFC”)

- \* A group of physicists chatting about science, life, culture

[Cosmic Variance](#) (Sean Carroll, Joanne Hewett, etc.)

“Physics for the rest of us”: the populist approach

[Cocktail Party Physics](#) (Jennifer Ouellette)

## A few more well-known physics blogs:

Asymptotia (Clifford Johnson)

[Backreaction](#) ([Sabine H.](#) and Stefen Scherer)

Biocurious (group blog)

Dynamics of Cats (Stein Sigurdsson)

Entropy Bound (Peter Steinberg)

Information Processing (Steve Hsu)

Jon's Travel Adventures (Jonathan Shock)

Life as a Physicist (Gordon Watts)

Mutable Matter (group blog)

Not Even Wrong (Peter Woit)

Often in Error (anonymous "UF")

[The Quantum Pontiff](#) (Dave Bacon)

The Reference Frame (Lubos Motl)

Shtetl-Optimized (Scott Aaronson)

Science After Sunclipse (Blake Stacey)

[Uncertain Principles](#) (Chad Orzel)



*“Dude, that’s an awful lot of bookmarks!”*  
Fortunately, there are now blogreaders and RSS feeds.  
EG: [Bloglines](#), Google Reader



*“That’s still a lot of individual blogs to read every single day. Some of us have lives, you know...”*

Aggregate feeds can help lighten the load:  
EG: [Mixed States](#), Science Blogs combined feed



*“WELL, YES, WE COULD READ YOUR BLOG... OR YOU COULD JUST TELL US ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL DAY.”*

## Blogosphere has its own viral culture:

“Carnivals”: collections of submitted blogposts on common themes

“Blogthings”: Polls, quizzes, etc.

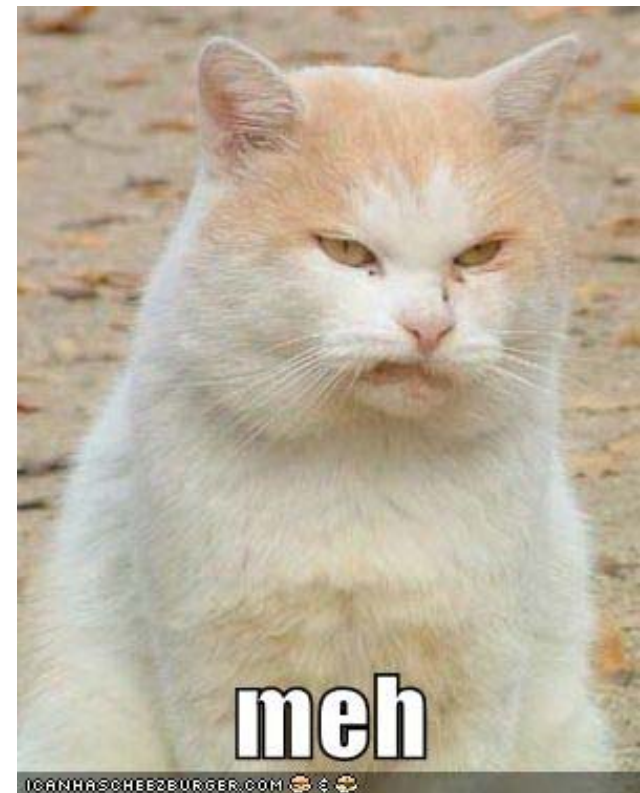
YouTube: users can upload video clips, often homemade.

-- “You Suck at Photoshop”

Humorous memes:

-- LOLcats

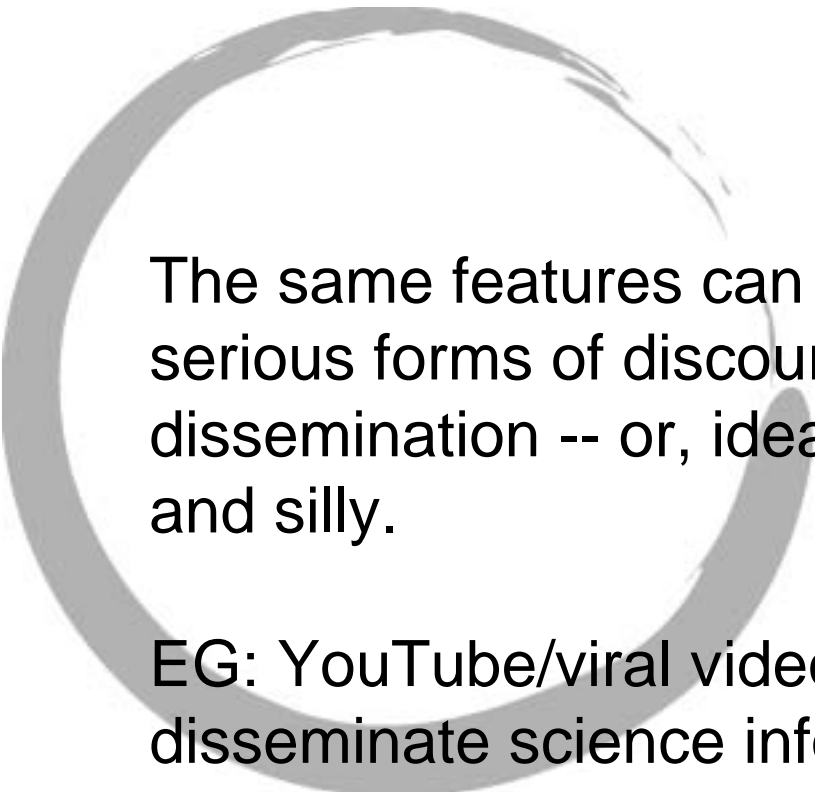
-- Demotivational posters



“On second thought, let’s not go to Camelot. It is a silly place.” -- *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*

Can scientists really take the blogosphere seriously?





The same features can be just as easily used for more serious forms of discourse and information dissemination -- or, ideally, a balance between serious and silly.

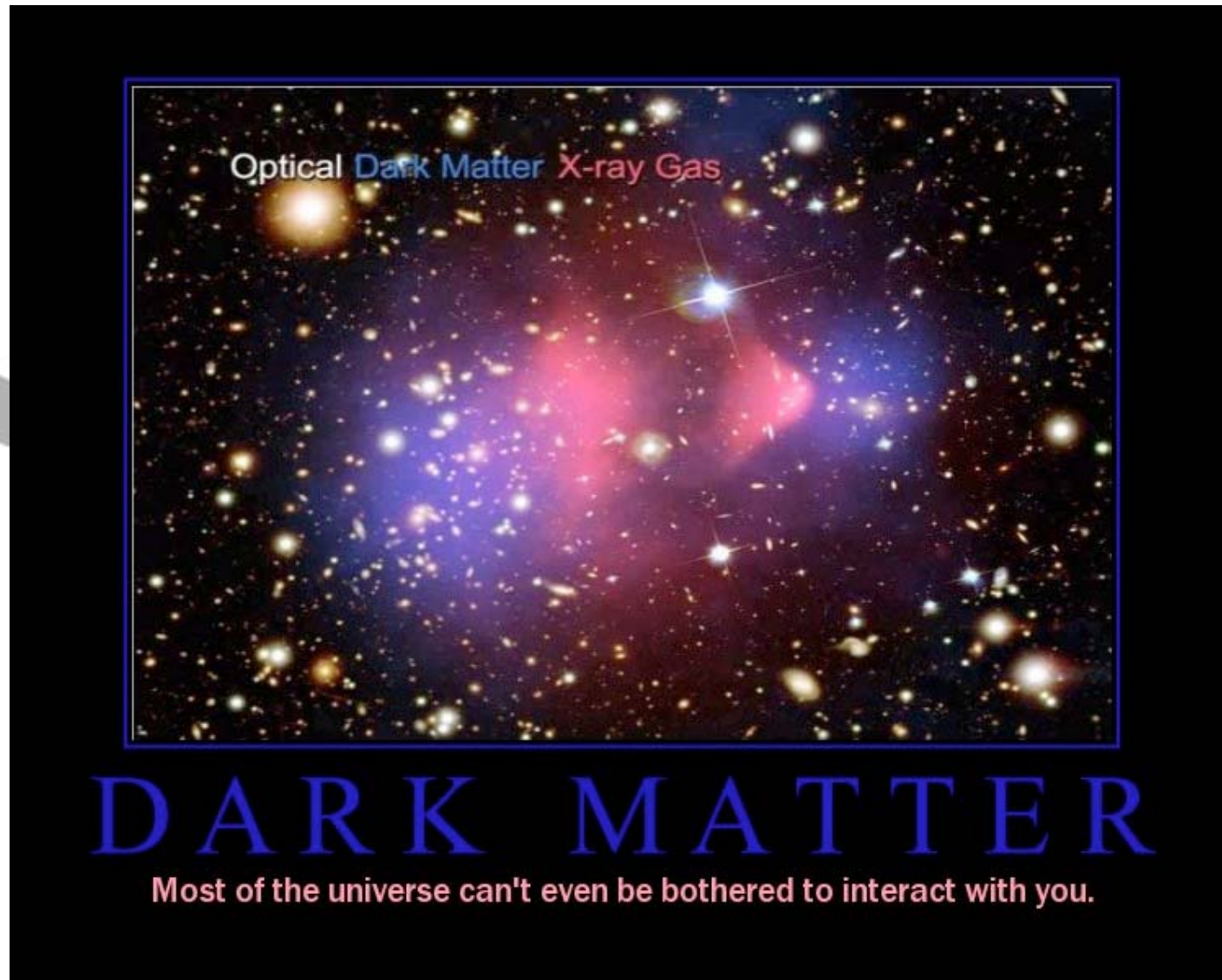
EG: YouTube/viral videos can be used to record and disseminate science information: public talks, or videotaped lab experiments:

-- TED Talks: [Murray Gell-Mann](#), “Beauty and Truth in Physics”

-- Harry Swinney et al., University of Texas, Austin  
Water and [corn starch experiment](#)



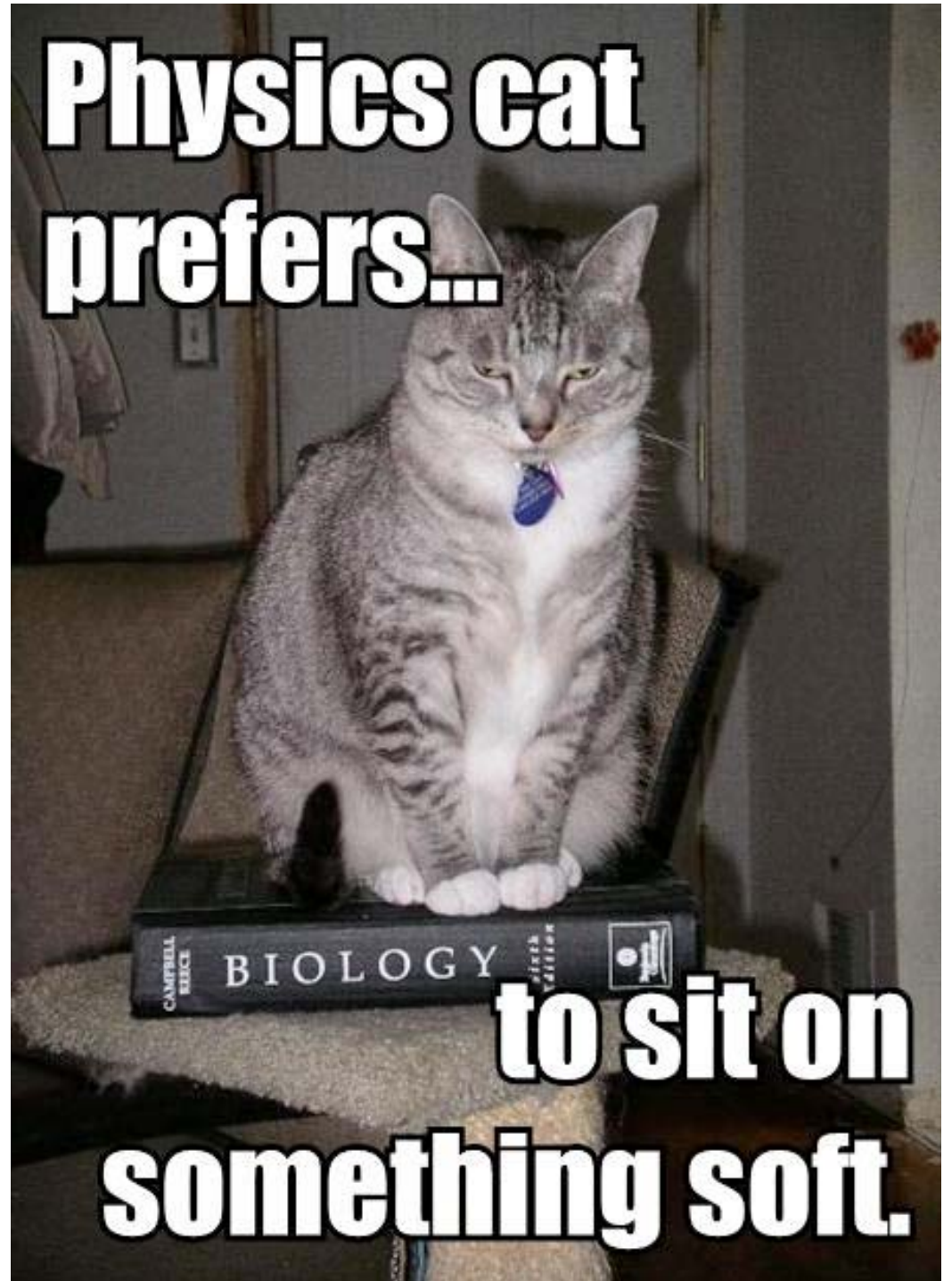
Physicists can be silly sometimes, too -- and that's a good thing! Accessible to a broader audience.





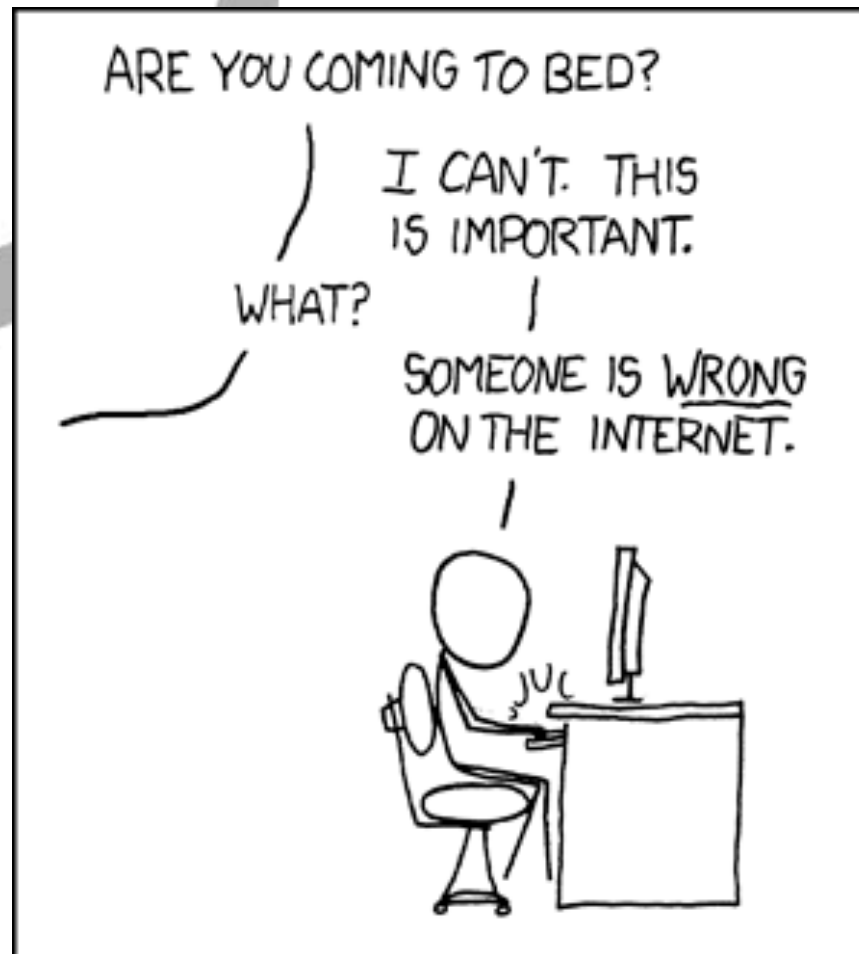


**Science LOLcats!**



## WHY WE NEED BLOGGY SCIENTISTS:

Blogs can be used to explain basic (or not so basic) physics concepts. They can also be an excellent forum for correcting misinformation.



\* **D-Wave Controversy**

Company made over-hyped claims about having built the first operating quantum computer. Scott Aaronson publicly challenged those claims on Shtetl-Optimized. The result was more accurate subsequent reportage.

\* ***Wired's* questionable coverage of cold fusion**

Debunked on Cocktail Party Physics.

\* **The “String Wars”**

Guest post by Joe Polchinski on Cosmic Variance

\* **Garrett Lisi’s “Theory of Everything”**

Media fell in love with “surfer dude physicist” narrative. Most of the major physics theory blogs had lively discussions about this.

\* **General debunking of superstition/pseudoscience**

Sean Carroll wrote a lengthy blog post on Cosmic Variance about why telekinesis violates the laws of physics.

## **A few more pearls of wisdom from Matt Nisbet:**

“A blog is not like a press release, ie, relaying carefully planned information one way to a targeted audience.... Rather, a blog is a two-way communication and involves daily and hourly community building with readers and stakeholders. This often means being willing lose control of a message, or more precisely, to have a community of readers respond to and re-purpose the content of the original post.”

“One fear in launching a blog is the generation of misinformation and inaccuracy.... Yet science blogs, if well run, have a established a pretty good track record in building a community of readers who engage in self-correction of false or misleading information.” [EG: RealClimate, Wikipedia]

“If science organizations are not blogging about their reports, their press releases, their activities, and the implications, other bloggers surely will be. Science organizations, by not having blogs, lose the ability to respond to and engage with the growing influence of the blogosphere on public discourse and understanding, not to mention the inaccuracies and negative attention already featured in traditional media.”




**CAVEAT: The blogosphere is not an online Utopia.  
There are definitely downsides:**

EG: Comment threads can get ugly. Cultivate a thick skin!

- Anonymity means people aren't as careful about what they say, and how they say it. Flame wars can break out.
- SPAMbots
- Trolls (often obscene)
- Crackpots
- Sometimes, the stupid, it burns...

The blogger sets the tone of discourse and can steer the “conversation” by lightly “moderating” the comment section. Think of it as inviting guests into your home: you have the right to boot obnoxious drunks or unruly boors.

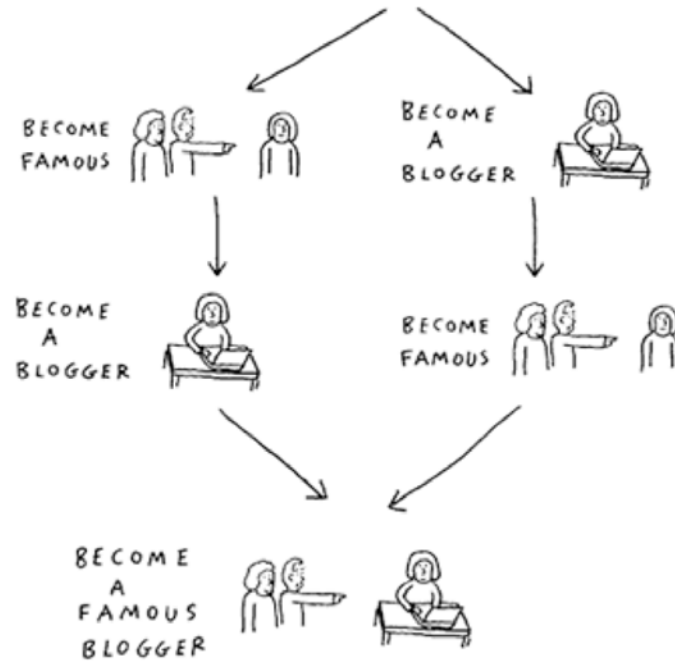
If you do this, expect that some people will accuse you of “censorship.” Tell them to start their own damn blog!



Bloggers should never forget they are posting to a public forum. People will read it, and hold you accountable. You can become “famous” for the wrong reasons.

HOW TO BECOME A FAMOUS BLOGGER

THERE ARE TWO MAIN ROUTES



CartoonChurch.com

**BOTTOM LINE:** Don't post anything you wouldn't want your boss, advisor or your mom to read -- chances are, they will read it!

*“Okay, maybe I’ll try it. How do I start a blog?”*

Lots of hosting platforms and software:

EG: Wordpress, Typepad, Moveable Type, Livejournal



We’re going to use Blogger -- a platform so easy to use, even my cat can do it!

No, really.....



**STEP 1:** Blogger is now linked to [Gmail](#), so first, I set up an email account for KITP: [kitp08@gmail.com](mailto:kitp08@gmail.com)

**STEP 2:** Set up blogging profile

**STEP 3:** Create your blog!

-- We need a name for our blog: eg, “KITP08” or “Equations of State” Other suggestions?

-- Also need to decide on various settings

**STEP 4:** Write the first post!





## How do you get “plugged in”?

**Hyperlinks and Trackbacks:** People link back and forth to share and comment on interesting posts, news stories, etc.

If you get linked by Slashdot or Boing Boing, eg, congratulations! You’ve arrived! Also, brace yourself for the sudden tidal wave of traffic. Many a server has been known to crash from the onslaught.

**Blogrolls:** Most sidebars have lists of other blogs.

**Comments section** has field for leaving URLs.

**Carnivalia:** Submit your posts to topical carnivals.

Technology

REMEMBER WHEN THAT TIRESOME OLD DRUNK  
USED TO SIT AND BORE US TO TEARS WITH  
HIS COCKAMAMIE THEORIES AND  
INSANE OPINIONS?

AND THEN,  
THANK GOD,  
HE GOT HIS  
OWN BLOG.



**DANZIGER**  
NYTS/CWS May 25 2005 (2405)