New Views on News and Research

THIS WEEK, SCIENCE UNVEILS TWO PROJECTS AIMED AT MAKING OUR CONTENT MORE USEFUL and accessible amid today’s information glut: a revamp of the News section to provide a faster launch into the week’s top stories, and a prototype of some new ideas for our online articles, on which we seek your feedback.

For 20 years, Science’s News section has included a page called Random Samples, an eclectic mix of brief items about science and the scientific community. Reader surveys have consistently shown that it is one of the most-read features in the magazine. Starting with this issue (see p. 382), we are expanding and refocusing the type of coverage that has made Random Samples so popular. Each week, the News section will open with three or four pages of brief items under the heading News of the Week. The aim is to give busy readers a quick take on the important events in the world of science. It will include a roundup of the top stories in science policy, written from our far-flung bureaus: Washington, DC; Cambridge, UK; Paris; Berlin; Tokyo; Beijing; New Delhi; and São Paulo. We will bring you news of scientists making headlines and present the bottom line on newly published research papers. In the tradition of Random Samples, we will also include items that are offbeat, whimsical, or just plain interesting—quotes, factoids, striking images. News of the Week will be edited by Lauren Schenkman, who has been editing Random Samples since the tragic death last year of the page’s long-time editor Constance (Tancy) Holden. The items will be drawn in part from Science’s daily online coverage of research findings, ScienceNOW, and our science policy blog ScienceInsider (http://news.sciencemag.org).

News of the Week is designed to provide a quick overview of the week’s top events; the rest of the News section focuses beyond the headlines. In a section renamed News & Analysis, our award-winning news team will draw on expert opinion to put the news in context. And the News Focus section will continue to take a broad look at the trends, personalities, and events shaping the world of science. At a time when traditional journalism is under severe pressure, and science reporting is declining in many major media outlets, our goal—and that of our publisher, the American Association for the Advancement of Science—is to provide the best coverage across the sciences and throughout the interface of science with society.

On a different note, we’re also reaching out to our Web readers this week for their fresh, direct input to help us rethink the format and functionality of our online articles. Recently, a staff team from across Science has been exploring a variety of new ideas for Web article content, including a tabbed interface, summary material to help put the article in context, a different treatment for figures and supporting online data, and a variety of other possibilities that we hope will save users time, make online articles more readable and functional, and open up new possibilities for further exploration.

We’ve rolled these ideas into an initial prototype that is posted in a beta version at http://labs.sciencemag.org/. We encourage readers to try out the prototype and leave us their thoughts. What do you like and dislike about this first model? What’s missing that would help you work more efficiently with the content; and what’s distracting? What’s at the top of your own “wish list” for more effectively interacting with scientific content? The prototype is very much “release 0.1”; we plan to incorporate new ideas and adjustments based on your feedback. This process will help us to zero in on a new article interface that’s better tuned to user needs in the crowded and rapidly changing environment for communicating scientific information. Stop by for a look, give us your thoughts and ideas, and become a part of this new undertaking.

— Colin Norman and Stewart Wills
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