

WRITING AND DATA



The current moment is characterized by a fierce public interest in understanding and engaging with new developments in science, especially quantitative and computational science – what can machine learning do and what can it not do? Which social problems can be meaningfully talked about in quantitative terms and what kind of policy conclusions can be drawn from those quantitative descriptions? There is a pressing need, not just for science journalists to interpret and disseminate this kind of information, but for *scientists themselves* to be able to speak directly to the public about what’s happening at the frontiers of research.

This practice is sometimes called “outward-facing science” and it’s essential for making academic research translational. But it requires specialized skills, skills which are not typically taught in our Ph.D. programs and which are acquired by working scientists only by accident.

Jordan Ellenberg, a mathematician who is also a successful writer of bestselling books on quantitative topics for the general public, piloted a writers’ workshop for Ph.D. students in the sciences (especially data science and computer science) in Spring 2022; with the insights gained from that process in hand, he is launching a new first-year course, Writing and Data to be given at UW-Madison for the first time in Fall 2023, which will train first-year undergrads in the dual skills of *critically reading* nontechnical articles involving data, and ably writing data-informed pieces of their own (a key skill there being the critical reading of one’s own work.)

Credits: Jordan Ellenberg (UW-Madison), supported in part by NSF grants DMS-2001200 and DMS-2023239.

Publications: J. Ellenberg, “емкость is Great (Or: What I Learned at the Writing Scientists Workshop)”, *Notices of the Amer. Math. Soc.*, Dec 2022

2022 Workshop: <https://sites.google.com/view/writingscientistsworkshop/home>