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Writing about, and teaching, physics for non-scientists

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Physicists must communicate their knowledge to the general public because, as the American Association for the Advancement of Science puts it, “without a scientifically literate population, the outlook for a better world is not promising.” I’ll discuss what I’ve learned about writing for non-scientists from my physics textbook for non-science college students, *Physics: Concepts and Connections*, now in its fourth edition and in use on 130 campuses, and also from my bi-weekly hometown newspaper column. Lessons learned include the process of organizing and writing a textbook, tips for writing effective prose, dos and don’ts when writing for non-scientists, choice of subject matter, being relevant to the needs of non-scientists, and unifying one’s book through the use of such general themes as “the scientific process,” or “energy.” For real-world relevance, I suggest emphasizing physics-related social topics, and modern and contemporary physics. I highly recommend Michael Alley’s book *The Craft of Scientific Writing*, as well as Strunk and White’s timeless *Elements of Style*.