

# Pitch & Polish Program

**Science Borealis**

ScienceBorealis.ca  
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# PITCH & POLISH

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# Science Borealis: sharing Canada's science stories

Science Borealis is a strong supporter of Canadian science and science writing. Our mission is to provide exposure, platforms, and training to help science communicators share stories about Canadian science.

We work to increase the quality and reach of science communications in Canada by promoting, supporting, and training Canadian science communicators. In addition to our own Borealis Blog, Science Borealis is also the largest aggregator of science blogs in Canada, syndicating over 130 member blogs covering topics from astronomy to zoology. We also partner with like-minded organizations to help experienced and emerging science writers develop and showcase their writing skills.

We are a non-profit corporation powered by volunteers, who contribute over 1,800 hours of their time annually to Science Borealis. Today our full team includes more than 40 people located across Canada, the US, and the UK. We are sponsored by Genome Alberta.

## Borealis Blog

Science Borealis' flagship program is our own Borealis Blog. On this platform, we publish Canadian science stories weekly, exploring topics ranging from Policy & Politics and Science in Society, to Chemistry, Physics, and Biology.

Science Borealis authors contribute nearly 50 posts to the blog every year. These authors include students and creative writers, as well as science graduates, postdocs, and professors from universities across Canada.

The popularity and reach of the Borealis Blog continues to grow. Between January 1 and September 22, 2021, the blog saw more than **330,000 unique page views** from more than **260,000 users**. The Borealis Blog is a major asset to the Pitch & Polish Program: through it, Science Borealis is able to provide a valuable platform for writers to develop their skills and increase their reach to improve public understanding and appreciation for science.

# Pitch & Polish

At Science Borealis, we know that it can be a struggle to communicate technical information to the public. Our mentoring programs help budding science communicators develop their writing skills for lay audiences. This not only helps spread stories of great Canadian science, but also builds valuable career skills.

In the Pitch & Polish Program, groups of 4-10 students pitch their blog post ideas to the science writing mentor leading their program. Over the course of 8-10 weeks, the mentor helps the students refine their pitches and produce, polish, and publish their posts.

Students will receive feedback on their pitches as well as three rounds of one-on-one feedback on their submissions, and professional editing to ensure they can proudly add their post to their portfolio. Our mentors are all seasoned, published science writers and editors who will set the bar high and ensure students successfully rise to the challenge.

Upon successful completion of the program, student posts will be submitted to the Managing Editor of the Borealis Blog. The posts will be considered "evergreen," and will be used to fill gaps in our editorial calendar within a six-month period. Where appropriate, posts may also be shared with our publication partners for cross-posting.

Students retain the rights to their posts and are free to republish them after they appear on the Borealis Blog.

## Fees

The cost of this program is a non-refundable \$250 administrative fee per cohort, plus \$300 per student (both payable in advance). We offer two dates on which students may withdraw for either a full or 50% credit. Our experience suggests that having students cover a small portion of the course fee helps ensure their commitment to completing the program. We assume that the department or institution will manage any student payment contributions.

# Timeline

The schedule outlined below is based on our experience with previous cohorts. However, the program timeline is flexible and can be modified to fit different course schedules and structures.

Week	Task
1	Students participants selected; final numbers provided to Science Borealis. Science Borealis mentor contacts the students.
2	Students submit pitches to mentor. Pitch not received, student removed from program for 100% refund. Students can withdraw by Friday for full refund.
3	Mentor provides response to pitches. Students can request additional feedback.
4	Students submit first draft of article. First draft not received, student removed from program for 50% refund. Students can withdraw by Friday for 50% refund.
5	Mentor provides feedback on first draft.
6	Students submit second draft of article, including 2-4 images with captions and attribution and text for social media posts.
7	Mentor provides feedback on second draft.
8	Students submit third draft of article.
9	Mentor provides feedback on third draft
10	Student & mentor finalize post with images (appropriate attribution and usage rights), any relevant Twitter usernames and hashtags, and related URLs. Posts not finalized by this date will not be published (no refund).

Blog posts will be published within six months of completing the program. Exact timing will depend on the Borealis Blog editorial calendar.

**Interested in participating in Pitch & Polish?  
E-mail us at [contact@scienceborealis.ca](mailto:contact@scienceborealis.ca)**

# The Fine Print

We require at least 4 students per cohort.

Three required deadlines must be met to proceed in and complete the course. Students who do not meet these deadlines will be dropped.

- Pitch deadline: End of Week 2. If missed, student is dropped and 100% of fees are refunded. Also last date to withdraw from the program with full refund.
- First draft deadline: End of Week 4. If missed, student is dropped and 50% of fees are refunded. Also last date to withdraw from the program with 50% refund.
- Final manuscript (with all checklist items) deadline: End of Week 10. If missed, student's piece will not be published and no refund will be given.

Mentor will send weekly emails and one reminder in advance of required deadlines, but will not chase students for submissions.

All pitches and drafts must be completed in Microsoft Word. We will follow protocols for strict version control (i.e., file names to include version numbers and editor initials). Students may not submit "final manuscripts" without going through the editing process.

Students retain the right to cross-post their work on their own blogs after publication on the Borealis Blog.

Science Borealis reserves the right to not publish pieces that do not meet quality standards of the Borealis Blog.

# Previous Cohorts

Over the past five years, Science Borealis has run successful Pitch & Polish Programs in partnership with Simon Fraser University, the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (University of Saskatchewan), and Science Atlantic, among others. Below are links to select posts by Pitch & Polish students.

- [Llama Drama: Research into the Mechanics of Llama Ovulation Reveals a Rare Tumour](#), by Kylie Hutt
- [Treating Mental Health Virtually](#), by Del Ingvaldson
- [Every Stone Has a Story](#), by Katie McCulloch
- [Saving the Planet One Species at a Time](#), by Jennifer Poirier. **This post was selected for cross-posting with our publishing partner, Nature Conservancy of Canada's Landlines blog.**

## Student Feedback

"I had never written for such a broad audience and I learned a lot about the writing and editing processes. Also it was awesome to be able to collaborate with professionals!"

"I really enjoyed the helpful editing process. The editors were thorough, but also helpful and kind. As a first-time writer this was a great experience for me."

"I enjoyed the editing process: there was great communication back and forth between myself and the editor, which made me feel a lot more comfortable about the idea of publishing my writing."

"The guidance was incredibly helpful. It made me pay a lot more attention to who my audience was and helped my piece be more accessible to the general public."

# Meet Our Team

**MONIQUE KEIRAN**



Monique Keiran has been writing about and promoting science for more than 20 years. She has written about dinosaurs and other ancient critters for the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology, the birds and bees for Alberta Parks, all things forest-science related for the Canadian Forest Service, health policy for Alberta Health, and engineering and technology for Engineers and Geoscientists British Columbia. She has written a weekly column – usually on science topics – for the Victoria Times Colonist since 2012. She served as Managing Editor of the Science Borealis Blog from 2017 to 2022.

**ALICE FLEERACKERS**



Alice Fleerackers manages the Science Borealis New Science Communicator programs, including Pitch & Polish. She is an award-winning researcher and writer whose work has appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and *Nautilus*, among other outlets. She holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Publishing, and is currently pursuing a PhD in digital science communication at Simon Fraser University. Over her 8+ years of experience as a professional communicator, she has worked with an array of clients, including book and magazine publishers, literary festivals, career matching platforms, research institutions, and digital marketing agencies.

**CATHERINE DALE**



Catherine Dale is the managing editor of the Science Borealis Blog. A field biologist by trade, she completed her PhD studying bird migration in 2018. Her love of fieldwork inspired her to create the award-winning blog *Dispatches from the Field*, which is syndicated on Science Borealis. Her writing has also appeared on *Landlines*, the Nature Conservancy of Canada's blog, as well as in *Picoides* and *BirdWatch Canada*. From 2020 to 2021, she volunteered as an editor for the Borealis Blog, and she has taught a wide variety of writing courses and workshops.