

**ARI DANIEL | Digital Producer, PBS NOVA, and Freelance Science Reporter
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Degree: When, where, what, and what in?

In 2002, I earned a master of philosophy degree in animal behavior from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, training grey seal pups on various vocalization tasks. I went on to get my PhD in biological oceanography in 2008 from the MIT/Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution Joint Program, studying the movement and vocal behavior of wild Norwegian killer whales.

Did you stay in academia at all, and if so, for how long?

After defending my dissertation, I did a half-time postdoc with my PhD advisor for six months. The other half of the time, I worked on radio and multimedia projects.

How did you go about searching for a job outside of the university setting?

In the final year of graduate school, I discovered that I wanted to tell stories about science on public radio. As I wrapped up my doctorate, I spent some of my time reporting radio stories with the help of transom.org. But upon graduation, I still had very little practical experience reporting and producing stories. I applied for a public radio fellowship, made it to the interview round, but didn't end up receiving it. So I decided to become a freelance science journalist, and started working for a variety of outlets.

Is this the only job (post-academia) that you've had? If not, what else did you do?

I have worked as an independent reporter and producer since finishing my PhD, though my primary responsibilities have

evolved over the last six years. I began by spending a good portion of my time producing a podcast called "Ocean Gazing" for the Centers for Ocean Sciences Education Excellence. Later, I produced a podcast about biodiversity called "One Species at a Time" for the Encyclopedia of Life. I spent a little more than a year as a science reporter for Public Radio International's The World and NOVA. And recently, I've gotten involved in making online science videos and interactive multimedia features for NOVA. In addition to these projects, I have reported stories for a variety of public radio outlets, nonprofit organizations, and academic departments.

What is your current job? What path did you take to get there?

I work as a freelance journalist, specializing in radio and multimedia storytelling about science. My path has involved pitching numerous shows and outlets, developing relationships with individual editors, and consistently trying to move outside of my comfort zone in terms of the medium I'm reporting in, the types of stories that I'm covering, and the logistics required to pull them off.

What did your oceanographic education (or academic career) give you that is useful in your current job?

I credit my PhD program with a lot of the success that I've had as a freelance journalist. First, the network of scientists I came to know as a graduate student provided me with contacts and ideas for some of my stories. As recently as last year, I received a reporting grant to travel to Palau to cover the work of a scientist from the Woods



Hole Oceanographic Institution whom I met through a graduate school contact. Second, the self-discipline and self-scheduling I learned as a PhD student have been invaluable to me as I've had to figure out how to meet deadlines and complete work on a variety of time scales. Third, so far in my professional life, nothing has been as difficult to execute as my dissertation. The logistics, planning, project management, and capacity to break a big project down into smaller pieces as well as the hefty amount of thinking and writing that my dissertation demanded have served me well as I've worked on my radio and multimedia stories. These stories often require coordinating a number of moving parts, synthesizing and organizing those various elements into a coherent whole, and a lot of writing and rewriting.

Is the job satisfying? What aspects of the job do you like best/least?

There have been times as an independent reporter, while working from home, when I've been lonely—when I mused about having a group of colleagues whom I would see regularly and with whom I could eat

lunch. Now, my part-time appointment with NOVA has resolved that problem. And by nature, I get restless when it comes to my work. I like to feel challenged and motivated, which means I'm constantly seeking out new subjects and opportunities to explore.

But overall, I find my job very satisfying. I love the independence that it affords and the way it allows me to stay in touch with a wide swath of topics and people in the fields of science and mathematics. I enjoy meeting new people and hearing about their passions. I adore crawling into corners of the universe that I never would have seen had my interviewees not escorted me there. It's such fun to hear the noises and voices of the world pour into my ears through my microphone.

And I would say the favorite part of my job is finding ways to give voice to the stories we wouldn't otherwise hear, but should. Stories of small discoveries and big insights and deep humanity—from the people and places you'd least expect.

Do you have any recommendations for new grads looking for jobs?

Imagine what you want to be doing, and just start doing it. You're a unique offering—a blend of your background, your interests, your passions, and your personality. Find a community or an organization that celebrates and values that blend, and do what you treasure doing. Build the door, and then walk through it. 🌀