As I was approaching the halfway point of my last postdoctoral position, I felt increasingly uncertain about my future. I loved my research, but what would happen when the contract ended? Would I be able to stay in academia? Did I even want to?

One day, bored on my commute, I wrote a sciku inspired by Matt Ridley’s book *Nature via Nurture*:

“Character entwined/locked in sinuous chain or/perhaps blooms from birth?”

As I discovered the satisfaction of compressing a complex subject into an evocative micro-poem, the idea for The Sciku Project struck: to provide an online platform where scientists could promote their work through haiku. I wanted to create a website where people could explore, contribute, and maybe even learn something new via these nuggets of science.

My motives were not purely altruistic. Building the website also seemed like a great way to learn new skills and engage in science communication—sensible moves at my career crossroads. If I remain in academia, the project will enhance my CV. If I change my career trajectory, then I will have gained some useful transferable skills. I’ve learned the basics of website construction and spent time considering aesthetics and page readability. These are not issues I’d normally be concerned about, but learning about navigation and usability has helped me improve my scientific presentations. Through The Sciku Project, I’ve also practiced science writing, discovered social media, and gotten involved with public engagement.

Perhaps most important, the project has reignited my love for science and helped me rediscover my motivation. I tend to get wrapped up in my research, head down and focused on the details. When a project comes to an end, I find myself adrift, wondering what to do next. In an ideal world, I would plan concurrently, charting my next project while still working on my current one. In an ideal world, I’d keep abreast of research outside of my immediate study area. But the real world is full of time-sinks, and it leaves little room for luxuries such as wider reading.

Yet wider reading is what inspired me to become a biologist in the first place. Through creating The Sciku Project, I’ve come to appreciate that this is what motivates me. By combining my appetite for interesting science with my more creative side, I’ve given myself an incentive to look up from the lab bench and rediscover why I got into this career in the first place.

The Sciku Project has reminded me that there’s a wider world of research out there. It has enabled me to engage with my career in a new and stimulating way. It keeps me going between projects when I’m feeling lost and adrift. Having to post regular updates of sciku, either ones I have written or submissions from others, could have been a burden. Instead, it helps keep me striding forward when the path gets rough.

Andrew M. Holmes is a visiting lecturer at the University of Chester in the United Kingdom and the founder of The Sciku Project (thesciuku.com). Send your career story to SciCareerEditor@aaas.org.

“One Christmas, my aunt Barbara gave me a poetry book. Nestled among the pages of verse was a single haiku. For those as unfamiliar as I was, haiku is a short form of Japanese poetry presented in the West across three lines of five, seven, and five syllables. Haiku are quick to consume, but they linger in the mind. Frequently, they concern the natural world—one famous haiku describes a frog jumping into a pond—so the leap to scientific haiku, or “sciku,” is easy. (In fact, author Mary Soon Lee published a periodic table of sciku, with a verse for every element, in the 4 August issue of *Science*.) Sciku are an easy-to-digest form of public engagement. And I have found that writing sciku can be a form of career therapy, forcing me to view research through a different lens and gain a novel perspective on my own work.”
Science in 17 syllables
Andrew M. Holmes

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