How to find stories for THE CONVERSATION
Good Conversation stories

- Explanation of topic in the news
- Comment or analysis of events in the news
- New or recent research
- Answer to an interesting question
- Broad topic with news-peg or list format
How to launch a rocket into space ... and then land it on a ship at sea

On Friday 8 April 2016, SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket launched a mission to deliver a spacecraft called Dragon, with its payload of supplies and experiments, on a trajectory towards the International Space Station.
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Litvinenko poisoning: polonium explained

January 21, 2016 11:50am GMT

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Disclosure statement

Simon Cotton does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.

The murder of former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko was one of the most high-profile

Polonium is found naturally in uranium ore. (Re: Geostatistics, CC BY-NC)
The murder of former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko was one of the most high-profile
The success of Tesla's Model 3 goes far beyond its affordability.
The success of Tesla’s Model 3 goes far beyond its affordability

April 8, 2016 1:43pm BST

Tesla Motors has already established its electric cars as fast, well-sized and capable of competing with petrol cars in how far they can go without needing a recharge. Now, the US firm run by Elon Musk appears to have countered the final remaining negative perception of electric vehicles: price.

Following its April launch, Tesla’s new Model 3 generated over 250,000 orders in just a few months.
How we built a robot that can evolve – and why it won’t take over the world

The latest research on robots is often described as if it were a step on the inexorable march toward a robot apocalypse straight out of the Terminator films. While there are risks in developing artificial intelligence that need to be taken seriously, reacting to every development in robotics with undue fear could stifle research and creativity.

For example, creating artificial intelligence that can design future versions of itself – effectively a robot that can reproduce and evolve – might help us discover innovations that humans might not consider on their own. It would need to be carefully monitored and controlled but...
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Research

Have scientists really found something harder than diamond?

January 19, 2016 12:01am GMT

Ask most people what the hardest material on Earth is and they will probably answer "diamond". Its name comes from the Greek word adamas (ἀδάμας) meaning "unbreakable" or "invincible" and is from where we get the word "adamant". Diamond’s hardness gives it incredibly cutting abilities that – along with its beauty – have kept it in high demand for thousands of years.

Modern science has spent decades looking for cheaper, harder and more practical alternatives and every few years the news brings the creation of a new "world’s hardest material".
Have scientists really found something harder than diamond?
January 19, 2016 1.24pm GMT

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Questions
What’s it like to see auroras on other planets?

November 9, 2015 3.16pm GMT

Witnessing an aurora first-hand is a truly awe-inspiring experience. The natural beauty of the northern or southern lights captures the public imagination unlike any other aspect of space weather. But auroras aren’t unique to Earth and can be seen on several other planets in our solar system.

An aurora is the impressive end result of a series of events that starts at the sun. The sun constantly emits a stream of charged particles known as the solar wind into the depths of the solar system. When these particles reach a planet, such as Earth, they interact with the...
The five greatest balls of fire over Earth

We live on a moving target in a cosmic firing range. Each day, the Earth is bombarded by about a hundred tonnes of space debris. It may sound alarming, but this is really nothing to worry about. Most of the objects that fall towards our planet are pretty small – typically about the size of a grain of sand or even smaller – and burn up in the upper atmosphere.
The five greatest balls of fire over Earth
February 26, 2016 11.53am GMT

Chelyabinsk meteor. Nikita Prikhodov/wikimedia, CC BY-ND

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Five ways nanotechnology is securing your future

The past 70 years have seen the way we live and work transformed by two tiny inventions. The electronic transistor and the microchip are what make all modern electronics possible, and since their development in the 1940s they’ve been getting smaller. Today, one chip can contain as many as a billion transistors. If cars had followed the same development pathways, we would now be able to drive them at 100,000mph and they would cost just $3 each.

But to keep this progress going we need to be able to create circuits on the extremely small.
The past 70 years have seen the way we live and work transformed by two tiny inventions. The electronic transistor and the microchip are what make all modern electronics possible, and since their development in the 1940s they’ve been getting smaller. Today, one chip can contain as many as 5 billion transistors. If cars had followed the same development pathway, we would now be able to drive them at 300,000mph and they would cost just £3 each.

But to keep this progress going we need to be able to create circuits on the extremely small, quantum scale. That’s where nanotechnology comes in.
Things we like

- New
- Unusual
- Fun
- Surprising
- Universal

- Dramatic
- Explainers
- Questions
- Lists
- Stories

- Timely
We want to hear about:

- Your opinion on something you read or heard in the news, *as soon as possible*
- New research from you or others
- Ideas for 'big picture' pieces or analysis
- Important research or newsworthy events that are NOT being talked about
- New angles or approaches to stories
How to write for us

- Respond to expert request
- Follow the news
- Tell us about your latest research
- Pitch an idea
One-line test

- You know you've got a good story if you can summarise it in one sentence
- To do this you need to work out what the right angle is
- Identify the most important or interesting thing to your readers
Example

- The legends of the Kraken and historical mentions.
- The Kraken's origin as sightings of giant squids on the northern seas.
- Biology of the giant squid (genus Architeuthis).
- Kraken in popular culture.

The real-life origins of the legendary Kraken
Example

Doomsday scenarios surrounding a robot apocalypse abound in popular science fiction, from Battlestar Galactica to Terminator. But working with machine intelligence in the lab is a methodical practice that can uncover innovative designs that can help humanity and enable us to learn how our own intelligence came about. My recent work has included designing a ‘mother’ robot that can manufacture its own ‘children’ without human intervention. In the process it uses principles from nature, including natural selection, to produce incrementally superior generations that improve in performance on a specific task.

How we built a robot that can evolve - and why it won't take over the world
Example

I have interviews from Paris, Berlin and Barcelona where I interviewed digital activists in the last six months. There is a quieter digital activism of building platforms for civic purposes and cultural citizenship. Tech/artists involved in projects for digital inclusion against surveillance etc, which does not involve cyberattacks à la anonymous or just using social media to mobilise protests but builds community and is for public use as digital commons.

How a new wave of digital activists is changing society