



An atmospheric scientist studies how the air behaves, and how that behavior produces all of the types of weather we experience on Earth.

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Important Scientist Characteristics

Creativity and critical thinking are important. Creativity enables me to consider questions from different directions, and to make up or think through “what if” questions. I need critical thinking skills to work through the tangle of physical processes involved in the things I study.

Example of a simple research question I have tried to

answer: There were two fires in Missouri with almost identical surface weather and forest fuels, but only one fire was very intense. Were there any unseen weather conditions that might have explained the difference in fire behavior?

Technology or equipment used in research: Most of my work is done using powerful computers and computer models that simulate the atmosphere. The most exciting/fun piece of equipment I’ve used was a radio-controlled hobby airplane. We flew the hobby airplane over a prescribed fire to measure temperature and moisture in the smoke.

• Most Exciting Discovery

• I read all of the science papers
• about my field that I could find
• from the last 100 years.
• I discovered many things people
• think are “new ideas” are really
• very old, and there are hundreds
• of ideas people have suggested
• but no one has ever pursued.
• A lot of those unexplored ideas
• are really good and many could
• be studied easily.

• **When did you know you wanted
to be a scientist?** I knew I wanted
• to be a scientist when I was a
• freshman in high school. I really
• enjoyed my geology class, and
• every science class after that
• was even more interesting.

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/research/people/bpotter>