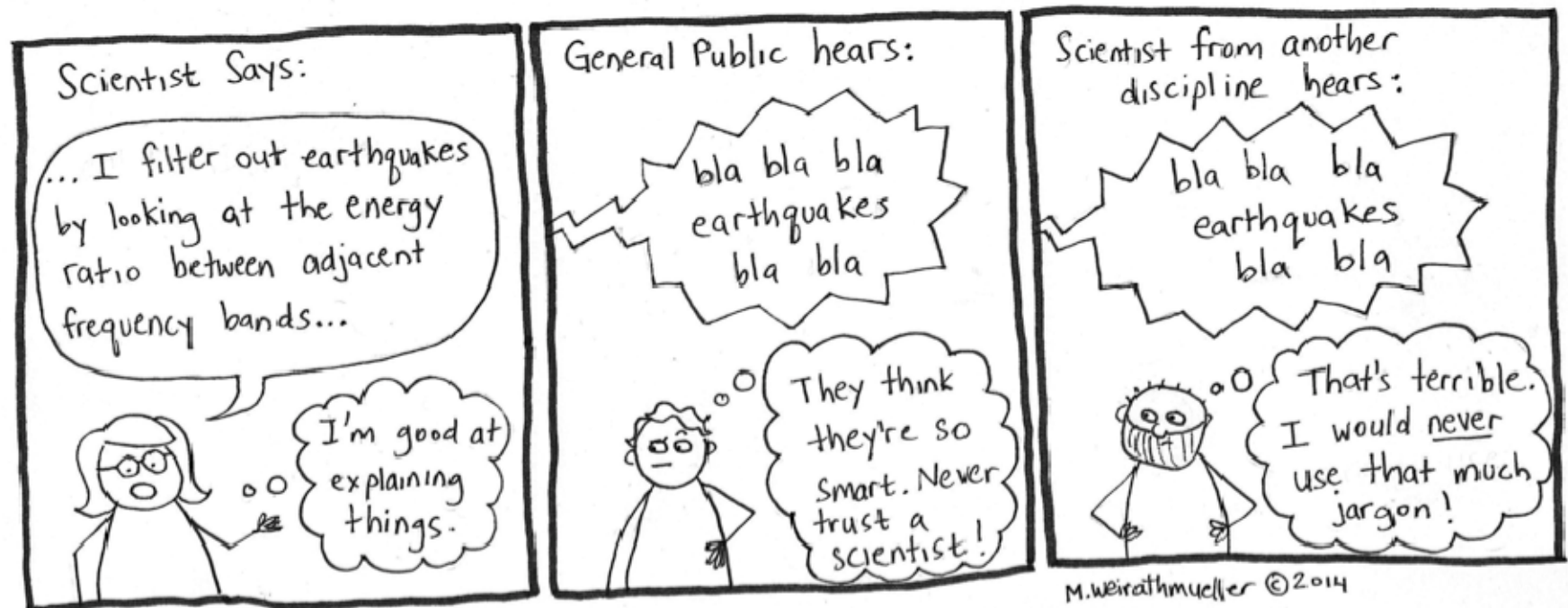


# Conducting an Interview

HOW TO EXTRACT LAY LANGUAGE FROM SCIENTISTS



## Why can't scientists let go of jargon?

- It's how they talk
- Don't want to be imprecise
- Don't really understand what people do and don't know
- Don't care if people understand their work





Why do you need the scientist to speak well?

You can translate their science better than they can in some cases, so who needs them?



Why do you need the scientist to speak well?

- You want to quote them



Why do you need the scientist to speak well?

- You want to quote them
- You need their analogies/descriptions



Why do you need the scientist to speak well?

- You want to quote them
- You need their analogies/descriptions
- You want the scientists to seem like real people

Scientists don't use lay language with other scientists  
SO...

You can't appear to be a scientist







## Exercise: What is the role of the quote?

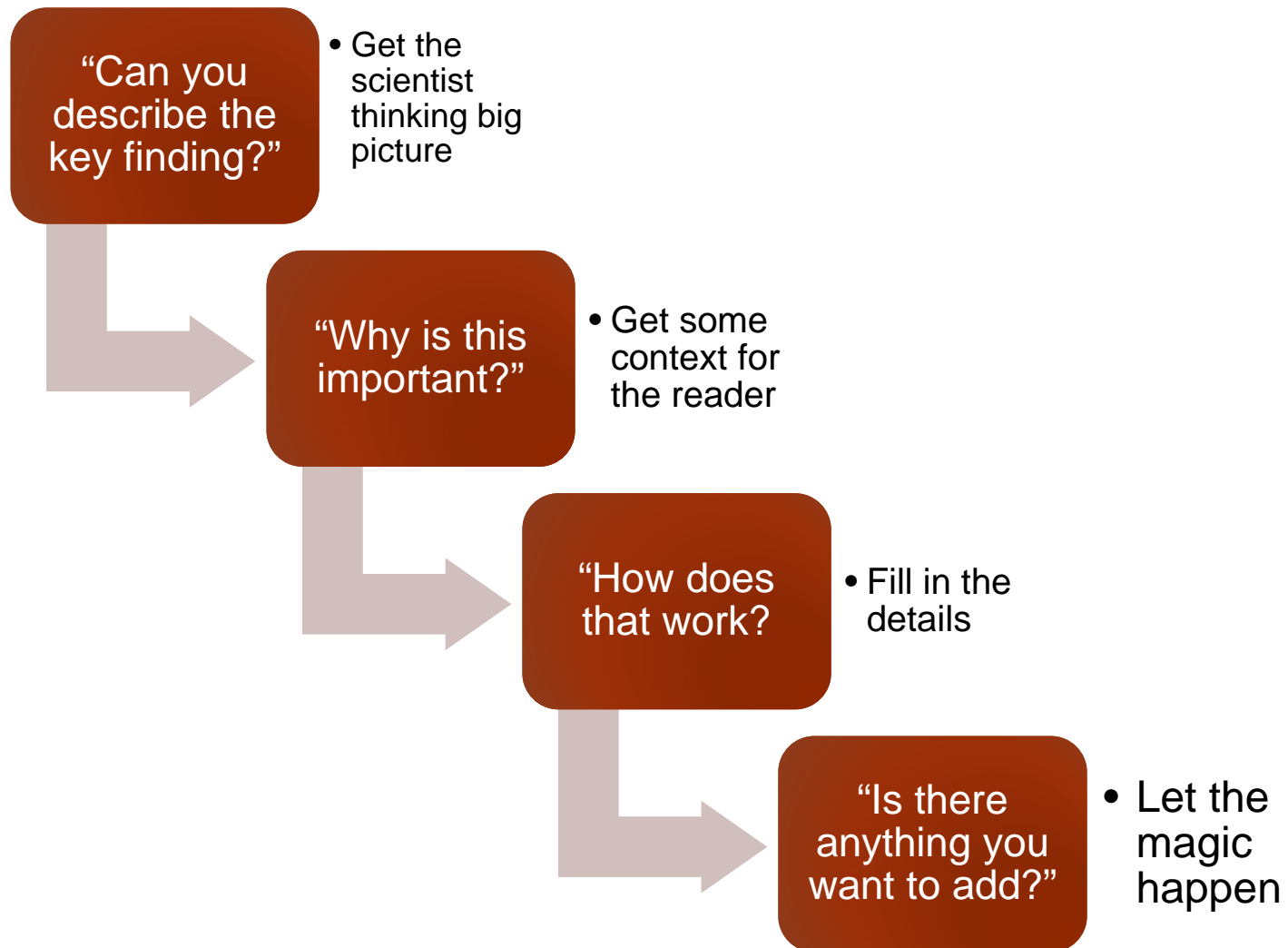
Take a look at the stories and discuss what role the quotes play

## What questions elicited those quotes?



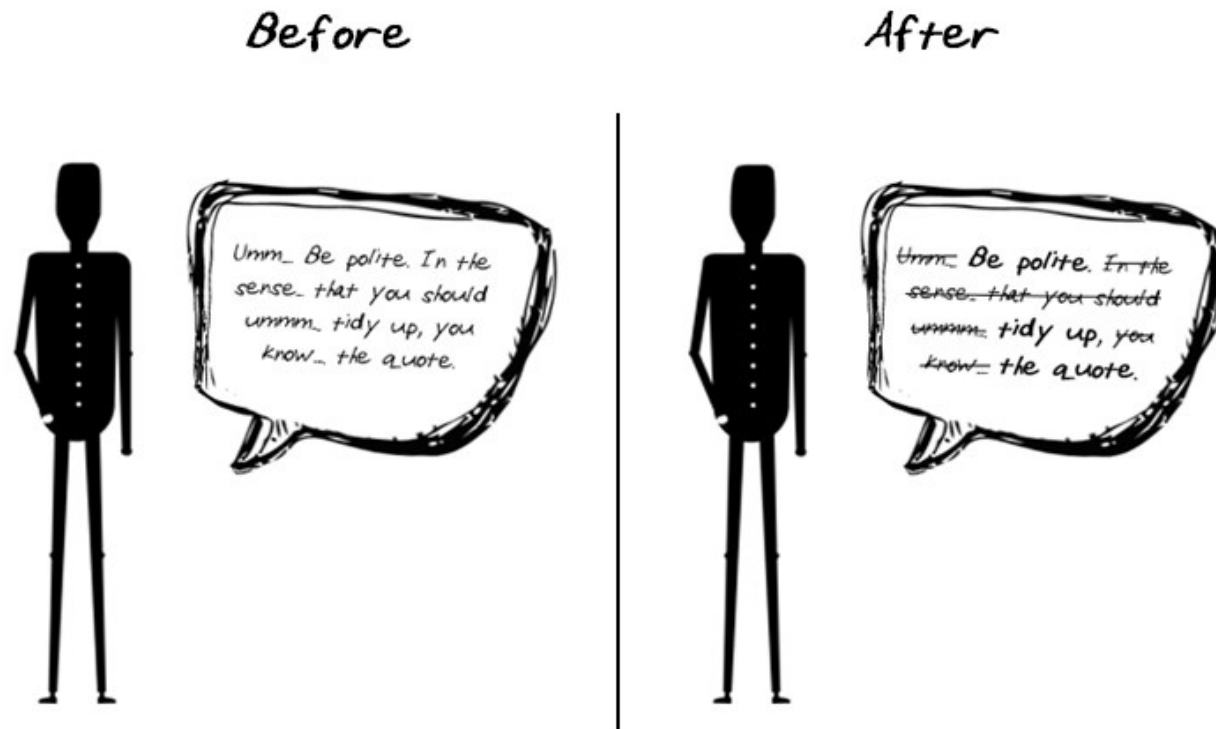
- What is the significance of this work?
- Who will benefit from this work?
- What did you think when you got the result?
- What made you look into this question?

## Anatomy of an interview



## Using the quote

The general rule of thumb is to use a quote exactly as it was said, but...



Poynter.

Icon by matthijs de block via The Noun Project

Stanford University



## Using the quote

From the Poynter Institute (Roy Peter Clark):

### **1. Be truthful.**

Quotes should be faithful to the words and intended meaning of the speaker. My goal is not to trap a source into making a mistake. It is to make public a meaningful statement.

## Using the quote

From the Poynter Institute (Roy Peter Clark):

**2. Adding language to quotes is more dangerous than taking stuff out, although both can distort meaning.**

Distortion by subtraction is necessary in the very selection of quotes.  
Distortion by addition can get you fired.

## Using the quote

From the Poynter Institute (Roy Peter Clark):

### **3. Because of language prejudice on race and class, be careful with slang and dialect.**

In "The Elements of Style," E.B. White advises "Do not use dialect unless your ear is good...and you are a devoted student of the tongue you hope to reproduce."

## Using the quote

From the Poynter Institute (Roy Peter Clark):

### **4. That said, the American language is a great treasure.**

If everyone you quote sounds like you, your readers are in trouble. Listen to NPR to get a feel for how skilled reporters and editors reveal the diversity of American speech.



## Using the quote

From the Poynter Institute (Roy Peter Clark):

### **5. Be polite.**

Tidy up the quote rather than make someone sound stupid. Too many journalists have a double standard: they may clean up the mayor, but not the cranky old lady complaining to City Council.



## Exercise: interview each other

Take 10 minutes to interview another student. Write down a quote that would help explain the research or add color to a story

Topic: “Tell me about your research.”

## Q&A: Not exactly one long quote

A Q&A is a good option when:

- you have a scientist who speaks really well
- the person is the story
- the point of the story is to get that person's opinion
- you don't have a lot of time (Q&A eliminates the need to write a lede, nut graph, clever analogies, etc)
- you want to help your readers understand a new process or decision

## What a Q&A is NOT

A literal transcript of the answers

(Because people aren't actually that interesting)



## What a Q&A IS

A more succinct, more engaging version of what the person actually said.



## Interviewing for a Q&A

Like any other interview except:

- Know in advance what you want the story arc to be
- Have more questions prepared than what you will eventually use
- Be open to detours, but be thinking about how they fit in to your arc
- Be listening to make sure the person answers the full question. You won't be able to write in context or fill in details.



## Example

So that problem was waiting to be solved and was solved because there were two people in different fields who decided to work together. And they got money in the form of a seed grant and actually the students also had fellowships to really launch the project.



## Example

~~So that problem was waiting to be solved~~  
~~and was solved because there were two~~  
~~people in different fields who decided to~~  
~~work together. And they got money in~~  
~~the form of a seed grant and actually the~~  
~~students also had fellowships to really~~  
[Seed funding to] launch the project.



## Exercise: Edit the transcript

Use the transcript to create an answer to the question “Why are people suddenly taking an interest in how to propagate the Bio-X concept?”

Tips:

- Combine parts of sentences where helpful
- Try to use the interviewees sentence structure and language
- Clean up meandering thoughts, partial sentences
- Condense significantly



Exercise: Compare to final



## Assignment

Conduct a ~15 minute interview with a friend, lab member, or classmate on a single question. For example:

- What interests you about this field?
- What was the key finding in a recent paper/poster?

Write a short answer to the question based on the transcript.

## Tomorrow

### **Science journalists:**

<https://twitter.com/nytscience/lists/nyt-science-section>

@NeilTyson

@SciFri

@NPRScience

### **Scientists:**

@Pknoepfler

Blog: [www.ipscell.com](http://www.ipscell.com)

@RosieRedfield

<http://rrresearch.fieldofscience.com/>