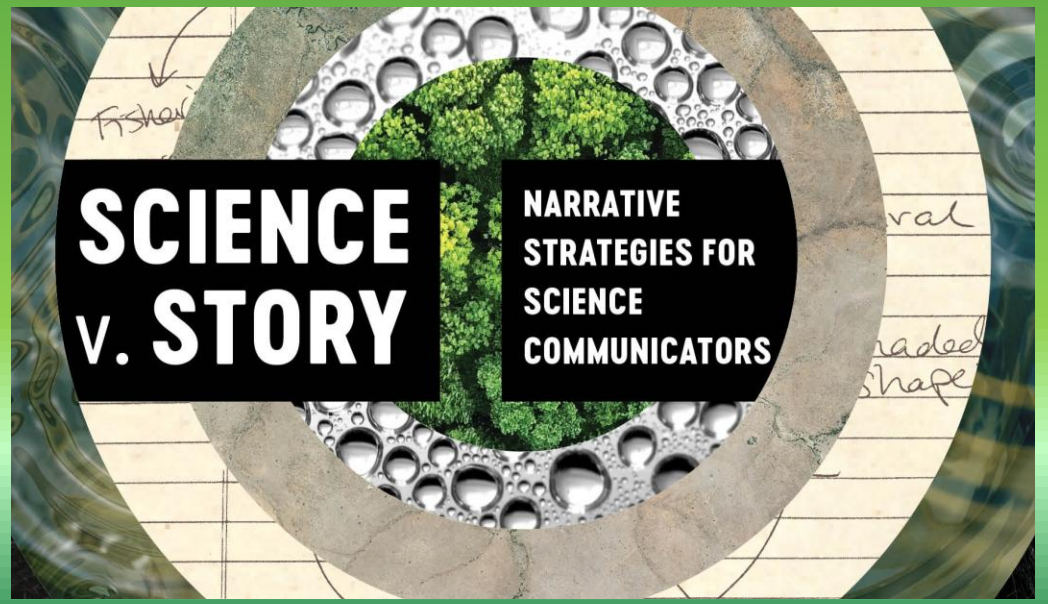
The Importance of Stories for Health Communicators

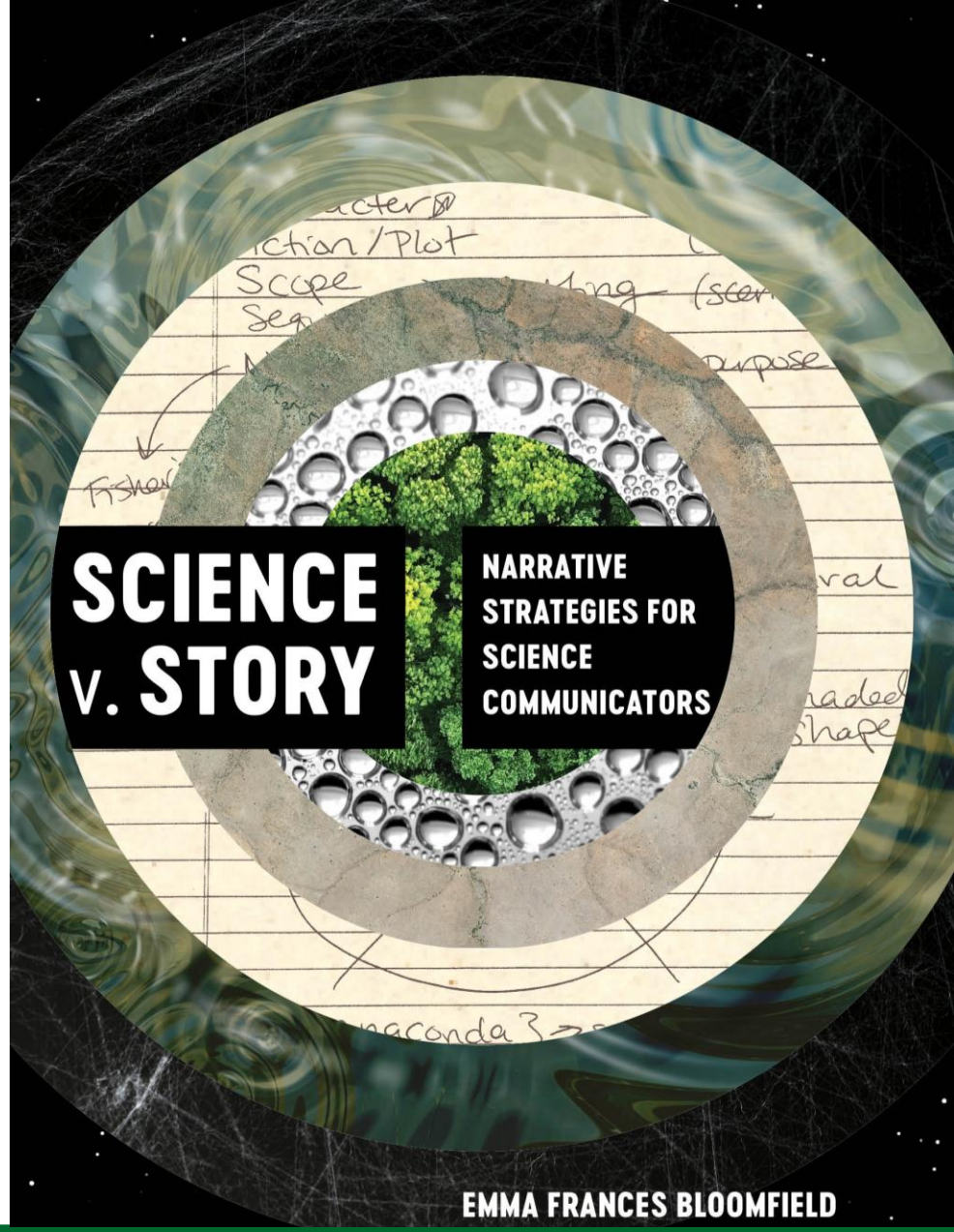
Dr. Emma Frances Bloomfield

UNLV
Greenspun College of
URBAN AFFAIRS



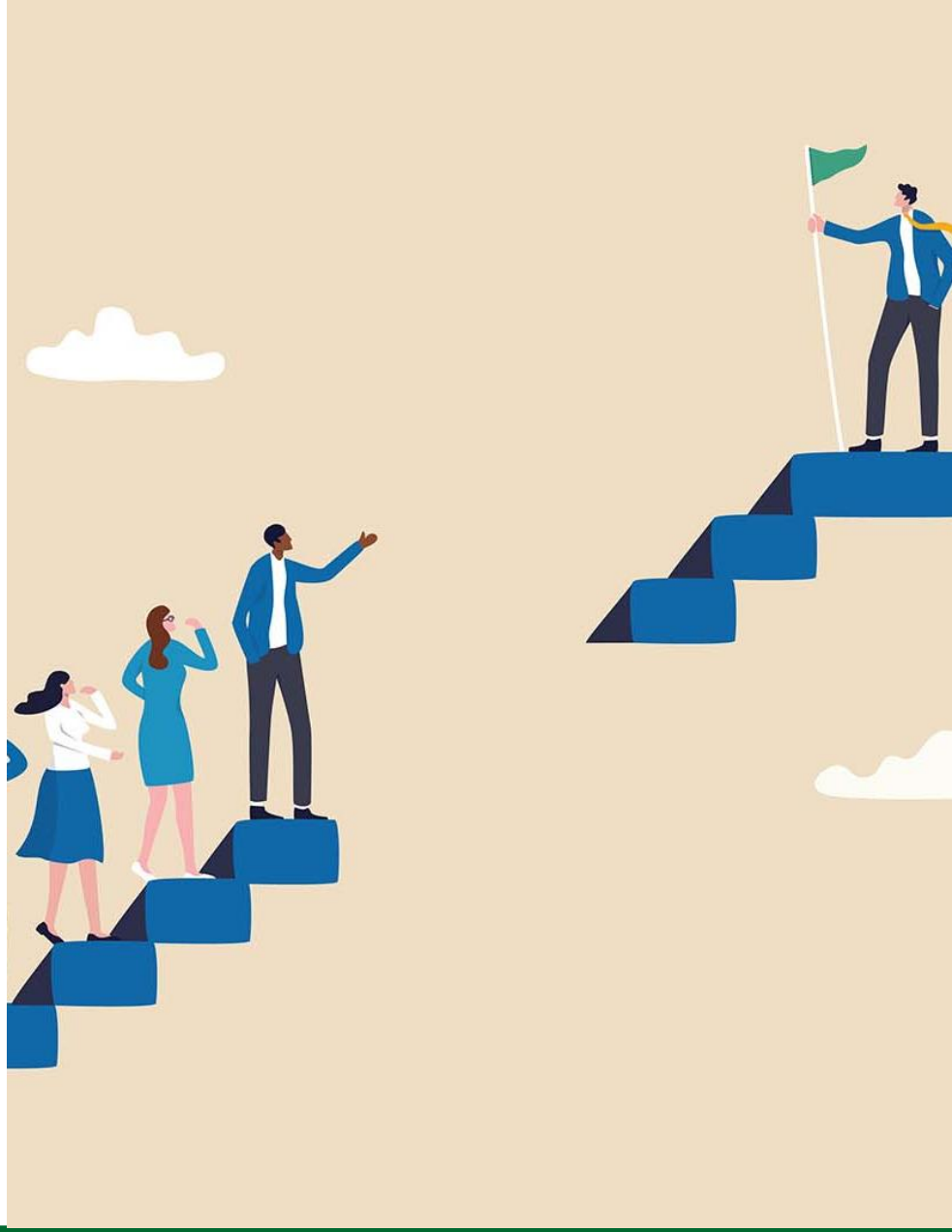
WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

- Explain the relationship between storytelling, science communication, and health information
- Identify the primary components of storytelling within health and medical communication
- Develop strategies for communicating health and medical topics to the public



ISSUES IN HEALTH COMMUNICATION

- Gaps exist between technical experts and public knowledge on a variety of scientific topics



A POTENTIONAL SOLUTION?

- Information deficit model
  > Information + discussion = agreement with experts



INFORMATION DEFICIT MODEL

- Increases in information can lead to boomerang or backfire effects (Hart & Nisbet, 2012)

- Increases in information do not lead to increased efficiency in climate-related groups tasks (van Swol et al., 2022)



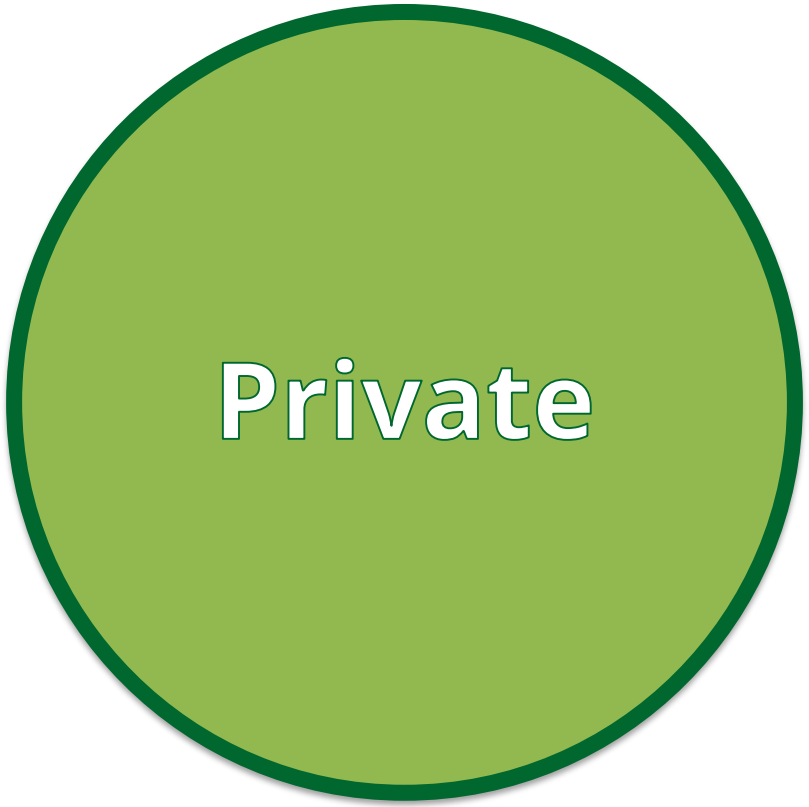


A DIFFERENT EXPLANATION?



COMMUNICATION SPHERES

- Individuals, friends, family, small groups
- Language colloquial and accessible to those involved
- Small, limited consequences



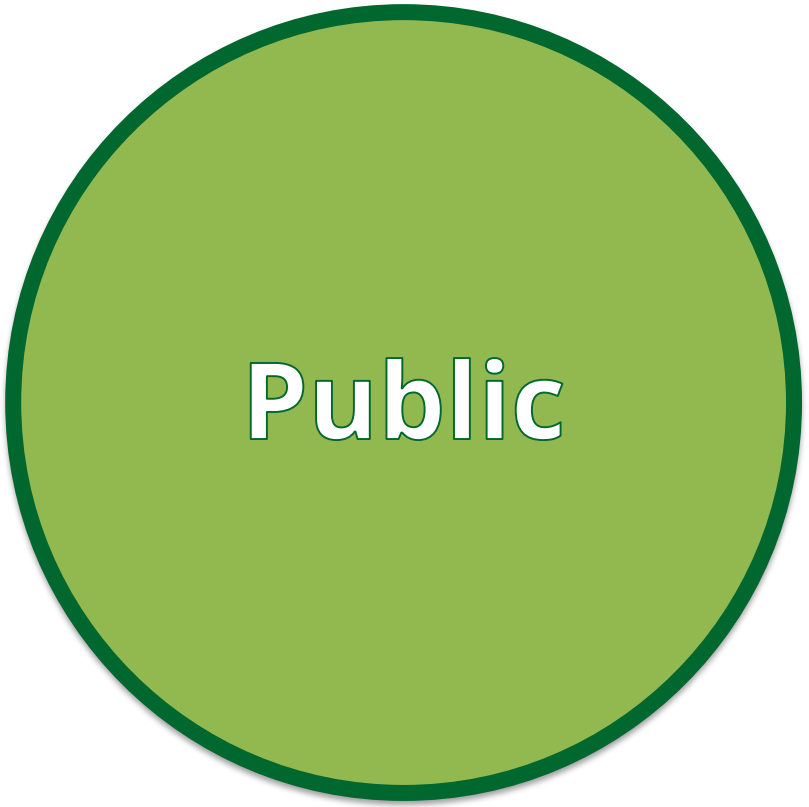
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COMMUNICATION SPHERES

- Journalism, politics, the general population
- Accessible and common parlance
- Large impacts



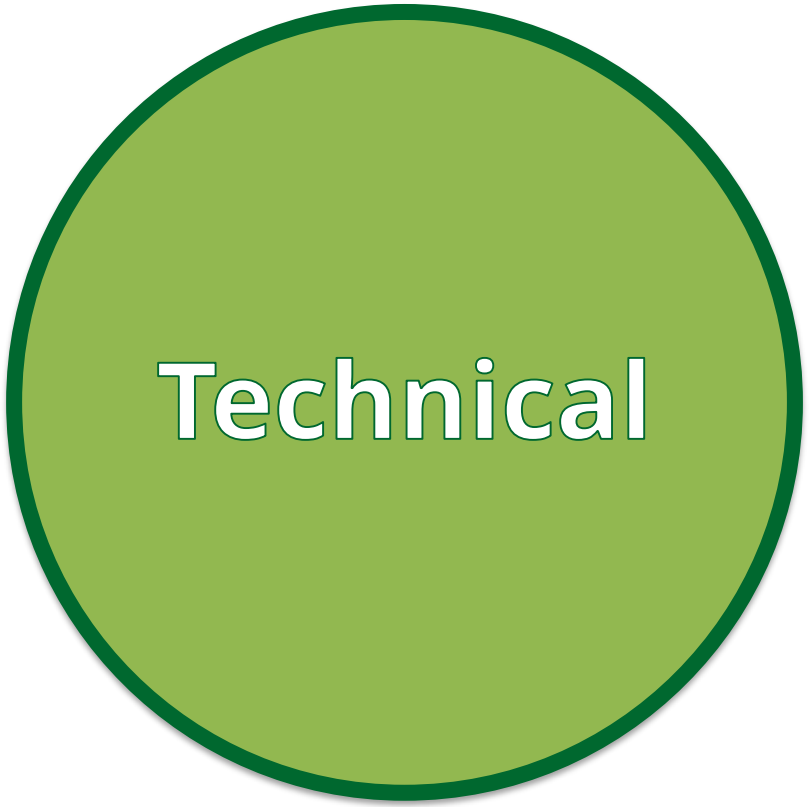
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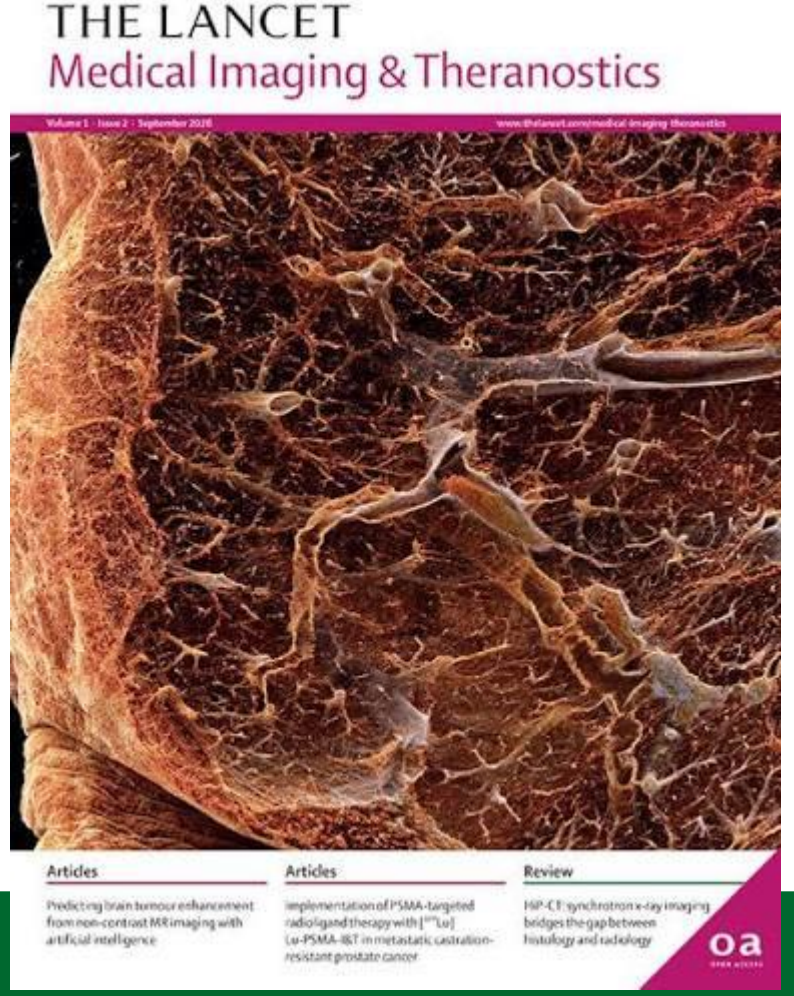
COMMUNICATION SPHERES

- Experts, credentialed or specialized knowledge
- Jargon, highlight technical or specific terminology related to discipline
- Impacts relative to discipline or community of experts

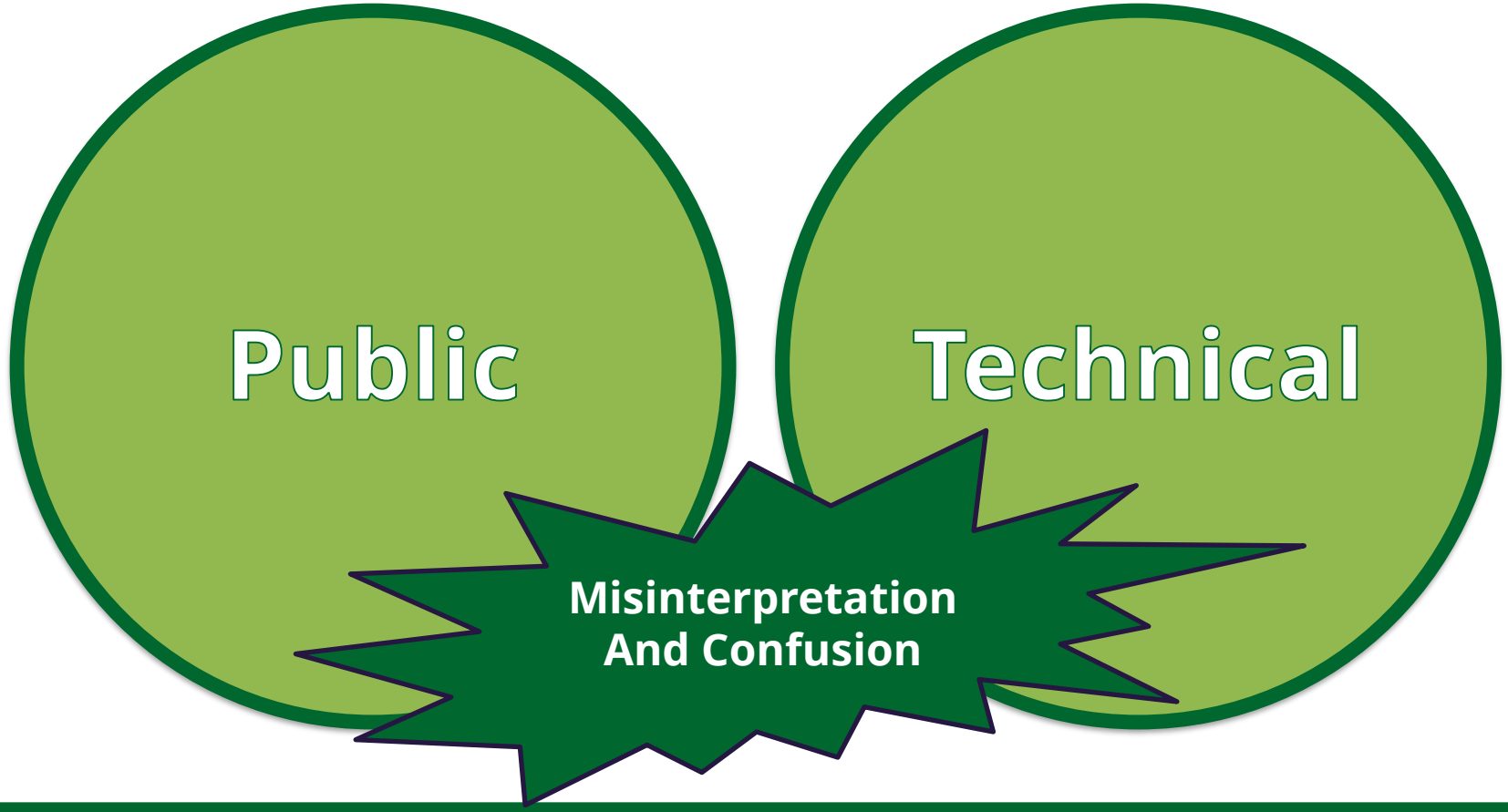


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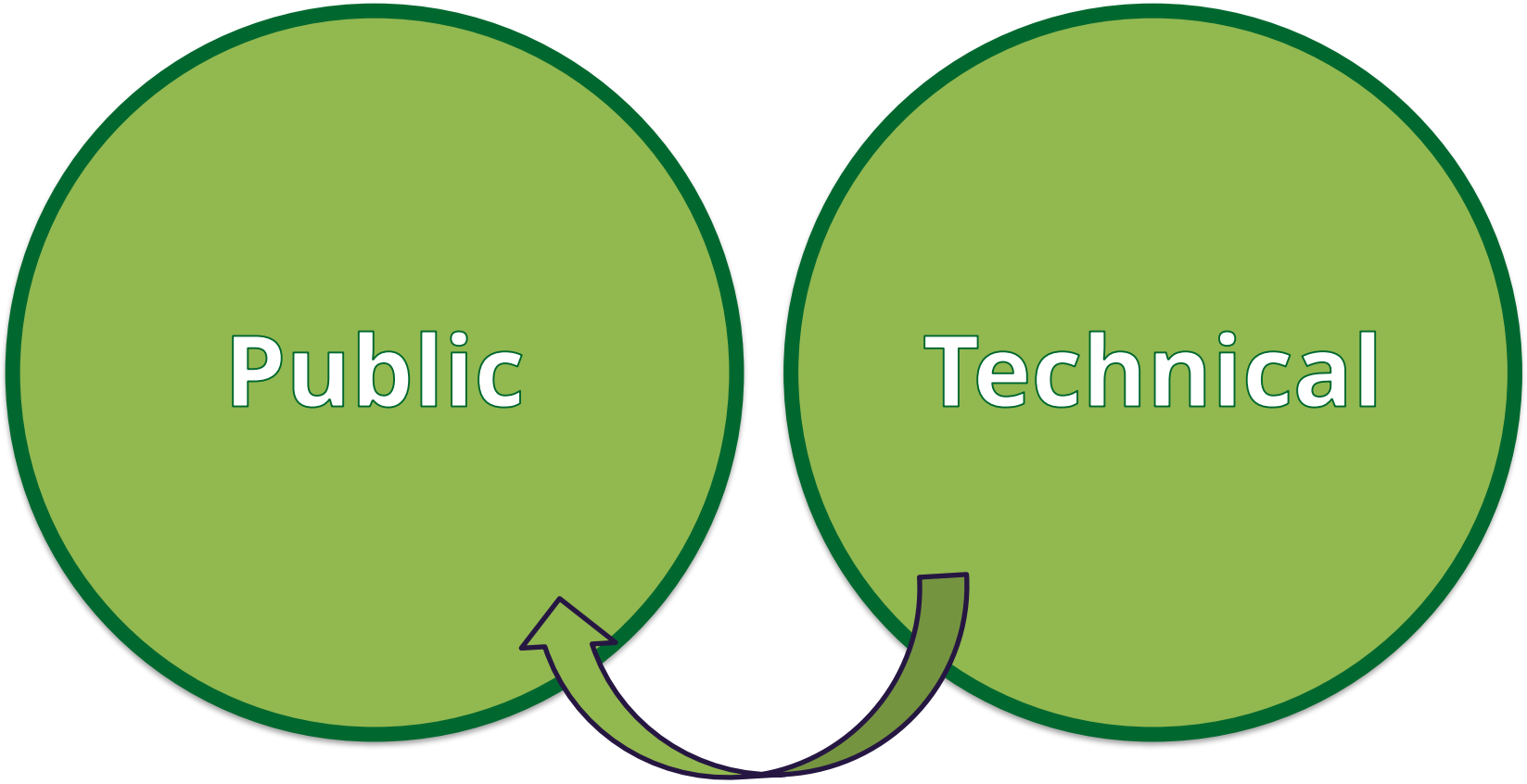
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PUBLIC AND TECHNICAL SPHERES



EXAMPLE MISINTERPRETATION



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PUBLIC AND TECHNICAL SPHERES



A DIFFERENT SOLUTION?

- Instead of simply providing more information, scholars have looked to other ways to “package” that information to be more engaging for audiences

- Stories!

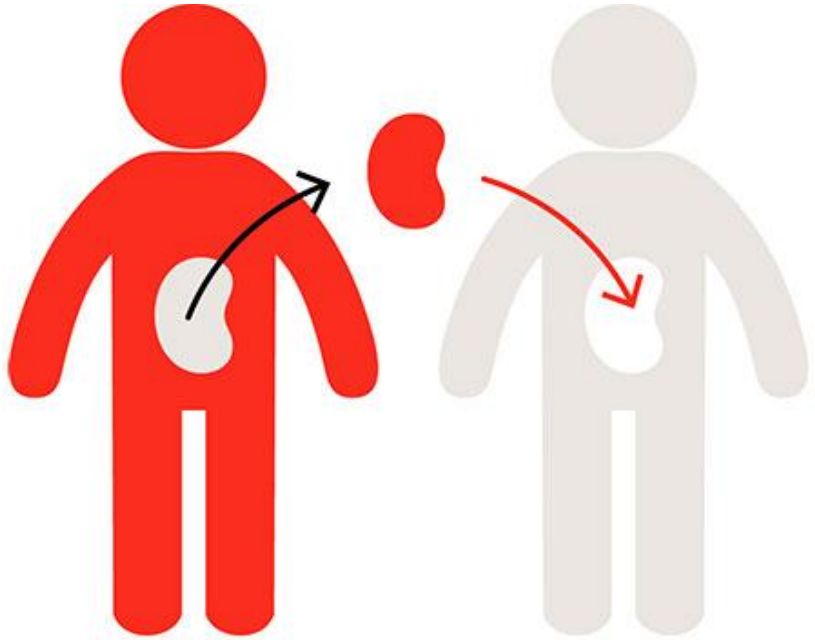


STORIES ARE EFFECTIVE AT...

- Promoting action
- Promoting policy support
- Overcoming ideological roadblocks

STORIES ARE EFFECTIVE AT...

- **Promoting action (Dillow & Weber, 2016)**
- Promoting policy support
- Overcoming ideological roadblocks



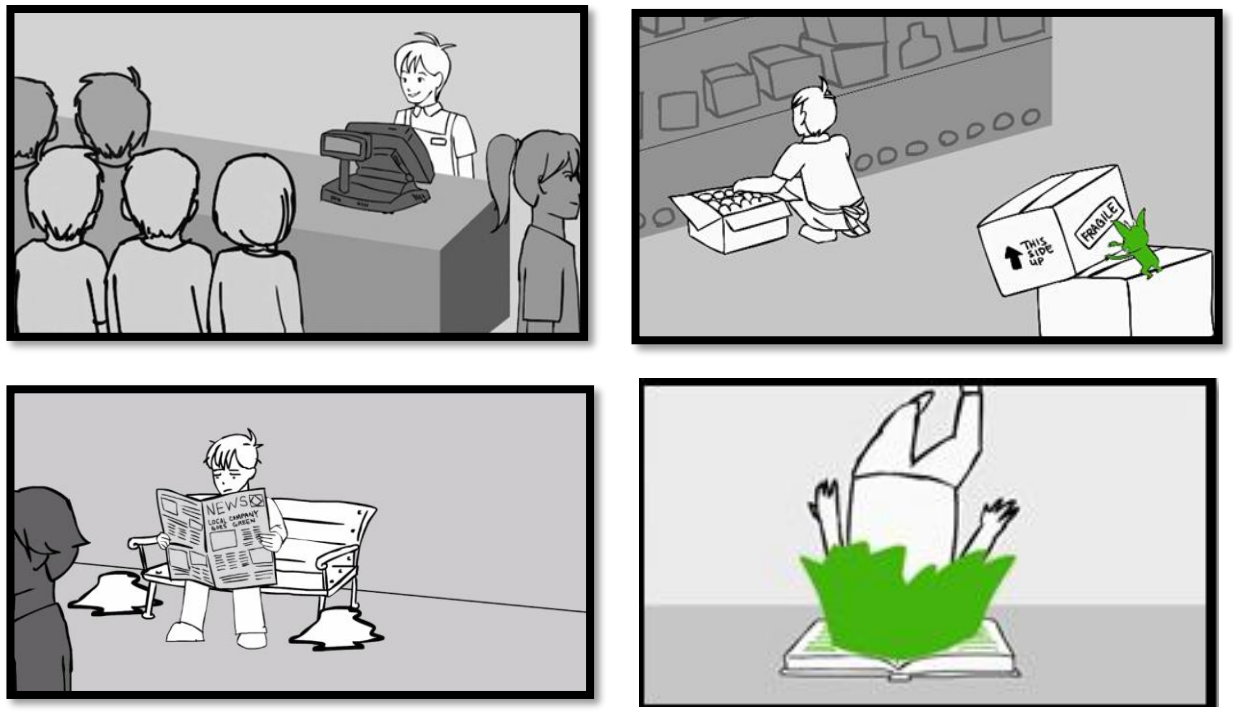
STORIES ARE EFFECTIVE AT...

- Promoting action
- **Promoting policy support (Hart & Nisbet, 2012)**
- Overcoming ideological roadblocks



STORIES ARE EFFECTIVE AT...

- Promoting action
- Promoting policy support
- **Overcoming ideological roadblocks (Sangalang & Bloomfield, 2018)**



DEFINING STORY

- What is a story?

- How can we package health and medical information to be stories?







DEFINING STORY

Fairy tale

Hamlet

Recipe

Blanket-weaving

The Odyssey

Conversation with a doctor

DEFINING STORY

Story	Non-Story
Fairy tale	**Blanket-weaving**
Hamlet	**Recipe**
The Odyssey	**Conversation with a doctor**

ACADEMIC DEFINITIONS

- “something happened; or, better, someone telling someone else that something happened” – Martin Kreiswirth

- Event
- Recounting of it (narrator or storyteller)

ACADEMIC DEFINITIONS

- “as soon as we follow a subject with a verb, there is a good chance we are engaged in narrative” – H. Porter Abbott

- Action
- Causality

ACADEMIC DEFINITIONS

- “symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them” – Walter Fisher

- Sequence
- Meaning

ACADEMIC DEFINITIONS

- “involving a temporal sequence of events influenced by the actions of specific characters” – Michael Dahlstrom and Shirley Ho

- Sequence
- Characters

STORY FEATURES

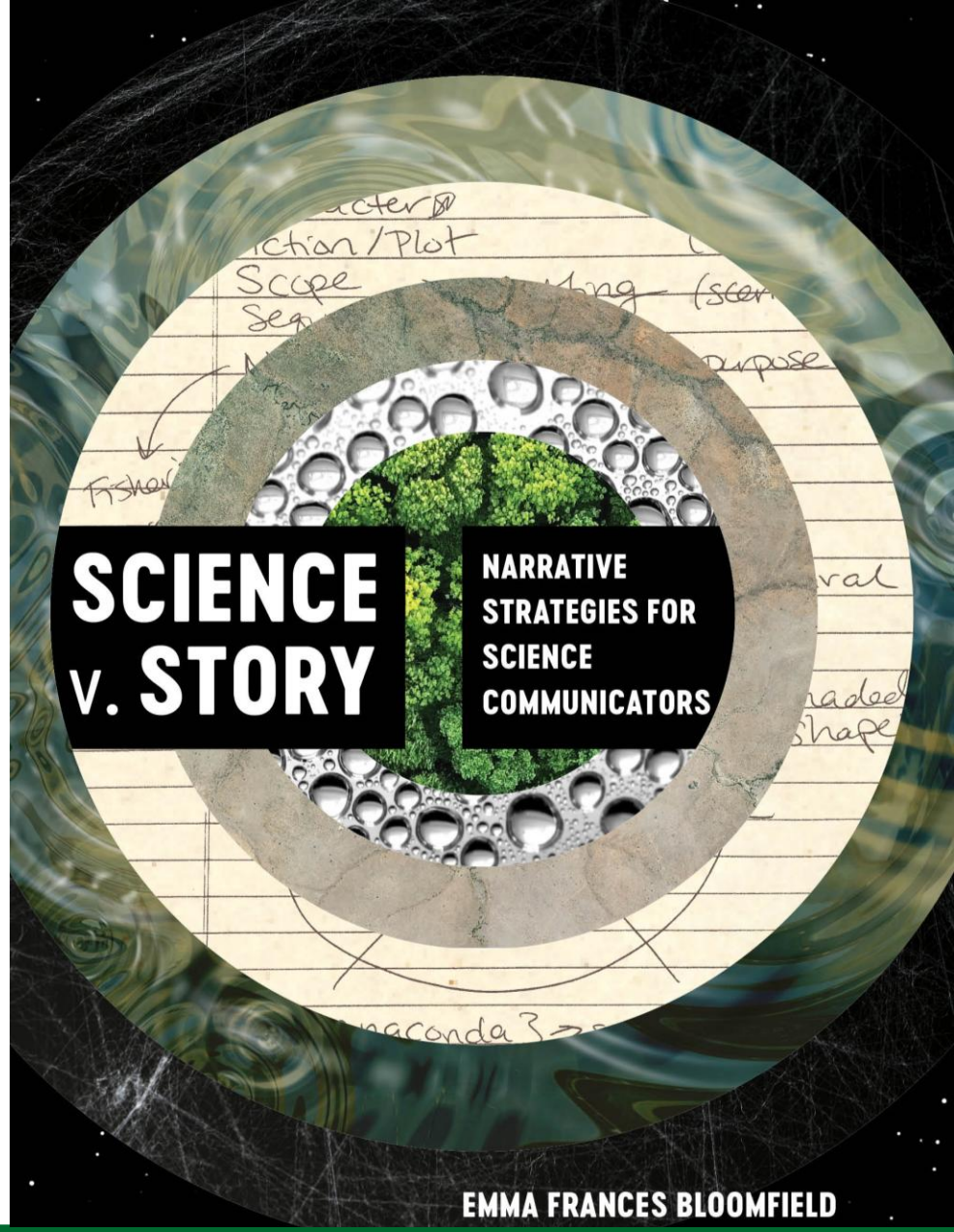
Features	Description
Characters	
Action	
Sequence	
Scope	
Storyteller	
Content	

STORY FEATURES

Features	Description
Characters	Agents, subjects, and objects involved in the action of the story
Action	The plot of the story, what characters are doing, the events of the story, and narrative probability
Sequence	Ordering of the story's events, its chronology, progression, and arrangement
Scope	What falls under the purview of the story in terms of space and time
Storyteller	Who or what is narrating the story, distributing the story, or recounting the story
Content	The topics of information discussed in the story as relevant to the lives of audience members, narrative fidelity

BLOOMFIELD'S DEFINITION OF STORY

- "I define story as a form of **symbolic or material** communication that contains to **greater or lesser degrees** the features of **characters, action, sequence, scope, storyteller, and content** and **provides meaning** for audiences" pp. 5-6



ACADEMIC DEFINITIONS

- All the ones discussed here (including mine) are incredibly broad and thus include most if not all communication

- “It is hard to image a type of communication that does not possess sequence or meaning” – Robert Rowland

NARRATIVES ARE UBIQUITOUS

- Narrative “is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative” – Roland Barthes and Lionel Duisit



A SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

- Instead of asking, “how can I use stories in my health and medical communication?

- Ask, “how can I add, emphasize, or strengthen the narrative elements in the stories I’m already telling?”

A SAMPLE CONVERSATION – FAMILY



A SAMPLE CONVERSATION – FAMILY

- Characters – doctor, friends, people with diabetes
- Action – starting/using a drug, unable to access drugs
- Sequence – causal links between starting the drug and losing weight
- Scope – family/friends but also broader public medical access
- Content – health and medical information, GLP1s, scientific adjacent data/inferencing
- Storyteller – family members

A SAMPLE CONVERSATION – DOCTOR



A SAMPLE CONVERSATION – DOCTOR

- Characters – Father?
- Action – take the GLP1 medicine
- Sequence – causal links between starting the drug and improved health outcomes
- Scope – individual's body
- Content – health and medical information, GLP1s
- Storyteller – medical doctor

DEFINING STORY

More story-like

Less story-like

Hamlet

Fairy tale

Blanket-weaving

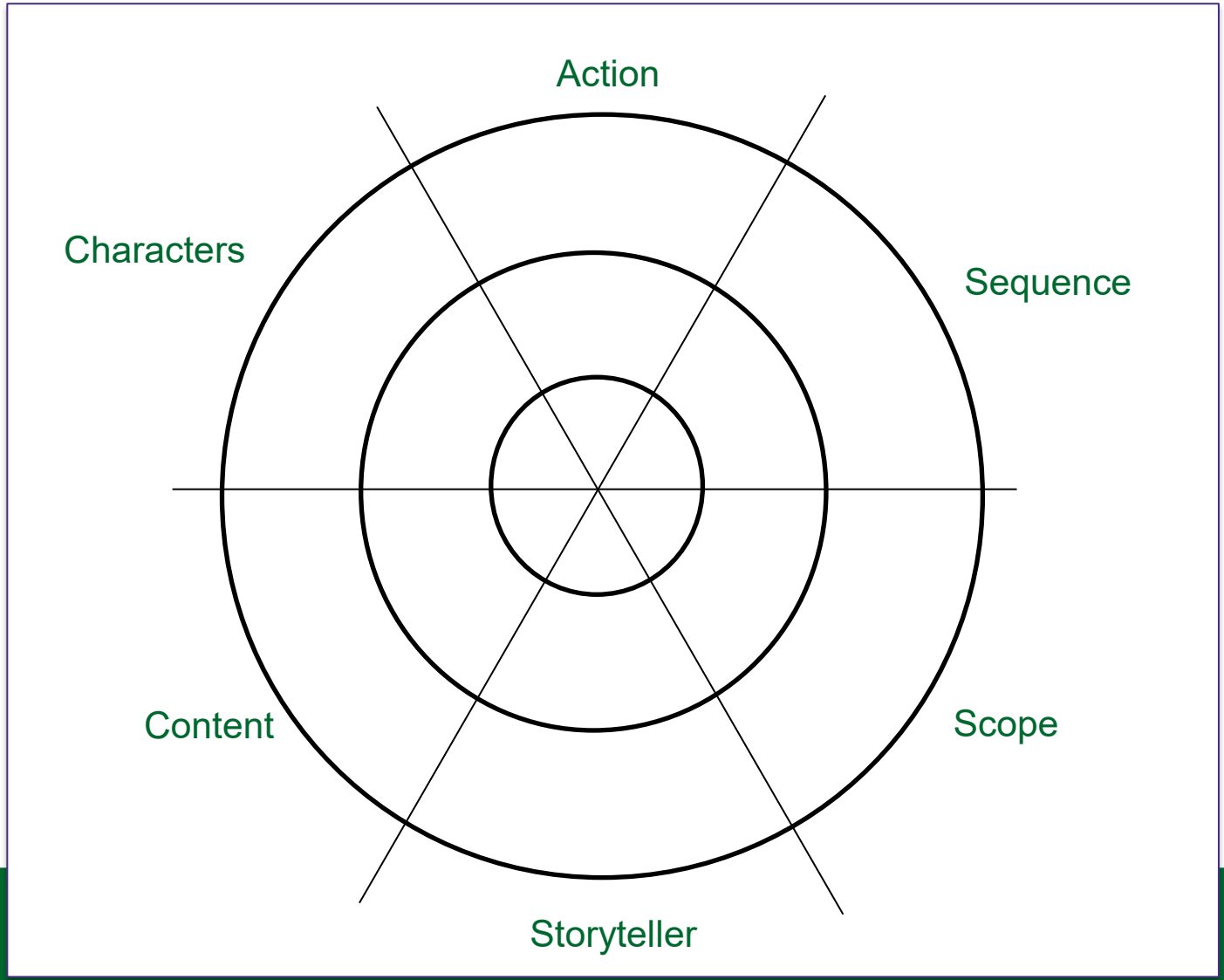
The Odyssey

Conversation with a doctor

Recipe

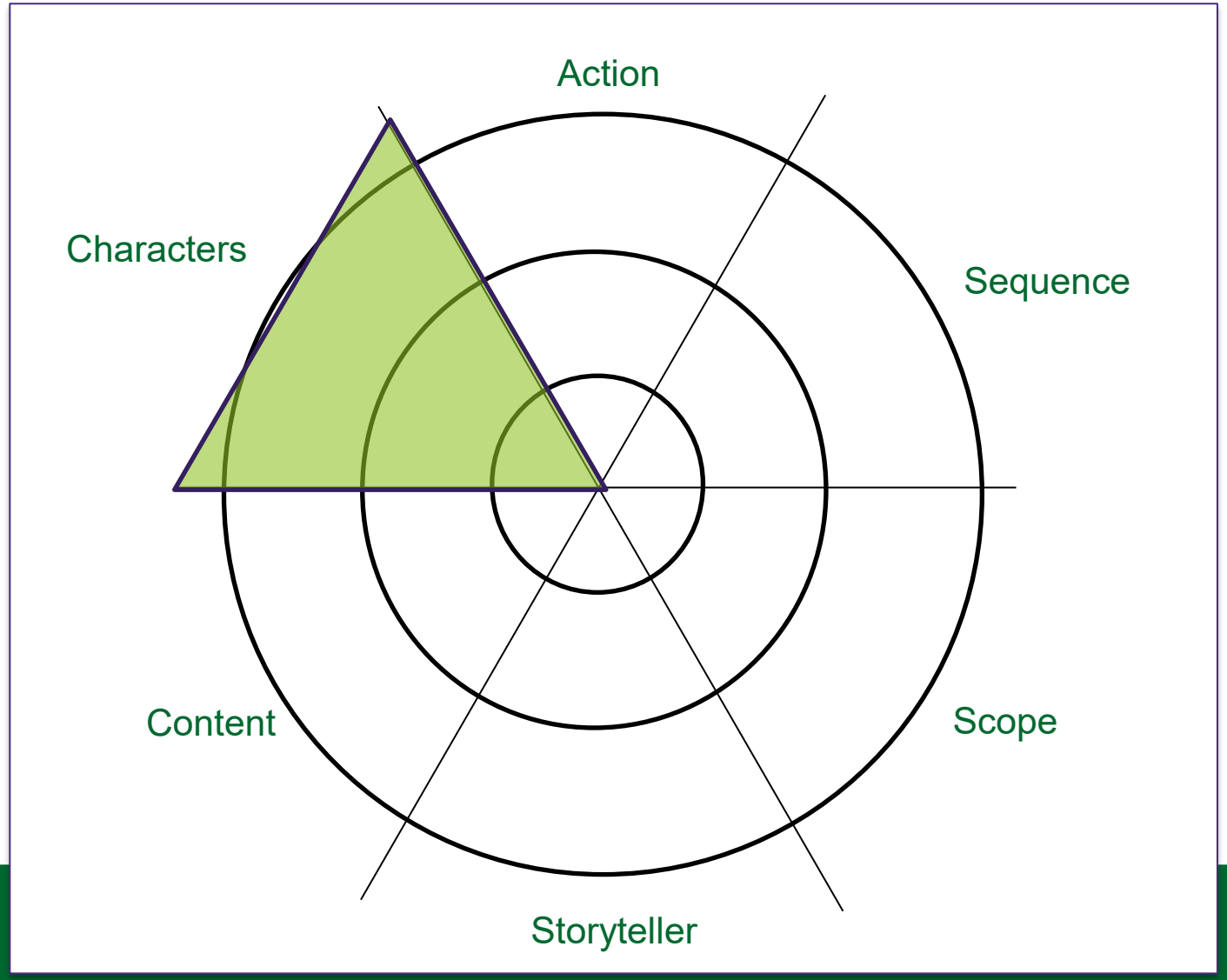


NARRATIVE WEB



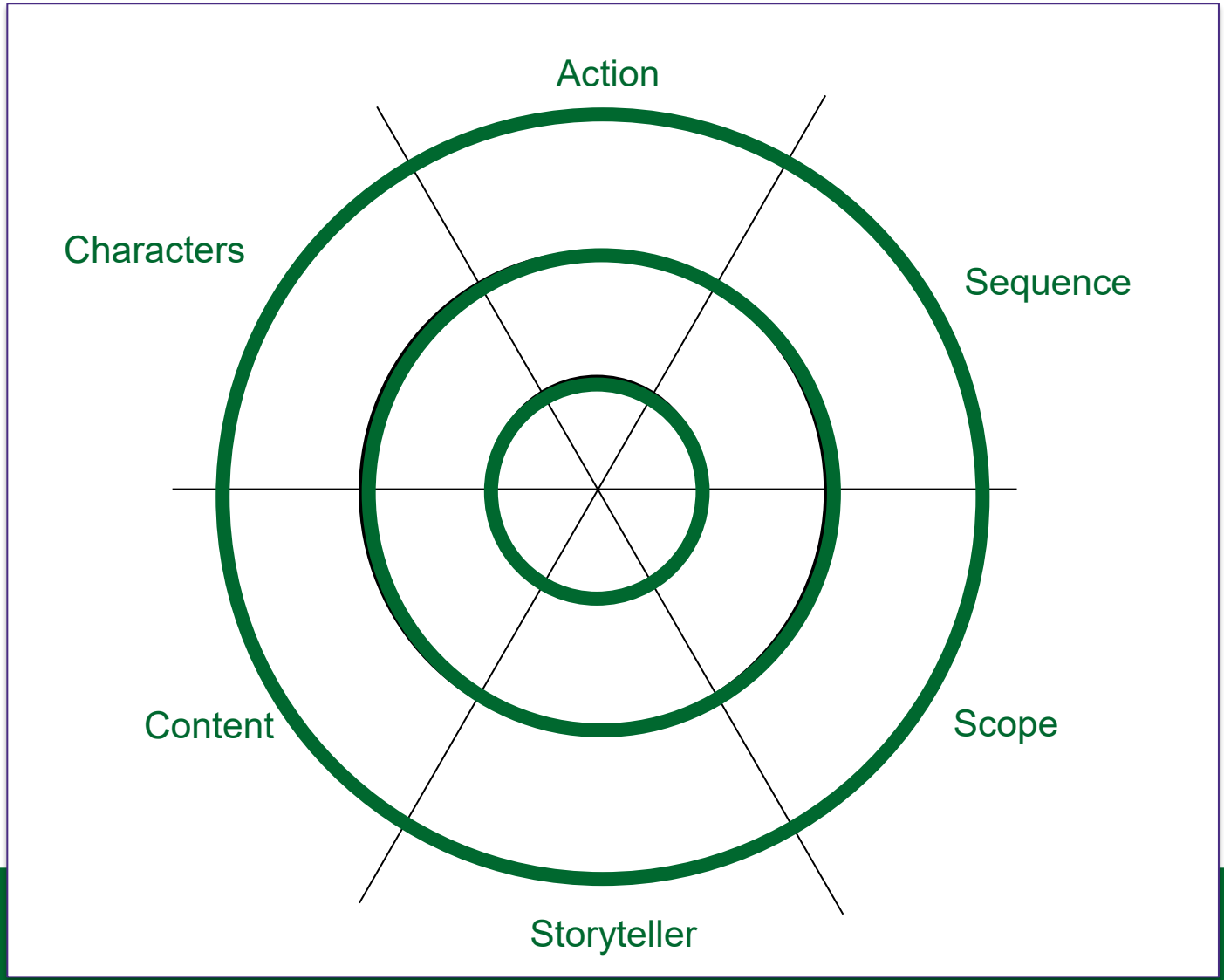
NARRATIVE WEB

- Narrative wedge



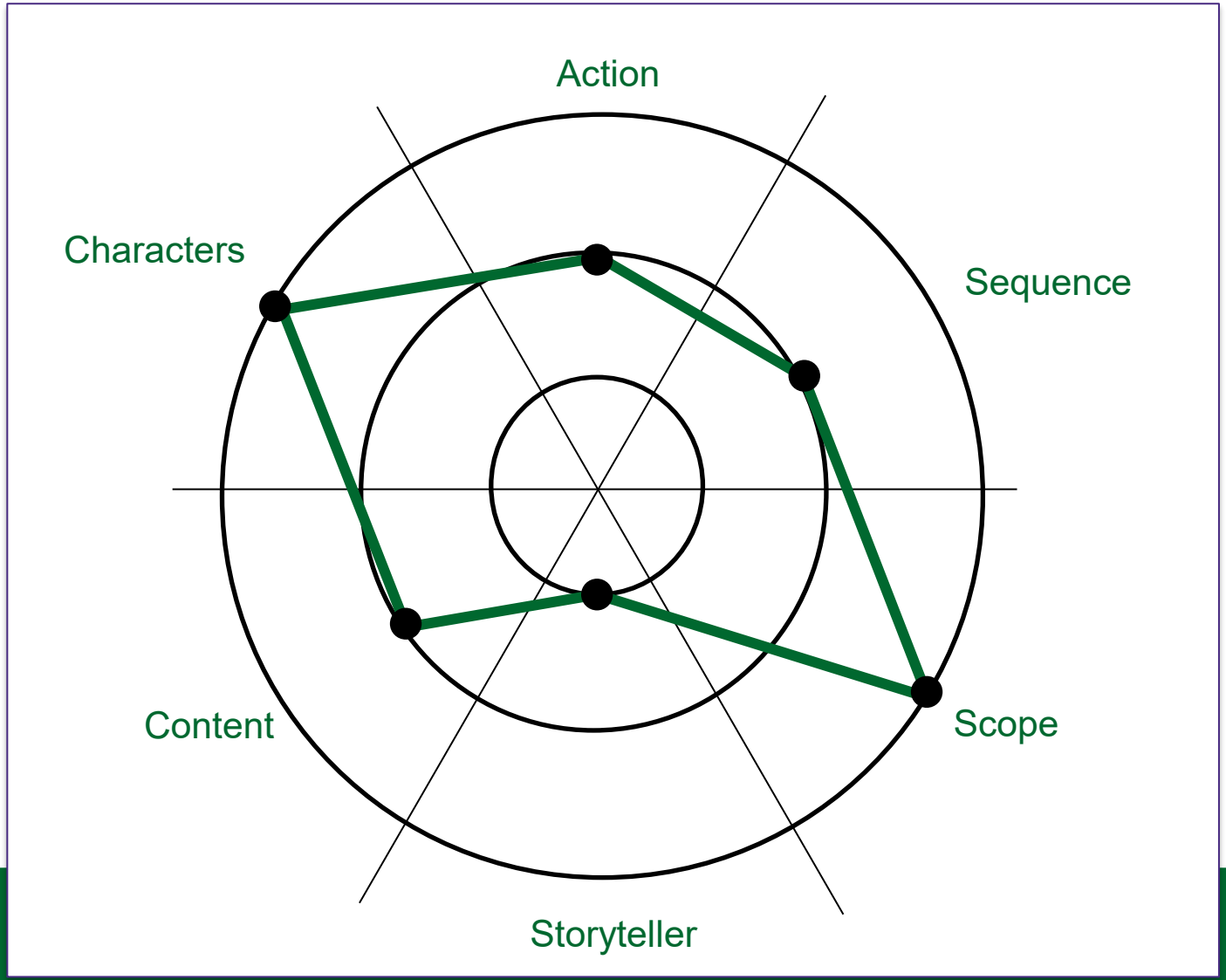
NARRATIVE WEB

- Micro-ring
- Meso-ring
- Macro-ring



NARRATIVE WEB

- Narrative constellations
- Micro storyteller
- Meso action, sequence, and content
- Macro characters and scope

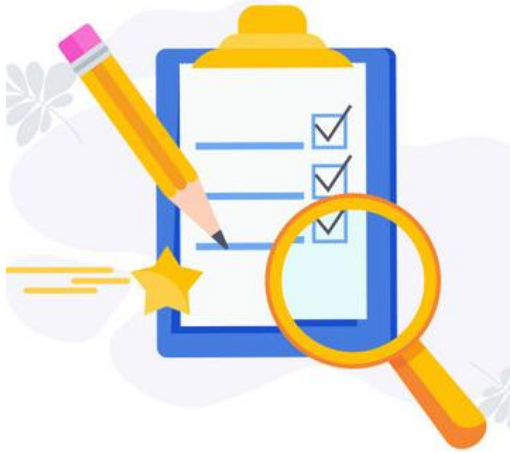


NARRATIVE WEB

- Tool to build stories



- Tool to evaluate stories



- Tool to compare stories

NARRATIVE WEB

- Applied storytelling elements and narrative web tool to scientific topics
- Science’s stories tend to emphasize the macro-ring, while the most compelling stories emphasize the micro-ring

SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE

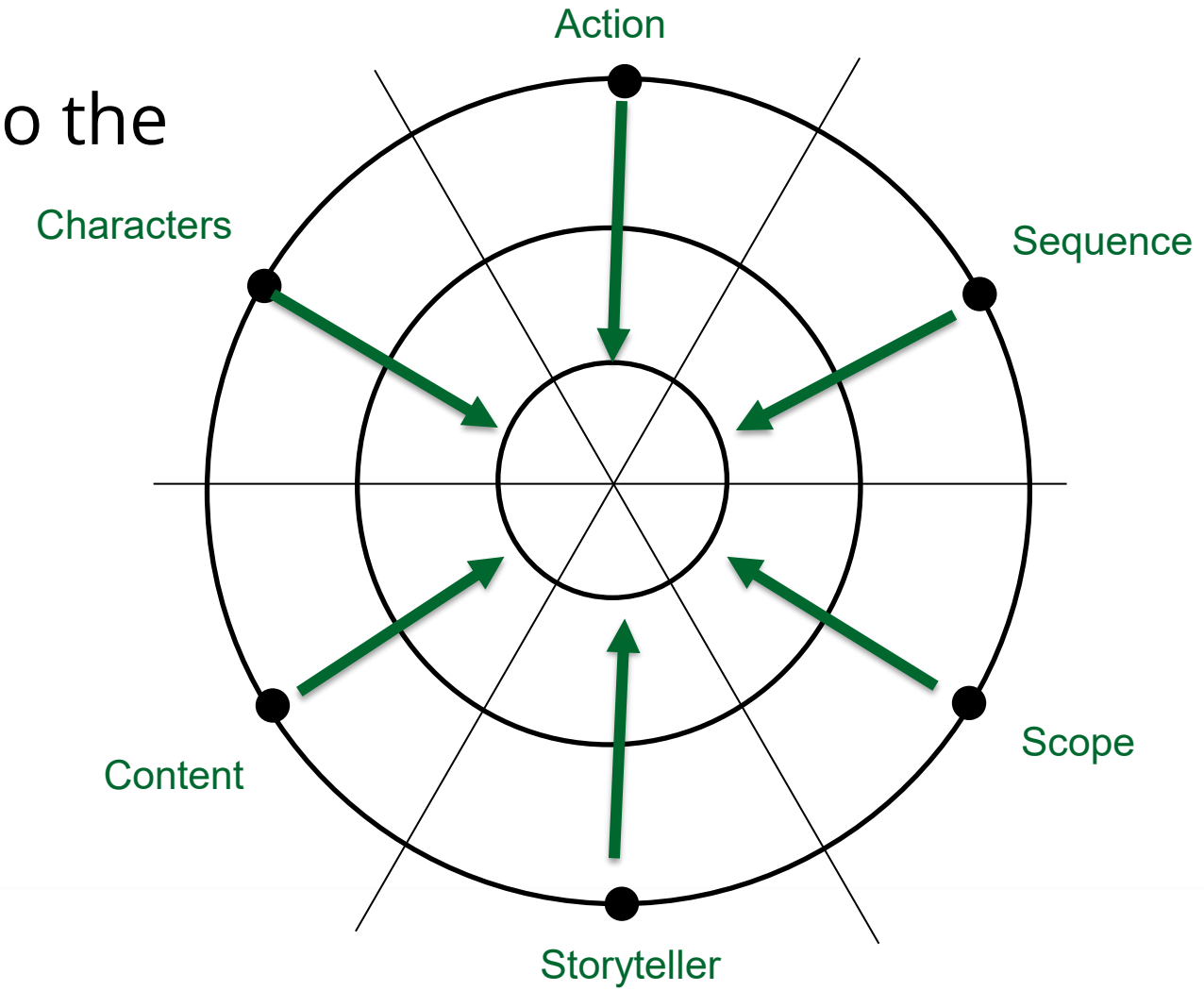
- Abstract, generalizable knowledge
- Removes people from the story
  > “professional norms that encourage [scientists] to focus on the object of their research” (Ceccarelli, 2018)
- Has expansive temporal and spatial scopes
  > People tend to see things on “human scale” and are weak at conceptualizing microscopic and cosmic scales (DiCaglio, 2022)

COMPELLING STORIES

- Specific details and examples
- Emphasizes people and personal experiences
  > the most appealing stories let “the reader follow the story in terms of [a] *single consciousness*” (Burke, 1969)
- Focuses on values such as the here and now, immediate, tangible benefits

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

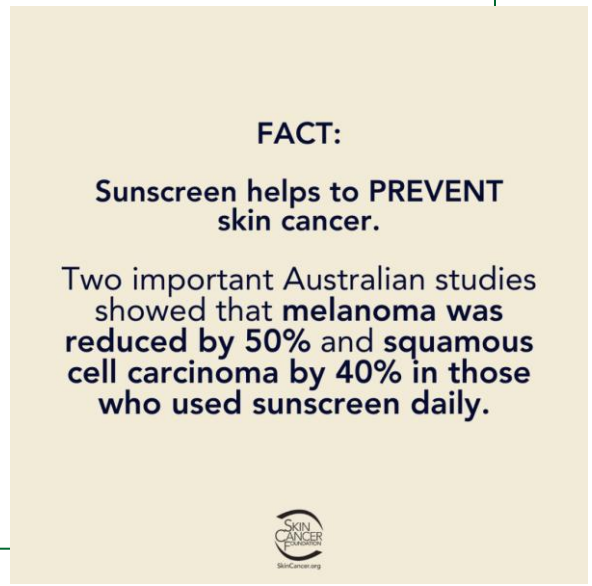
- Move macro-ring wedges to the micro-ring



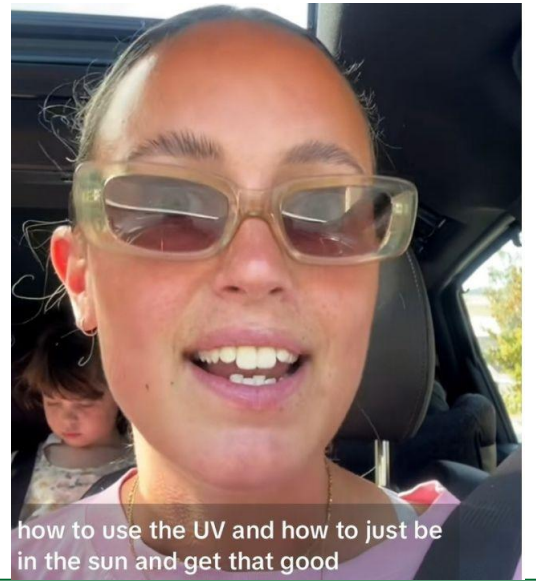
EXAMPLE – SUNSCREEN

- Depersonalized data





- Anecdotes of not wearing sunscreen



EXAMPLE – SUNSCREEN

- Add scientists and medical experts as characters



EXAMPLE – SUNSCREEN

- Pair scientific content with personal examples



EXAMPLE – SUNSCREEN

- Correct misperceptions by offering competing information or alternatives



EXAMPLE – SUNSCREEN

- Emphasize what we know and what we don’t know



FINAL THOUGHTS

- Learn from micro-stories while still retaining scientific accuracy/focus
- No ideal constellation shape – tool for experimentation
- The relative success or appropriateness of a web is audience, context, and purpose-dependent
- We can all tell science’s stories

SCIENCE *AND* STORY

- “science reflects not the meaning of the universe, but [humanity’s] efforts to make [their] universe meaningful” James Kelso, 1980 p. 18



Thank you!

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