Bernard Becker
Medical Library

Less is More:
Crafting & Delivering Compelling Messages

Center for Health and Science Communication
Bernard Becker Medical Library

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Center for Health and Science Communication

Our work spans four service areas to meet our mission to serve as a hub for resources and engagement around health and science communication at WashU Medicine.

Education and Training

Consultations

Resources

Connections

Center for Health and Science Communication

“The biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished.”
George Bernard Shaw

Communication Strategies: Planning

What is your goal? Objectives?

Who are you trying to reach?

How much time are you able to invest?

What is your strategy to achieve your goal and reach your audience?

Your message should be…

Audience-centered

Useful & relevant

Easy to understand

42

Communication Strategies: Audience-centered

Define your audience.

Be specific.

Meet your audience where they are.

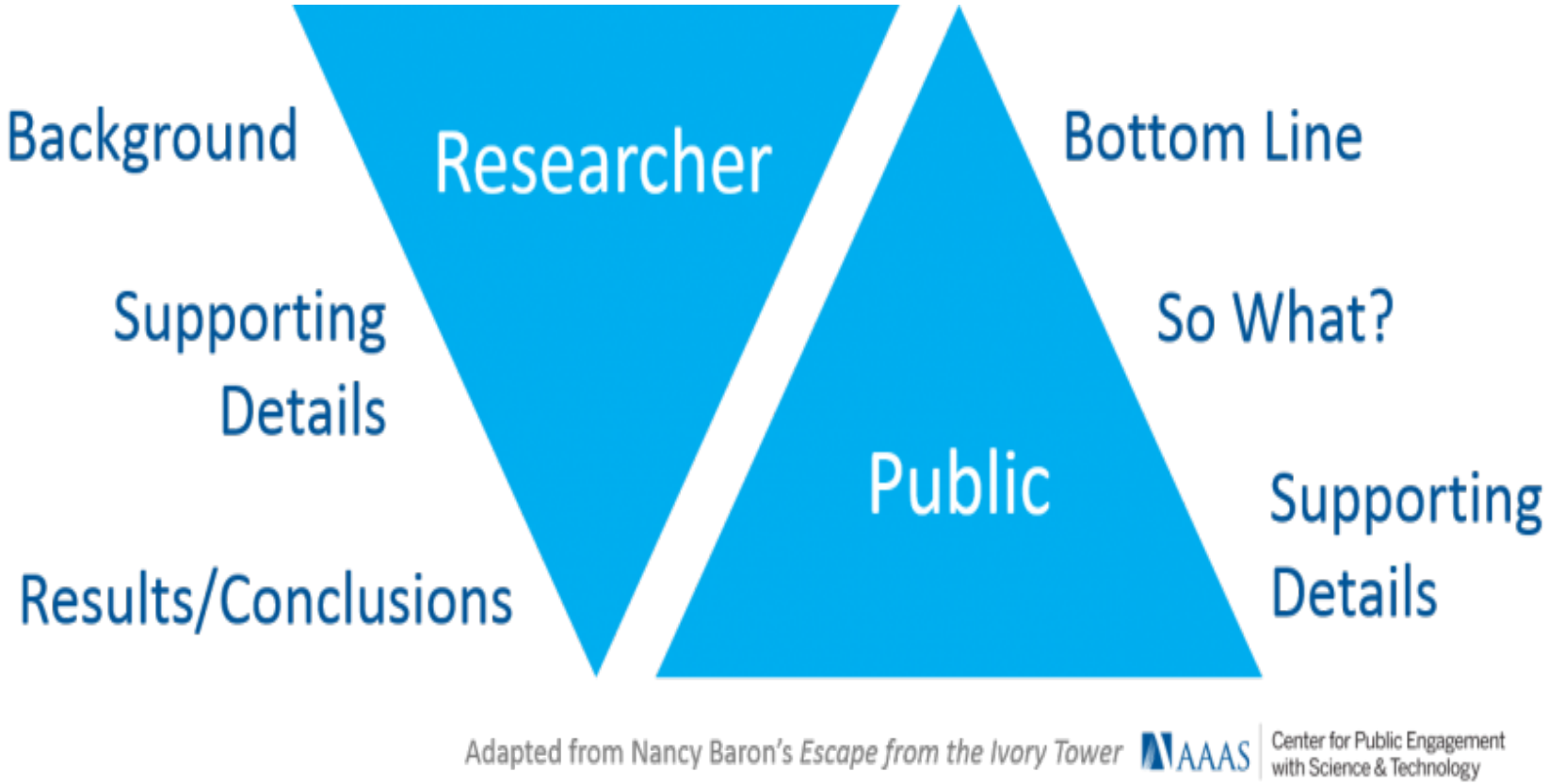
Find out what they already know.

Motivate the audience to listen.

Your audience

DaPuglet CC BY-SA 2.0

Your structure depends on the audience



AAAS Communication Toolkit

Communication Strategies: Useful and relevant

Tailor the message for the situation.

Stick to one theme or idea.

Don’t overwhelm your audience.

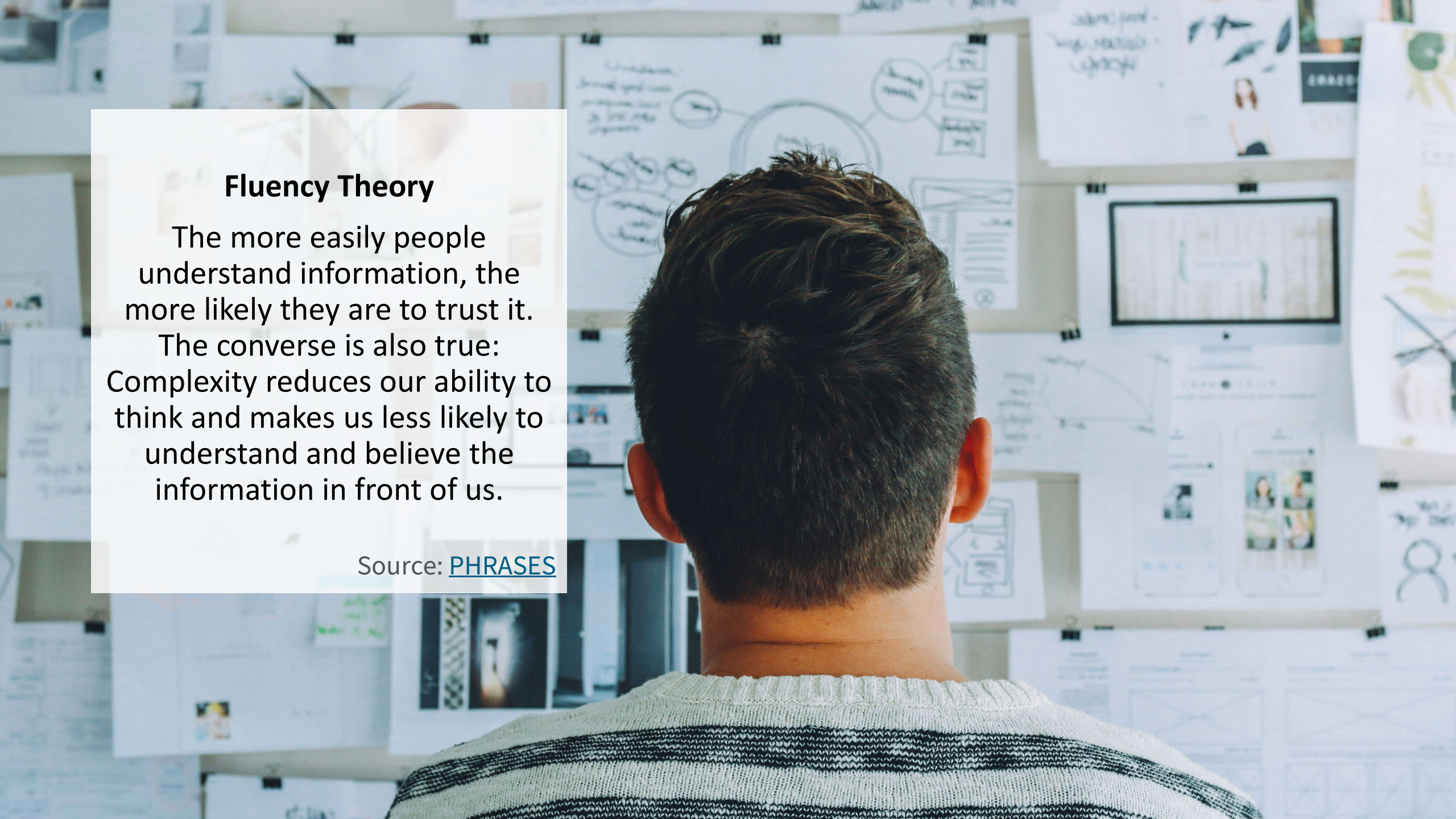
"It's hard because you are kind of married to your data and want to show it off, but I find I have to be realistic and ask myself, 'Of all the pieces of data that prove point A, what is best to highlight that issue?'"

Dr. Nika Danial

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute/Harvard University

Communication Strategies: Easy to understand

Use plain language best practices



Fluency Theory

The more easily people understand information, the more likely they are to trust it. The converse is also true: Complexity reduces our ability to think and makes us less likely to understand and believe the information in front of us.

Source: PHRASES

Plain language can be used to:

- Communicate with patients and research participants
- Create consent documents for research studies
- Talk to non-scientific audiences, such as funding agencies, stakeholders, community groups
- Simplify research for lay summaries and abstracts

Plain Language Principles

Simplify complicated words

Prolonged

Better terms:

stays, lasts long

Explain terms as they are introduced

Prophylaxis

Further explain:

?

Plain Language Principles

Avoid words with dual meaning

Novel

Better term:

New

Define abbreviations (first use)

PCP

Better term (first use):

Primary Care Physician

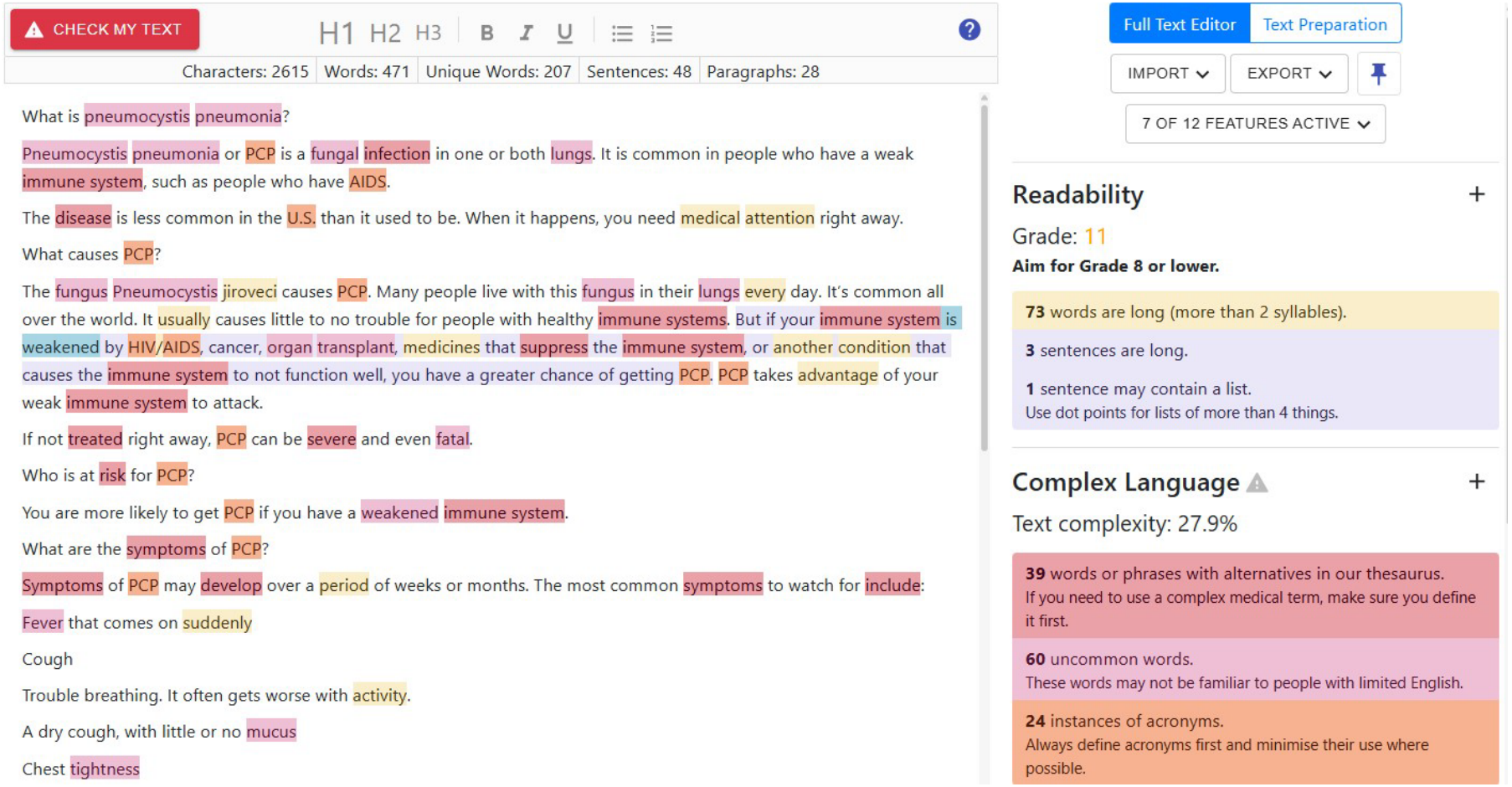
PASSIVE VOICE

Samples were collected by
our team.

ACTIVE VOICE

Our team collected samples.

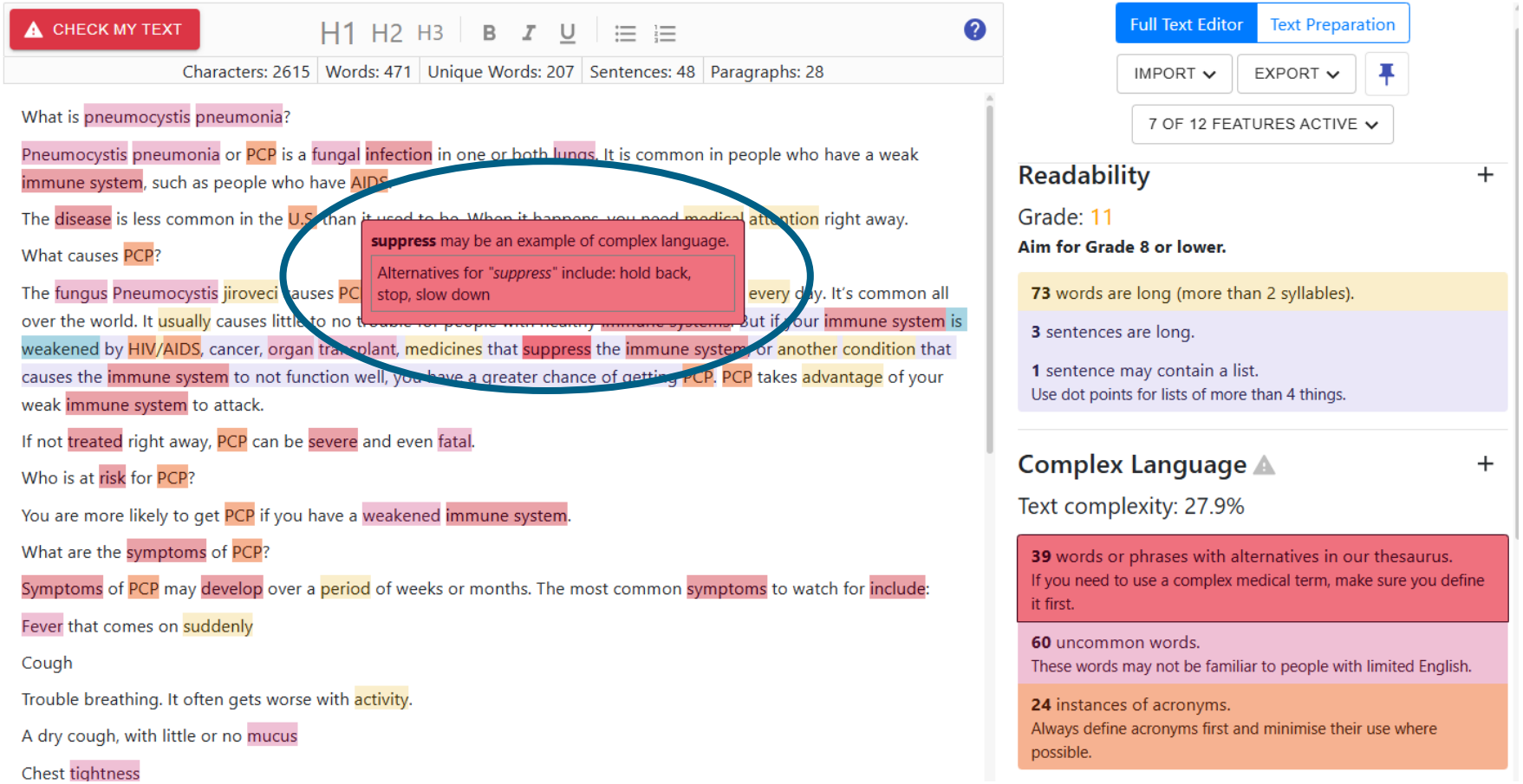
Sydney Health Literacy Lab Health Literacy Editor



Text from: Johns Hopkins Medicine

https://shell.techlab.works/

Health Literacy Editor

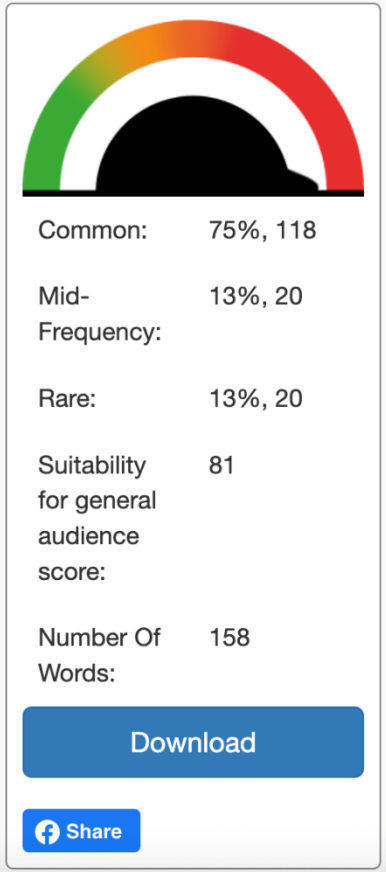


Text from: Johns Hopkins Medicine

https://shell.techlab.works/

De-Jargonizer

Individuals with neurofibromatosis type 1 (NF1) are prone to the evolution of neurodevelopmental symptomatology including motor delays, learning disabilities, autism, and attention deficits. Caused by heterozygous germline mutations in the NF1 gene, this monogenic condition offers unique opportunities to study the genetic etiologies for neurodevelopmental disorders and the mechanisms that underlie their formation. Although numerous small animal models have been generated to elucidate the causes of these alterations, there is little consensus on how to align preclinical observations with clinical outcomes, harmonize findings across species, and consolidate these insights to chart a cohesive path forward. Capitalizing on expertise from clinicians; human, animal, and cellular model research scientists; and bioinformatics researchers, the first Cognition and Behavior in NF1 (CABIN) meeting was convened at the Banbury Center of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in October 2024. This Perspective summarizes the state of our understanding and a proposed plan for future investigation and exploration to improve the quality of life of those with NF1.



Text from:
http://www.genesdev.org/cgi/doi/10.1101/gad.352629.125

http://scienceandpublic.com/

So, what words can you use?

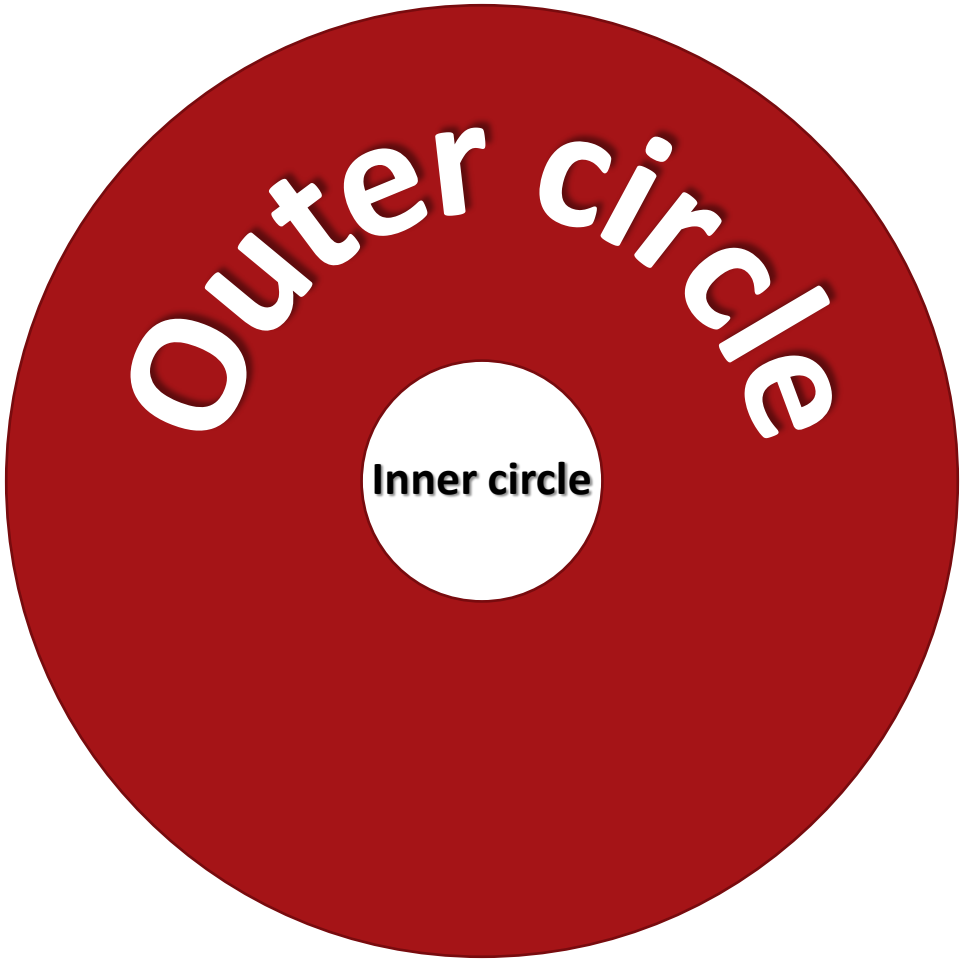
Clinical Research Glossary (Multi-Regional Clinical Trials Center)
https://mrctcenter.org/glossary/

Everyday Words for Public Health (CDC)
https://www.cdc.gov/other/pdf/everydaywords-060216-final.pdf

Glossary of HIV/AIDS-Related Terms (NIH's Office of AIDS Research)
https://clinicalinfo.hiv.gov/sites/default/files/glossary/Glossary-English_HIVinfo.pdf

Plain Language Word List (Health Research for Action)
https://multco-web7-psh-files-usw2.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/PlainLanguageWordList.pdf

Readability Toolkit Thesaurus (PRISM)
https://your.yale.edu/policies-procedures/other/prism-readability-toolkit

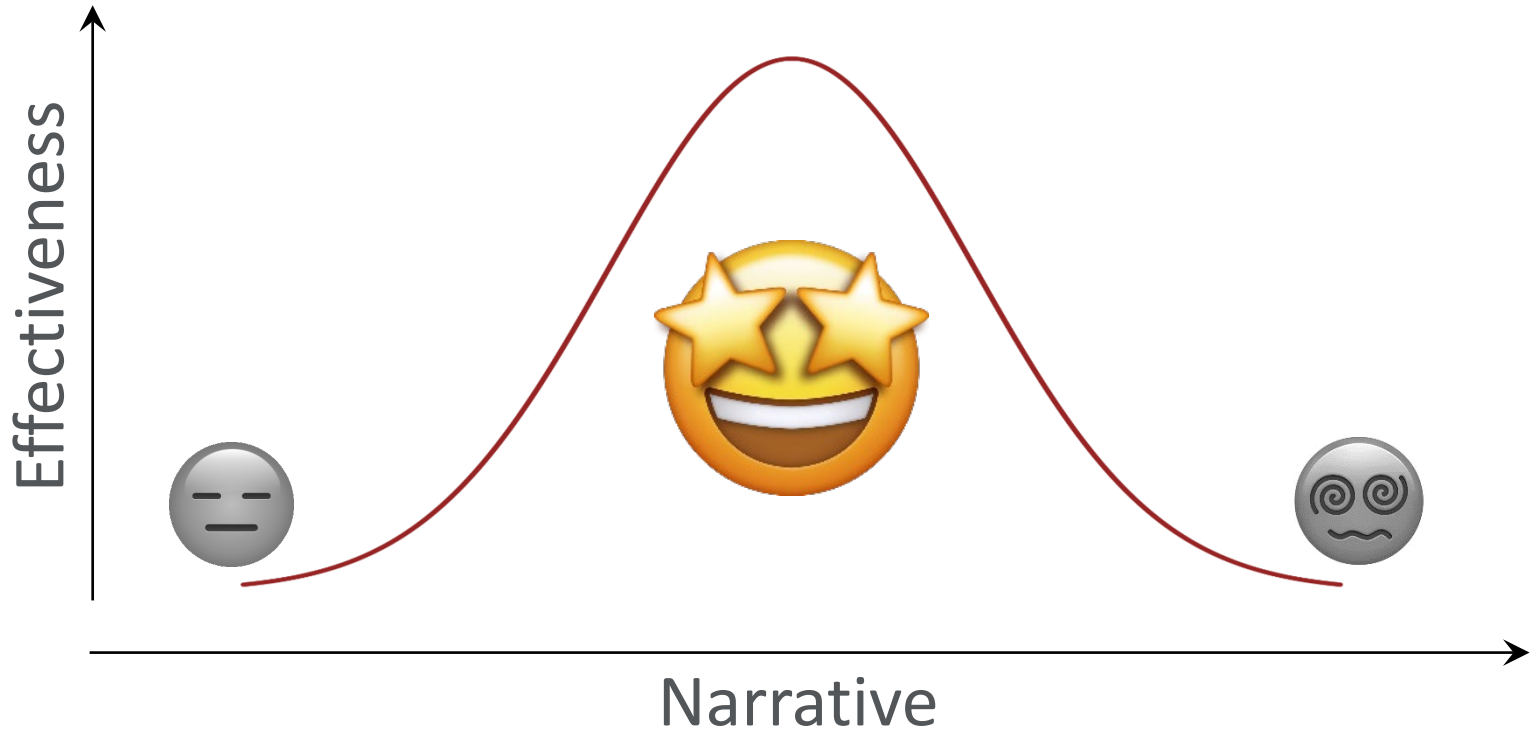


Adapted from Douglas, Bahr & Olson (2022) *The Narrative Gym*

- ✓ Topic
- ✗ Extent
- ✗ Complication
- ✗ Structure

Image from Etsy.com

$$\text{Narrative} = F_{\textit{topic, extent, complication, structure}}$$



The ABT framework

"There is not just one way of getting to that sweet zone, and if you go online you'll find many methods, but there's one that I find very useful, and therefore I thought I'd share it with you."

The ABT framework

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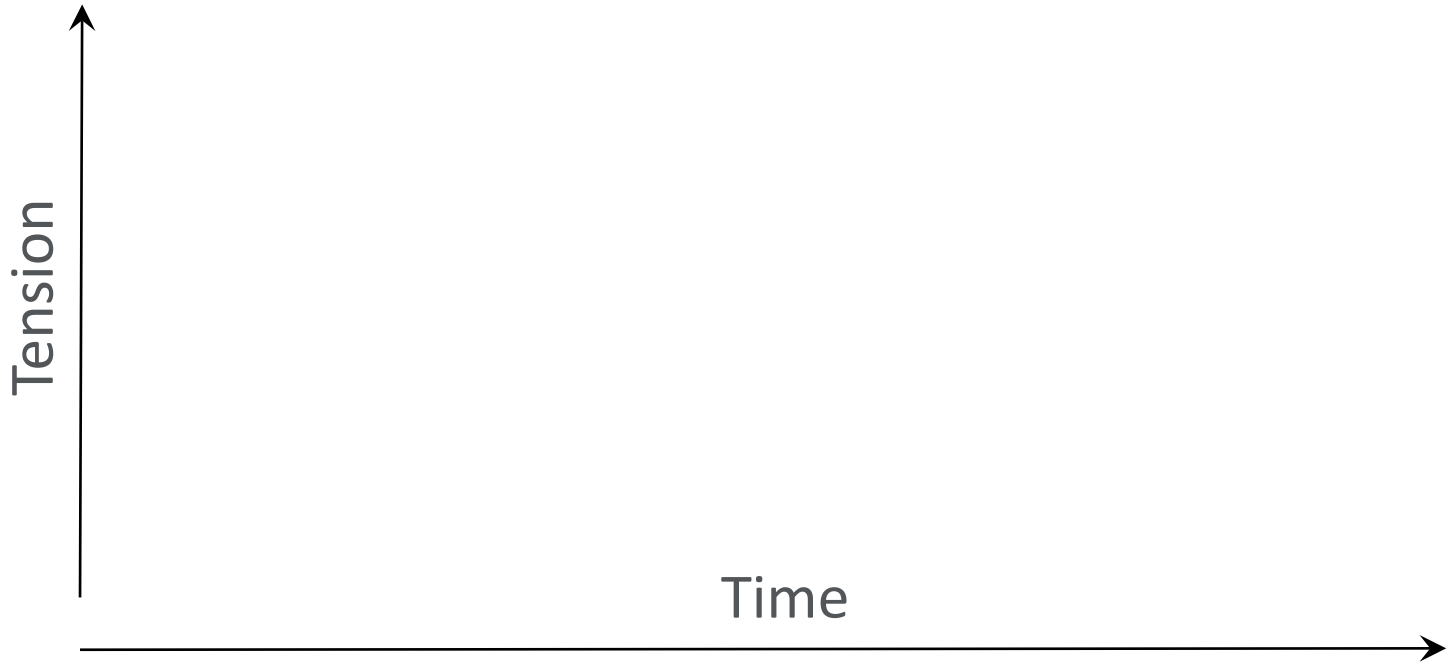
The ABT framework

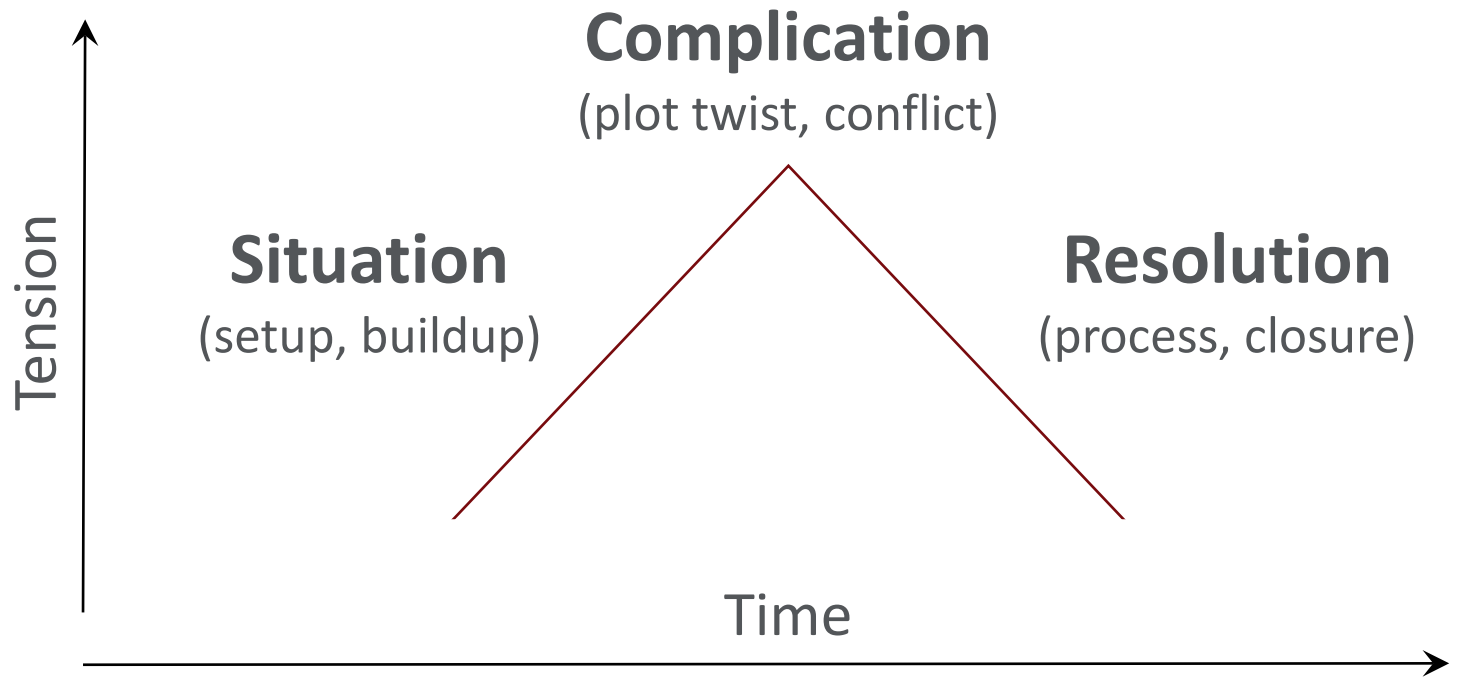
"There is not just one way of getting to that sweet zone, **and** if you go online you'll find many methods, **but** there's one that I find very useful, and **therefore** I thought I'd share it with you."

[…] and […] ***but […]*** ***therefore […]***

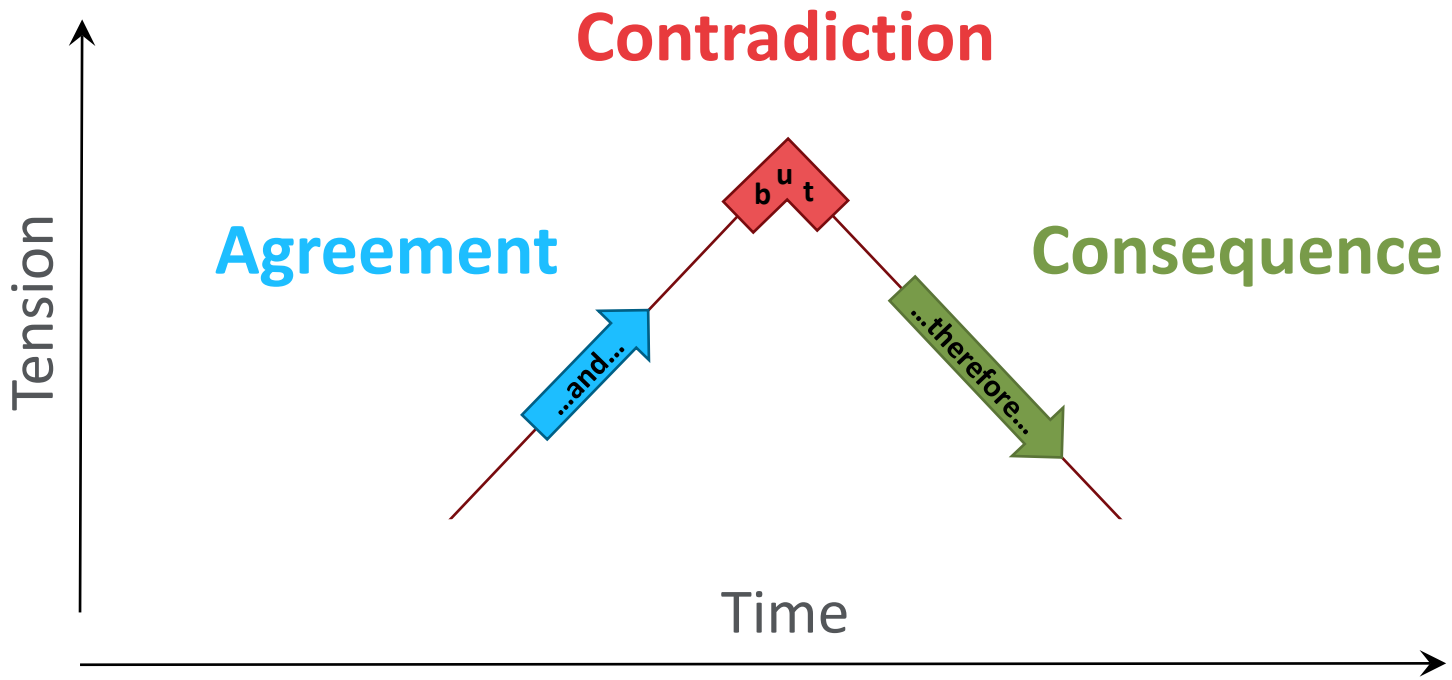
Memorable books, movies, podcasts are good stories



Memorable books, movies, podcasts are good stories



Turn anything into a story using the ABT framework!



Narrative switch words

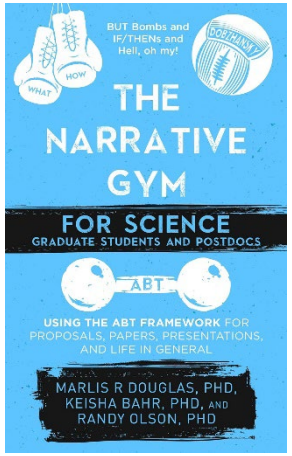
Agreement	Contradiction	Consequence
and	*but*	*therefore*
also	*however*	*so*
as well as	*instead*	*as a result*
moreover	*otherwise*	*for this reason*
likewise	*conversely*	*accordingly*

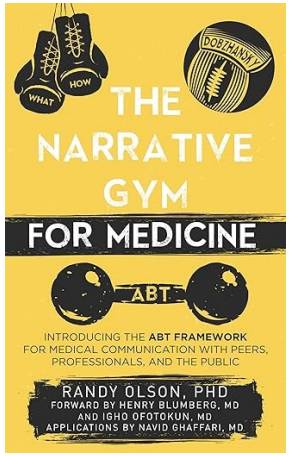
Randy Olson, PhD

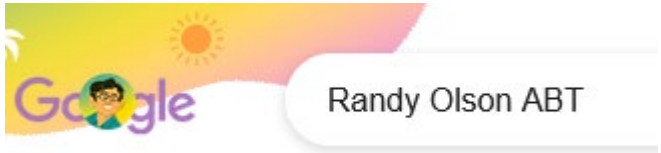
"This storytelling approach is universal, **and** we all have an intuitive sense of what makes a good story; **however,** it was Randy Olson who formalized it and made it popular, **to the point that** it turned into a career for him."

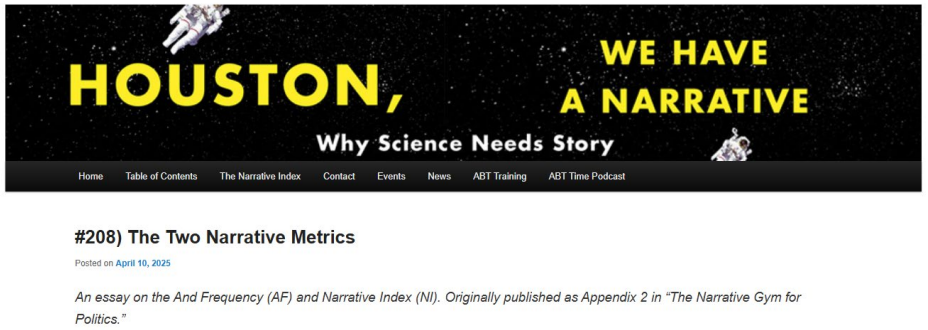
Biology professor turned filmmaker turned story coach

Randy Olson, PhD









One (professional) question that you have trouble answering concisely?

What's your research about?

Can you walk me through your poster?

Are we close to a cure?

How will your research advance the field, and impact society?

"I would have written a shorter letter, but I didn't have the time."
Cicero, 106 – 43 BCE

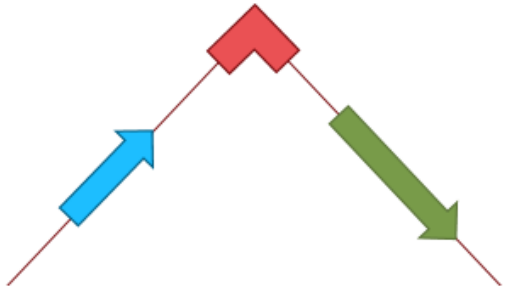
…hanging out with friends?

Am I…

…discussing with a fellow scientist?

…advising a patient?

…writing a research statement?



Context grid

[*Question or comment*]

Format	Who is asking?	Situation

[*Question or comment*]

Format	Who is asking?	Situation
Verbal? •Spontaneous, friendly •Known / prepared in advance •At a conference or meeting Written? •E-mail •Statement		

[*Question or comment*]

Format	Who is asking?	Situation
Verbal? •Spontaneous, friendly •Known / prepared in advance •At a conference or meeting Written? •E-mail •Statement	•New acquaintance •Friend / family member •Colleague •Supervisor •Mentee •Potential donor •Funding agency	

[*Question or comment*]

Format	Who is asking?	Situation
Verbal? •Spontaneous, friendly •Known / prepared in advance •At a conference or meeting Written? •E-mail •Statement	•New acquaintance •Friend / family member •Colleague •Supervisor •Mentee •Potential donor •Funding agency	•Professional, but casual •Professional, but business •Networking event •Casual, with friends / family •Professional social media •Job application •Grant application

[*Question or comment*]

Format	Who is asking?	Situation
Verbal? •**Spontaneous, friendly** •Known / prepared in advance •At a conference or meeting Written? •E-mail •Statement	•**New acquaintance** •Friend / family member •Colleague •Supervisor •Mentee •Potential donor •Funding agency	•Professional, but casual •Professional, but business •**Networking event** •Casual, with friends / family •Professional social media •Job application •Grant application

[…] and […] but […] therefore […]

Story portfolio

[*Question or comment*]

Format	Who is asking?	Situation

Format	Who is asking?	Situation

Format	Who is asking?	Situation

Example:

"Adolescents living with HIV have shown high rates of mortality, virologic failure, and loss to follow up. Treatment fatigue, forgetting, internalized stigma, interference with school and conflict with social and extra- curricular activities all contribute to lapses in adherence to oral, daily ART for adolescents living with HIV. The proposed research will evaluate the use of peer navigators and long-acting injectable antiretroviral therapy in addition to baseline adolescent-friendly services in a randomized clinical trial and evaluate implementation factors associated with each intervention in multiple settings throughout South Africa."

Source: **NIH Reporter for PATC^{3}H-IN ATTUNE project**

About ATTUNE

Question or comment

Format	Who is asking?	Situation

Two scenarios

About ATTUNE

Plain language impact statement

Format	Who is asking?	Situation
Written statement	A funding agency	Grant proposal

Balancing school, social pressures, **and** the stress of managing a lifelong condition make it very challenging for South African adolescents living with HIV to adhere to daily oral antiretroviral therapy (ART). For this reason, treatment failure and mortality rates among these youth remain high, **but** long-acting injectable ART has the potential to reverse this trend. **In this project,** we will engage peer navigators and adolescent-friendly services to optimize implementation of injectable ART among teenagers in South Africa living with HIV, improving their outcomes and saving countless lives.

About ATTUNE

Why should we donate to your cause?

Format	Who is asking?	Situation
60-s oral pitch	The board of a philanthropic organization	Fundraising event

In South Africa, too many teens living with HIV are still getting seriously ill or dying—even though treatment exists, **and** that is often because daily pills are hard to keep up with. These young people are balancing school, social pressures, stigma, and the daily stress of managing a lifelong condition, **but** there's a better solution: a long-acting injectable treatment that only needs to be taken every few weeks or months. **With your contribution**, we will bring this treatment to teens through peer support and services designed just for them, to help them stay healthy, stay in care, and build brighter futures—while saving lives along the way.

Other ideas?

Questions?

Email us:

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