

BALANCING SCIENCE AND STORY-TELLING

TIP SHEET

Steve Hall

- **OSCILLATION:** In the overall rhythm of the narrative, too much science creates a clot in the flow of story; go back and forth between the story-telling and the science
- **PROGRESSION:** Most accounts of science have an overall arc, with steps/benchmarks along the way; use those benchmarks to create discrete chapters or sections or passages of the narrative, so readers can follow the science, step by step, as it progresses toward the ultimate goal
- **CHRONOLOGY:** Reporting and understanding the scientific narrative informs the larger narrative arc
 - Use dates of scientific meetings and/or date of papers submitted or accepted to provide a chronological skeleton to the narrative
 - Ignorance is a great narrative element: Use those dates and your reporting to figure out what people *didn't* know at certain junctures of the story
- **SUSPENSE:** Framing the scientific goal as “Can this be done?” or “Will we be the first to do it?” can drive a narrative and pique reader interest in the scientific steps
- **HUMAN AGENCY:** Embed the science in human aspiration and emotion; use scientific personalities to lead into the science; use scientific failure as a storytelling element that readers can relate to
- **NARRATIVE THEORY OF RELATIVITY:** All rules depend on context; length of story, venue determine the amount and texture of science in the storytelling