

EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE ANALOGIES

Southern California Marine Mammal Workshop 2014

By Stuart Wolpert

An effective way to convey complex scientific ideas is by using analogies to everyday life. Here are a few examples:

- Telomeres are small pieces of DNA on the ends of chromosomes that act as protective caps – like the plastic tips on the ends of shoelaces.
- Imagine the cell as a train station jam-packed with proteins. Each protein bumps into other proteins an estimated one million times a second. Most of the time, the proteins act like strangers who brush up against each other and leave it at that. But every once in a while, they pass a message back and forth. It's as if you bumped into your sister and she told you, 'Mom said to get off at the next station.' In this way, the action of the protein is changed.
- If you go back three million generations, we are distantly related to eocytes in the same way that we are related to our parents and grandparents.
- The identification of the ancient city of Urkesh is analogous to knowing that Rome is in Italy and then finding Rome.

ALTERNATIVE TO 'NO COMMENT'

If a journalist asks you a question that goes beyond your expertise or a question you're not comfortable answering, rather than saying "no comment," which makes you look evasive, try using a transition phrase that lets you bridge to an answer you want to give. Here are a few examples provided by Stuart Wolpert, guest speaker at the SCMMW:

- "I wouldn't describe it that way, but I would say that ..."

- “That question points out a common misconception. The real issue is ...”
- “It’s important to remember that_...”
- “Unfortunately, our research does not answer that question, but it does tell us that...”