Science Journalism
Between Education and Entertainment
Die Zeit
Weekly paper, circulation 500,000
Science section: 8 editors/reporters
Books
Mathematics, Physics, Music, Babies, Urban Legends …
Books
Mathematics, Physics, Music, Babies, Urban Legends …
1. The Cheerleader Era
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1. The Cheerleader Era
1. The Cheerleader Era
1. The Cheerleader Era
2. The Watchdog Era
2. The Watchdog Era
2. The Watchdog Era
3. The Journalist Era
3. The Journalist Era
3. The Journalist Era
3. The Journalist Era
3. The “Journalist” Era
3. The "Journalist" Era

- Consumer Organizations
- Privater Health Initiatives
- Social Institutions
- Political Institutions
- Counterculture
- Doctors' Associations
- Pharmacists' Associations
- Research Institutions
- Universities
- Patient/Self Help Groups
- Schools and Preschools
- Environmental Groups
- Athletic Clubs
- Health Insurance Companies
- Health Authorities
- Labor Organizations and Unions
- Journalists
- Private Investors and Shareholders
- Pharmaceutical Companies
- Universities

Source: Franziska Weder
3. The “Journalist” Era

- Consumer Organizations
- Private Health Initiatives
- Social Institutions
- Political Institutions
- Counter Culture
- Doctors’ Associations
- Pharmacists’ Associations
- Research Institutions
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- Patient/Self Help Groups
- Schools and Preschools
- Athletic Clubs
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- Private Investors and Shareholders
- Pharmaceutical Companies
- Labor Organizations and Unions
- Health Authorities
- Health Insurance Companies

Source: Franzisca Weder
3. The Journalist Era
3. The Journalist Era
3. The Journalist Era
3. The Journalist Era
4. The Internet Era
4. The Internet Era
4. The Internet Era
4. The Internet Era
4. The Internet Era
4. The Internet Era
4. The Internet Era
A New Continuum
A New Continuum

- Scientist
- Blogging Scientist
- Professional Blogger
- Traditional Journalist

Science
An Alarming Trend

• Dedicated Weekly Science Sections in U.S. Newspapers
  Source: Columbia Journalism Review
An Alarming Trend

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  Source: Columbia Journalism Review

1989  2005  2012
An Alarming Trend

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  Source: Columbia Journalism Review

1989  95  2005  2012
An Alarming Trend

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An Alarming Trend

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  Source: Columbia Journalism Review
New Jobs for Old Media
New Jobs for Old Media

• Don’t bring the news, but explain the news
New Jobs for Old Media

- Don’t bring the news, but explain the news
- Surprise the reader
New Jobs for Old Media

- Don’t bring the news, but explain the news
- Surprise the reader
- Give the reader orientation
New Jobs for Old Media

• Don’t bring the news, but explain the news
• Surprise the reader
• Give the reader orientation
• Tell stories
New Jobs for Old Media

• Don’t bring the news, but explain the news
• Surprise the reader
• Give the reader orientation
• Tell stories
• Act in the reader’s interest
New Jobs for Old Media

- Don’t bring the news, but explain the news
- Surprise the reader
- Give the reader orientation
- Tell stories
- Act in the reader’s interest
- Be an expert, but keep the distance
The Relationship
The Relationship

Science ?

Science
The Relationship

- The journalist is not the scientist’s interpreter!
The Relationship

- The journalist is not the scientist’s interpreter!
- A vast part of science is too complicated to be explained in general-interest media.
The Relationship

- The journalist is not the scientist’s interpreter!
- A vast part of science is too complicated to be explained in general-interest media.
- Scientists have to be able to speak for themselves and address the public in plain language.
The Relationship

Science ?

Science
The Relationship

• Journalism isn’t knowledge transfer!
  (At least not primarily.)
The Relationship

- Journalism isn’t knowledge transfer!
  (At least not primarily.)

- Media are not educational institutions.
- Journalism isn’t knowledge transfer! (At least not primarily.)

- Media are not educational institutions.

- The job of science journalists is not just to present their audience with the wonders of scientific progress.
The Relationship

Science  ?  Science
The scientist doesn’t define the topics, the journalist does.
The Relationship

- The scientist doesn’t define the topics, the journalist does.
- A big part of scientific knowledge is not relevant to everyday life.
The Relationship

• The scientist doesn’t define the topics, the journalist does.

• A big part of scientific knowledge is not relevant to everyday life.

• The exceptions to this rule are the subject of reporting.
The Relationship

• The scientist doesn’t define the topics, the journalist does.

• A big part of scientific knowledge is not relevant to everyday life.

• The exceptions to this rule are the subject of reporting.

• Journalists have scientific and non-scientific criteria for choosing their topics.
The Relationship
• Science journalists are correspondents in a foreign country called Science.
The Relationship

- Science journalists are correspondents in a foreign country called Science.
- They are dependent on local guides – that’s you!
The Relationship

- Science journalists are correspondents in a foreign country called Science.
- They are dependent on local guides – that’s you!
- “Scientists are to journalists what lab rats are to scientists.” (Victor Cohn, The Washington Post)
The Relationship

Science

?
The Relationship

- The danger of misunderstanding each other:
The Relationship

- The danger of misunderstanding each other:
  - Different cultures
The Relationship

- The danger of misunderstanding each other:
  - Different cultures
  - Different roles
The Relationship

- The danger of misunderstanding each other:
  - Different cultures
  - Different roles
  - Different languages
The Relationship

- The danger of misunderstanding each other:
  - Different cultures
  - Different roles
  - Different languages
  - Different criteria for quality
The Relationship

Science  ?  Science
The Relationship

- Surprise: both sides report predominantly positive experience.
The Relationship

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• Survey 2002–03 about reporting on climate change in Germany: 78% of scientists, 92% of journalists call their experience “predominantly good”. (TATuP, vol 15 No. 2, p. 87–99)
The Relationship

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• In professional encounters, different interests and cultures are acknowledged.
**The Relationship**

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- In professional encounters, different interests and cultures are acknowledged.

- They appear to have compatible ideas about communicating with the public.
The Role of the Scientist
The Role of the Scientist

- Teacher – popularizes scientific knowledge
The Role of the Scientist

- Teacher – popularizes scientific knowledge
- Expert – provides advice and expertise in current affairs
The Role of the Scientist

- Teacher – popularizes scientific knowledge
- Expert – provides advice and expertise in current affairs
- Advocate – warns about dangers, criticizes public policy
The Role of the Scientist

- Teacher – popularizes scientific knowledge
- Expert – provides advice and expertise in current affairs
- Advocate – warns about dangers, criticizes public policy
- Lobbyist – seeks public exposure to secure funding etc.
The Role of the Journalist
The Role of the Journalist

- Educated layperson – doesn’t know everything, but knows who to ask
The Role of the Journalist

- Educated layperson – doesn’t know everything, but knows who to ask
- Readers’ advocate – picks topics according to what (she thinks) her readers are concerned about
The Role of the Journalist

- Educated layperson – doesn’t know everything, but knows who to ask
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- Steers the communication – “I am asking the questions!”
The Role of the Journalist

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- Readers’ advocate – picks topics according to what (she thinks) her readers are concerned about
- Steers the communication – “I am asking the questions!”
- Scientist’s partner – helps the scientist be articulate
What Do Science Journalists Do?
What Do Science Journalists Do?

• Report on recent developments in science
What Do Science Journalists Do?

- Report on recent developments in science
- Educate their readers
What Do Science Journalists Do?

• Report on recent developments in science
• Educate their readers
• Explore the scientific backgrounds of current events
What Do Science Journalists Do?

• Report on recent developments in science
• Educate their readers
• Explore the scientific backgrounds of current events
• Give advice and provide “news you can use”
What Do Science Journalists Do?

- Report on recent developments in science
- Educate their readers
- Explore the scientific backgrounds of current events
- Give advice and provide “news you can use”
- Write for a specialized audience
What Do Science Journalists Do?

- Report on recent developments in science
- Educate their readers
- Explore the scientific backgrounds of current events
- Give advice and provide “news you can use”
- Write for a specialized audience
- Entertain
When the Phone Rings …
When the Phone Rings ...
When the Phone Rings …

The fears:
When the Phone Rings …

The fears:

• Will she understand what my science is about?
When the Phone Rings ...

The fears:

• Will she understand what my science is about?

• Will she turn my words around?
When the Phone Rings …

The fears:

• Will she understand what my science is about?
• Will she turn my words around?
• Will she misrepresent or exaggerate my results?
When the Phone Rings …

The fears:

• Will she understand what my science is about?
• Will she turn my words around?
• Will she misrepresent or exaggerate my results?
• Will she really explain all the details?
When the Phone Rings ...
When the Phone Rings ...

So:
When the Phone Rings …

So:

• Stay calm – you know more!
When the Phone Rings …

So:

- Stay calm – you know more!
- Who is calling?
When the Phone Rings ...

So:

• Stay calm – you know more!
• Who is calling?
• Adjust your level of science lingo (if in doubt: -1)
When the Phone Rings …

So:

• Stay calm – you know more!

• Who is calling?

• Adjust your level of science lingo (if in doubt: -1)

• Simplify, don’t oversimplify (Einstein)
When the Phone Rings ...

So:

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So:

• Stay calm – you know more!

• Who is calling?

• Adjust your level of science lingo (if in doubt: –1)

• Simplify, don’t oversimplify (Einstein)

• Tell your story
When the Phone Rings …

So:

• Stay calm – you know more!

• Who is calling?

• Adjust your level of science lingo (if in doubt: -1)

• Simplify, don’t oversimplify (Einstein)

• Tell your story

• Be personal (use the “I” word)
When the Phone Rings …

So:

• Stay calm – you know more!

• Who is calling?

• Adjust your level of science lingo (if in doubt: −1)

• Simplify, don’t oversimplify (Einstein)

• Tell your story

• Be personal (use the “I” word)

• Offer to verify your quotes and