We are story-telling animals. Well-told stories, whether real or fictional, engage and move us. We remember them along with the lessons they contain, and we pass them on to others. Consequently, personal narratives or topic-centered narratives can be very effective tools for communicating ‘dry’ scientific facts and ideas to a lay public. But, perhaps surprisingly, narrative is also a dominant form of communication within science. New scientific data and discoveries are commonly presented in the context of ‘a good story’. My talk will focus on this use of narrative - in primary scientific papers - stories of true discoveries, but not necessarily true stories of discovery.

Peter Medawar’s 1963 provocative attack on the ‘classical’ format of scientific papers has clear merit and it can be used to argue in favor of the narrative format, in particular for hypothesis-driven research. More recent developments of this format, for example in the rapidly expanding area of molecular biology, highlight both its strengths and its limitations. I will argue that there are three major advantages to using narrative:

- Increased readability and retention of ‘a good story’ allows its communication beyond the immediate field.
- The natural fit of narrative form to investigations of causality.
- The opportunity to provide depth and context can aid understanding and appreciation.

The disadvantages and limitations are not insignificant, however, raising the question of whether this format should be as pervasive as it is:
• Seductiveness of ‘a good story’ can mislead readers as well as authors – both in terms of veracity and merit/impact.
• Storylines are inherently constrained; relevant results and interpretations may be undervalued or missed.
• Requiring ‘full’ stories for publication may waste scientific effort and inhibit early careers.

I will finish by presenting some alternative approaches to publishing scientific findings, including existing initiatives and more speculative ideas. One question is of course who controls the format of science communication and how.