

How to build (good) models

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Modeling workflow overview

- Have a scenario/question for which a model can provide useful insight (hardest part).
- Translate your scenario/question into a suitable model (hard).
- Implement the model on a computer, analyze it, produce results such as figures and tables (fairly easy).
- Write it all up and try to publish (easy to hard, depends on journal).

Step 1 - Should I?

- What do I want to accomplish and can a model help?



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Coming up with an important/relevant question where a model can be useful is the most important component.

Step 2 - Decide what matters

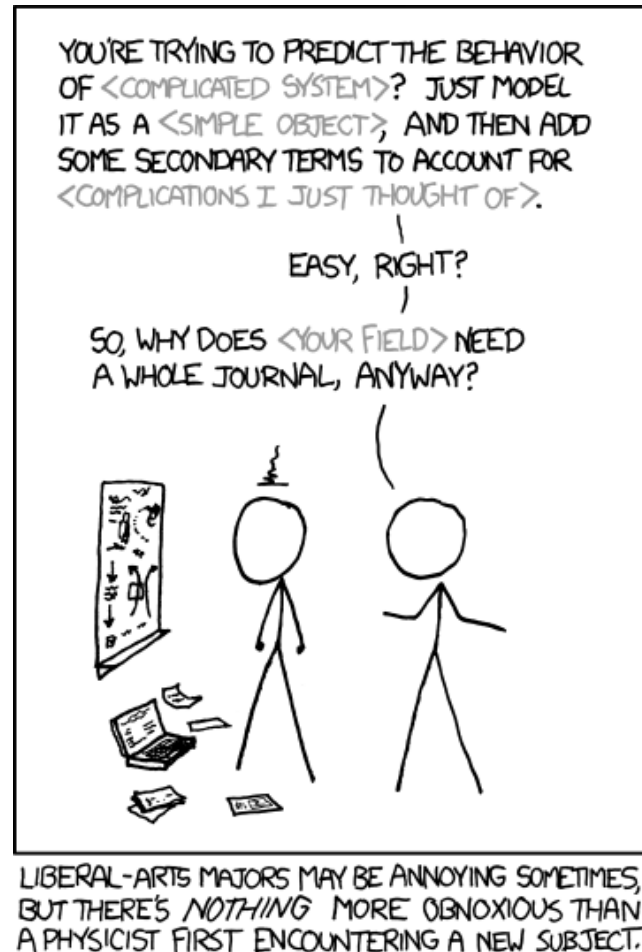
- Reality is so complicated, we can never (and don't want to) include every detail into a model. Therefore, models are always approximations of the real world.
- The type of model and detail needed depends on the question.
- Good modeling means having a model that includes details that matter and ignores details that do not matter.



Maps as an analogy for models.

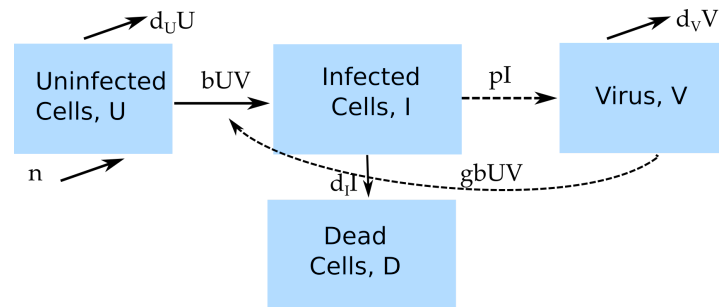
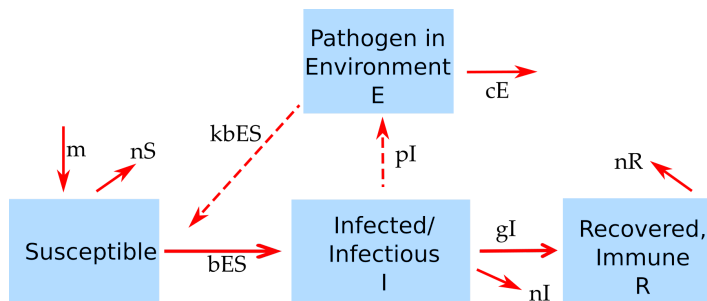
Step 3 - Choose model type & details

- I recommend starting with a simple model.
- ODE models are good starting points.
- Only include the most essential components and processes you know you need.
- You can always increase model size/complexity later.



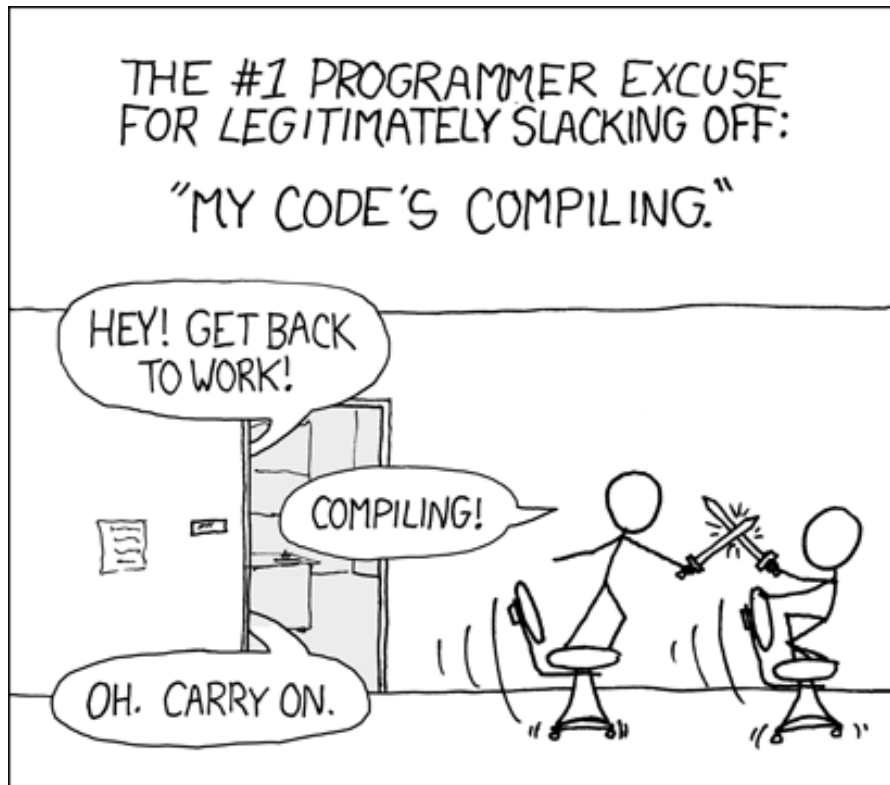
Step 4 - Sketch the model

- Draw diagrams of the model components and interactions.
- If you do an ODE model, write down the equations.
- Writing down the ODEs might be a good exercise even if you will use a more complicated model eventually.



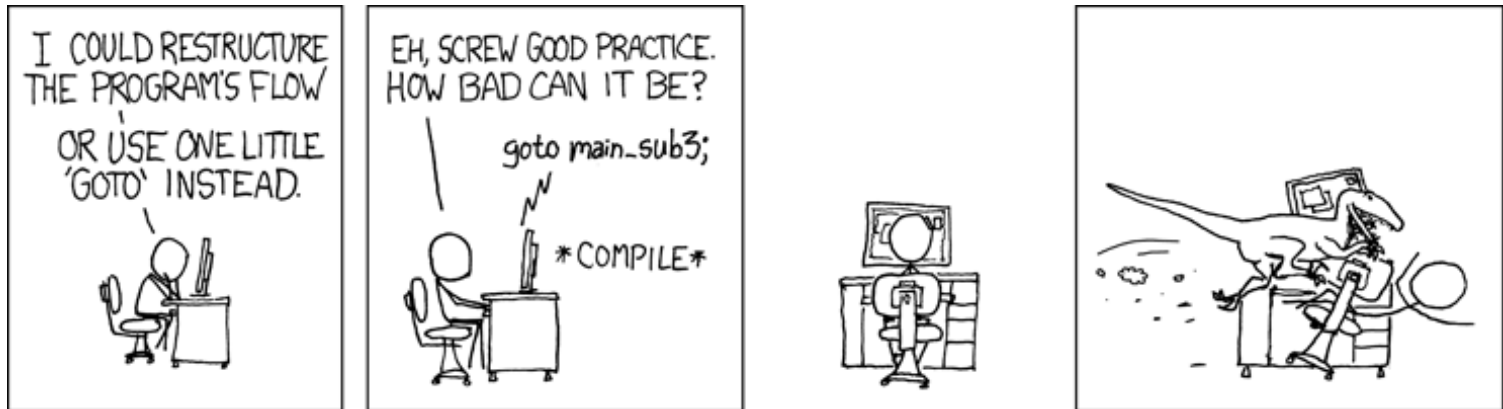
Step 5 - Implement the model

- Write computer code for the model.



Step 6-666 - debug code, fix model

- Run your model code. It will likely not run and/or produce weird results.
- Find all the bugs in your code and in your conceptual/mathematical model until everything seems to work.
- As you test your model, make sure every component works right.
- Trying extreme scenarios is often a good quick test.



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Step 667 - analyze model

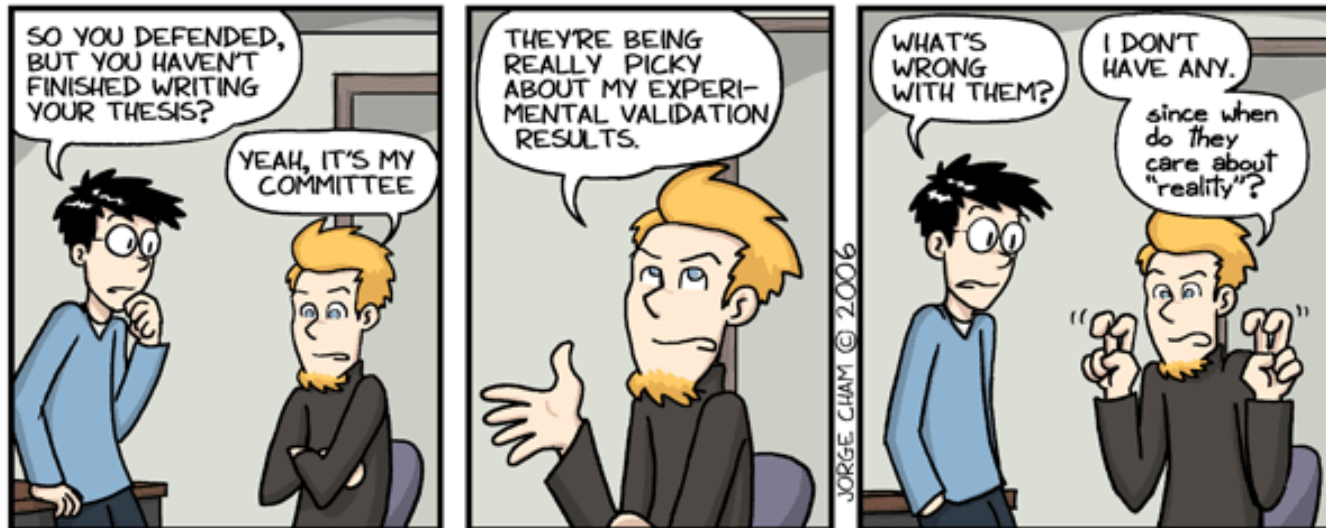
- Once your model works, run simulations, analyze results.



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Step 668-N - Reality check & model adjustment

- Compare your model results with whatever data you have/know about.
- As needed (very likely) adjust model to reality.
- **Note the model "failures"**: If you built a reasonable model and it wasn't able to reproduce reality, you/we have learned something.
- Keep iterating until the model "works".



Step N+1 - Write up and publish

Your (real) Impact Factor

$$\text{Impact Factor (corrected)} = \frac{\begin{array}{l} \# \text{ times your work is cited} \\ - \# \text{ citations that actually trash your work} \\ - \# \text{ times you cited yourself (nice try)} \\ - \# \text{ times you were cited just to pad the introduction section} \\ - \# \text{ citations the editor pressured the author to include to increase the journal's impact factor} \end{array}}{\begin{array}{l} \# \text{ original articles you've written} \\ + \# \text{ articles you were included in out of pity or politics} \\ + \# \text{ not-so-original articles you've} \\ \quad \text{copied and pasted} \end{array}}$$