École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne

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Laboratory of Chemical Nanotechnology

Surfaces in the Real World - Adsorption
Lesson 2

MSE 304

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September 19th 2025

Plan of the Course: Fundamentals, Characterization, and Applications

1: Intro to Surfaces & Interfaces

2: Surfaces in the Real World - Adsorption

3: Surface Fundamentals – Energy & Structure

4: Solid-Solid Interfaces

5: Characterization of Real Surfaces

6: Solid-Liquid Interfaces + Techniques

7: Interfacial Phenomena

8: Charged Solid-Liquid Interfaces

9: Surface Chemistry

10: Biological Processes at Surfaces

11: Electronic Properties of Surfaces

12: Thin Film Technologies

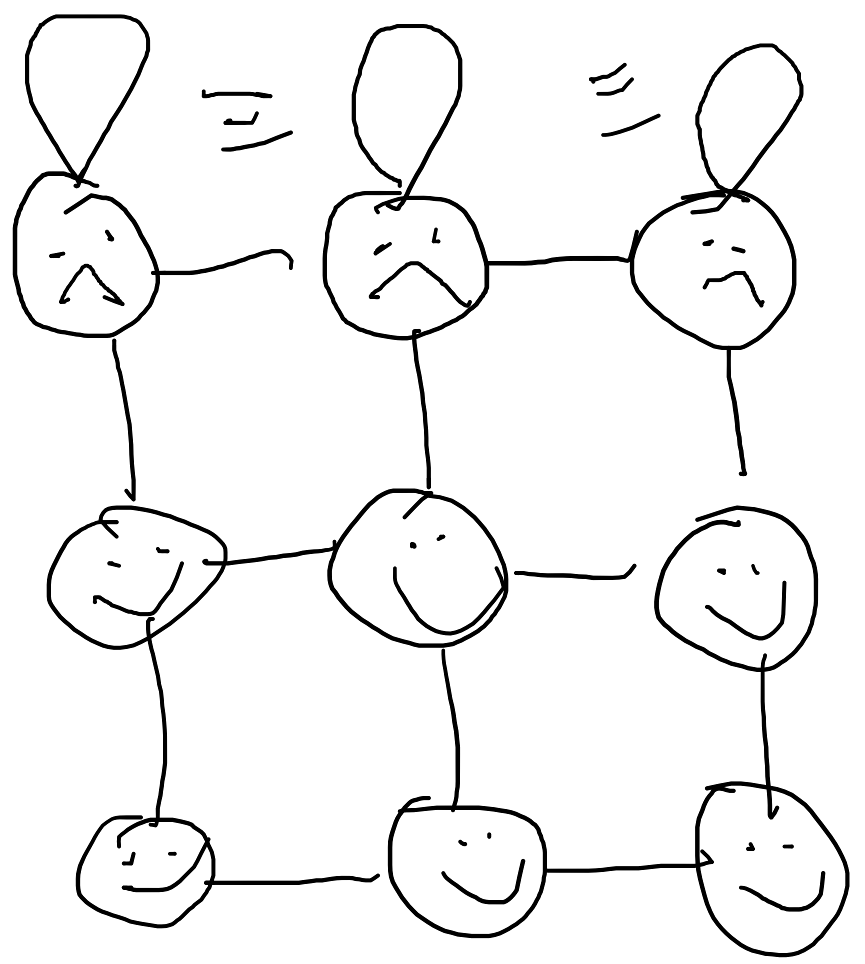
13: Biosensor Fundamentals

14: Biosensing applications

Things may be adapted in real time – thank you for your patience!
Midterm feedback (Week 5) – Recap session Week 7?

Recap from Lesson 1

- Surface science is *not* a mature field
- Why study surfaces and interfaces?
- Challenges of studying surfaces and interfaces
- Keeping surfaces clean is very challenging – UHV can help



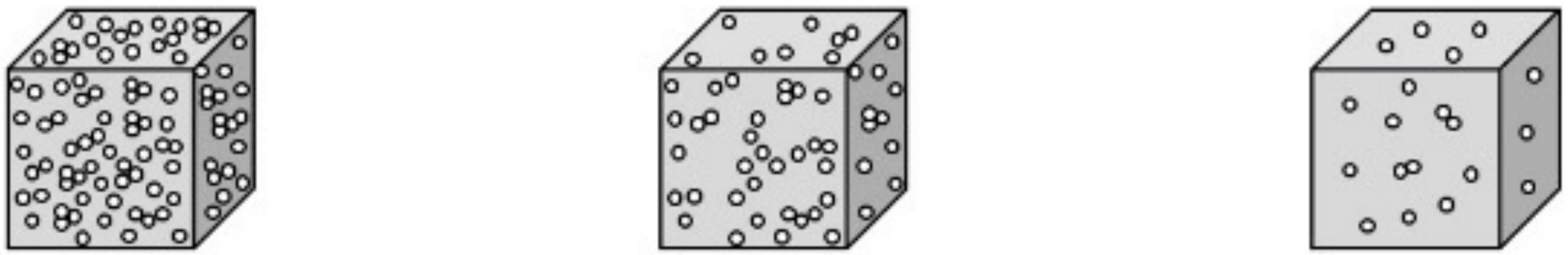
What's really on a surface and how do we deal with it?

Outline of Lesson 2

- Basics of physisorption and chemisorption
- Short recap of crystal structures
- Visualizing surfaces at the atomic level – scanning tunneling microscopy (STM)
- Surface contamination sources & problems
- How to obtain clean surfaces – cleaning hierarchy

Instantaneous Contamination on Surfaces

Rough Vacuum	High Vacuum	Ultra High Vacuum
1 atm – 10^{-3} Torr	10^{-3} Torr - 10^{-8} Torr	10^{-8} Torr - 10^{-12} Torr

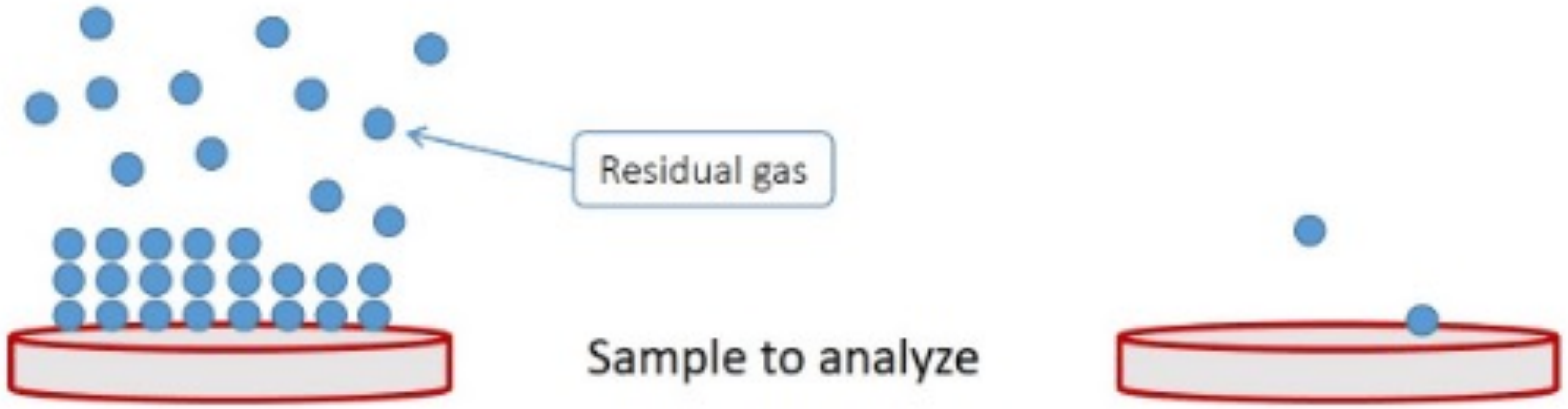


1 x 10^{-3} Torr	1 x 10^{-6} Torr	1 x 10^{-11} Torr
10^{13} atoms/cm^3	10^{10} atoms/cm^3	10^{5} atoms/cm^3

1 residual gas **monolayer** every **4 SECONDS**

1 residual gas **monolayer** every **4 DAYS**

High Vacuum



UHV

VAC COAT

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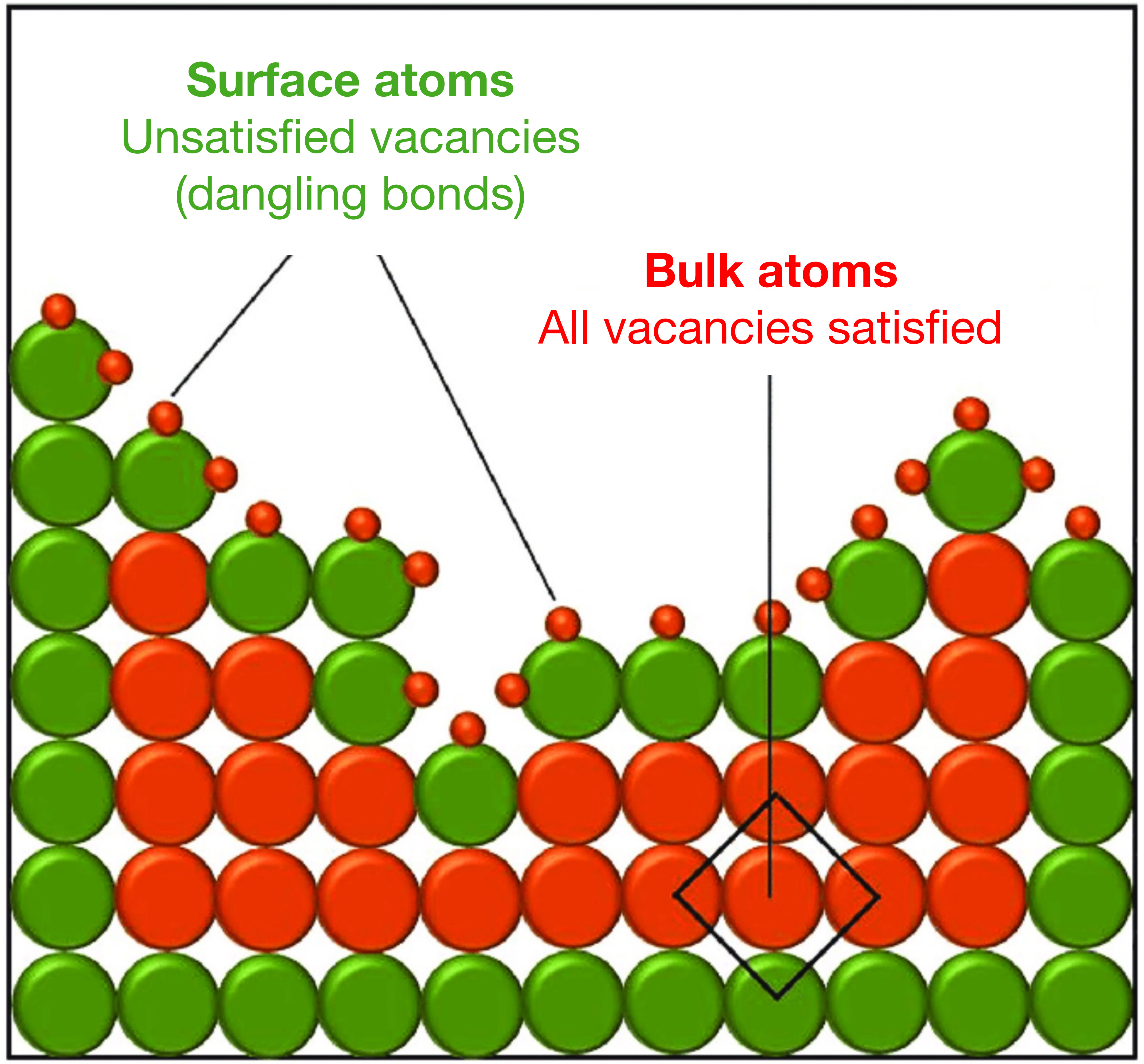
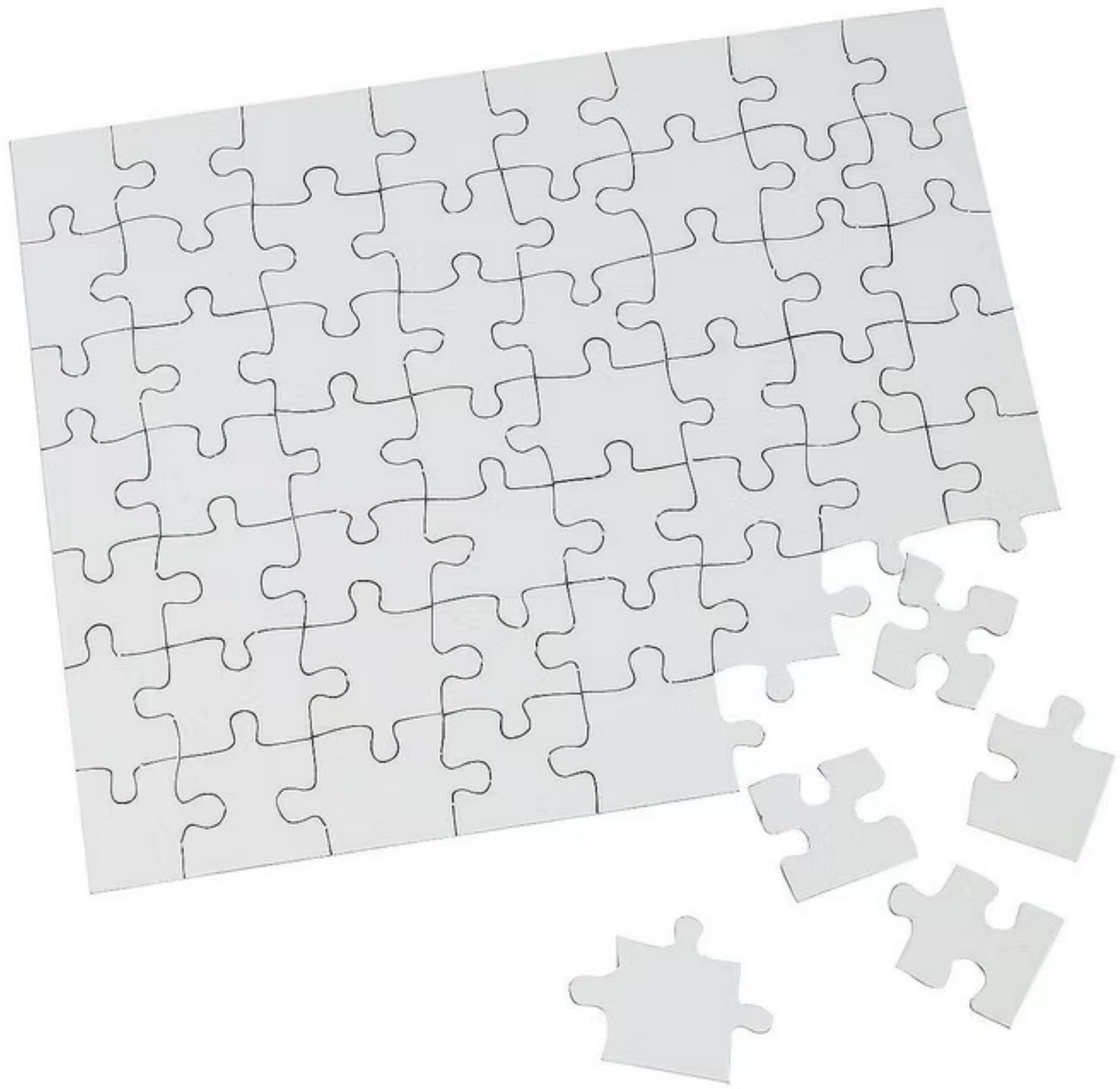
Clean Surfaces are High Energy – Coatings Lower Energy

Surface energetically unfavorable compared to bulk

Clean surface has a high surface energy and wants to reduce this





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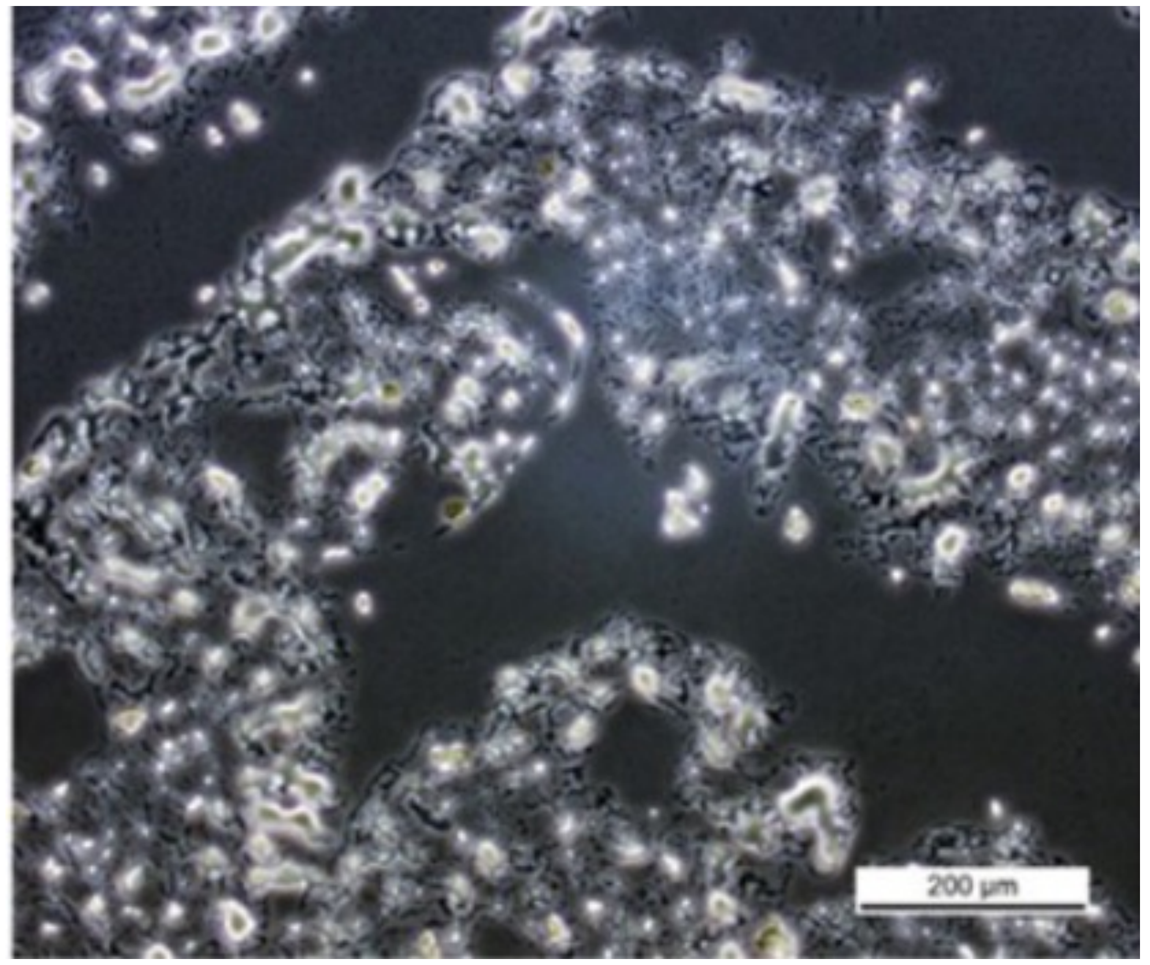
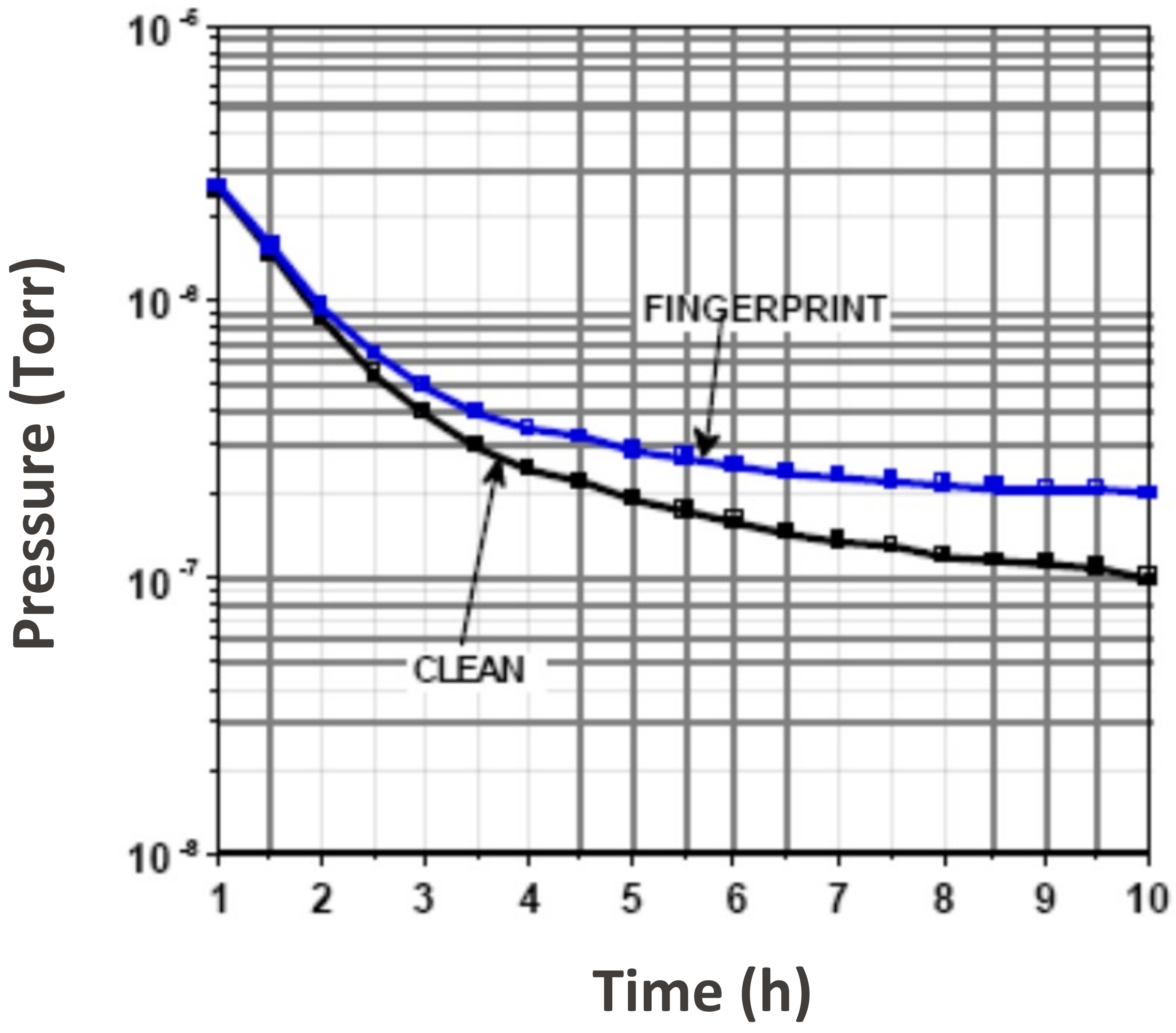
Sources of Surface Contamination

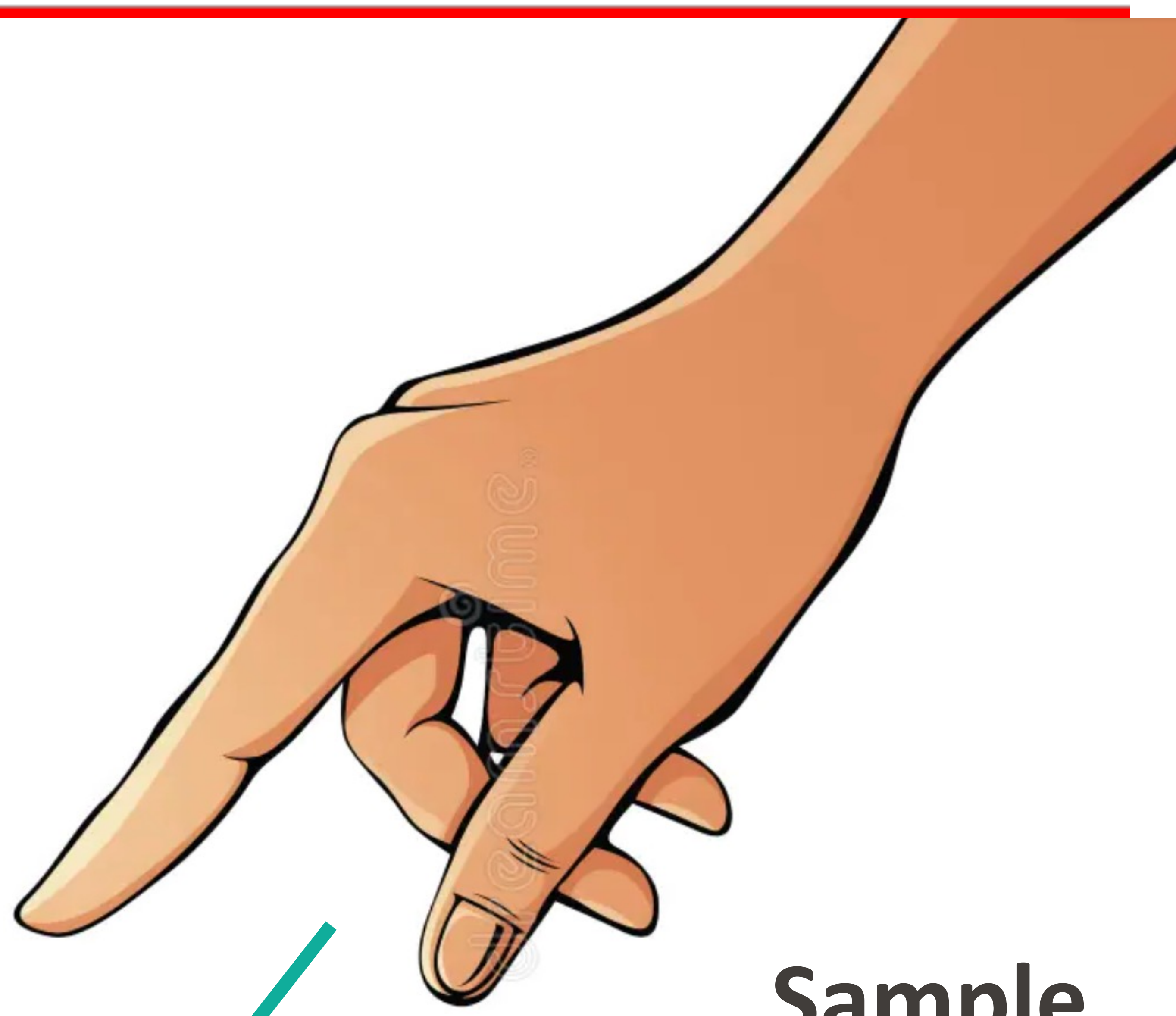
Single Fingerprint Has a Large Effect on Vacuum Pumpdown

1 fingerprint = 1 x 10^{19} molecules!



Moret *et al.* | *Forensic Sci. Int.* | 2018





Sample handling

Empa

Materials Science and Technology

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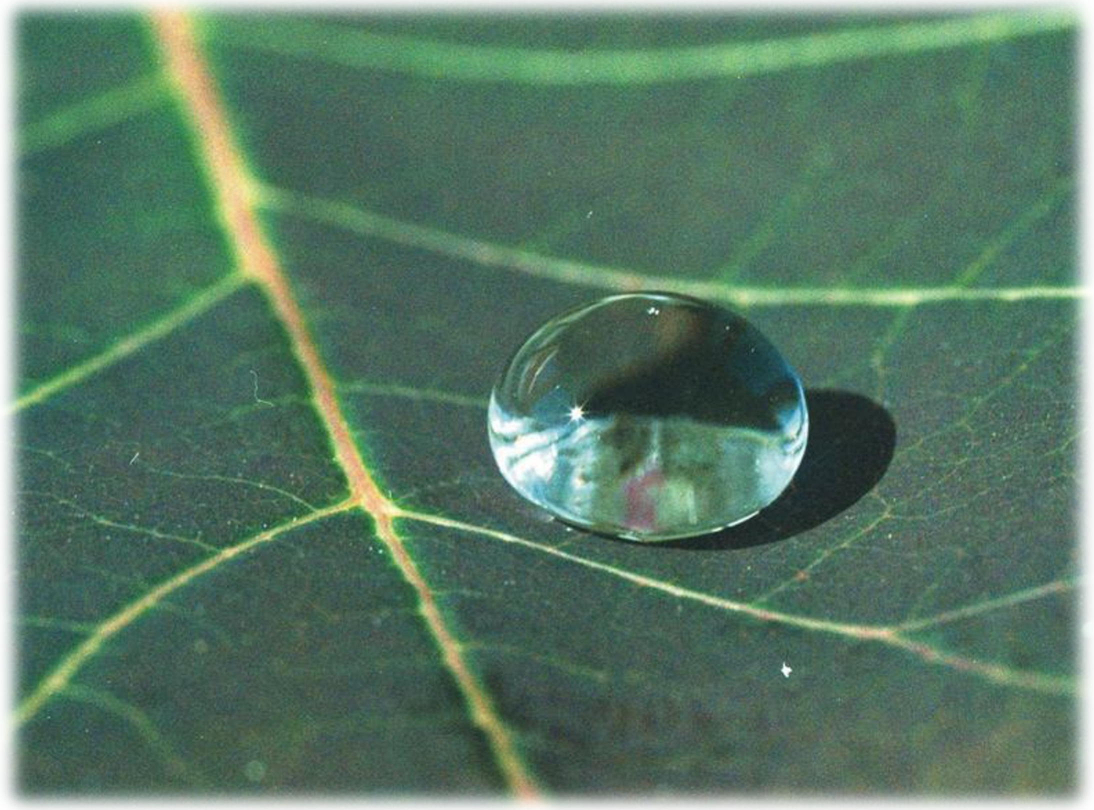
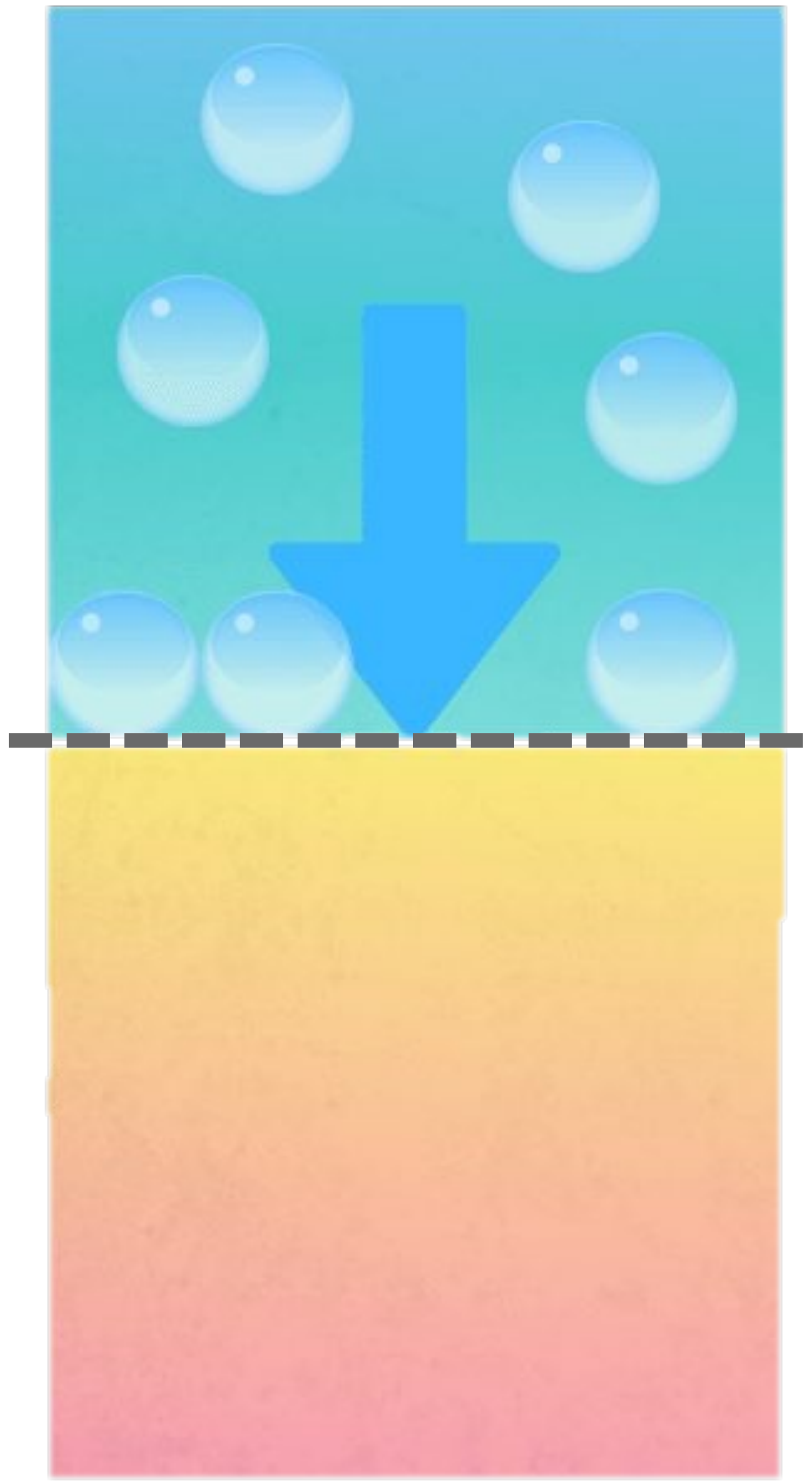
Careful: Adsorption *vs.* Absorption



Adsorption

Sticking to the surface of the other phase



Surface

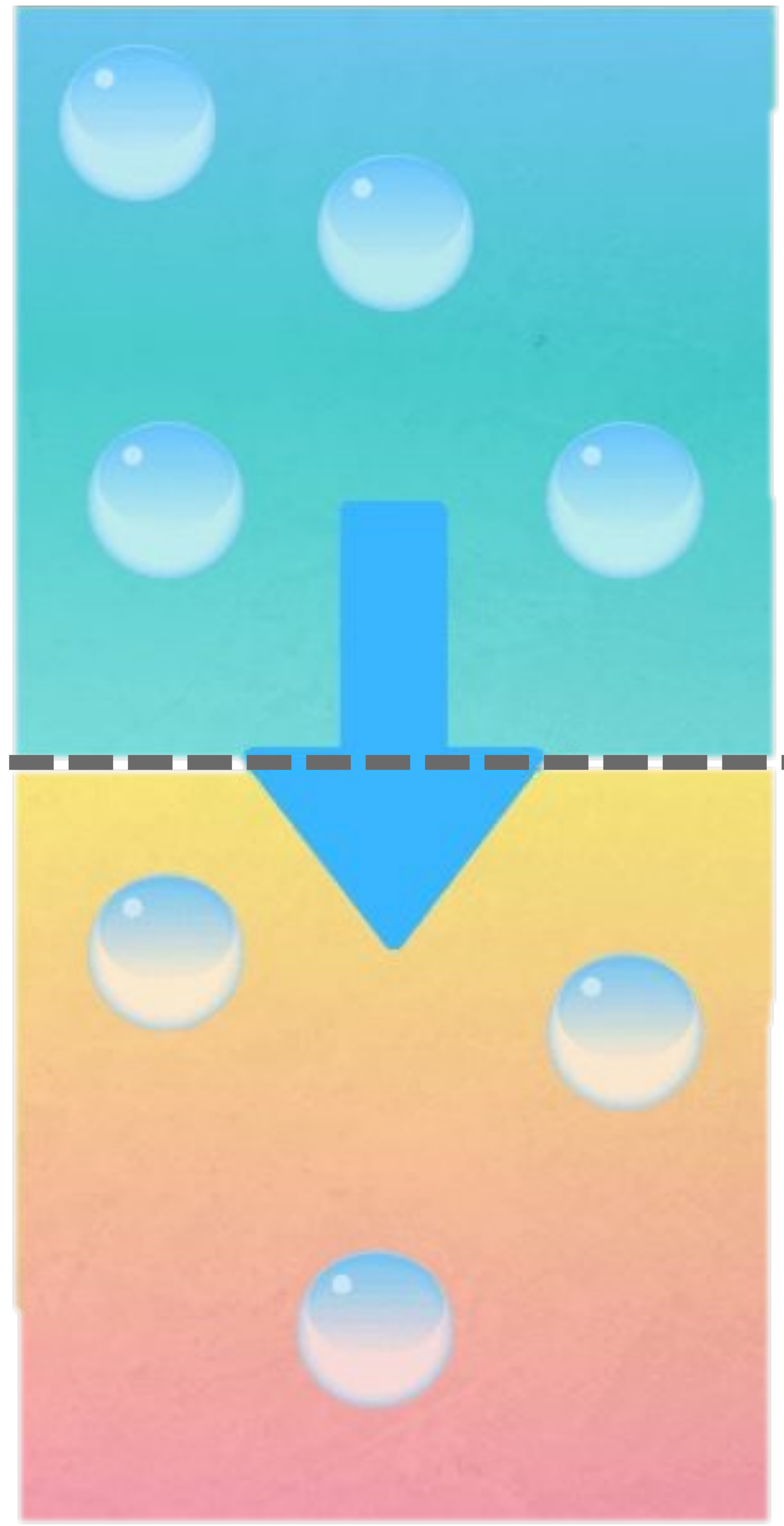
Interface

α

β

Absorption

Soaking into the bulk of the other phase



Mass transfer **into** another matrial

Careful: Adsorption *vs.* Absorption

Interactions

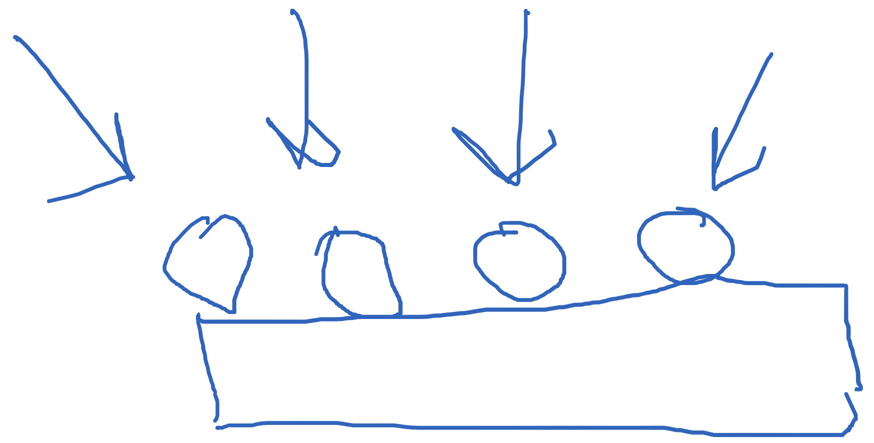
Bond

↑

Release Energy

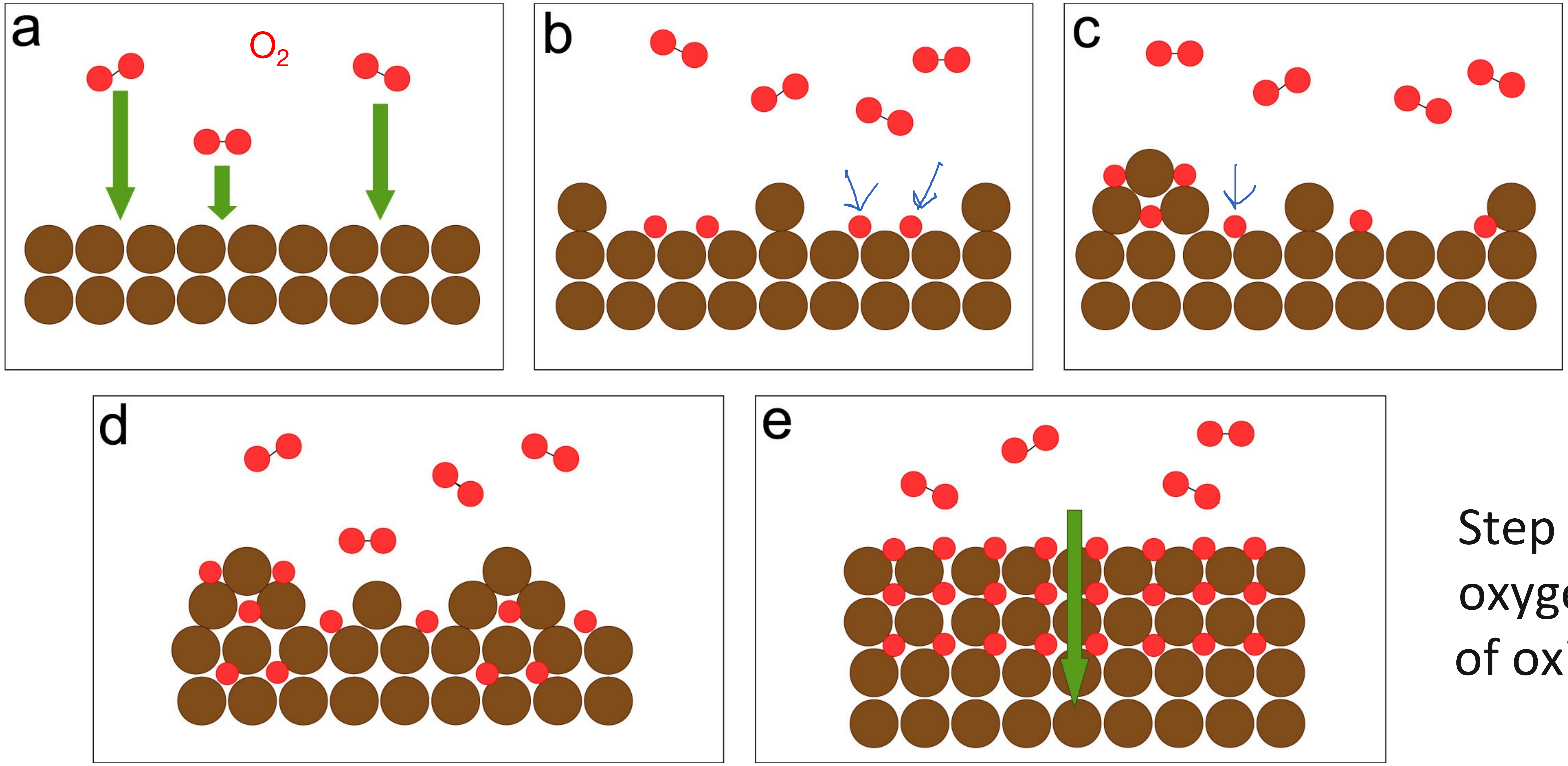
Adsorption	Absorption
Accumulation onto surface	Accumulation into another substance
Surface phenomenon	Bulk phenomenon
Exothermic process	Endothermic process
Favored by lower temperature	Mostly unaffected by temperature
Rate dependent on surface sites until equilibrium reached	Occurs at uniform rate
Surface concentration differs from internal concentration	Concentration eventually becomes the same throughout material

Le Chatelier's Principle



Metal Oxidation – Adsorption + Absorption

Copper surface



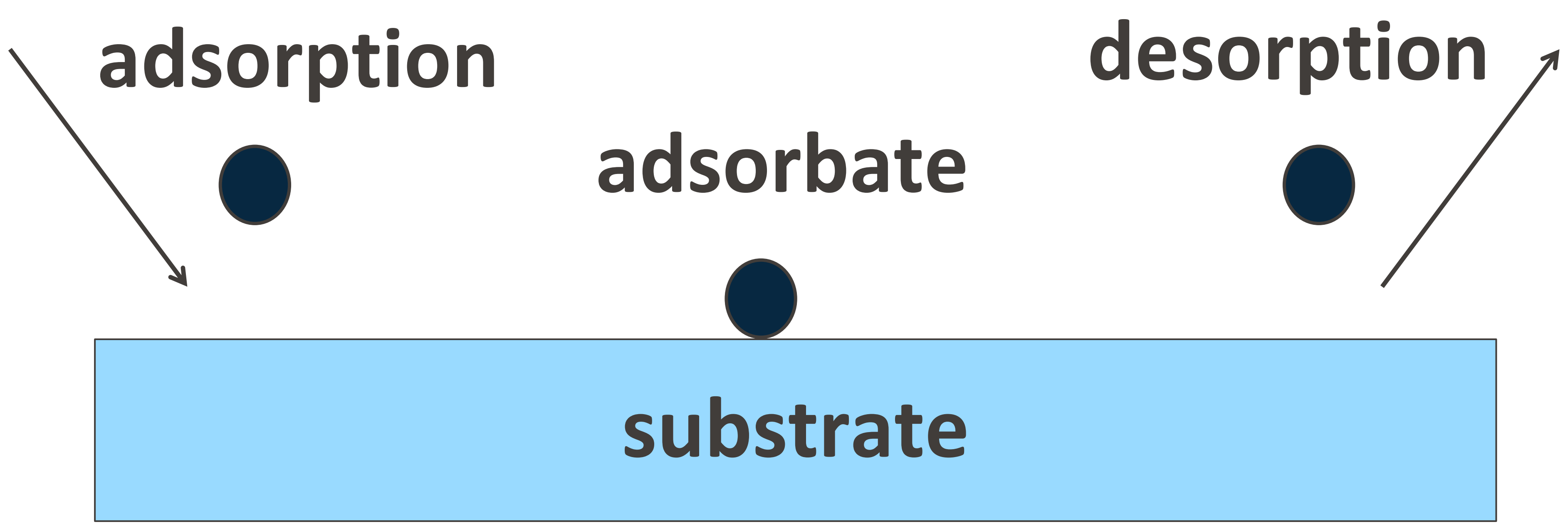
Gattinoni & Michaelides | *Surf. Sci. Rep.* | 2015

Step 1: **Adsorption** of O_2 onto copper surface

Step 2: **Absorption** of oxygen drives growth of oxide film into bulk

$CuO_{(s)}$

The Different Forms of Adsorption on Surfaces



Surface occupancy θ

$$\theta = \frac{\text{Number of occupied adsorption sites}}{\text{Number of adsorption sites present}}$$

θ = 0 clean surface

θ = 1 monolayer

Physisorption

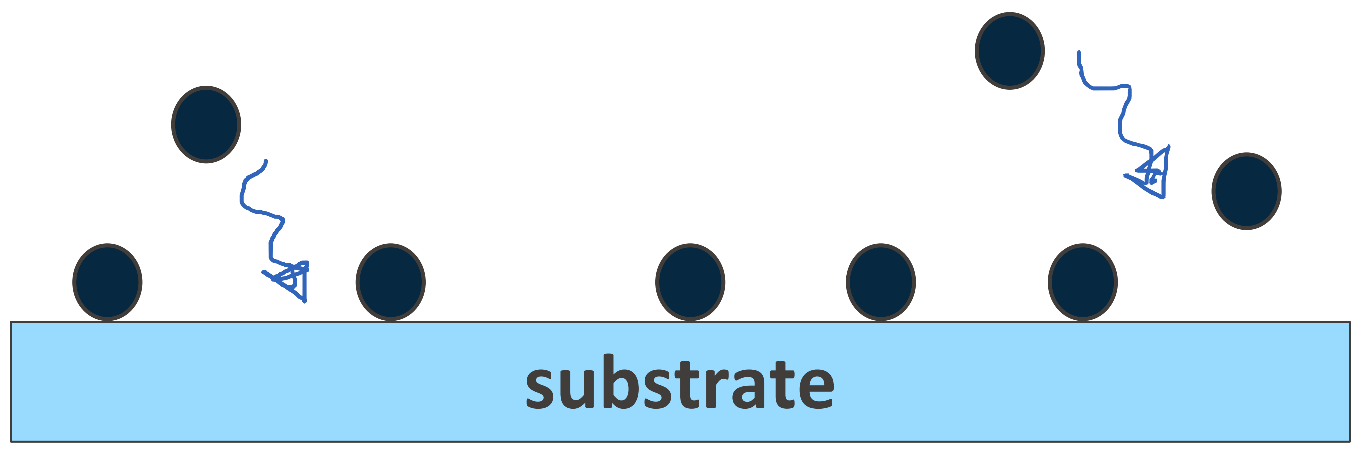
Van der Waals interactions between adsorbate and substrate

non-specific and weak

$\Delta H_{des} \approx 20$ kJ/mol

multilayer growth possible

observed mostly at low temperatures



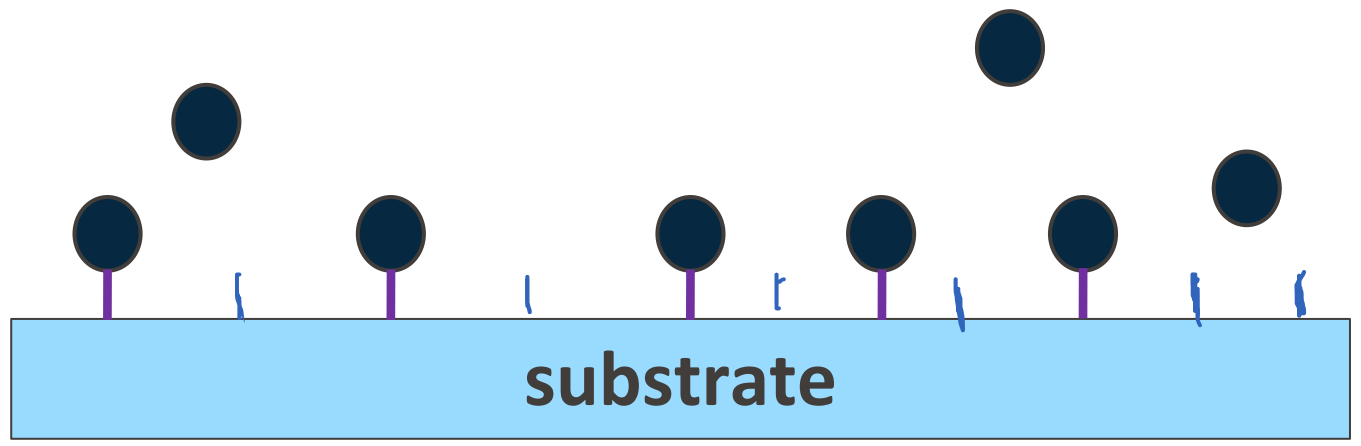
Chemisorption

Chemical bond between adsorbate and substrate

Generally kinetically stable at RT

$\Delta H_{des} \approx 200$ kJ/mol

maximum coverage is 1 monolayer (θ = 1)



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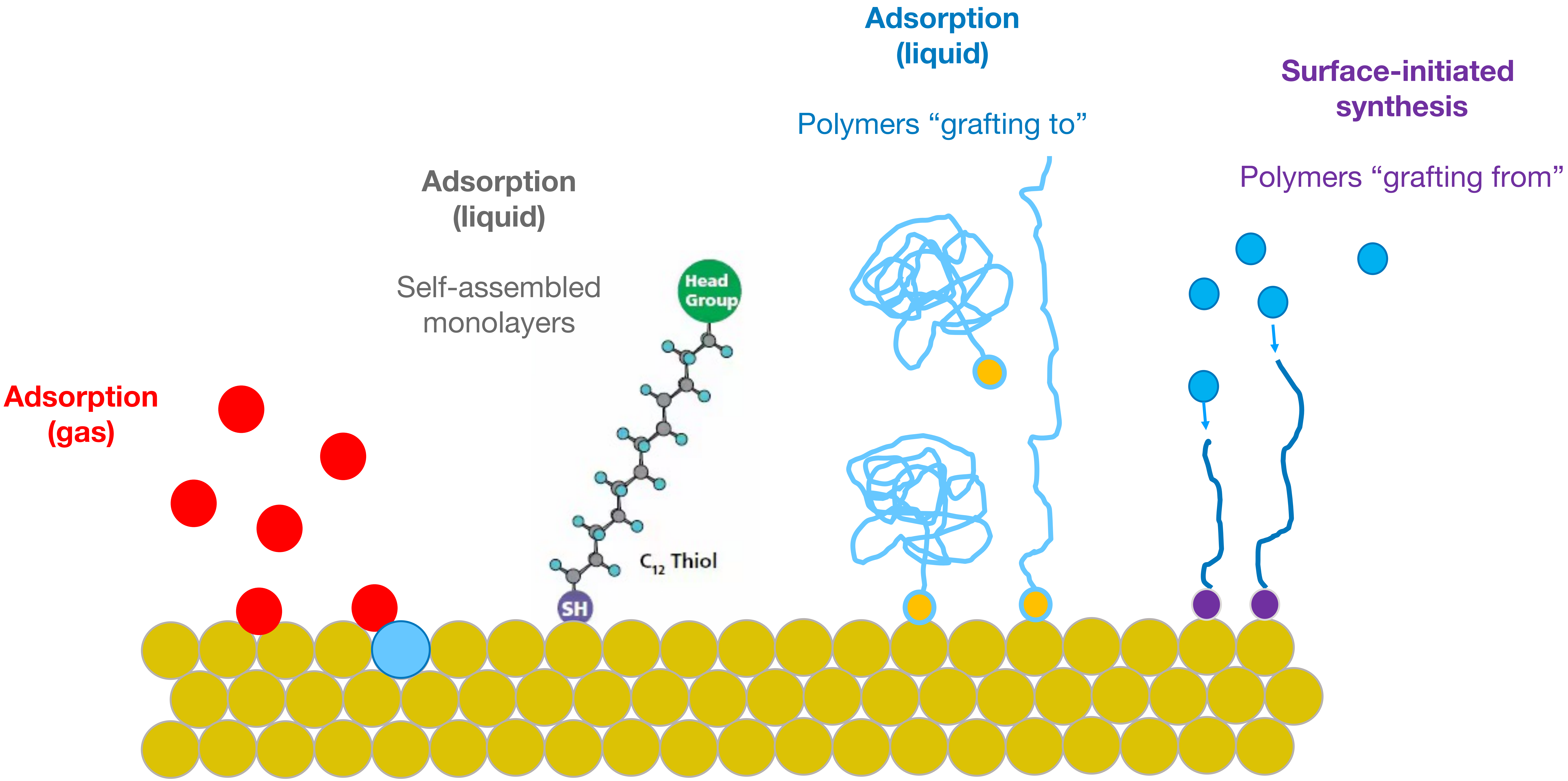
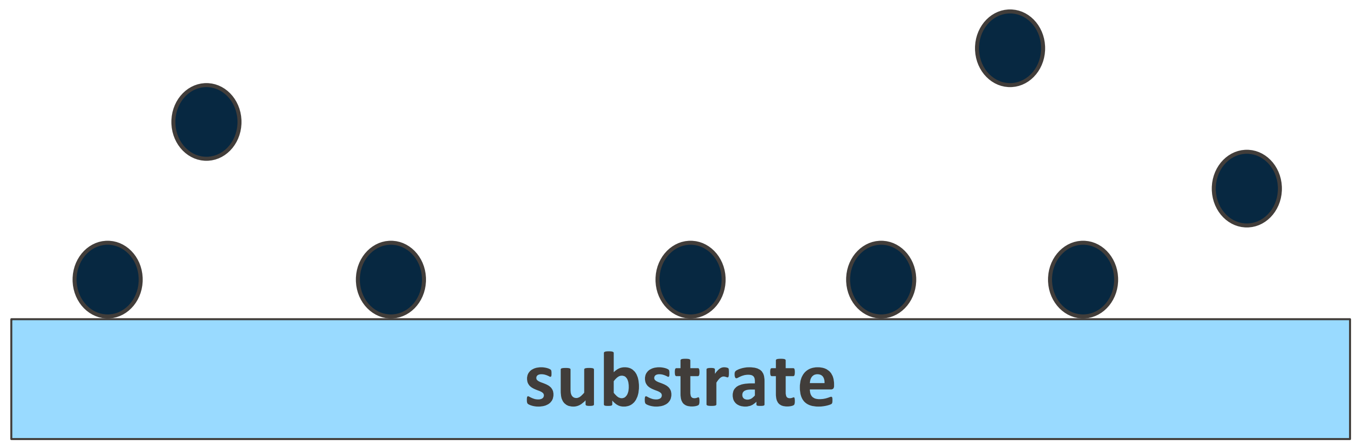
Chemisorption (Surface Chemistry) In Future Lessons



Potential Energy Change for Physisorption *vs.* Chemisorption

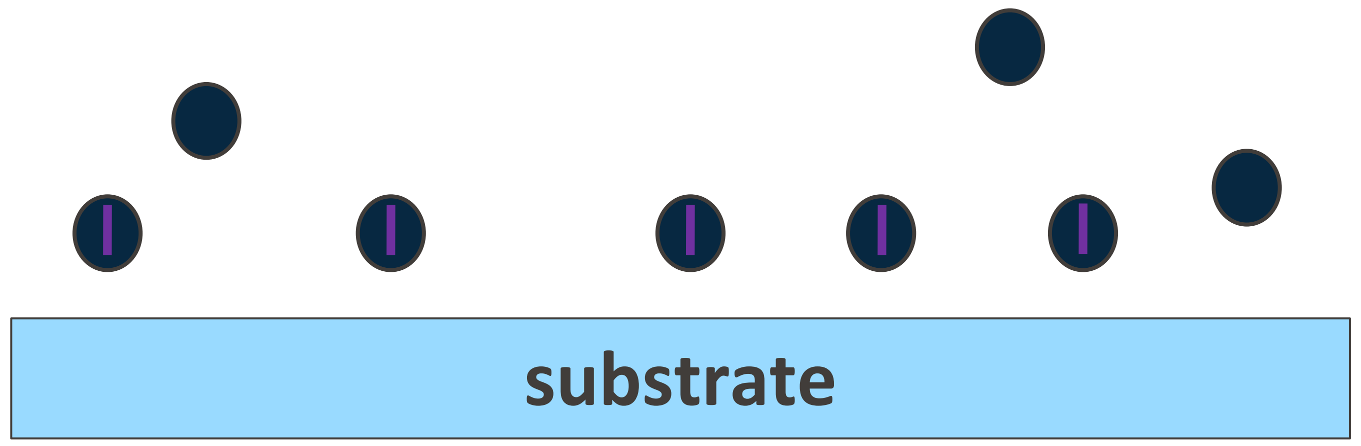
Physisorption

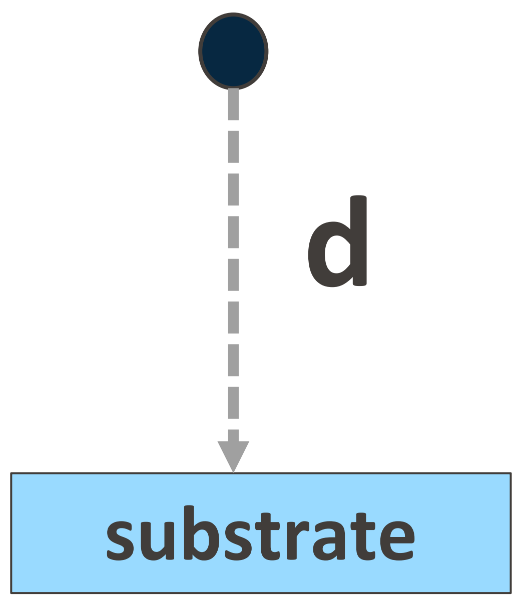
Van der Waals interactions between adsorbate and substrate

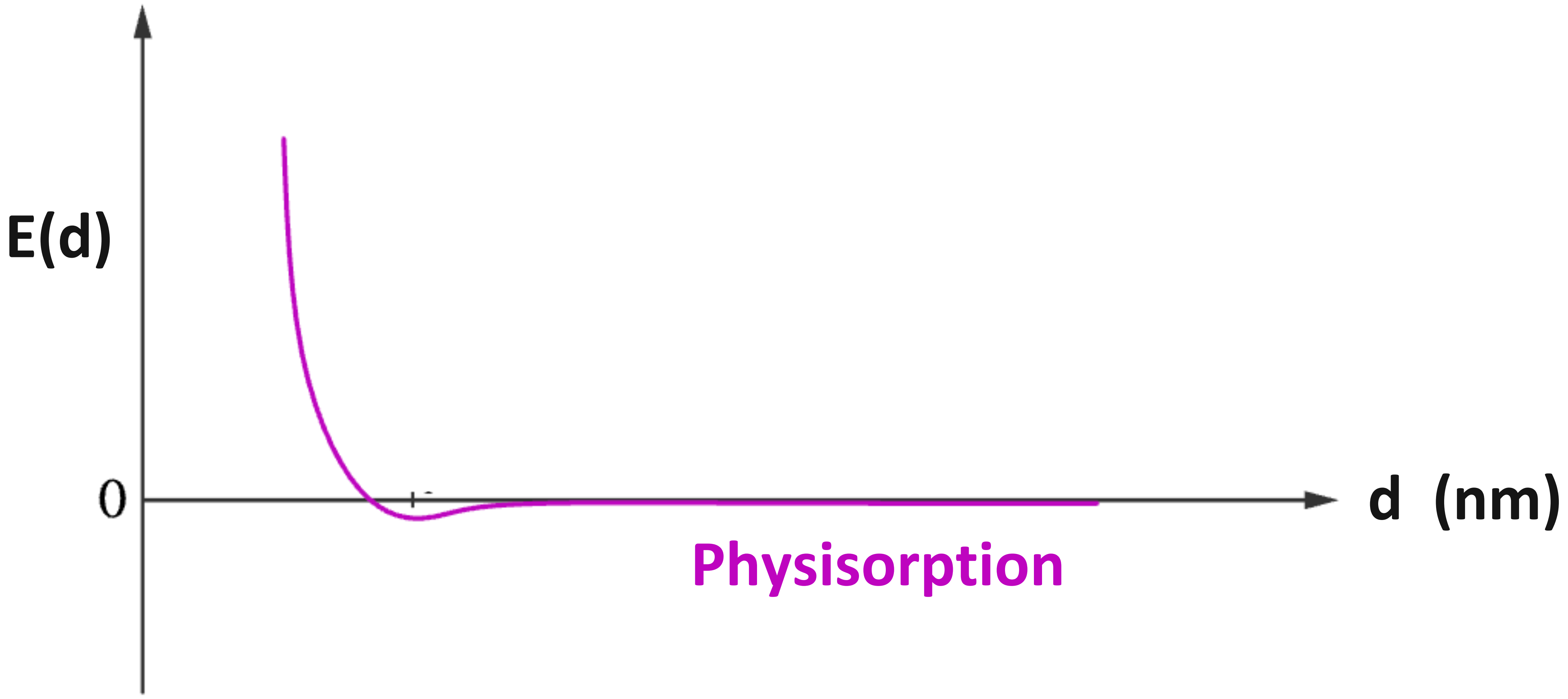


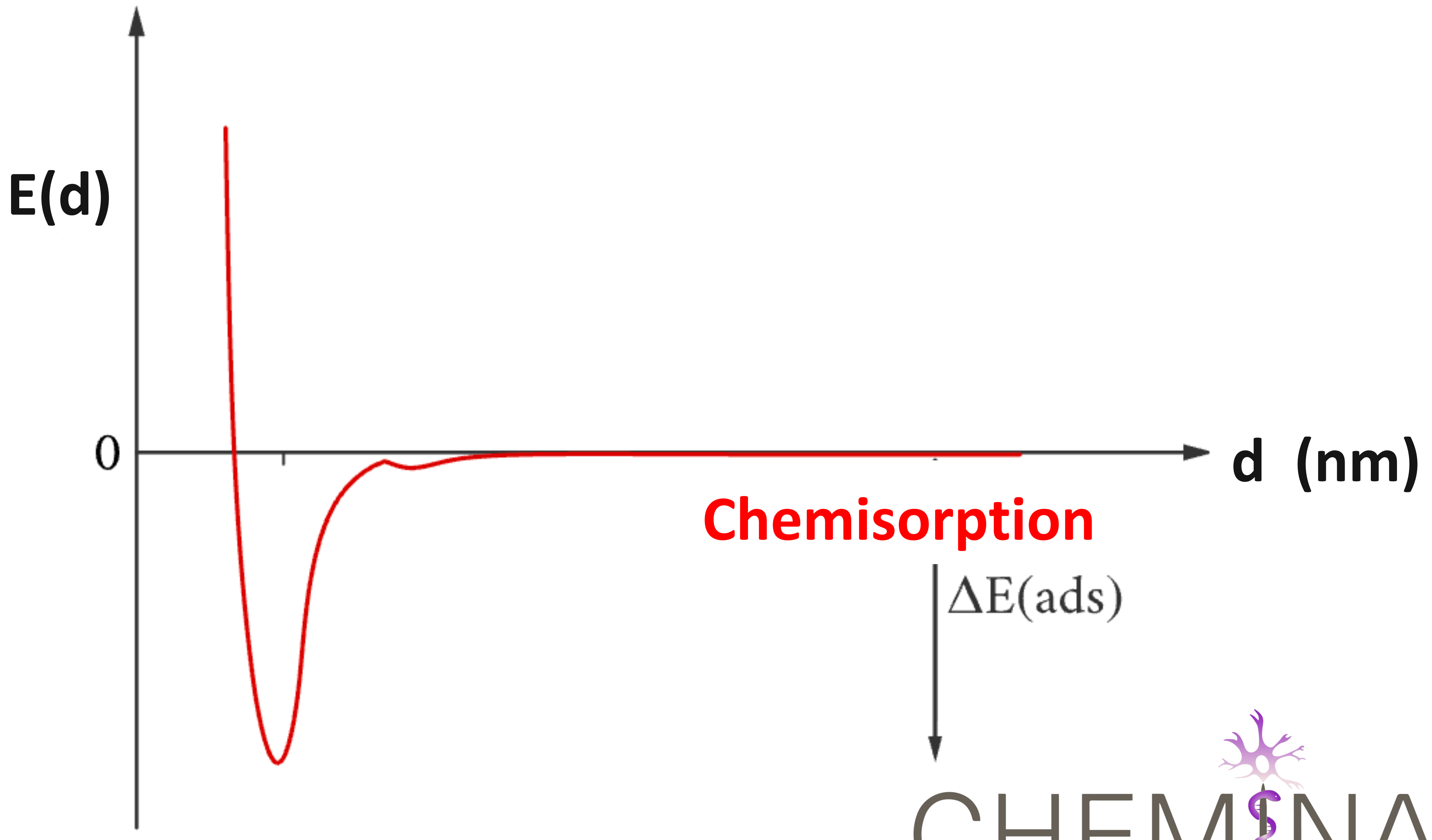
Chemisorption

Chemical bond between adsorbate and substrate





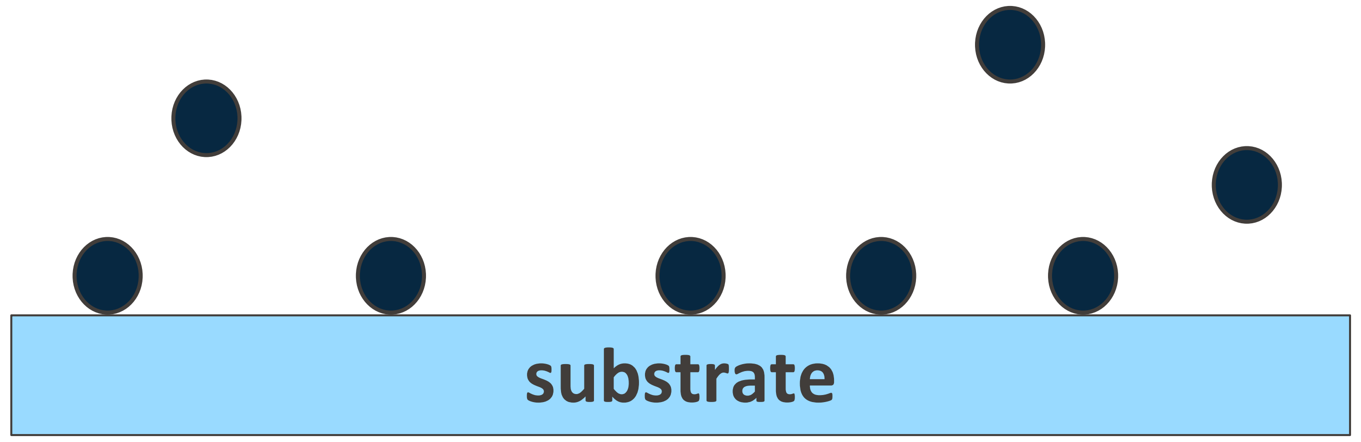




Chemisorption Typically Slower Due to Activation Barrier

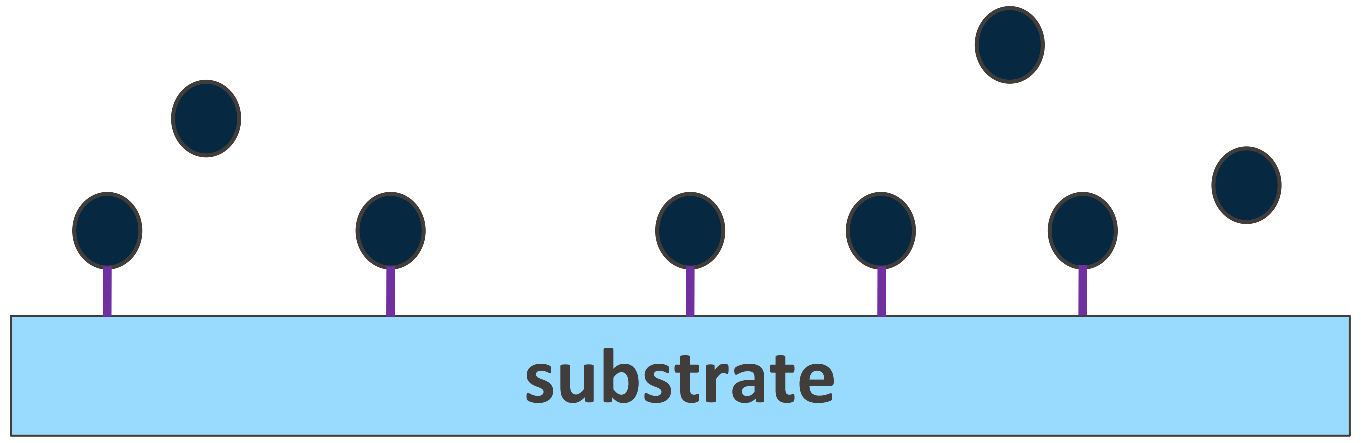
Physisorption

Van der Waals interactions between adsorbate and substrate

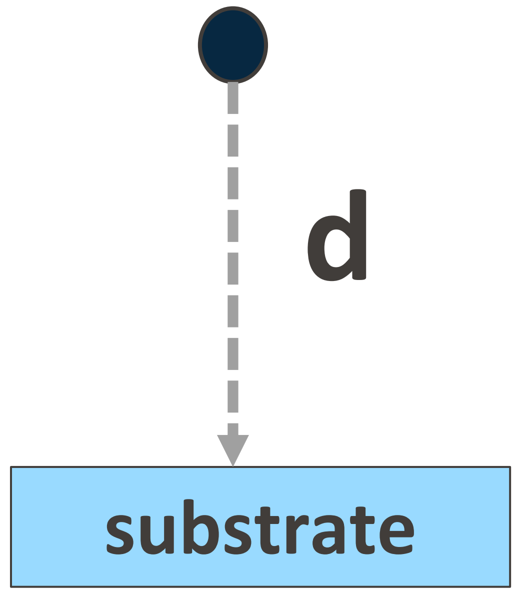


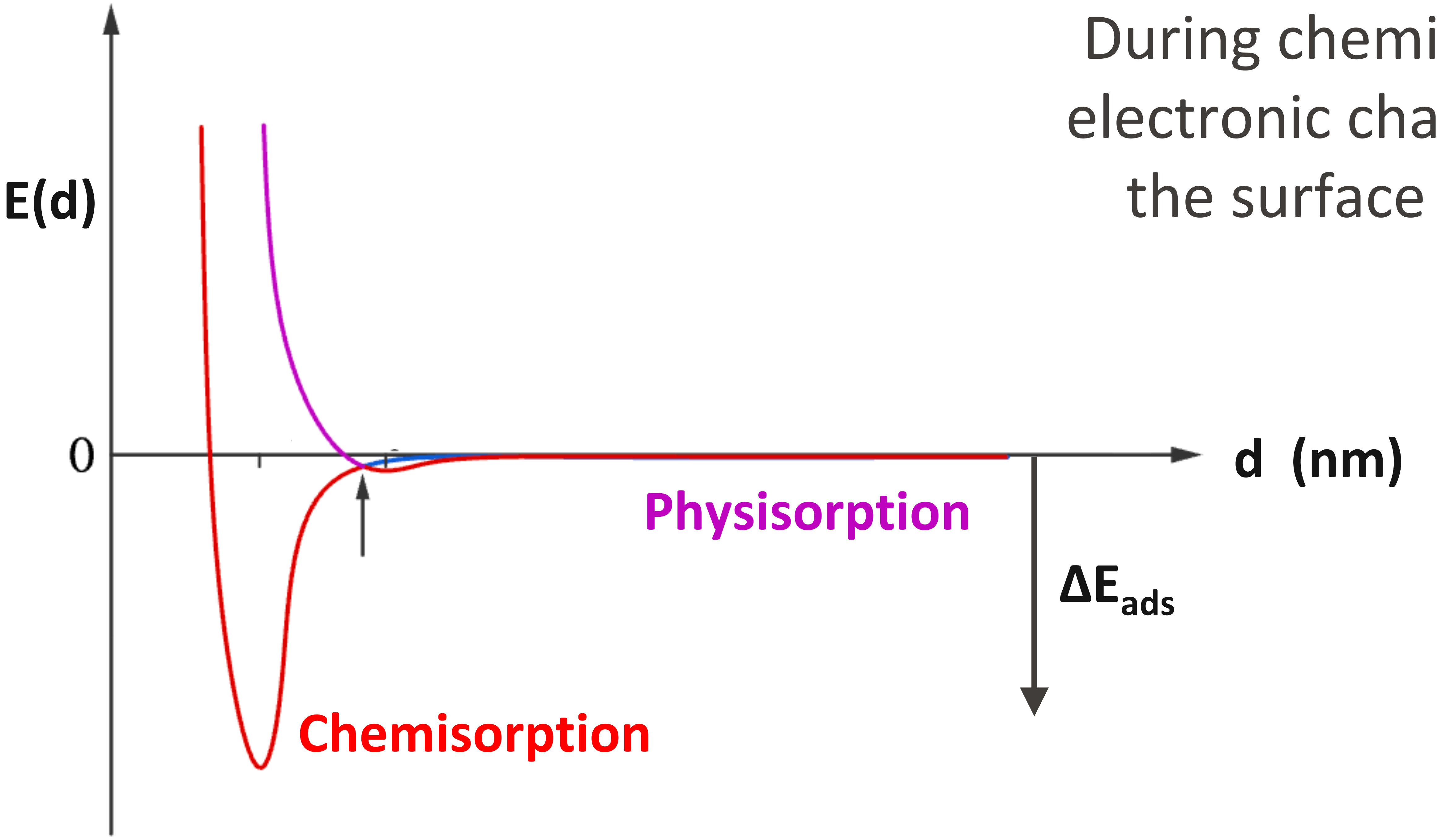
Chemisorption

Chemical bond between adsorbate and substrate

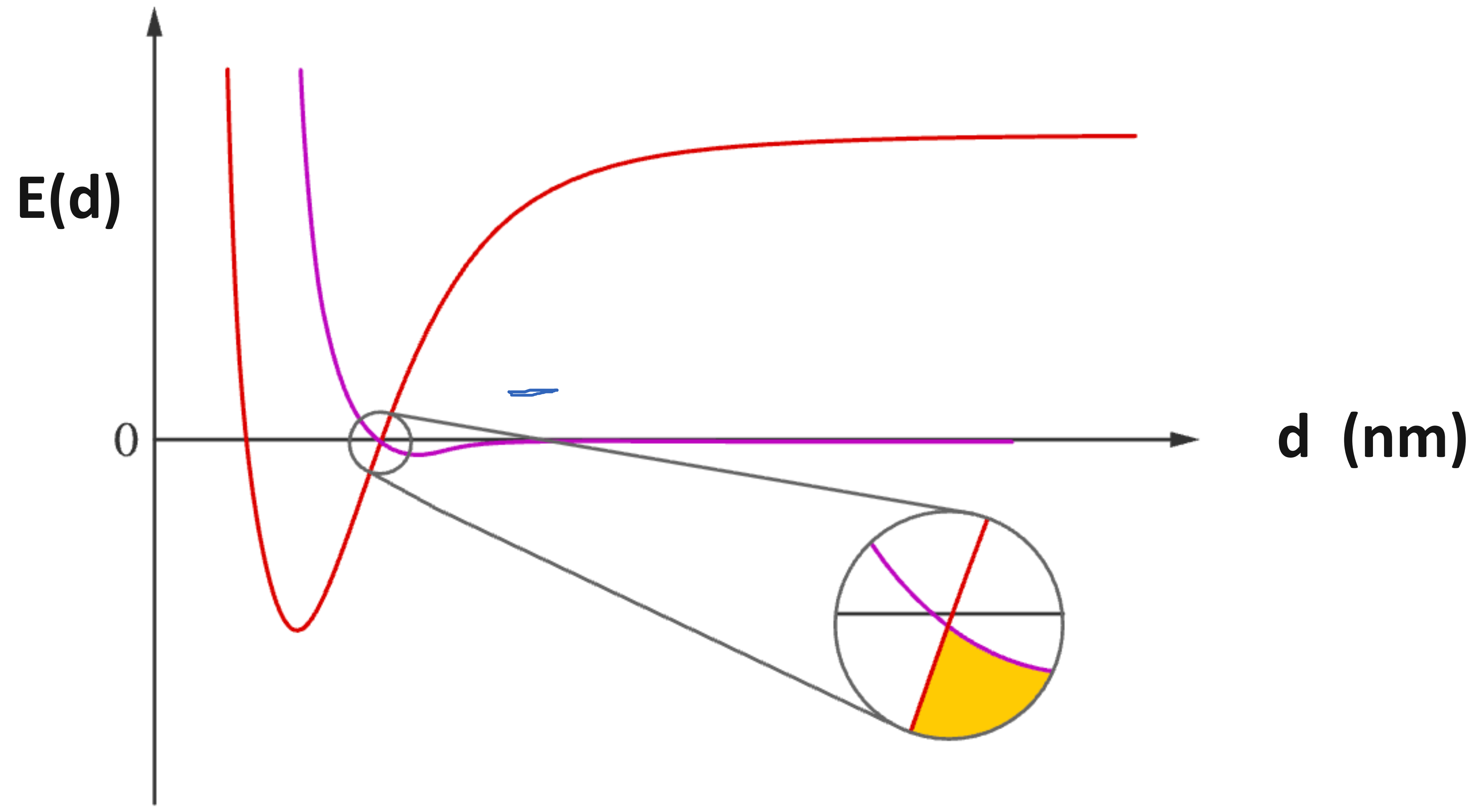


During chemisorption, the electronic characteristics of the surface can change

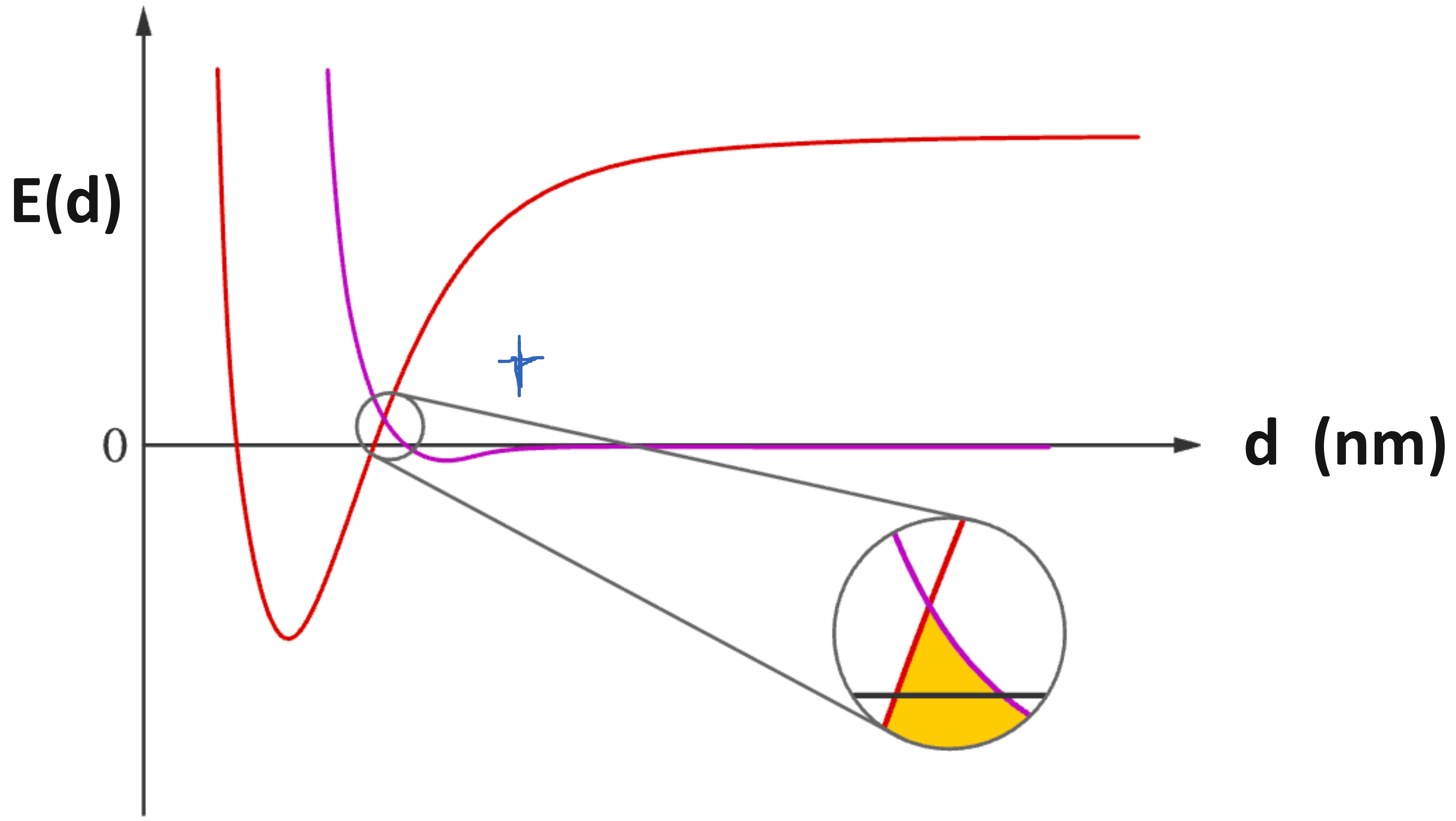




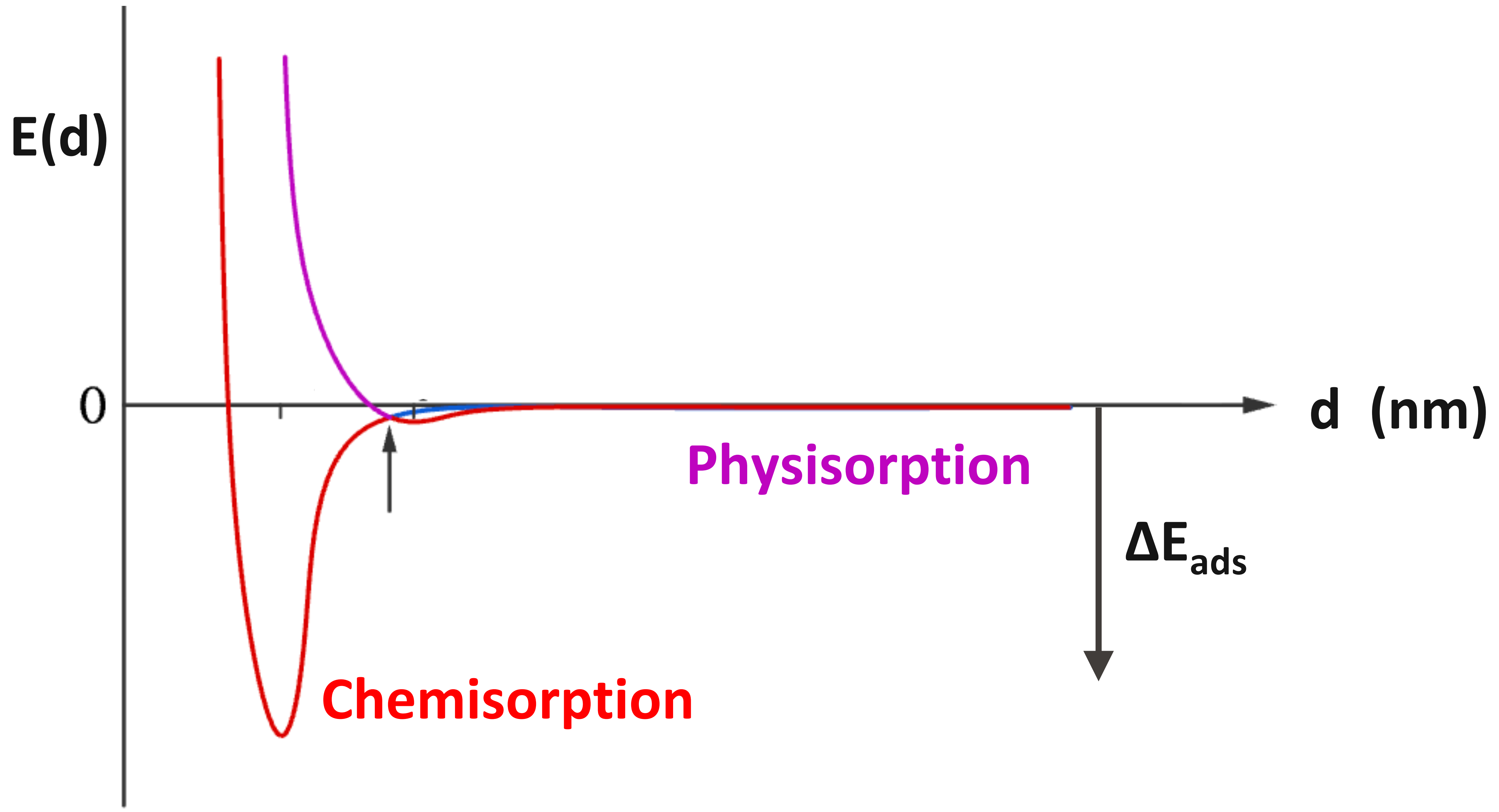
Crossover Point of Chemisorption/Physisorption Curves



No direct activation barrier for chemisorption to happen

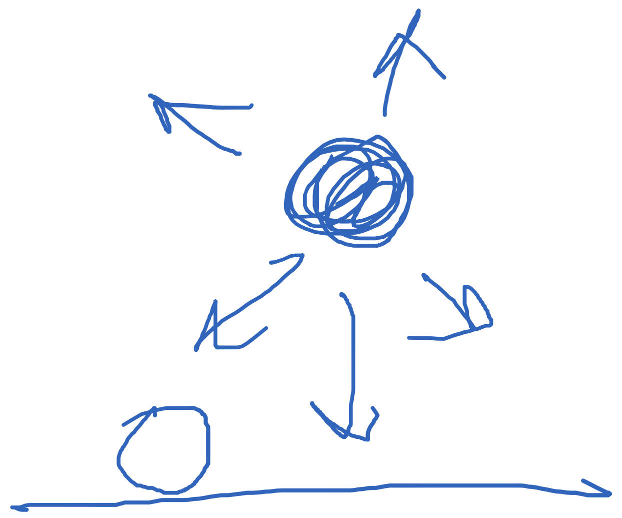


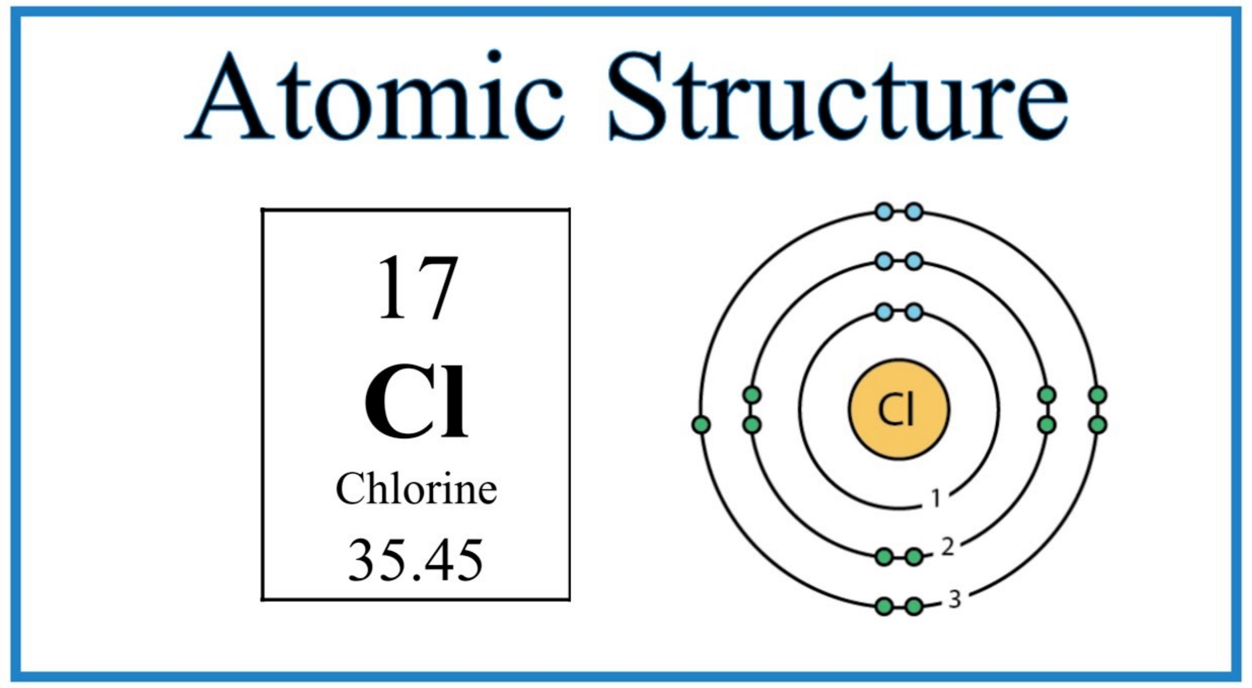
Activation barrier for chemisorption to happen



Chemisorption on Surfaces Often Occur After Physisorption

Spontaneous process: $\Delta G<0$



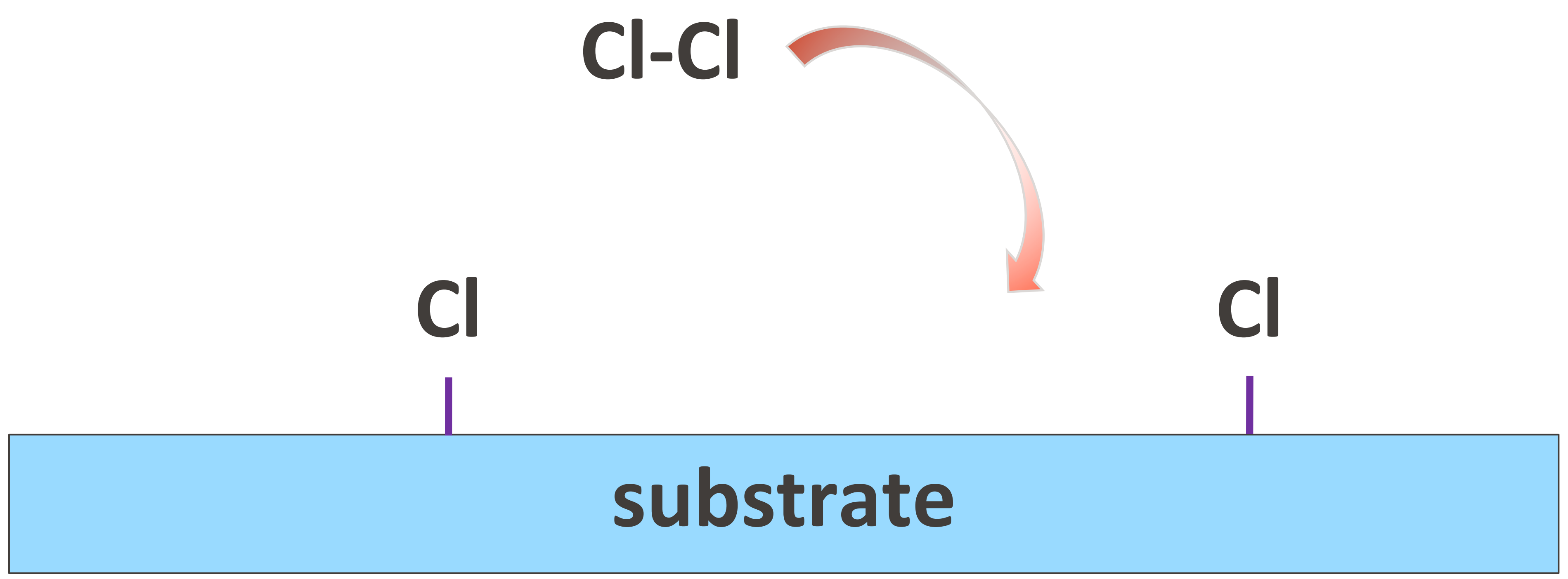


Adsorbate loses degrees of freedom upon adsorption: $\Delta S<0$

$\Delta G = \Delta H - T\Delta S$ → +

Almost always exothermic: $\Delta H<0$

Dissociation energy (strength of chemical bond) high in gas phase



Surface interactions reduce energy required to break Cl-Cl bond

Metal surfaces (*e.g.*, Platinum) ➔ empty d orbitals
Semiconductors (*e.g.*, Silicon) ➔ displace H atoms to create Si-Cl bonds

Catalytic surfaces inherently promote bond breaking!

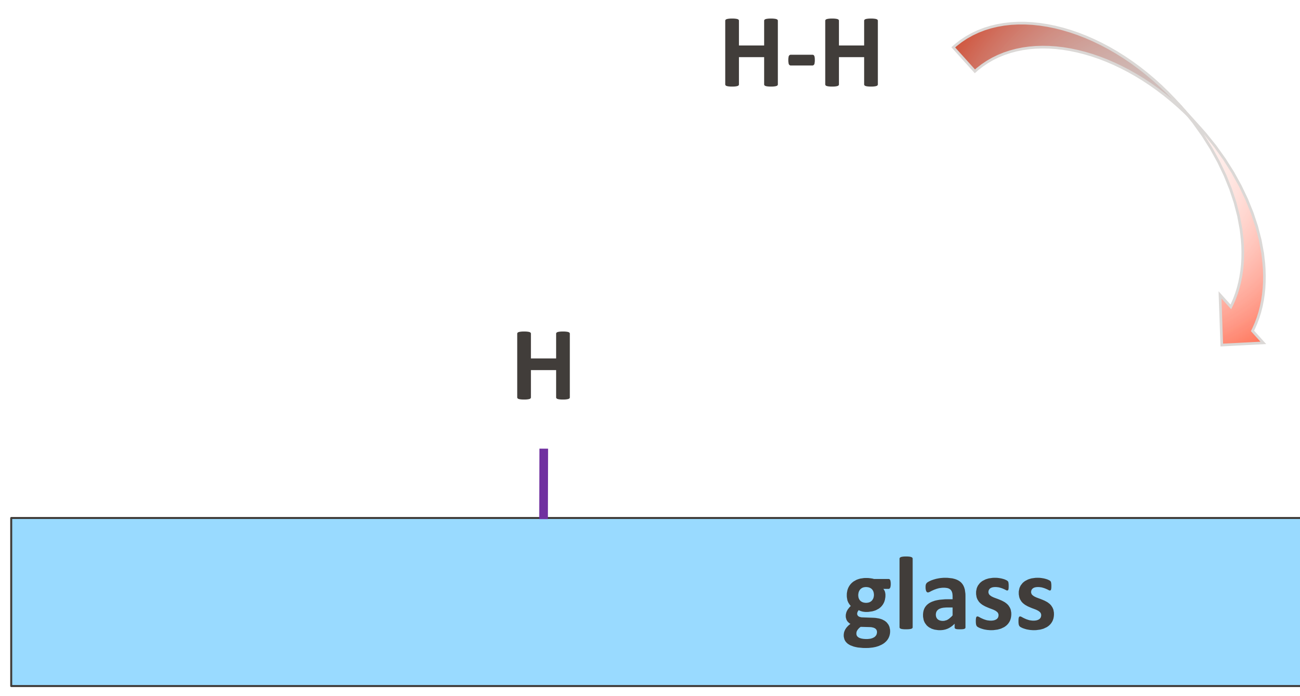
Chemisorption Exception: H_2 on Glass

Spontaneous process: ΔG<0

Endothermic reaction: ΔH>0

$$\Delta G = \Delta H - T\Delta S \rightarrow -$$

ΔS>0 meaning that entropy *increases*

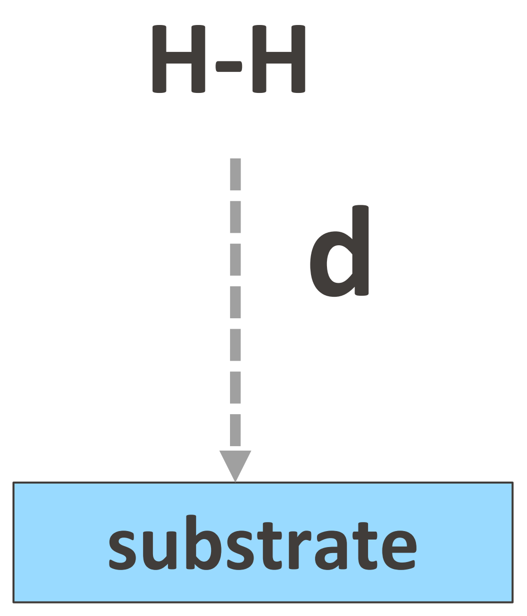


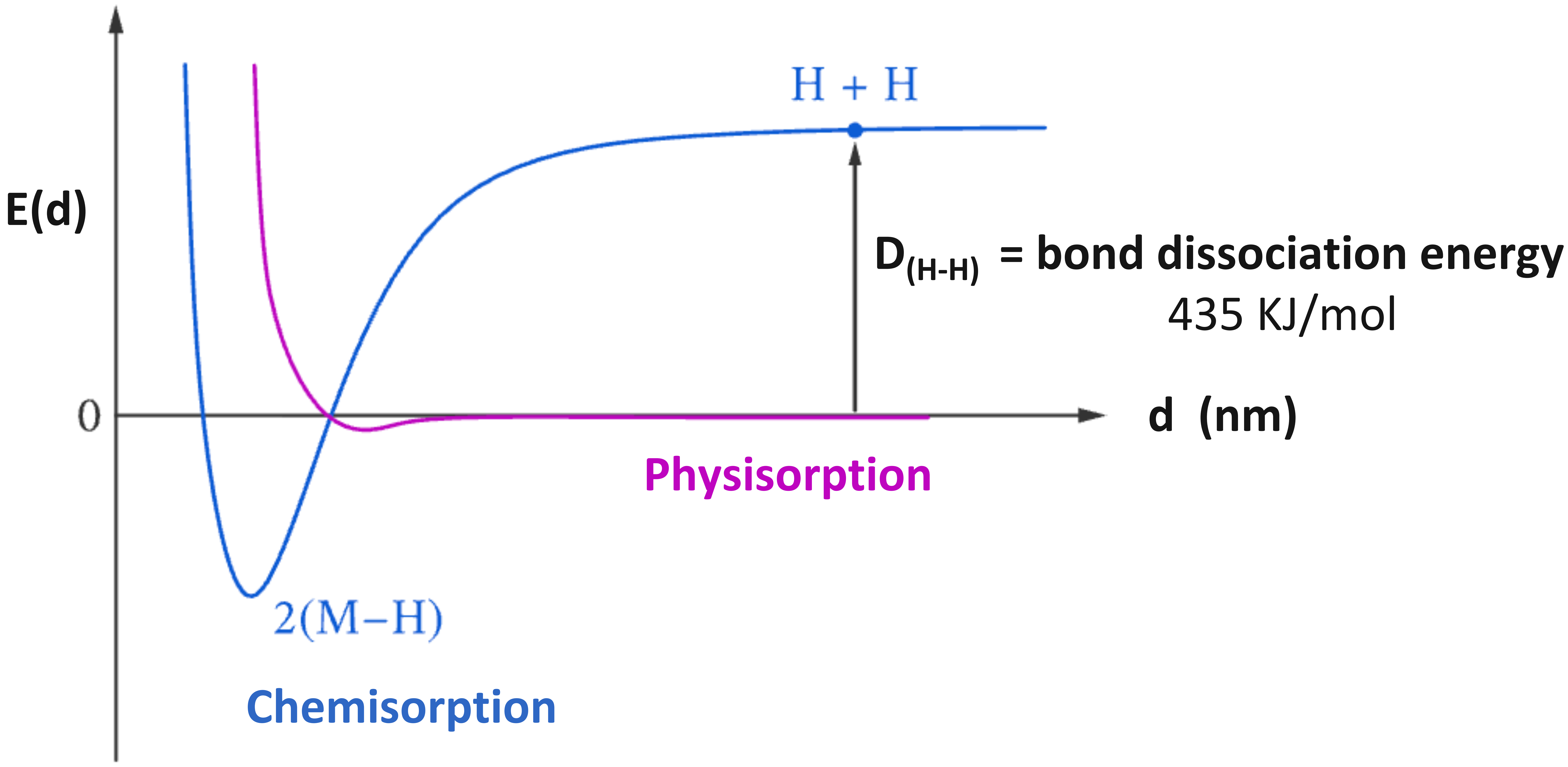
Lack of strong bond formation

Inert nature of glass – lack of strong binding interactions

Adsorbed H diffuses readily on glass and therefore the two diffusing atoms have more degrees of freedom than the gas-phase diatomic molecule

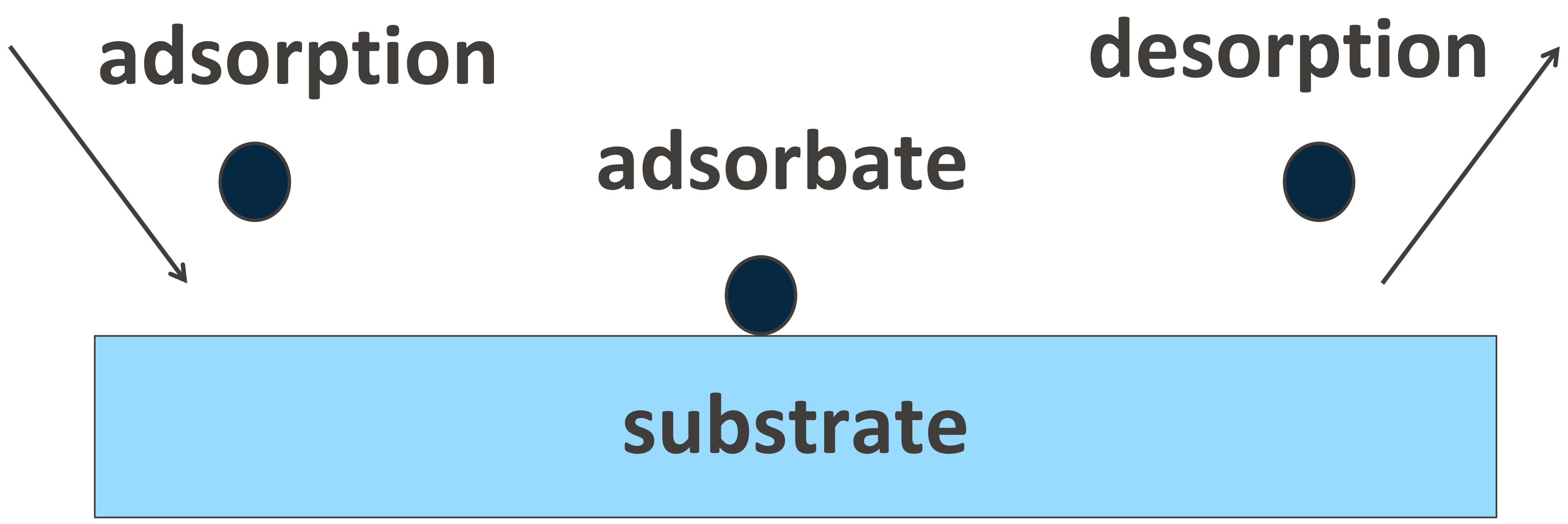
The Different Paths For H_2 Adsorption to the Surface





This concept is important for how catalysis works in a future lesson

Desorption from the Surface



Breaking of chemical bonds and removal of adsorbed species from the surface

Molecule requires sufficient energy to activate the desorption (E_d)

Desorption is temperature dependent and is described by:

$$\frac{d\theta}{dt} = -\frac{dN_i}{dt} = \nu_i N_i^m \cdot \exp\left(\frac{-E_{d,i}}{RT}\right)$$

Polanyi-Wigner equation

desorption rate

adsorbate vibrations binding geometry $10^{12} - 10^{13}\ s^{-1}$

N_i: surface concentration of the adsorbate
ν_i: frequency factor – how often molecules try to escape
E_{di}: desorption activation energy
m: order of the desorption reaction

0
= 1 →
2 →

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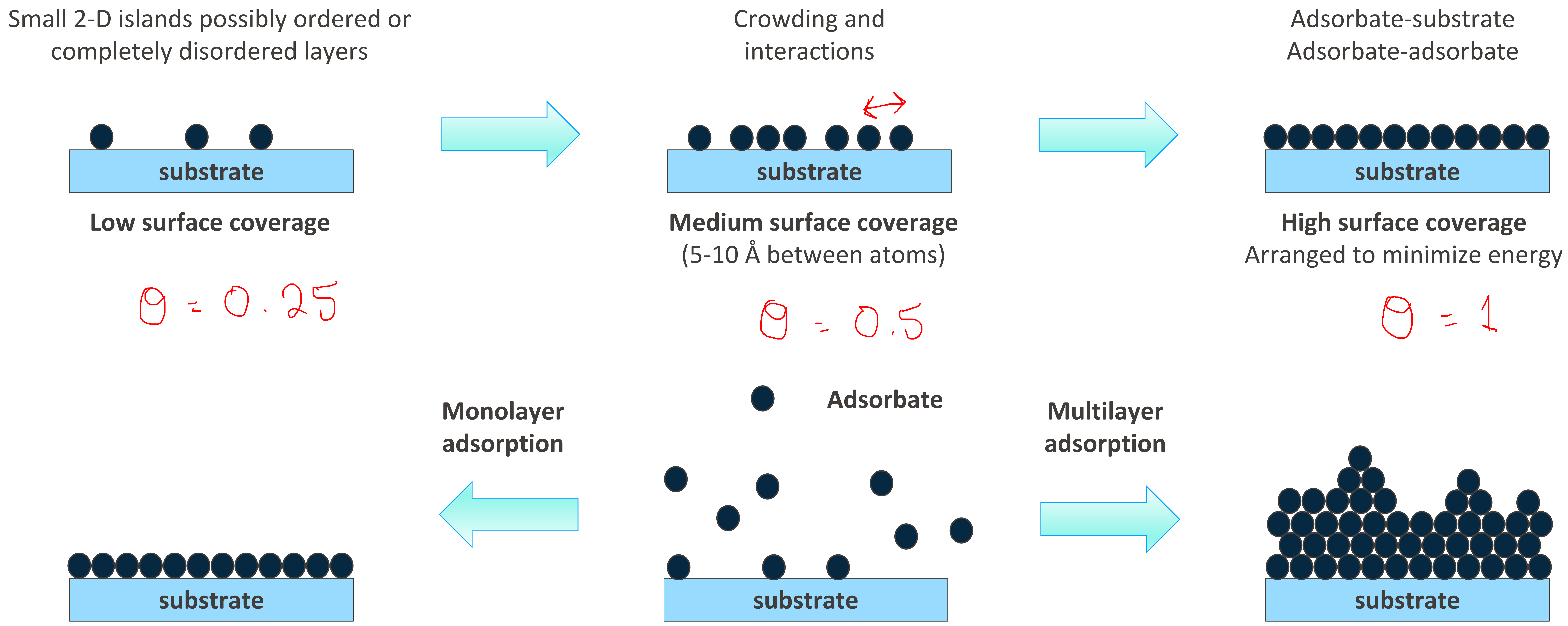
Ordered Adsorbate Layers



Crystal structure of the surface dictates where molecules adsorb

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Key Takeaways

Contamination comes from air, humidity, residues, dust, handling, etc.

Adsorption = surface, Absorption = bulk

Physisorption = weak and reversible
Chemisorption = strong and permanent

Adsorbates are arranged on surfaces to minimize surface energy

How are adsorbates arranged on surfaces?

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Solid Surfaces: Short Recap of Lattice Structures

Amorphous solids

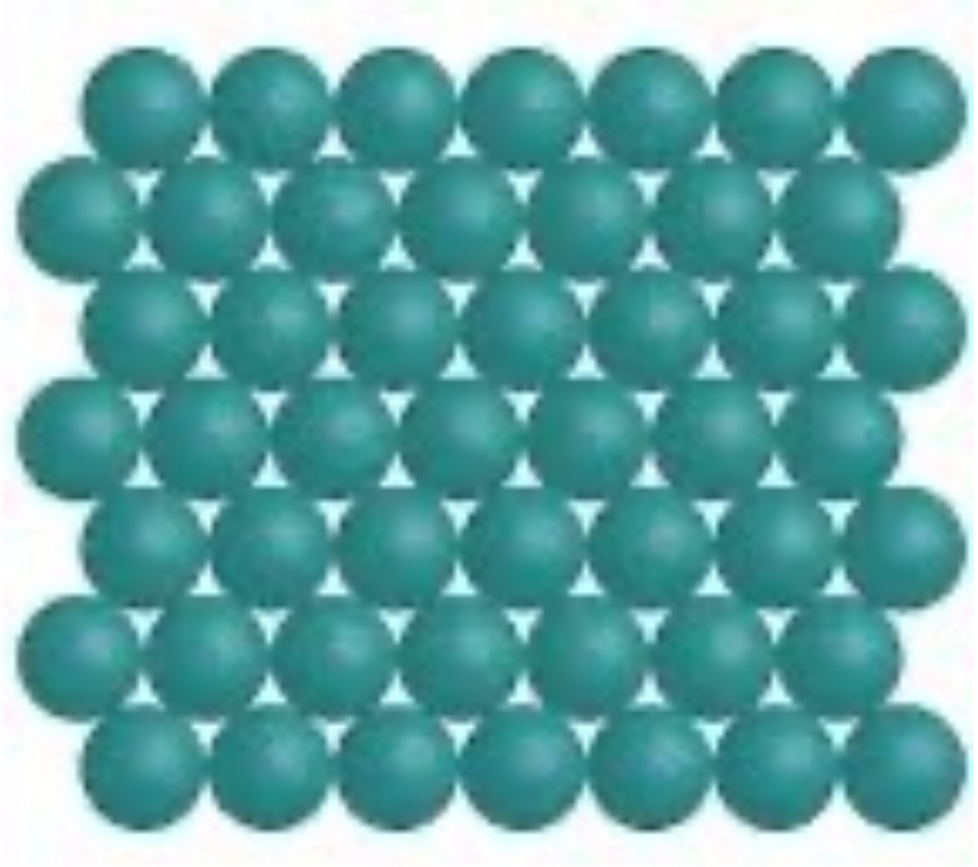
Random arrangement

No definite shape, can be molded

Softens over range of temperatures

Glass, plastic, gels

Crystalline solids



Regular repeating lattice

Definite geometric shape

Sharp, well-defined melting point

Salt, diamond, sugar

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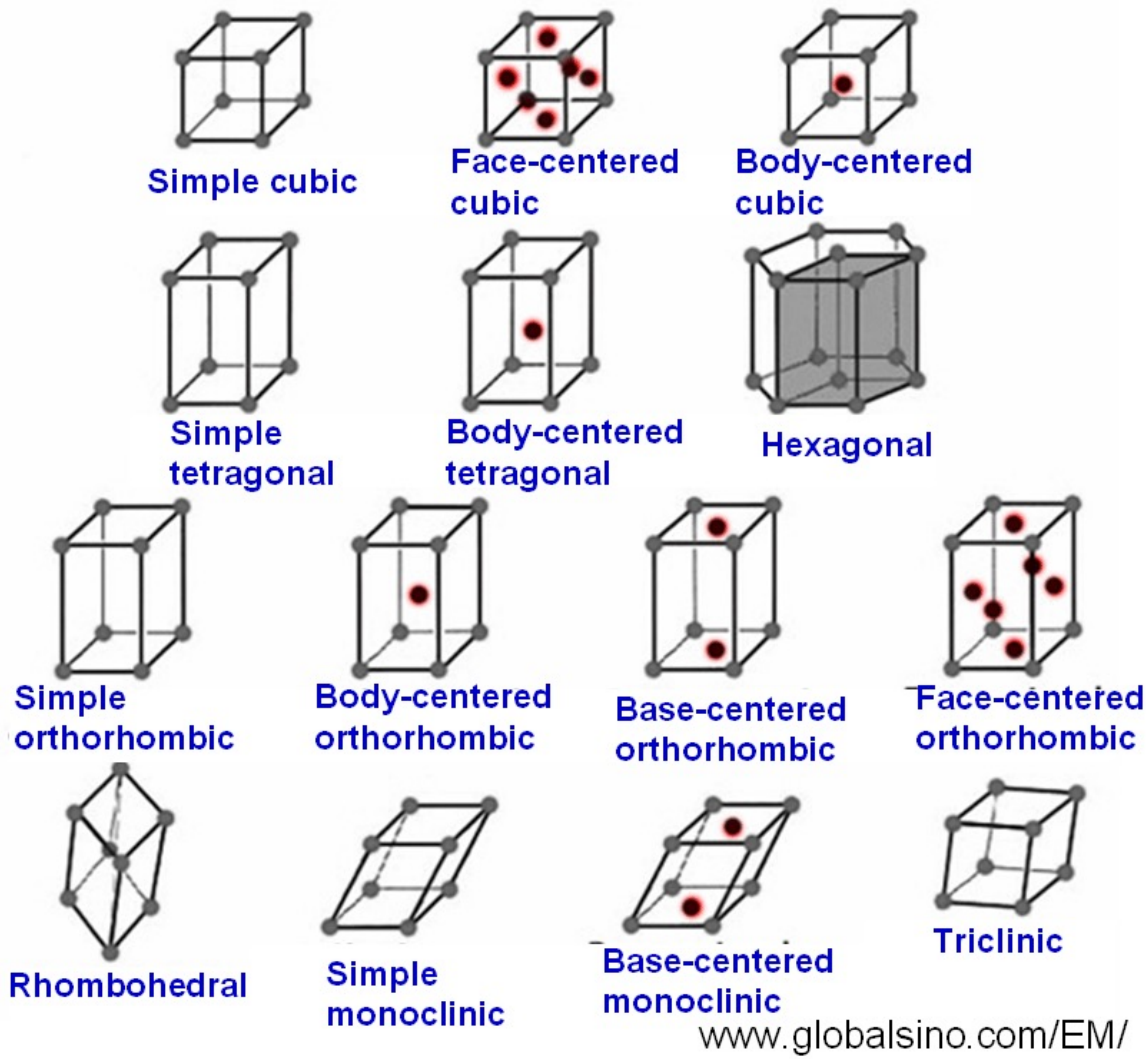
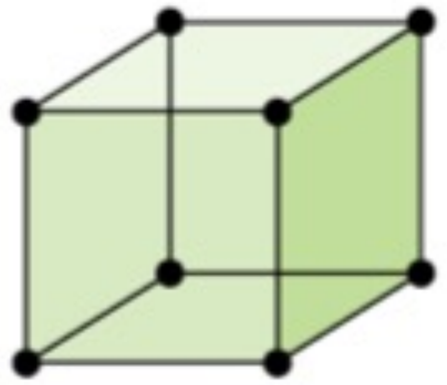
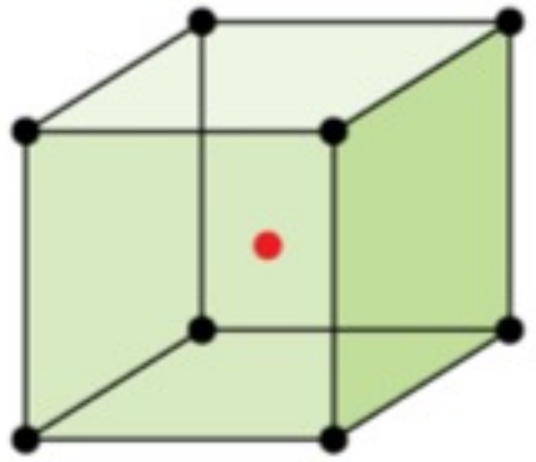
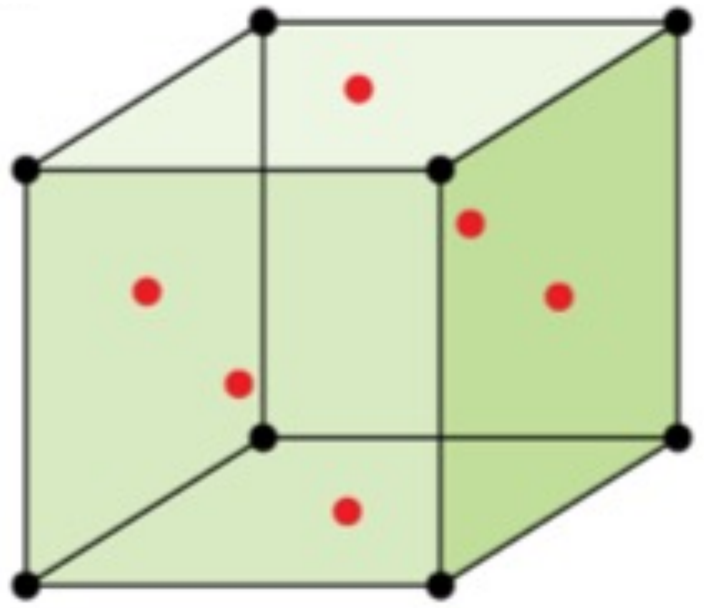
The 14 Bravais Lattices for all 3-D Crystals

All 3-D crystals can be described by one of these lattices. What matters is remembering that a crystal is a periodic arrangement of atoms, and depending on how we slice it, you expose different planes



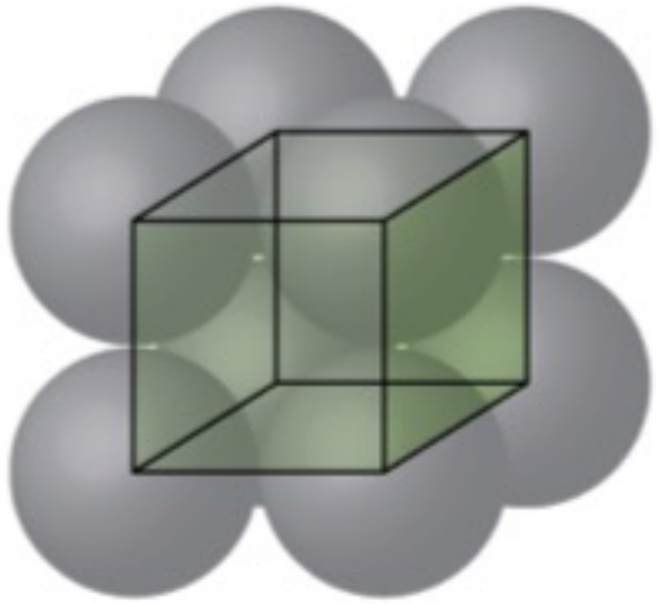
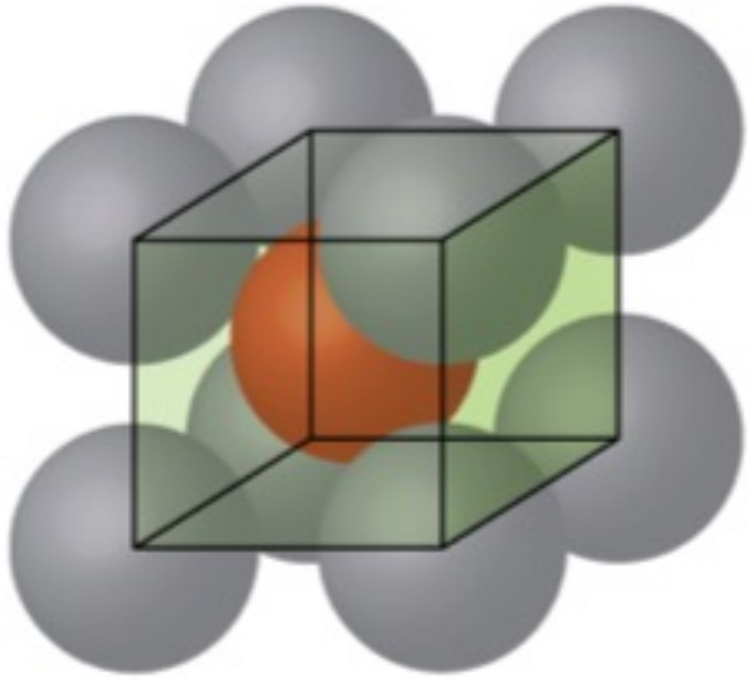
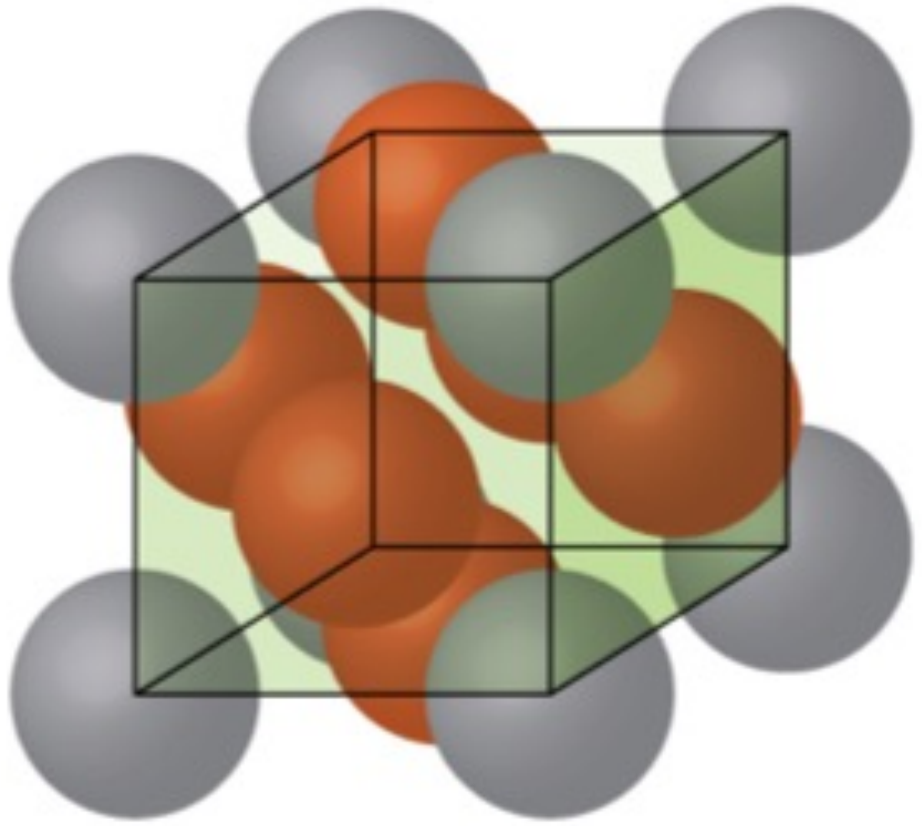
Common Cubic Lattices for Surface Science

Simple cubic

Body-centered cubic (bcc)

Face-centered cubic (fcc)

Polonium
(rare in Nature)

Iron, Tungsten
Chromium,
Molybdenum

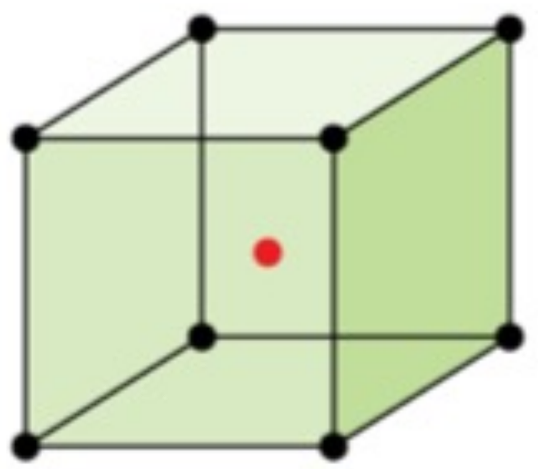
Copper, Nickel
Aluminum, Platinum
Gold, Lead

Close-Packed Structures: Role in Adsorption/Absorption

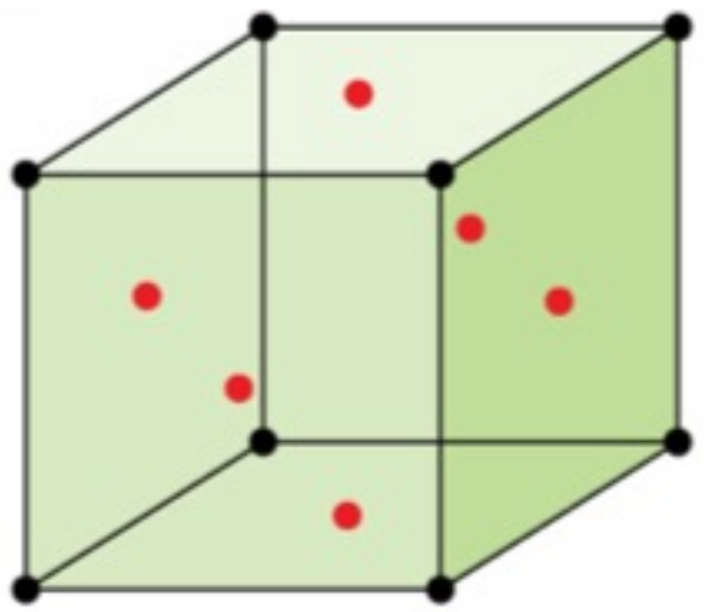
Structures where atoms are packed as closely as possible and minimizing empty space

$$Packing\ efficiency = \frac{Volume\ occupied\ by\ atoms}{Volume\ of\ unit\ cell} \times 100$$

68%

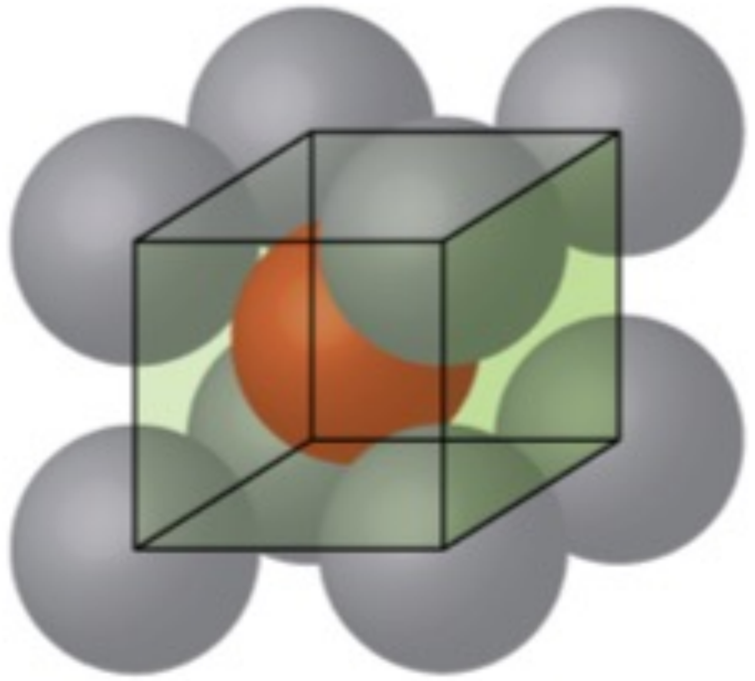


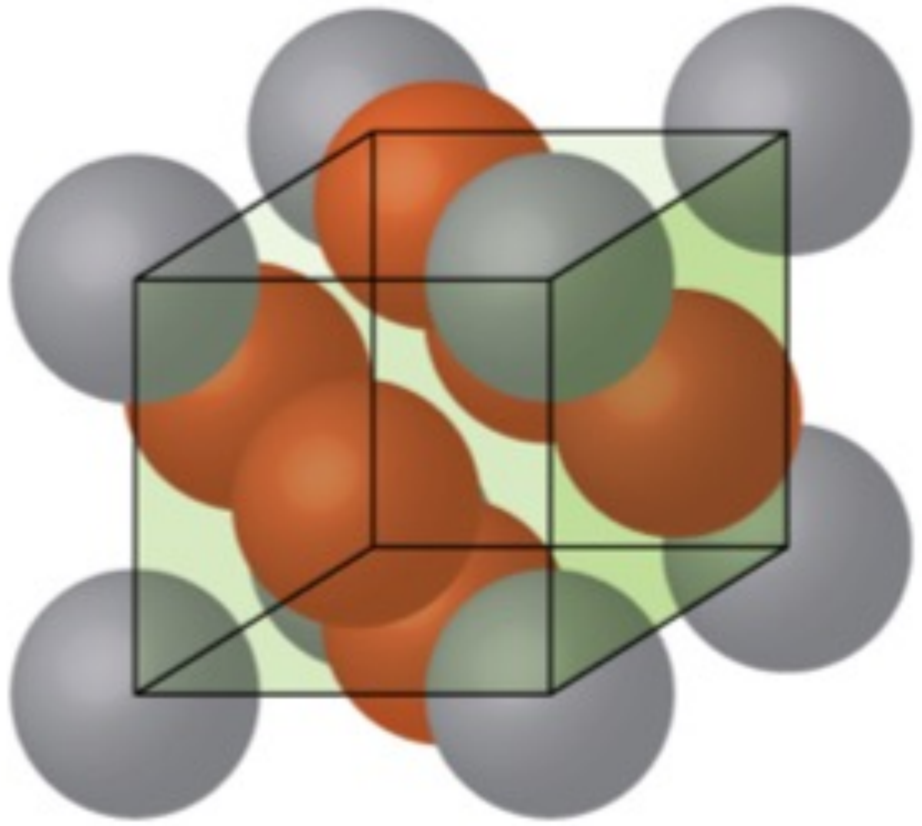
Body-centered cubic (bcc)



Face-centered cubic (fcc)

74%

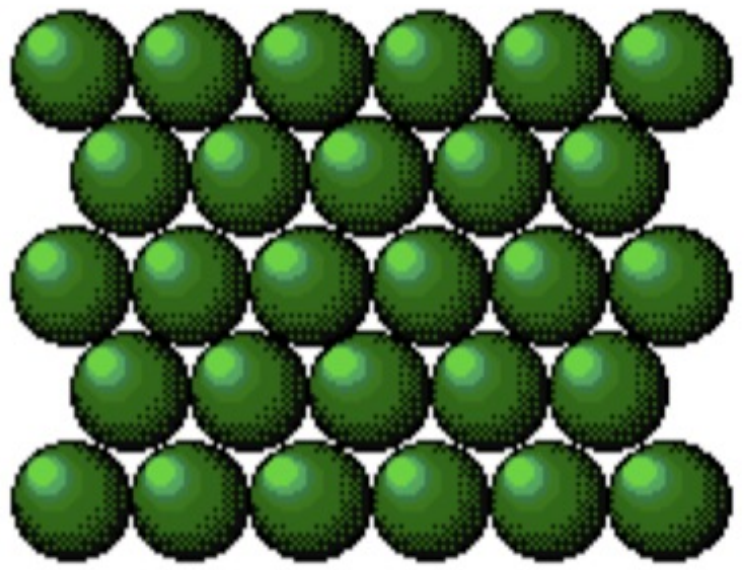




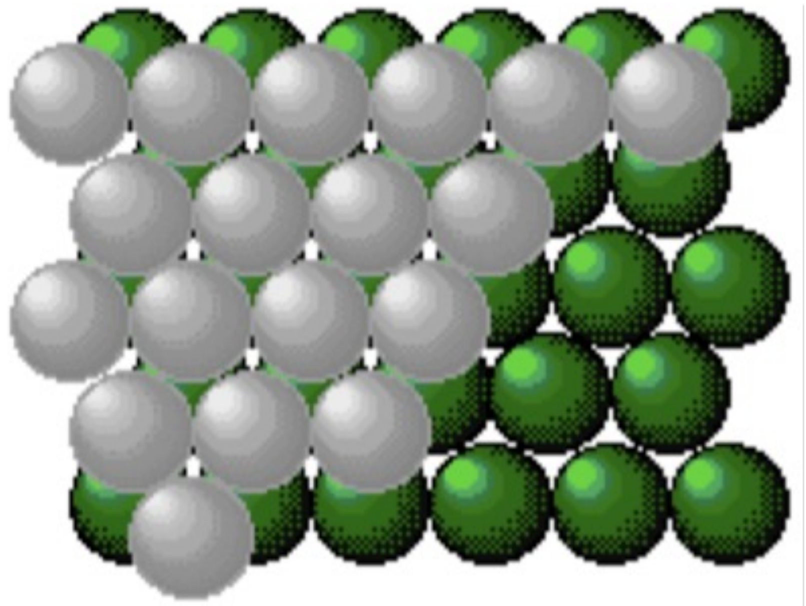
Close-Packed Structures: Role in Adsorption/Absorption

Structures where atoms are packed as closely as possible and minimizing empty space

1st layer: close packed atoms

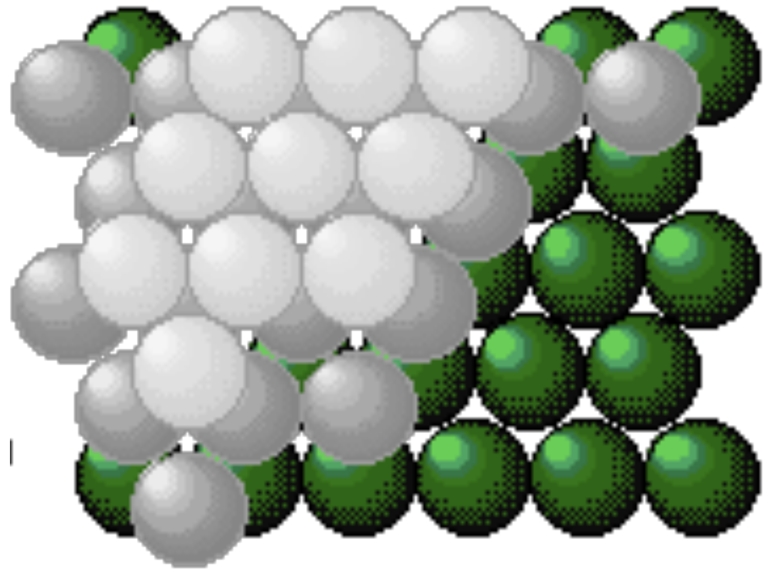


2nd layer: atoms are situated over gaps in the 1st layer



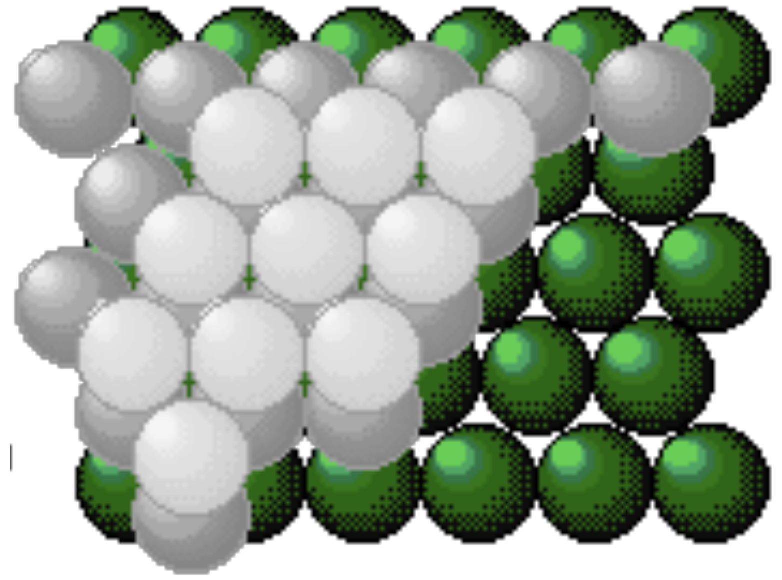
3rd layer: atoms are situated over the gaps in the 2nd layer

Two possibilities:



and over the atoms of the first layer

Hexagonal close packed

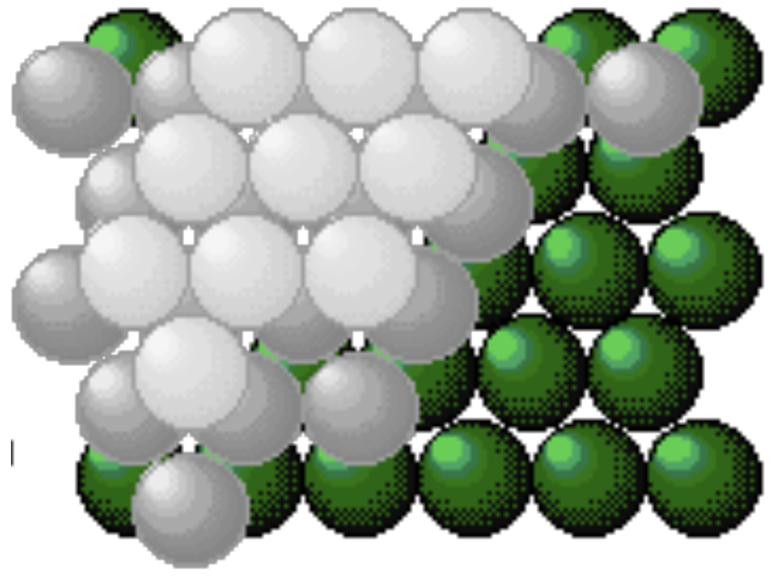


Over the gaps in the first layer

Cubic close packed

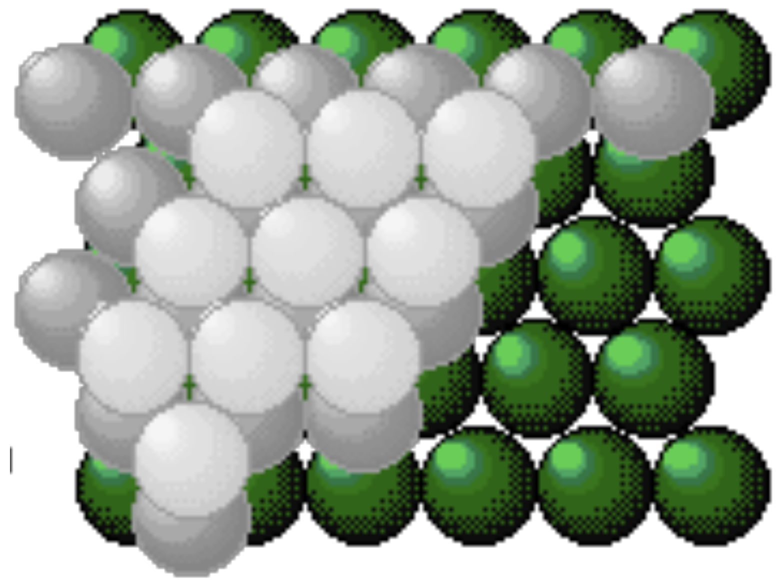
Close-Packed Structures: Role in Adsorption/Absorption

The packing efficiency influences both surface interactions (adsorption) and bulk interactions (absorption)



and over the atoms of the first layer

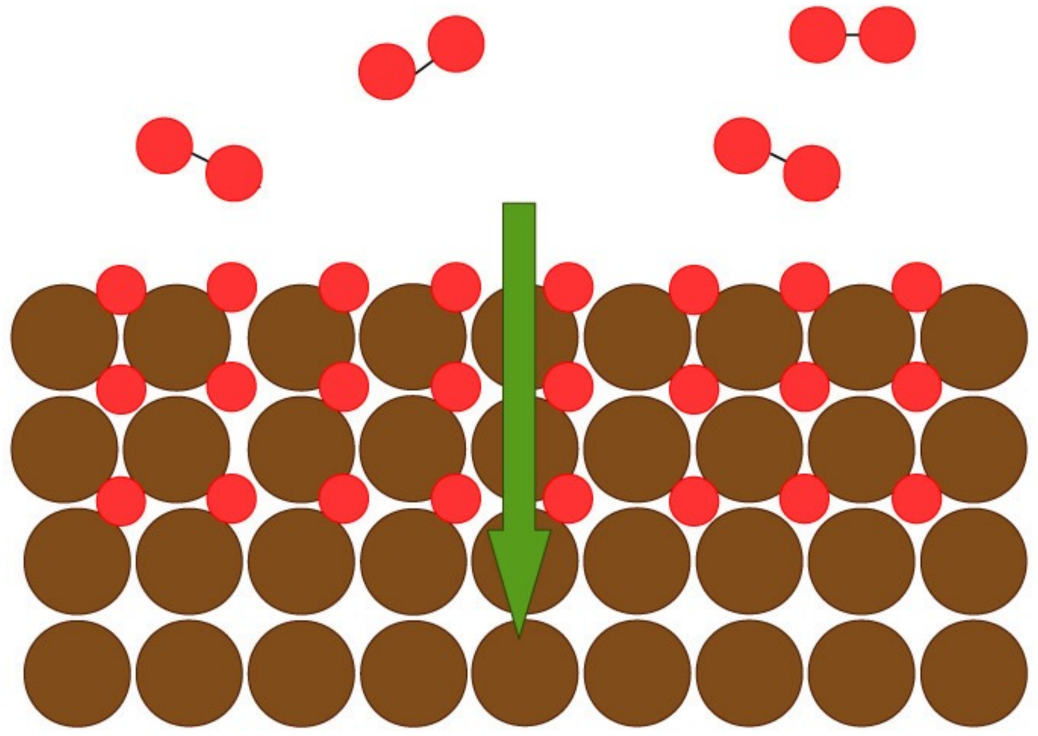
Hexagonal close packed



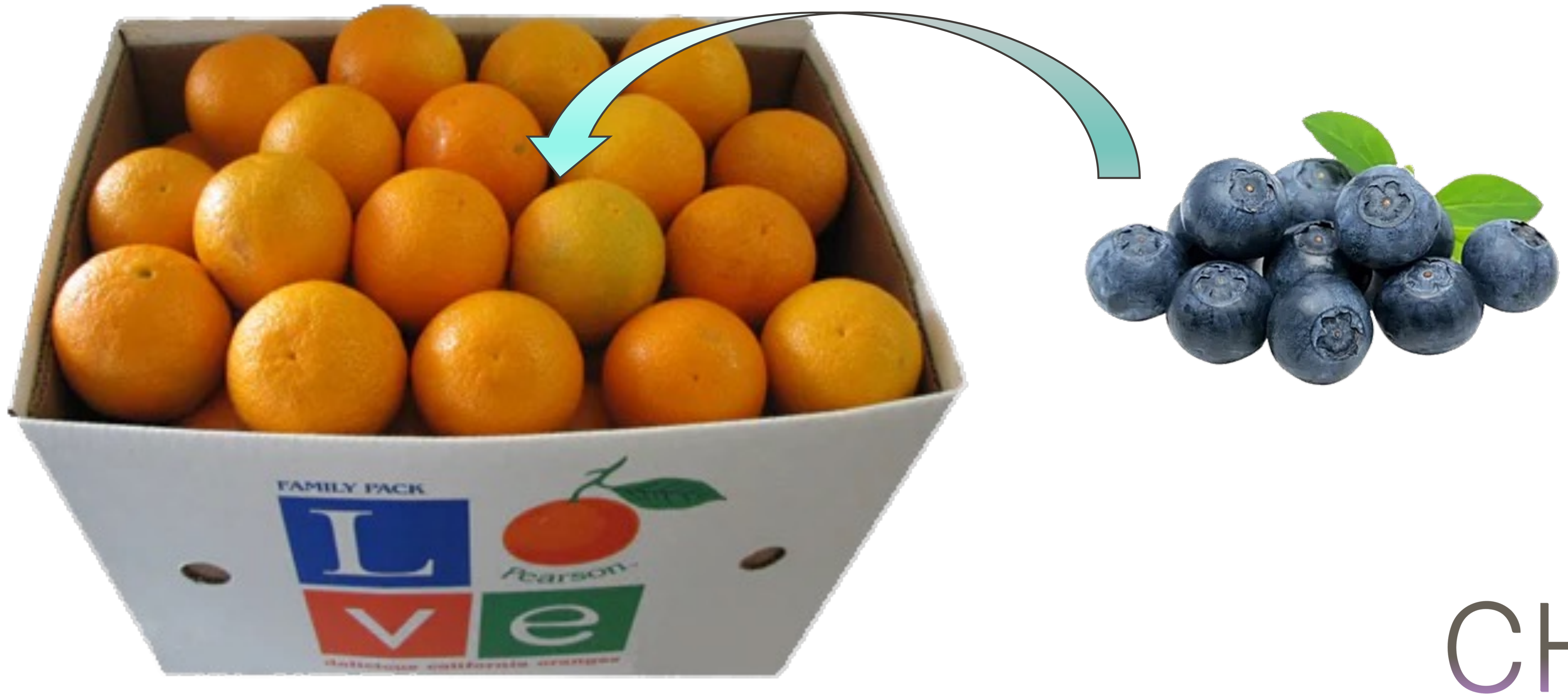
Over the gaps in the first layer

Cubic close packed

Interstitial sites (gaps between atoms in crystal lattices) define absorption pathways



Gattinoni & Michaelides | *Surf. Sci. Rep.* | 2015



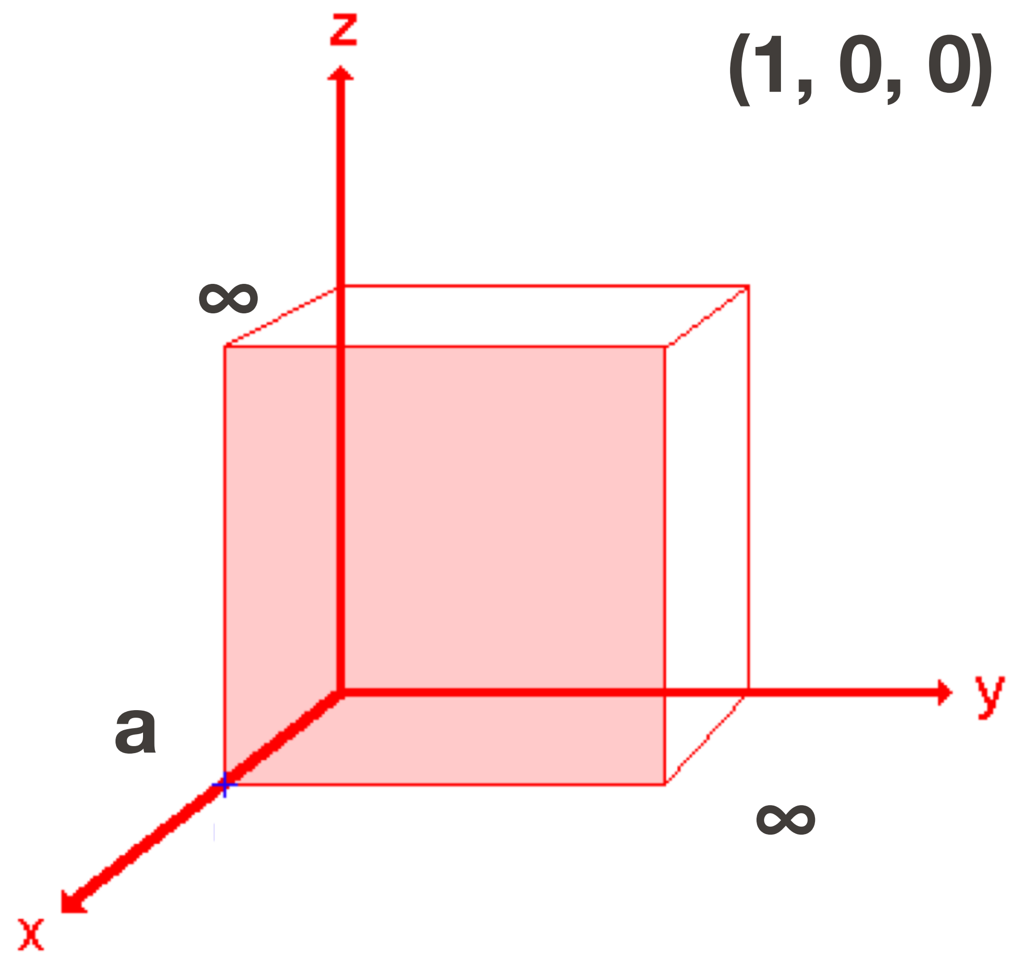
Miller Indices to Describe Crystal Planes

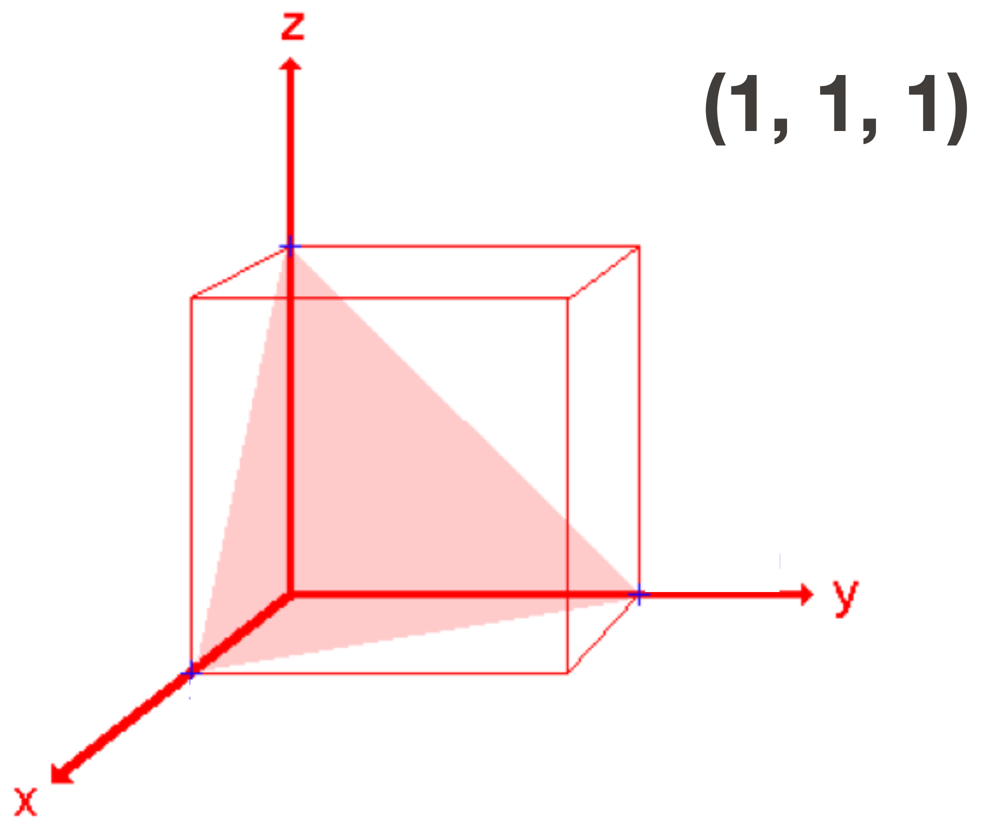
1. Identify where planes intersect the three axes

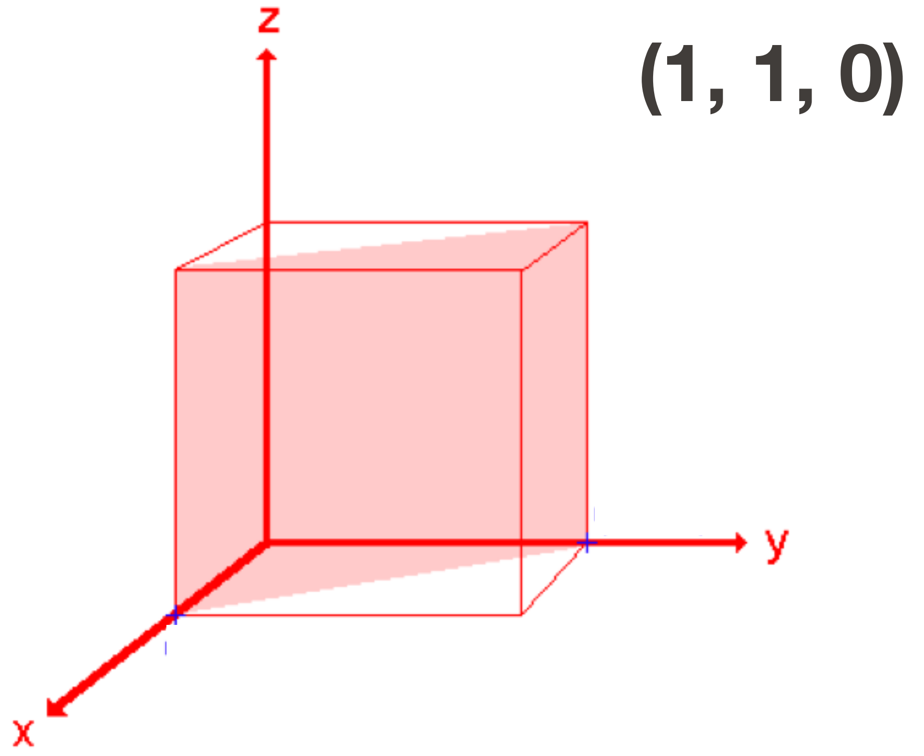
2. Take reciprocals of these locations in terms of lattice parameters a, b, c. If no intersection (parallel) then intersect is infinity (reciprocal is 0)

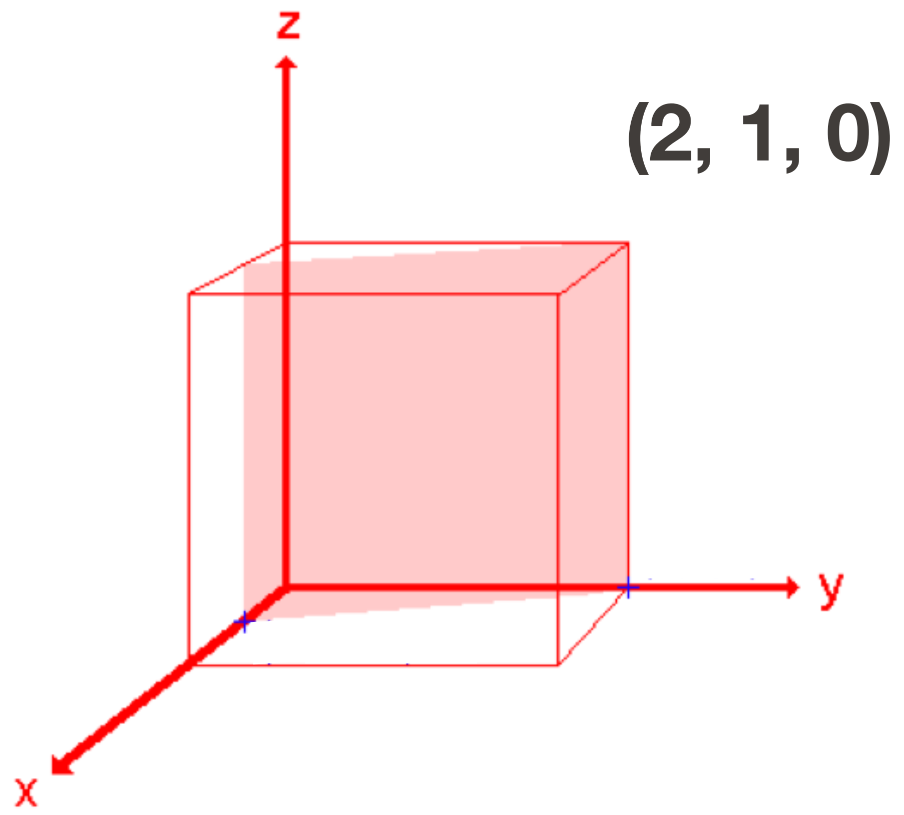
3. Use smallest whole numbers (1, 0, 0)

4. Put integers into parentheses to get Miller indices









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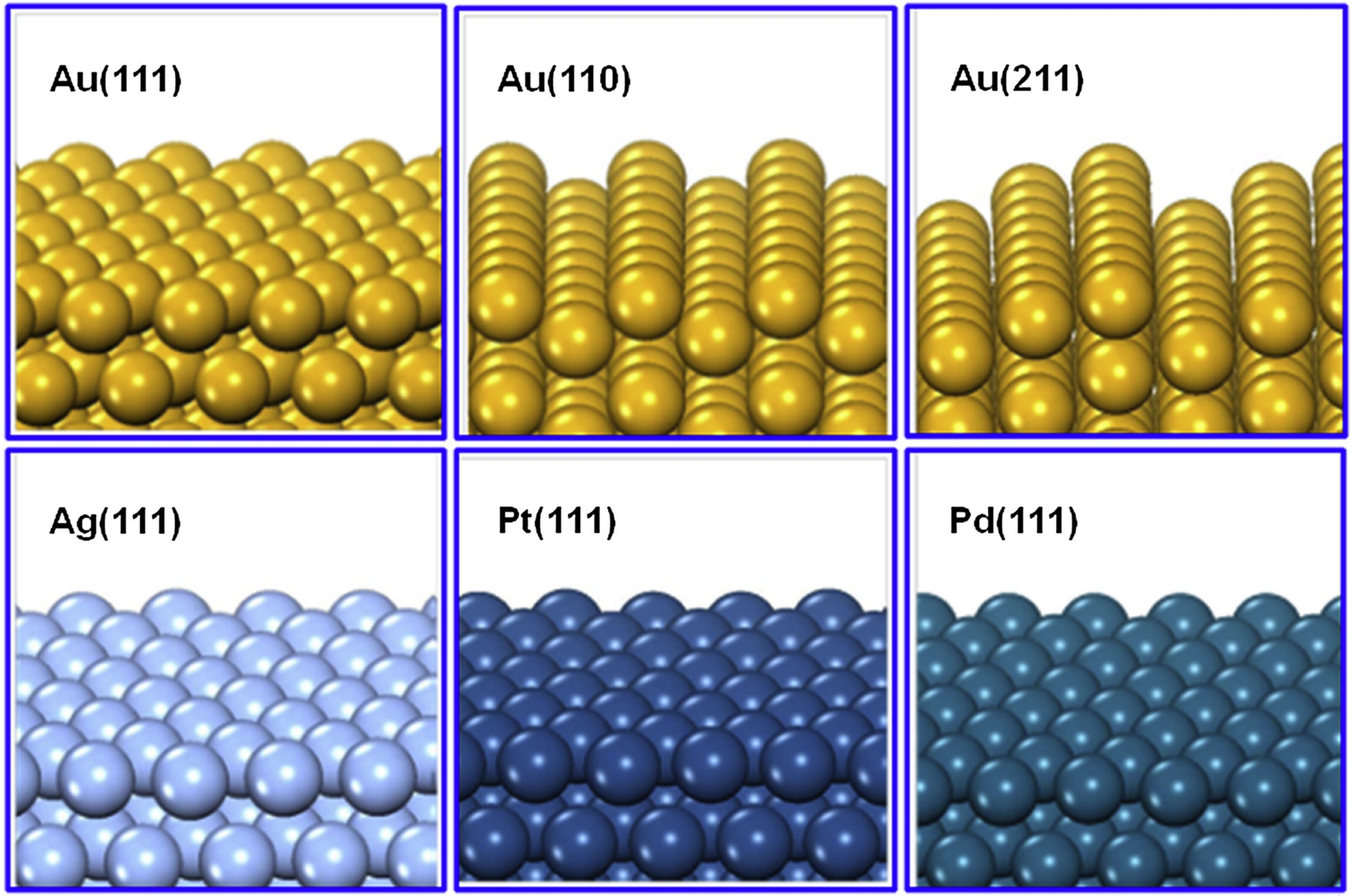
Atomic Arrangements of Atoms on Different Planes

Miller indices describe crystallographic planes in crystalline material

Each orientation represents specific arrangement of atoms on the surface of the crystal lattice, with distinct geometric and chemical properties

Variations in:

- Atomic density
- Surface energy
- Geometry
- Stability



Li *et al.*, | **Biomaterials** | 2023

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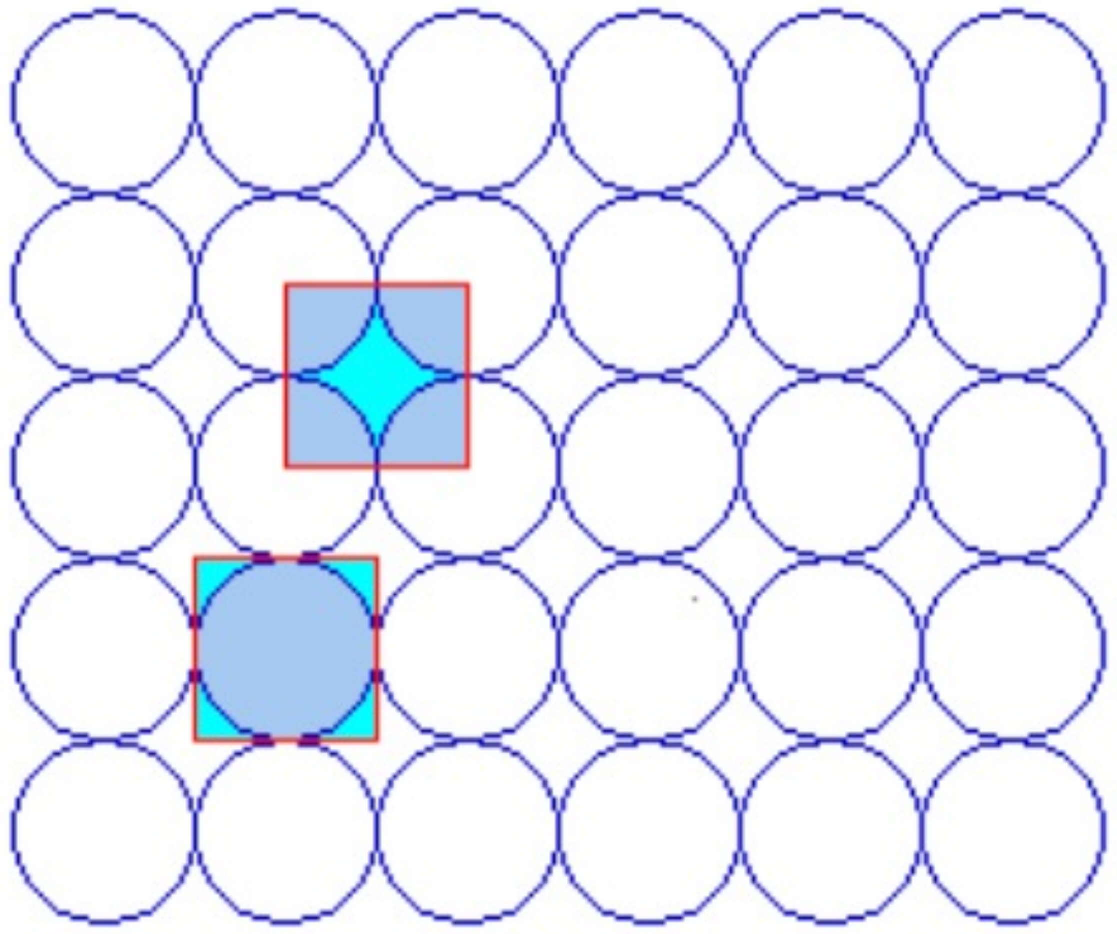
Ordered Adsorbate Layers in Relation to Substrate's Elementary Cell

Adsorbate unit cell
Substrate unit cell

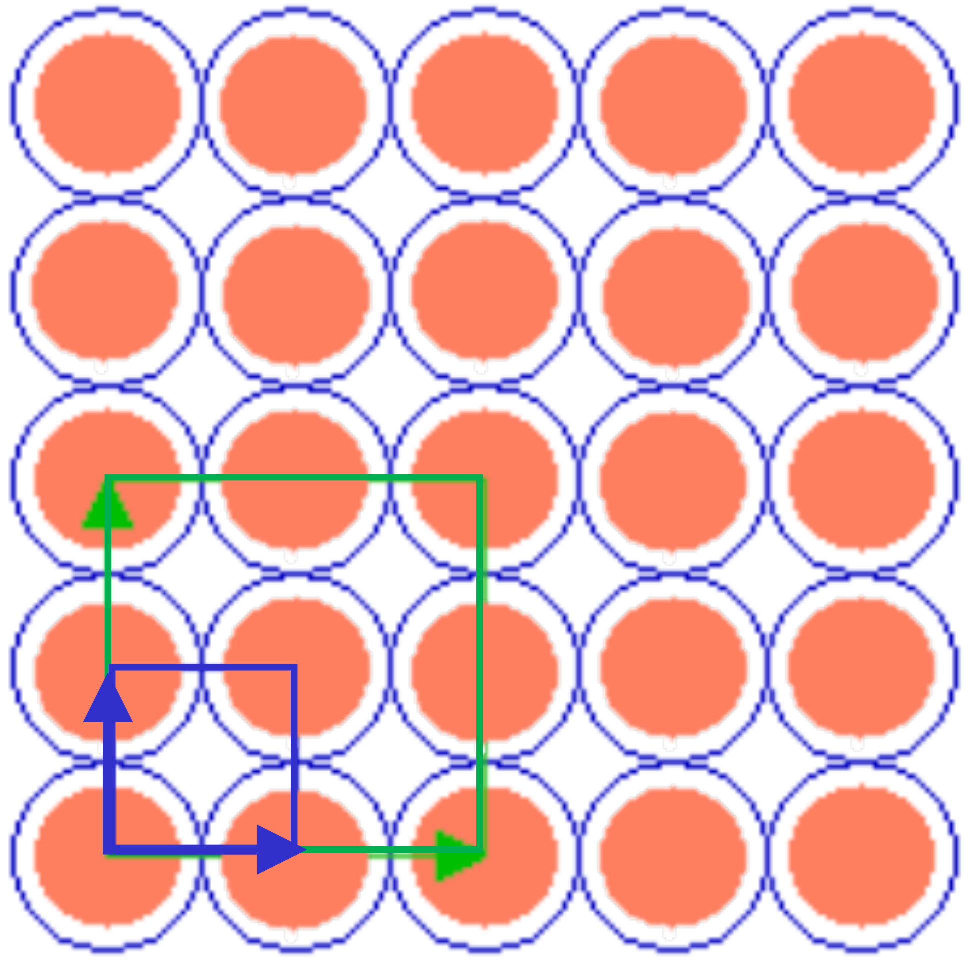
fcc(100) lattice



Two possible choices of unit cell

Substrate provides periodic grid of atoms

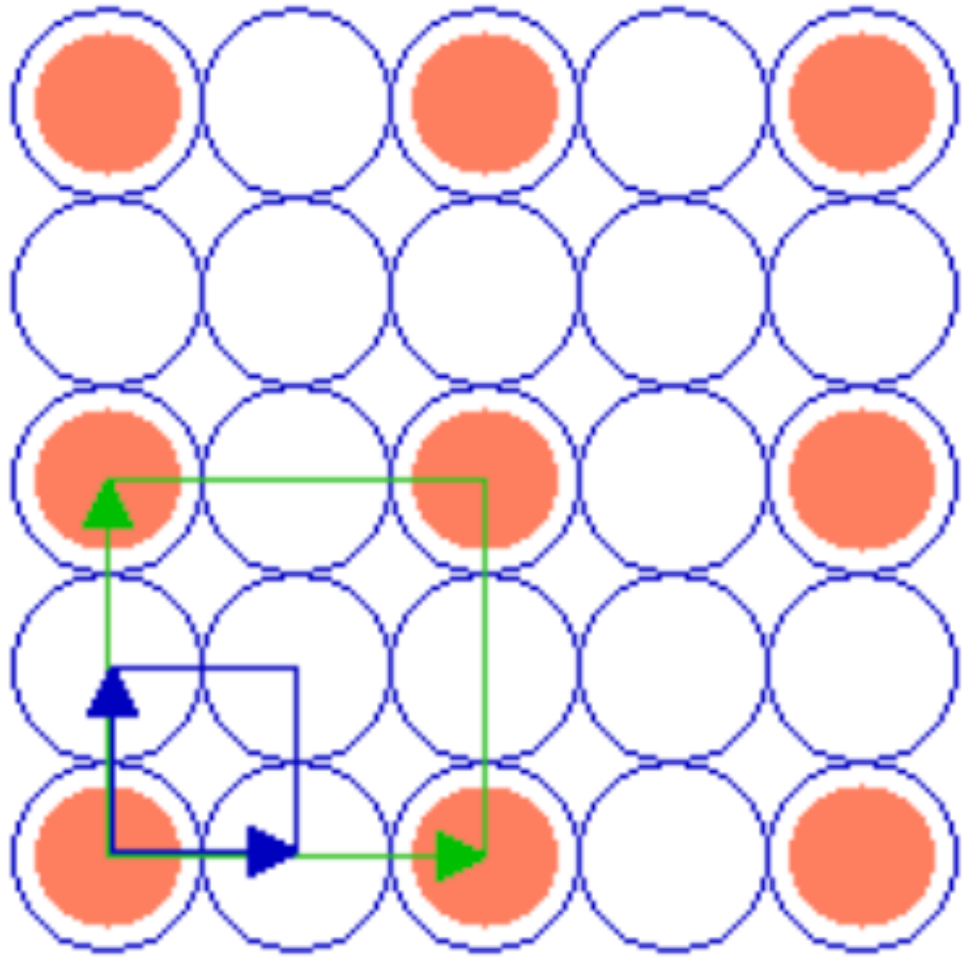
Adsorbates



(1x1)

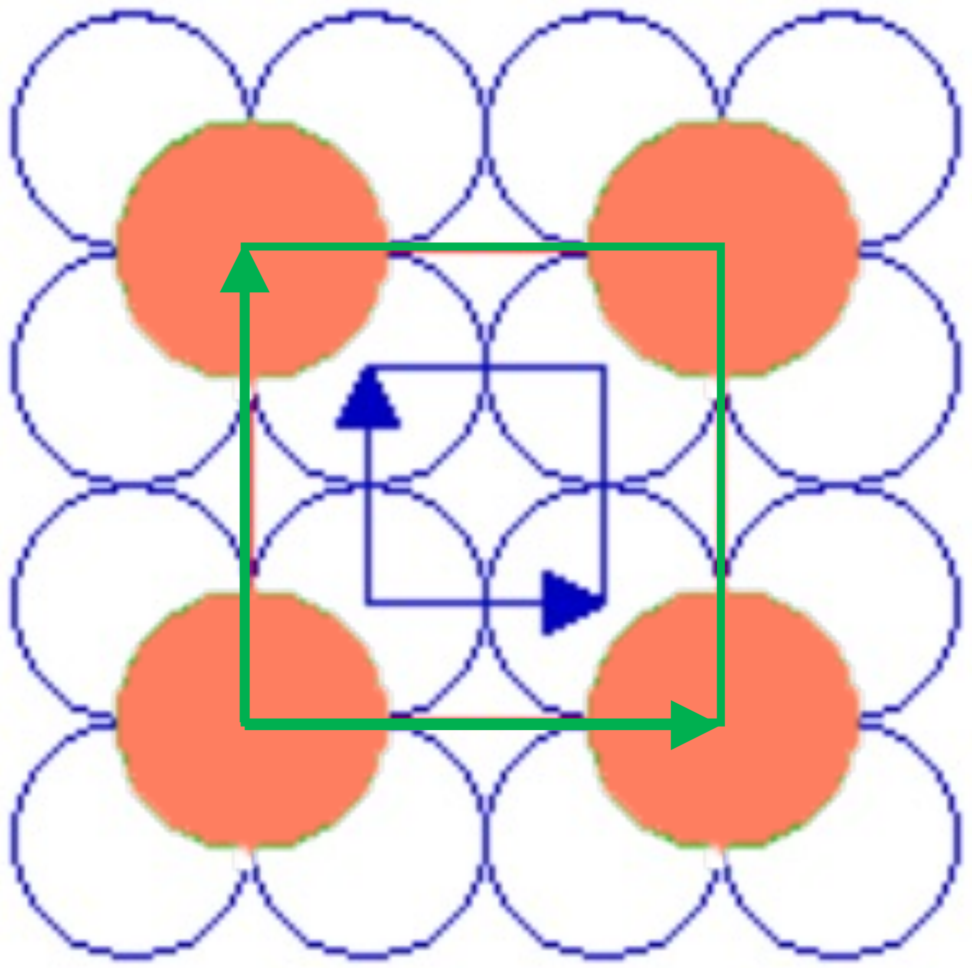
$\theta = 1$

coverage



(2x2)

$\theta = 1/4$



c(2x2)

$\theta = 1/2$

*c = centered

Adsorbates don't just stick randomly — they form ordered patterns based on substrate lattice

How to Read Wood's Notation (Adsorbate Address)

Substrate orientation

Miller indices

Adsorbate superstructure

Si(111)-(1x1)-O ← **Adsorbate species**

W(211)-(2x2)-H

Cu(100)-c(2x2)-Cl

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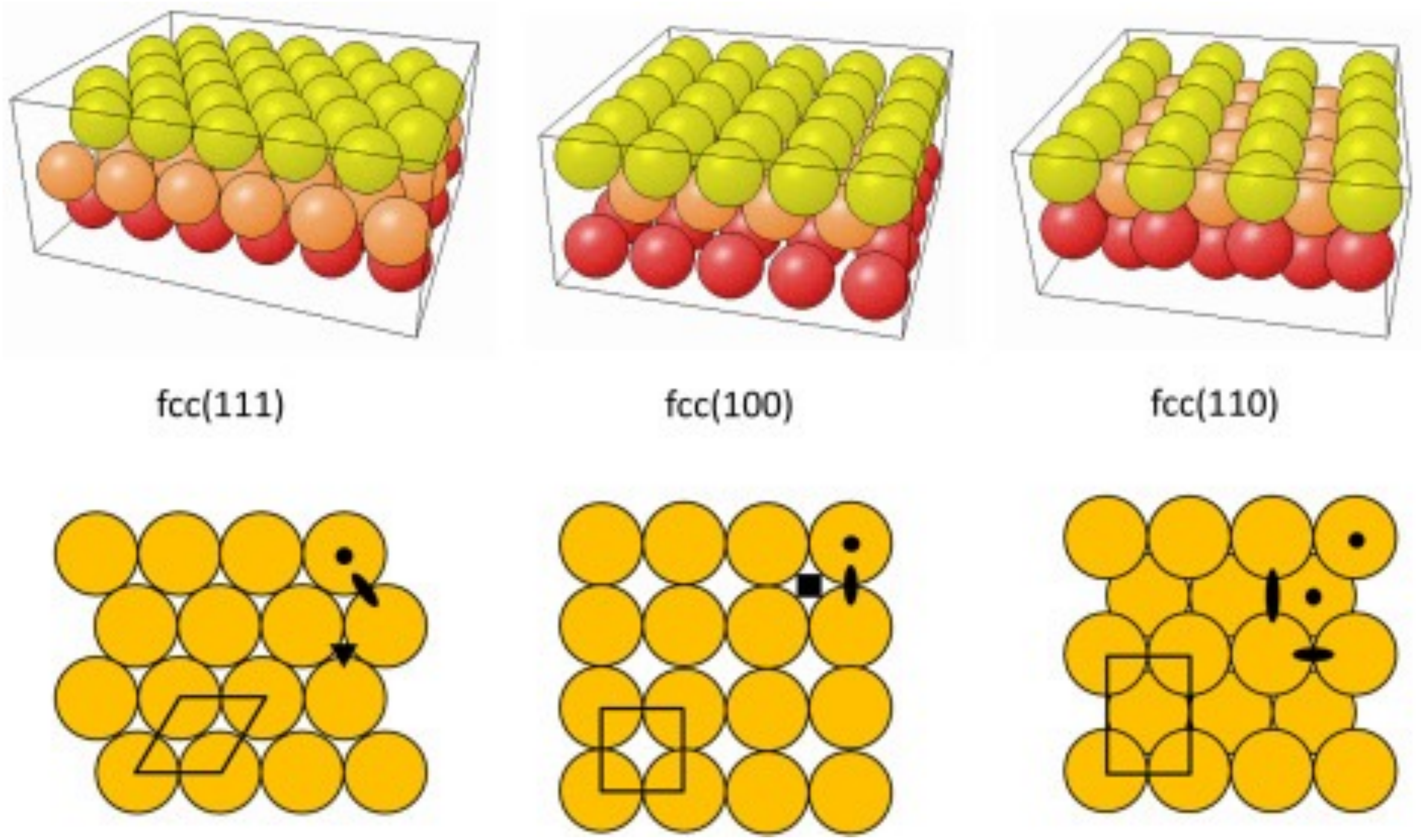
Face-Specific Behavior of Adsorption

Chloride ions adsorption on copper electrode surfaces



Wandelt | *Surf. Sci. Electrochem.* | 2018

Most symmetric adsorption sites are marked by the shapes

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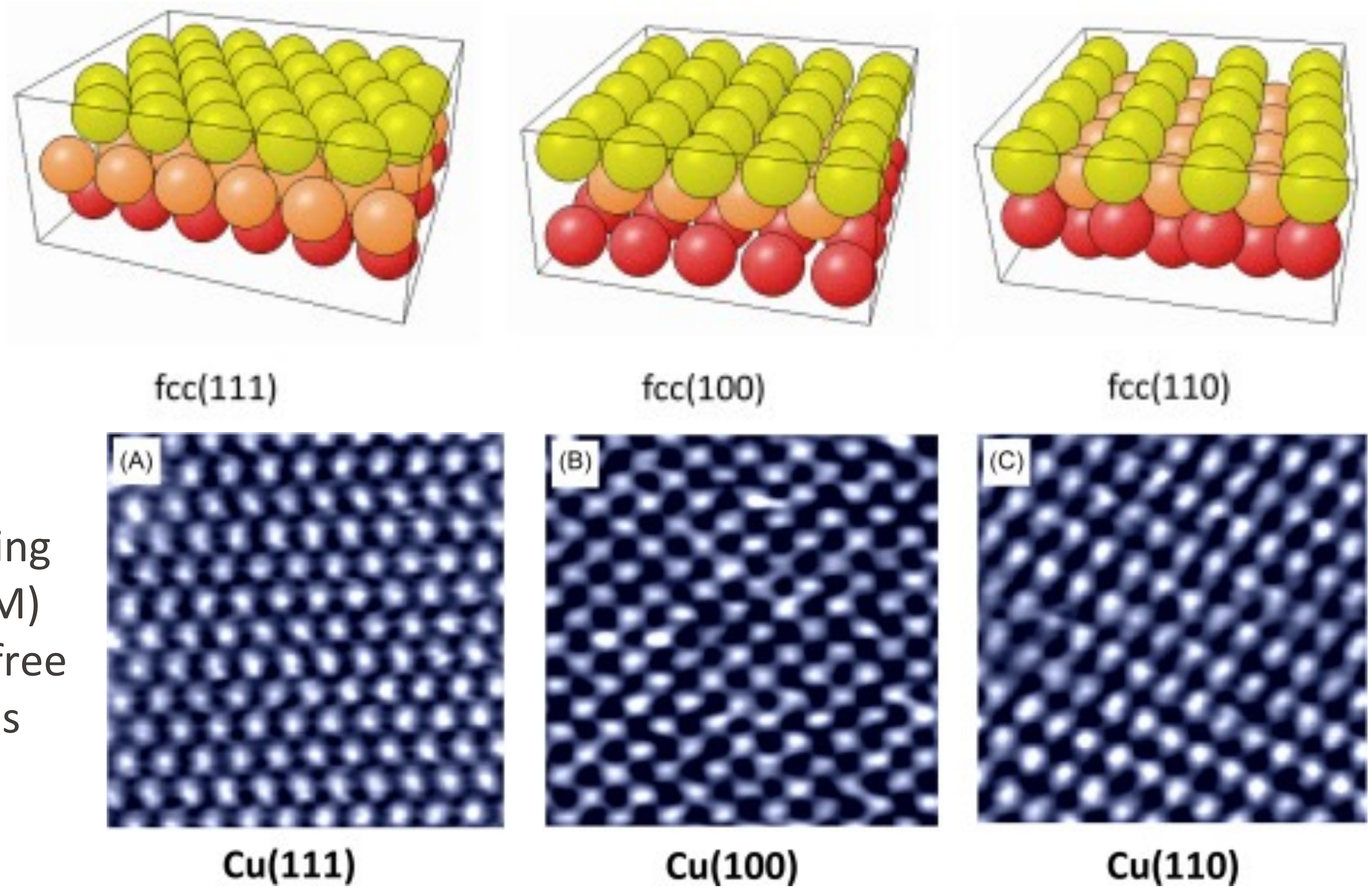
Visualizing Face-Specific Structure of Surfaces

Chloride ions adsorption on copper electrode surfaces



Scanning tunneling microscopy (STM) images of anion-free copper surfaces

Scale:
~ 3 x 3 nm

Wandelt | *Surf. Sci. Electrochem.* | 2018

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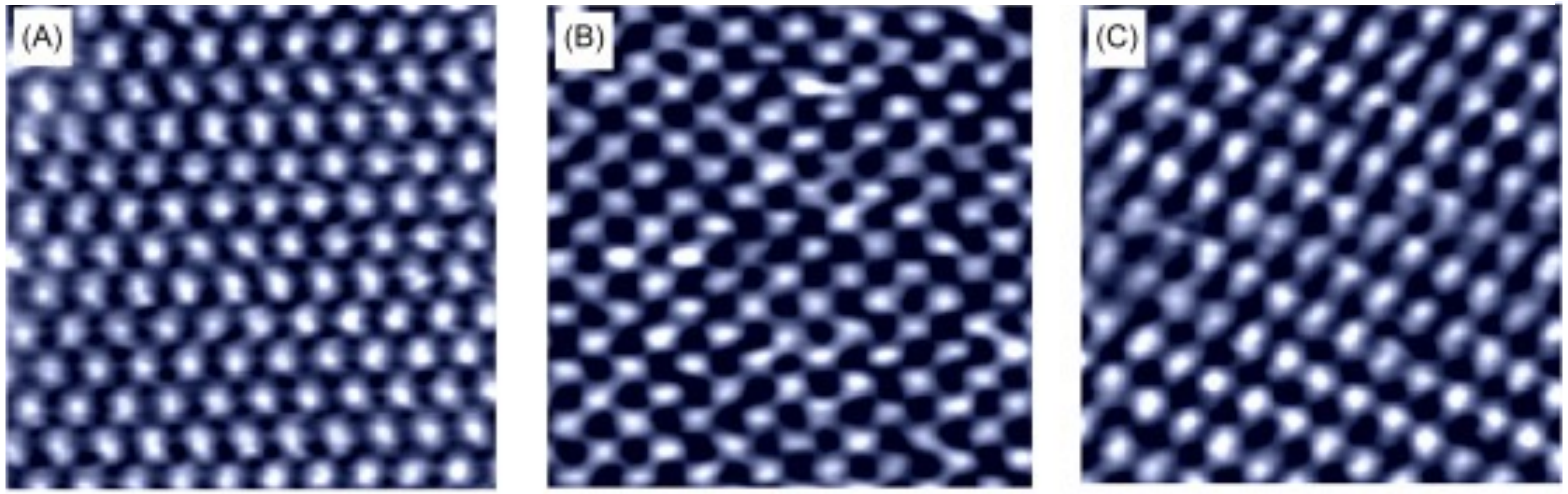
Extracting Face-Specific Parameters

FCC

	Cu(111) hexa	Cu(100) square	Cu(110) rectangular
Lattice constants (nm)	$\vec{a} = \vec{b}$ =0.256; α=60°	$\vec{a} = \vec{b}$ =0.256; α=90°	a=0.256, b=0.362; α=90°
Density (atoms/cm²)	1.767×10^{15} ↑	1.530×10^{15}	1.082×10^{15} ↓
Coordination number	9	8	7
Missing neighbors	3	4	5
Interlayer spacing (nm)	d=0.212	d=0.181	d=0.128
Workfunction (eV)	4.94	4.59	4.48

12 neighbors

Scanning tunneling microscopy (STM) images of anion-free copper surfaces



Cu(111) Cu(100) Cu(110)

Scale: ~ 3 x 3 nm

Wandelt | *Surf. Sci. Electrochem.* | 2018

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Key Takeaways

Crystal lattice structures of surfaces defines how adsorbates stick

Packing of lattice structure influences adsorption/absorption

Adsorbates form ordered patterns on the substrate lattice (adsorbate address)

Depending on the cut of the crystal, adsorption behavior will change

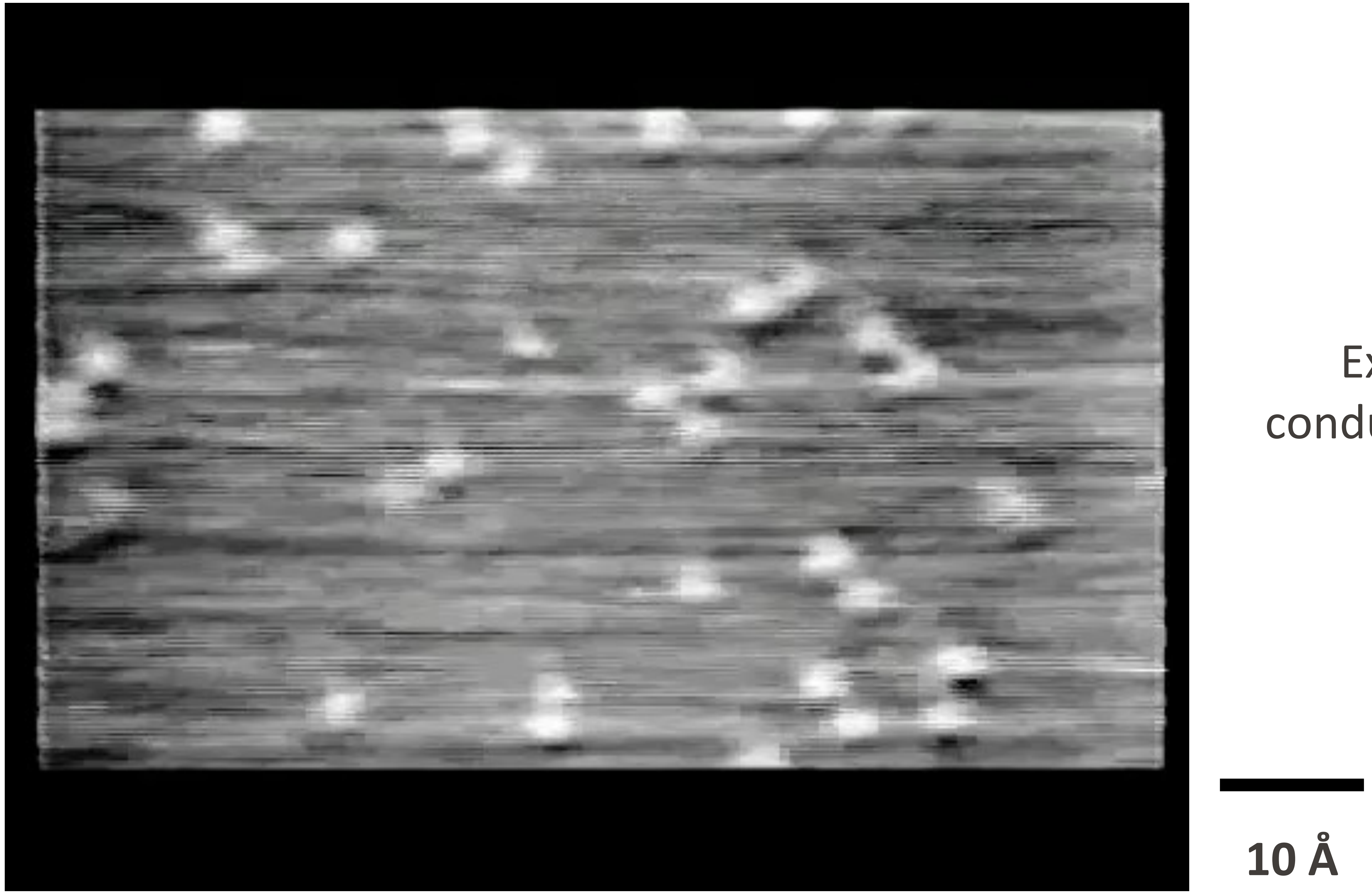
How can we characterize/visualize this phenomenon?

Real-Time Observation of Oxygen on Ruthenium Surface

Scanning tunneling microscopy (STM) images the random walk of individual oxygen atoms on Ru at 300 K

$\theta < 0.25$

θ = 0.25 corresponds to a complete, ordered (2x2) overlayer



Experiments conducted in a UHV chamber

Wintterlin | *Surface Science* | 1997

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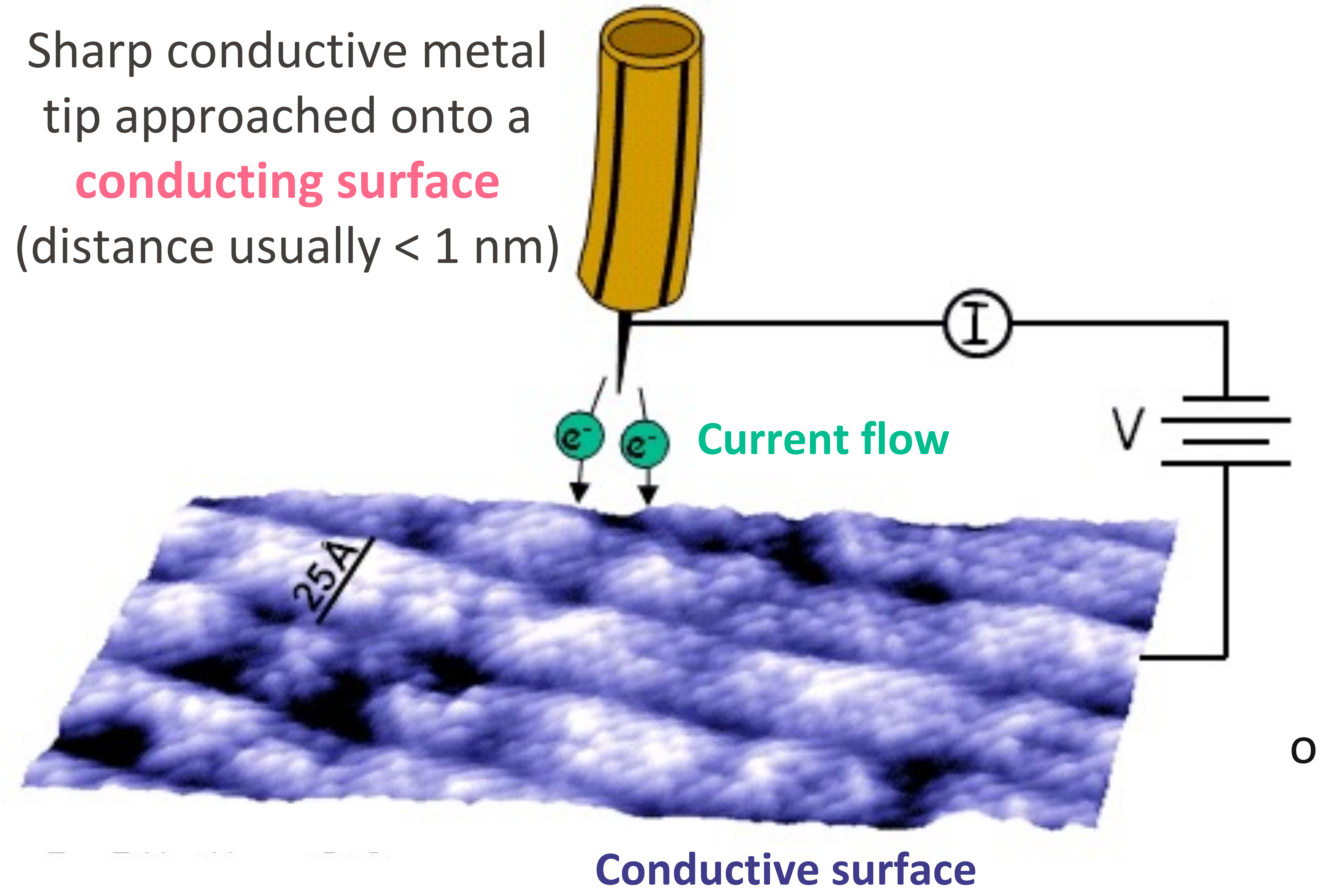
Seeing Surfaces with Atomic-Scale Resolution

Scanning Tunneling Microscopy (STM)

Sharp conductive metal tip approached onto a **conducting surface** (distance usually < 1 nm)



STM provides information on:

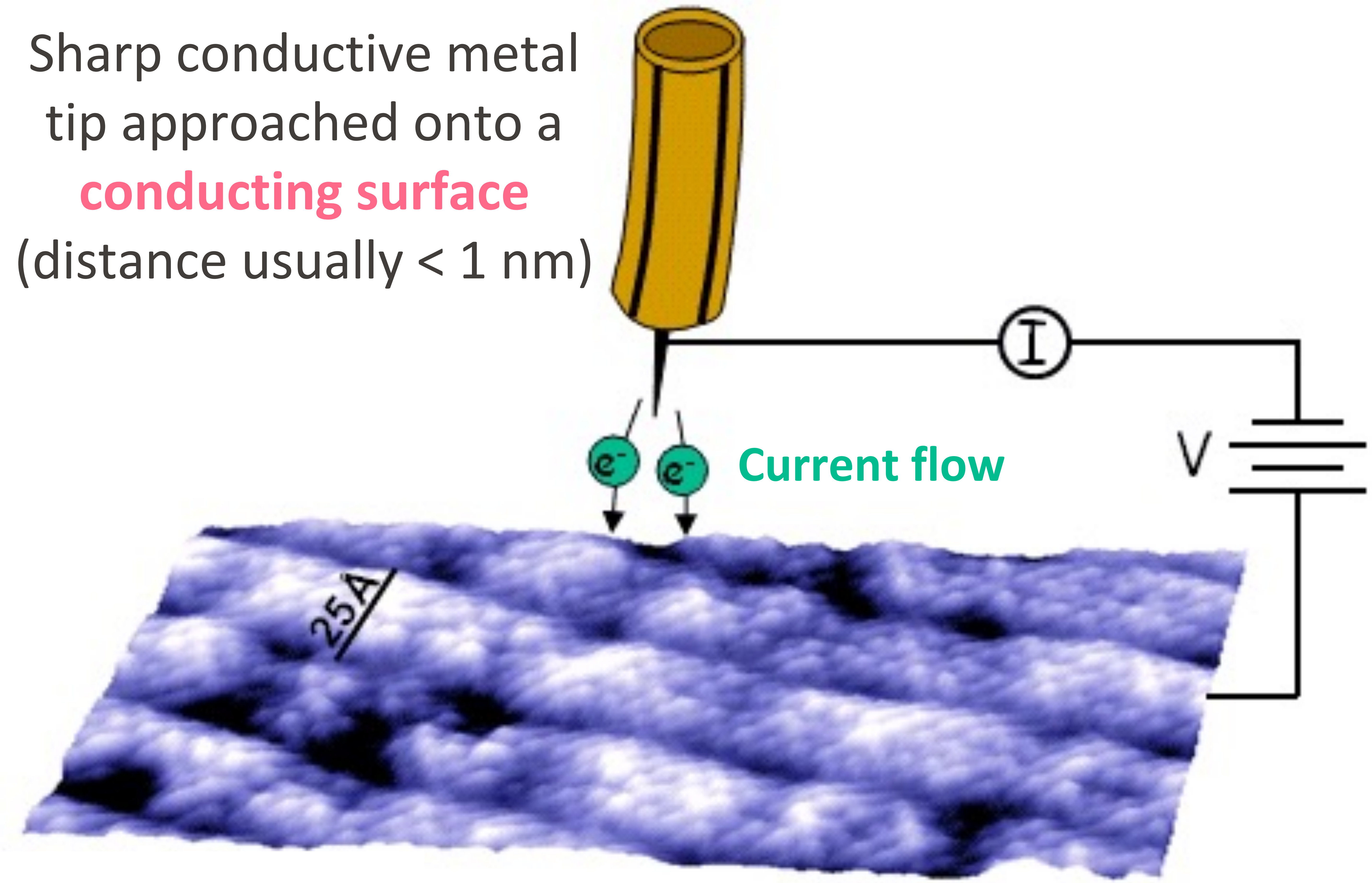
1) Electron-density distribution
2) Electronic work function
3) Surface topography

A 3-D image of the "surface" can be obtained with atomic resolution

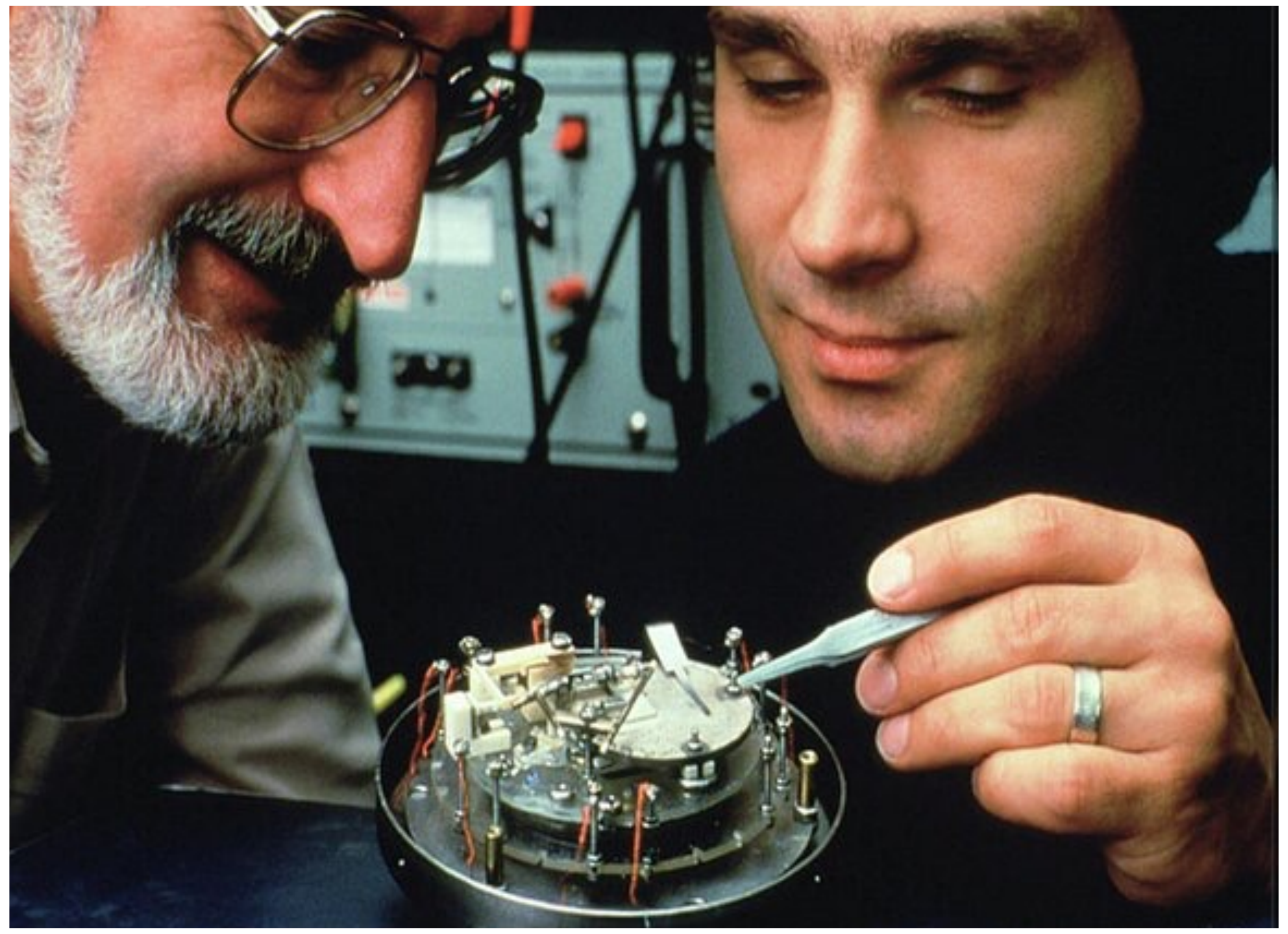
Seeing Surfaces with Atomic-Scale Resolution

Scanning Tunneling Microscopy (STM)

Sharp conductive metal tip approached onto a **conducting surface** (distance usually < 1 nm)



1981 IBM Rüschlikon



Heinrich Rohrer & Gerd Binnig

Nobel Prize in Physics for invention of STM (1986)

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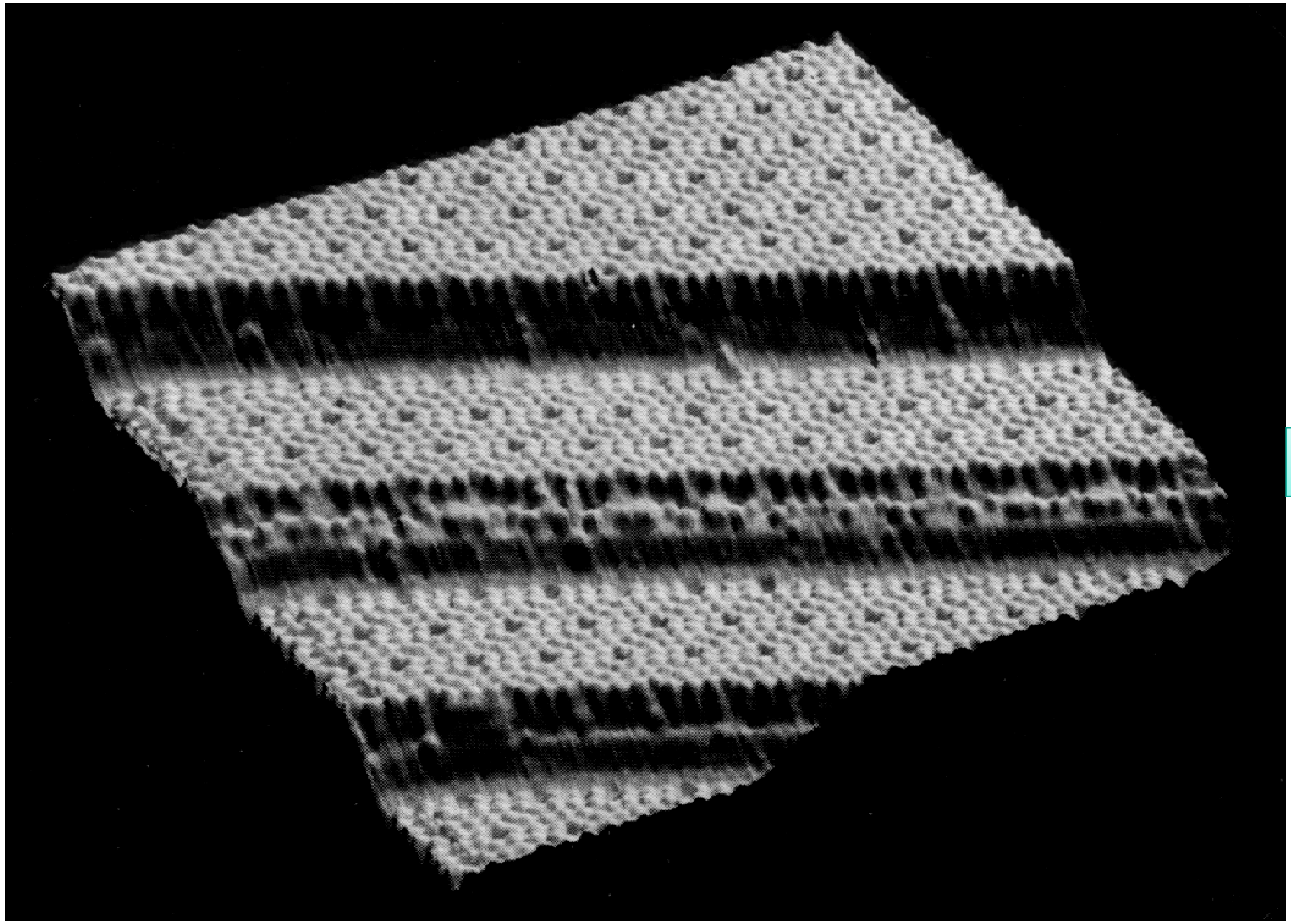
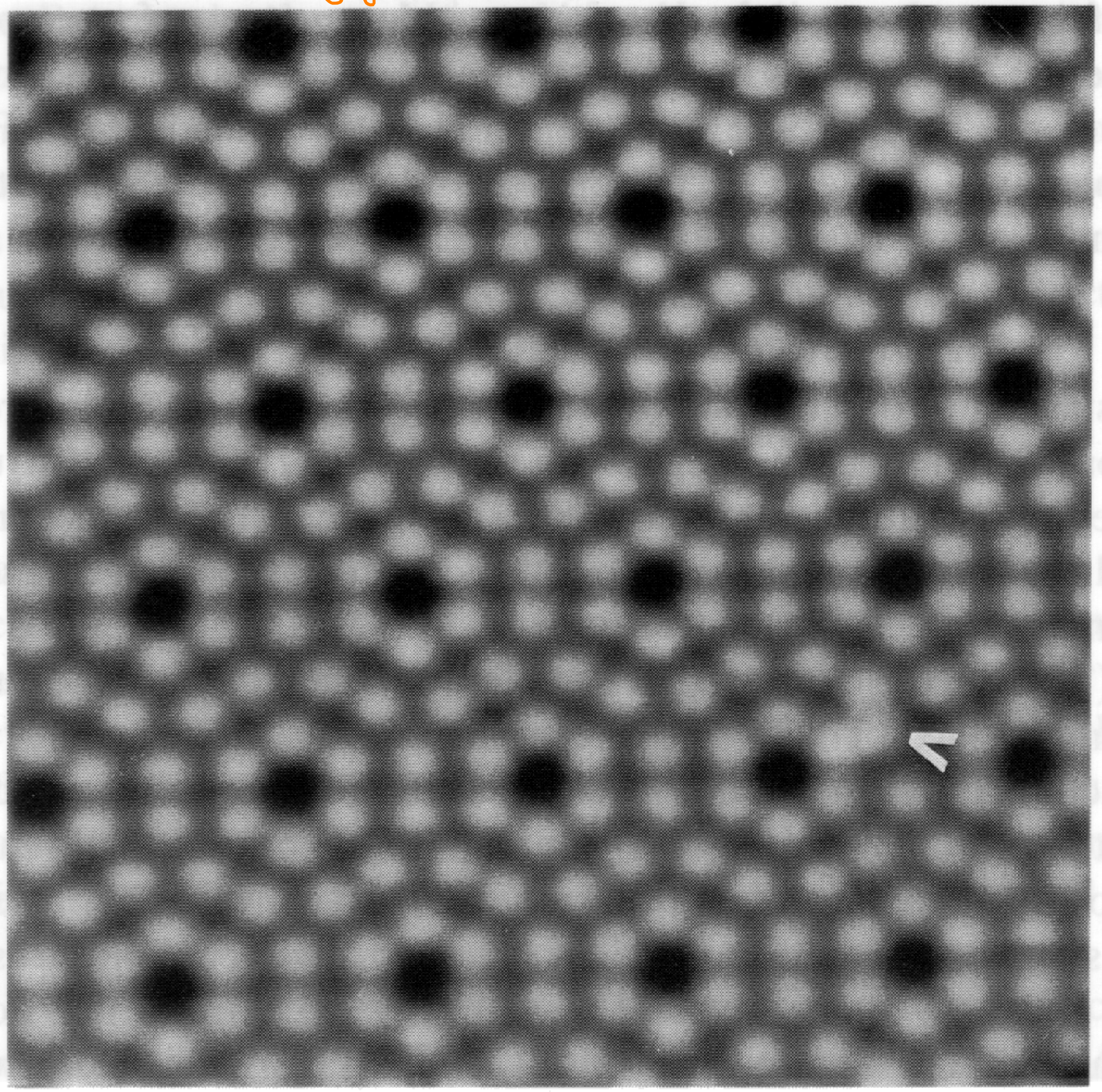
Seeing Surfaces with Atomic-Scale Resolution

LEED low energy electron diffraction



Perspective STM image of a 32 x 36 nm area of a Si(111) surface showing atomic layers



Source: Lucio Isa

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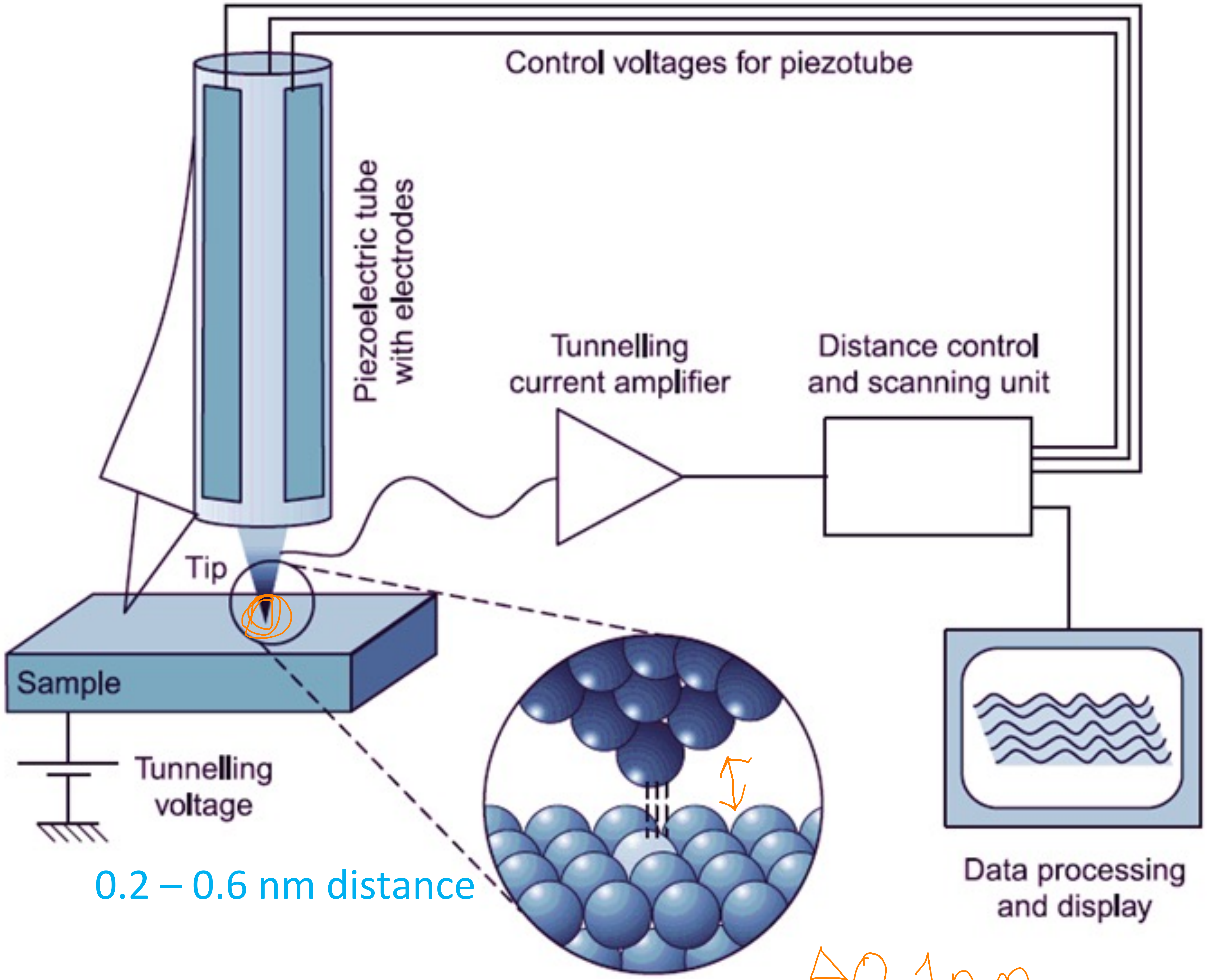
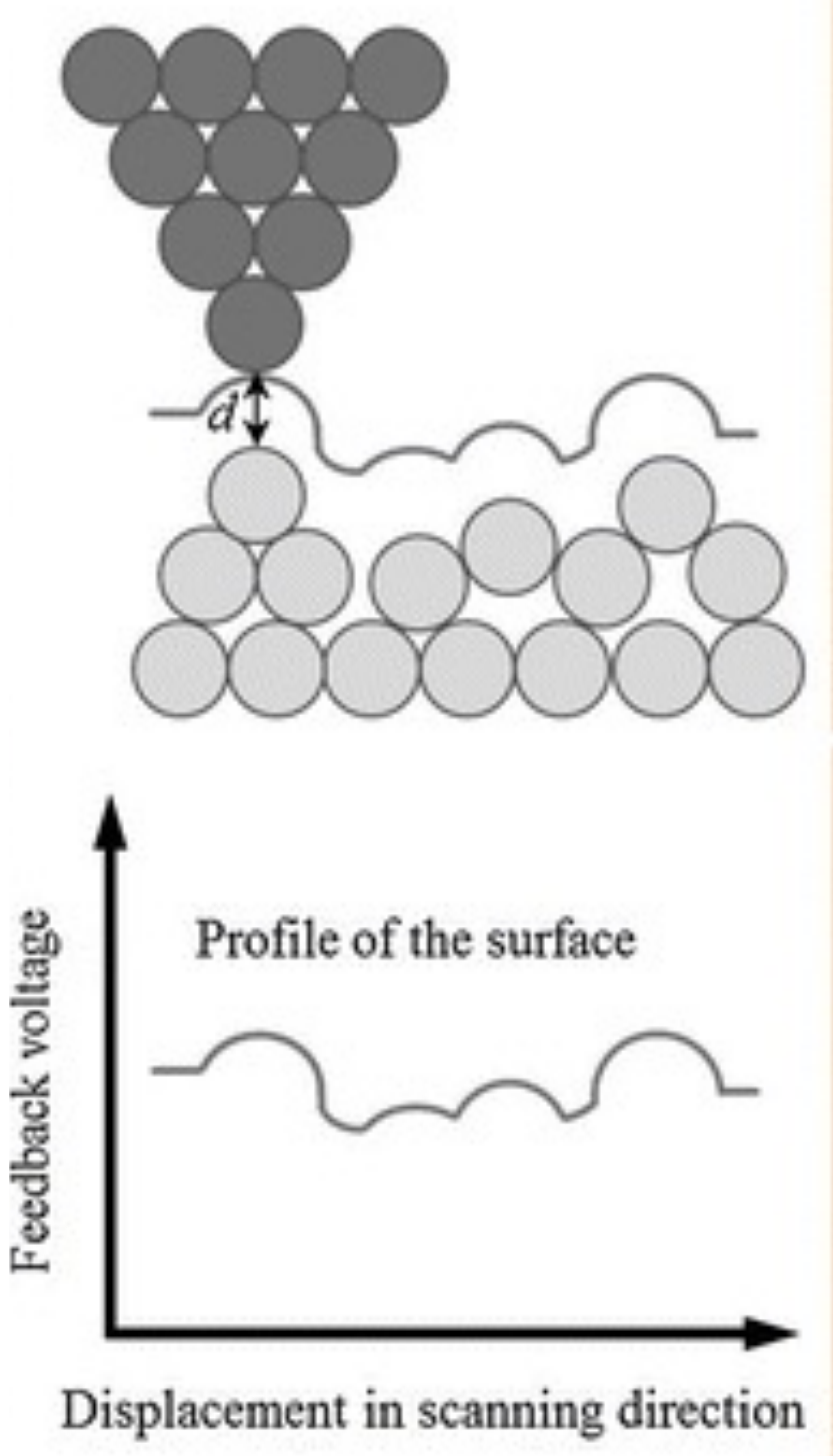
STM Uses a Tunneling Current to Map Atoms on Surfaces



0.2 – 0.6 nm distance

Δ0.1nm



Source: Wikipedia

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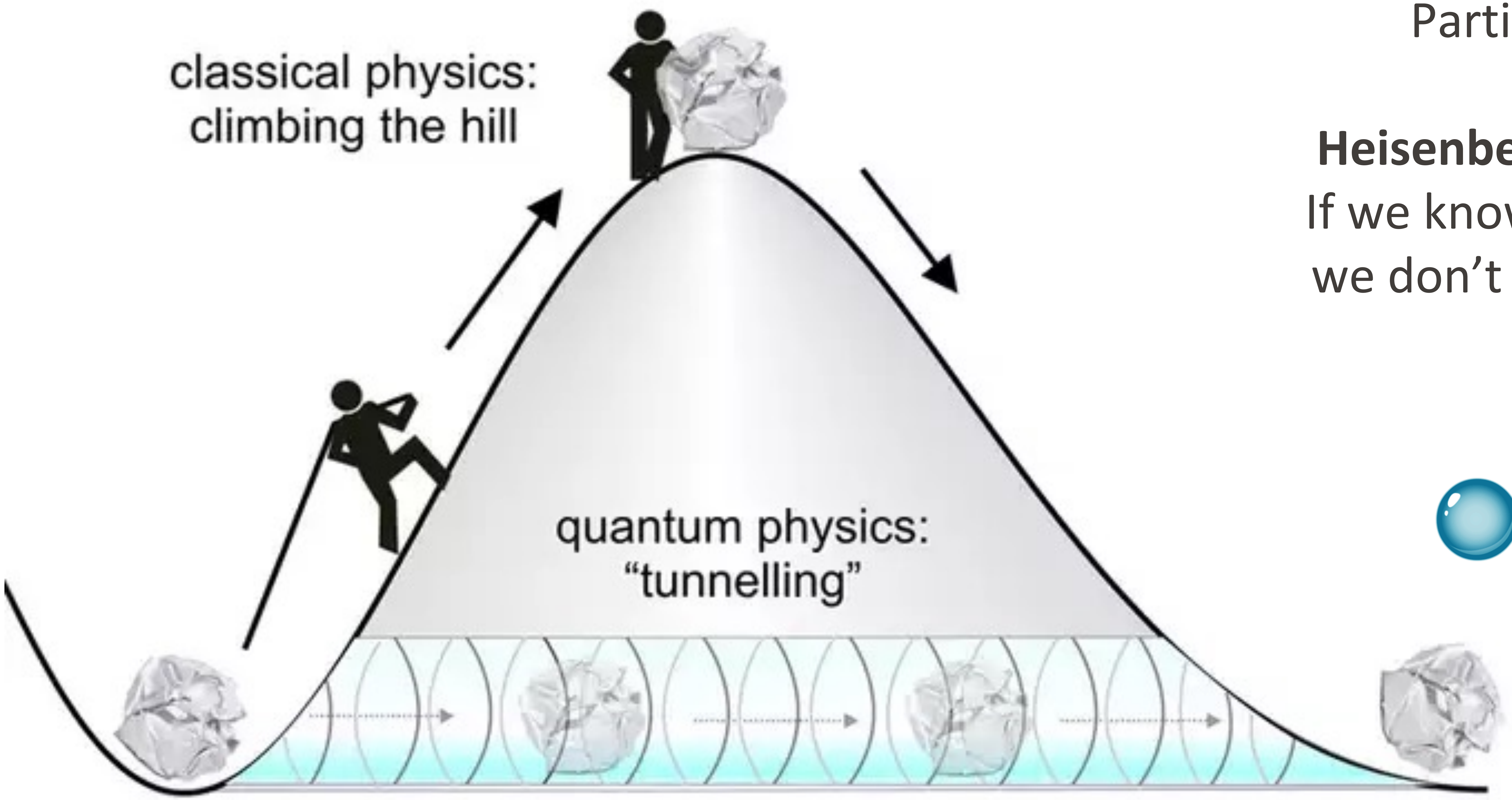
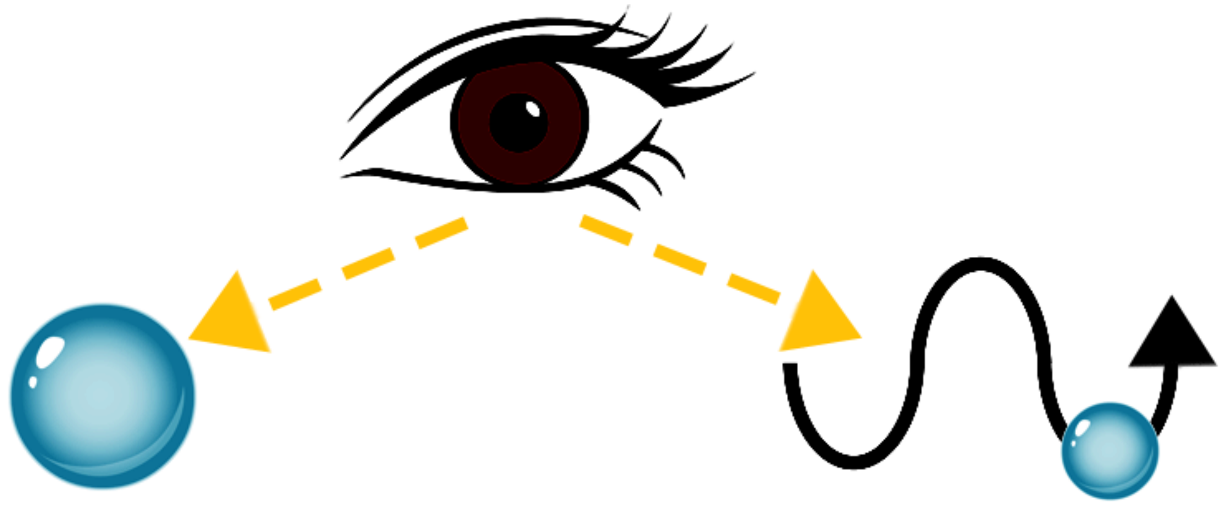
What is Quantum Tunneling?



Particles can act as waves

Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle:
If we know a particle's momentum, we don't know it's precise position



MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT

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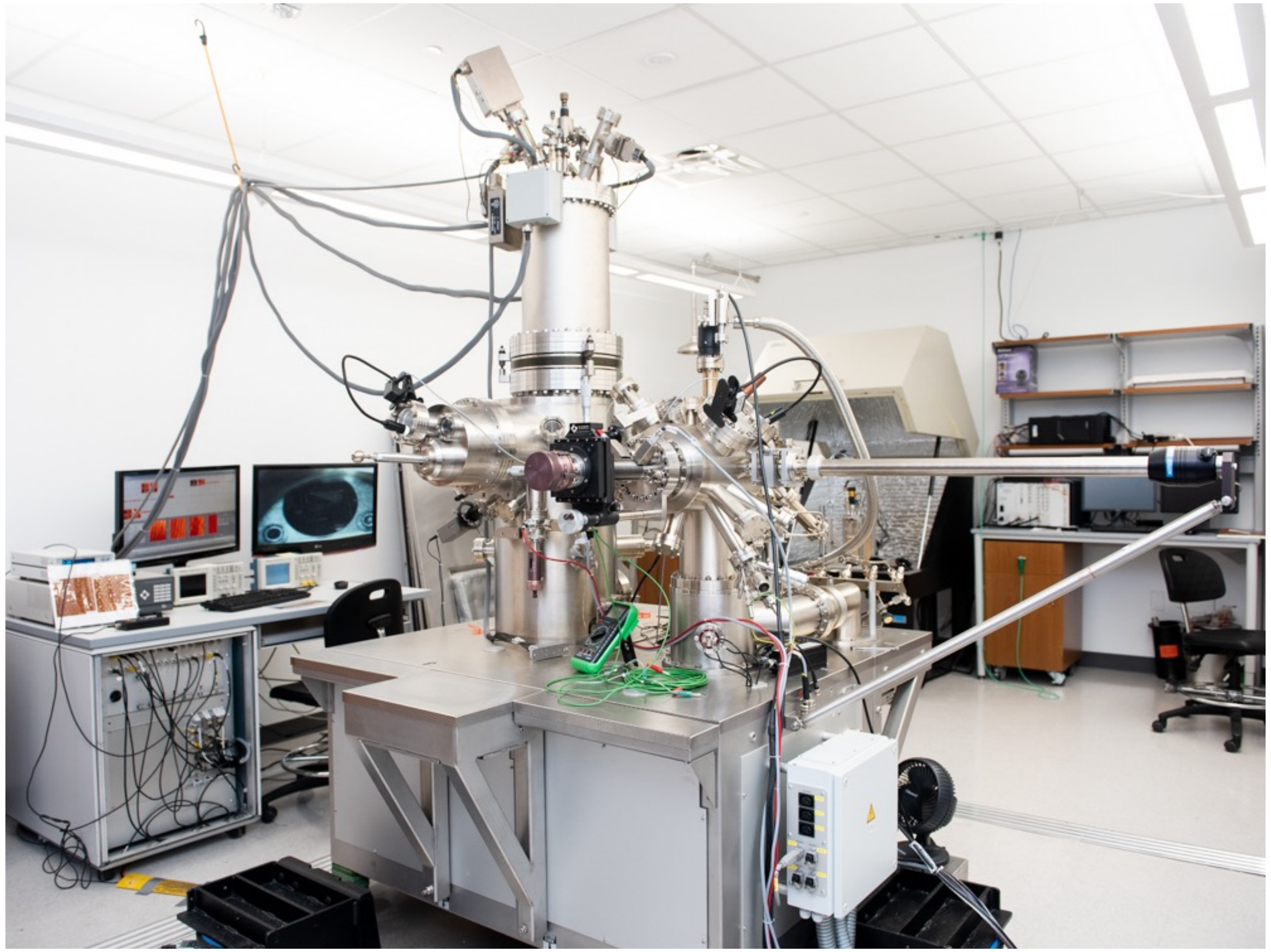
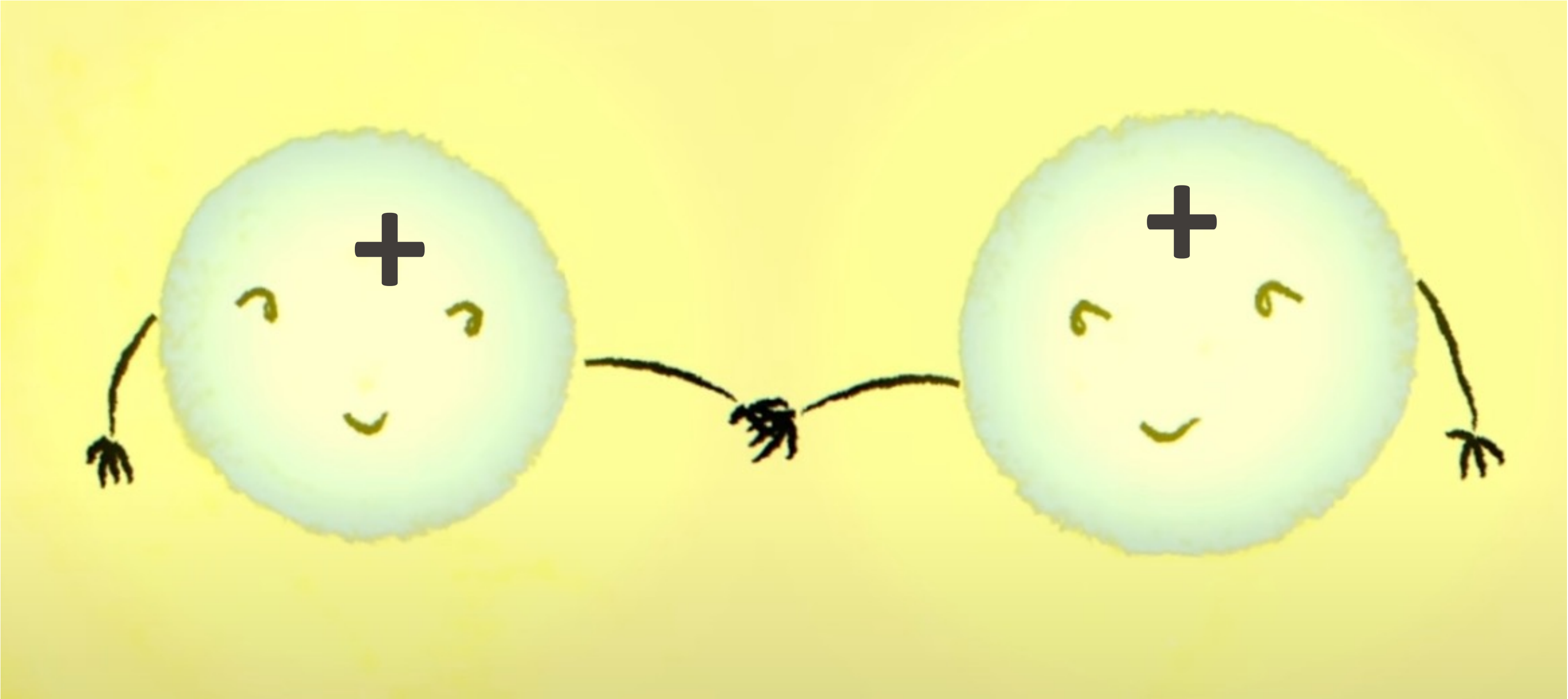
How is Quantum Tunneling Relevant in Our Lives?



Nuclear fusion of hydrogen atoms to form helium

Overcoming repulsion shouldn't be possible



Quantum tunneling
1 in a trillion encounters

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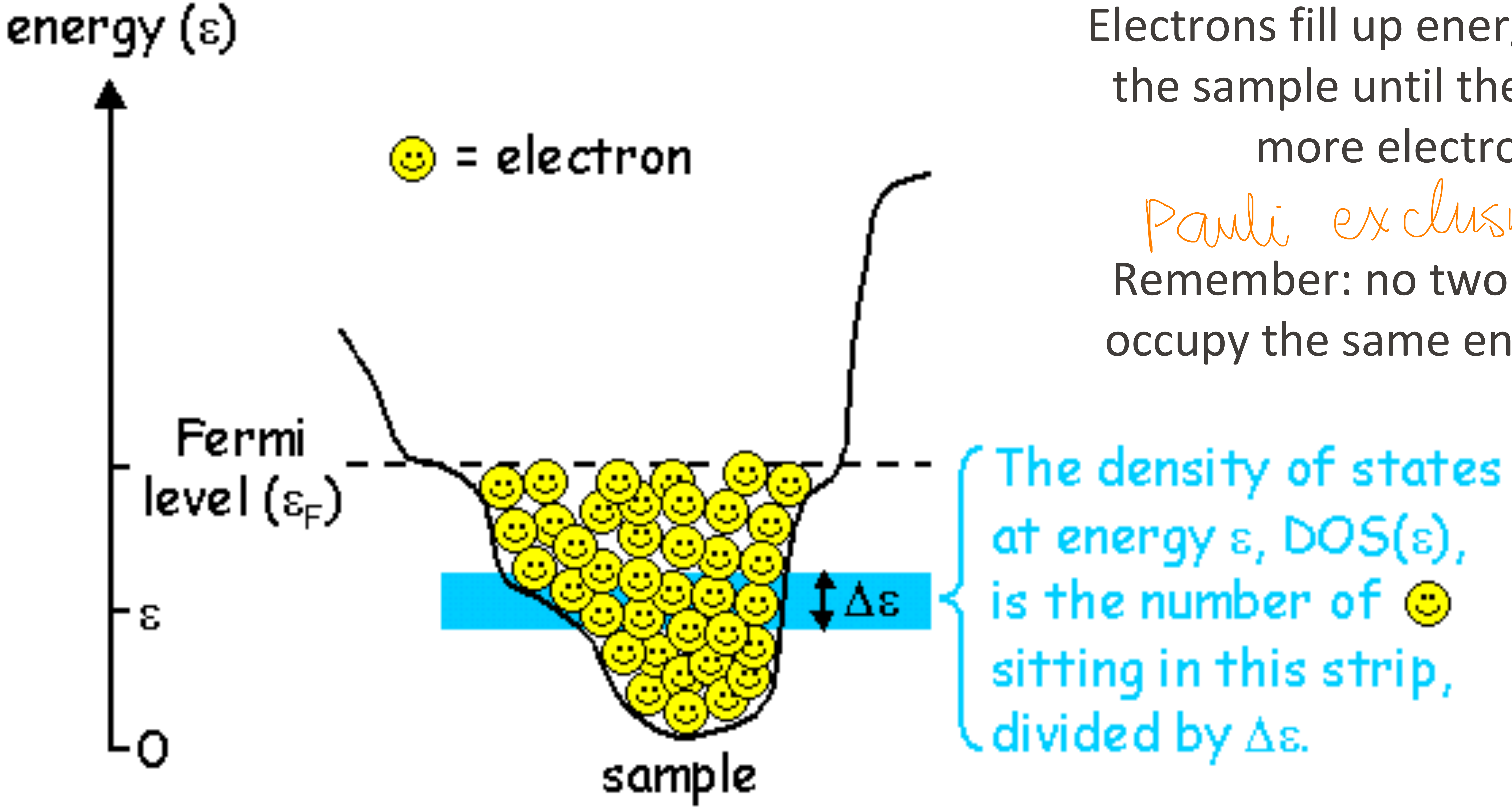
What is a Tunneling Current that Enables STM?



Electrons fill up energy valley in the sample until there are no more electrons

Pauli exclusion principle

Remember: no two electrons occupy the same energy state

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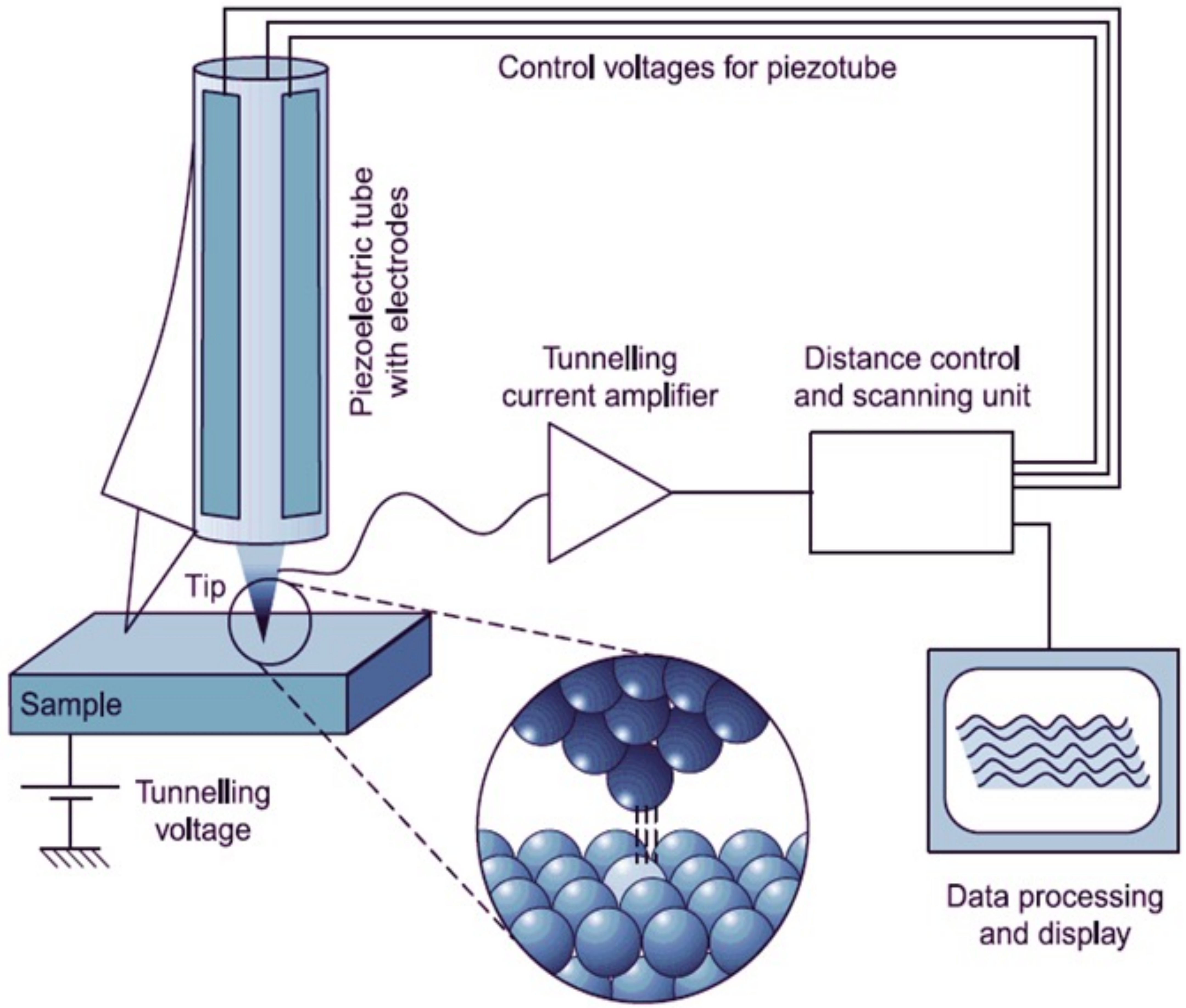
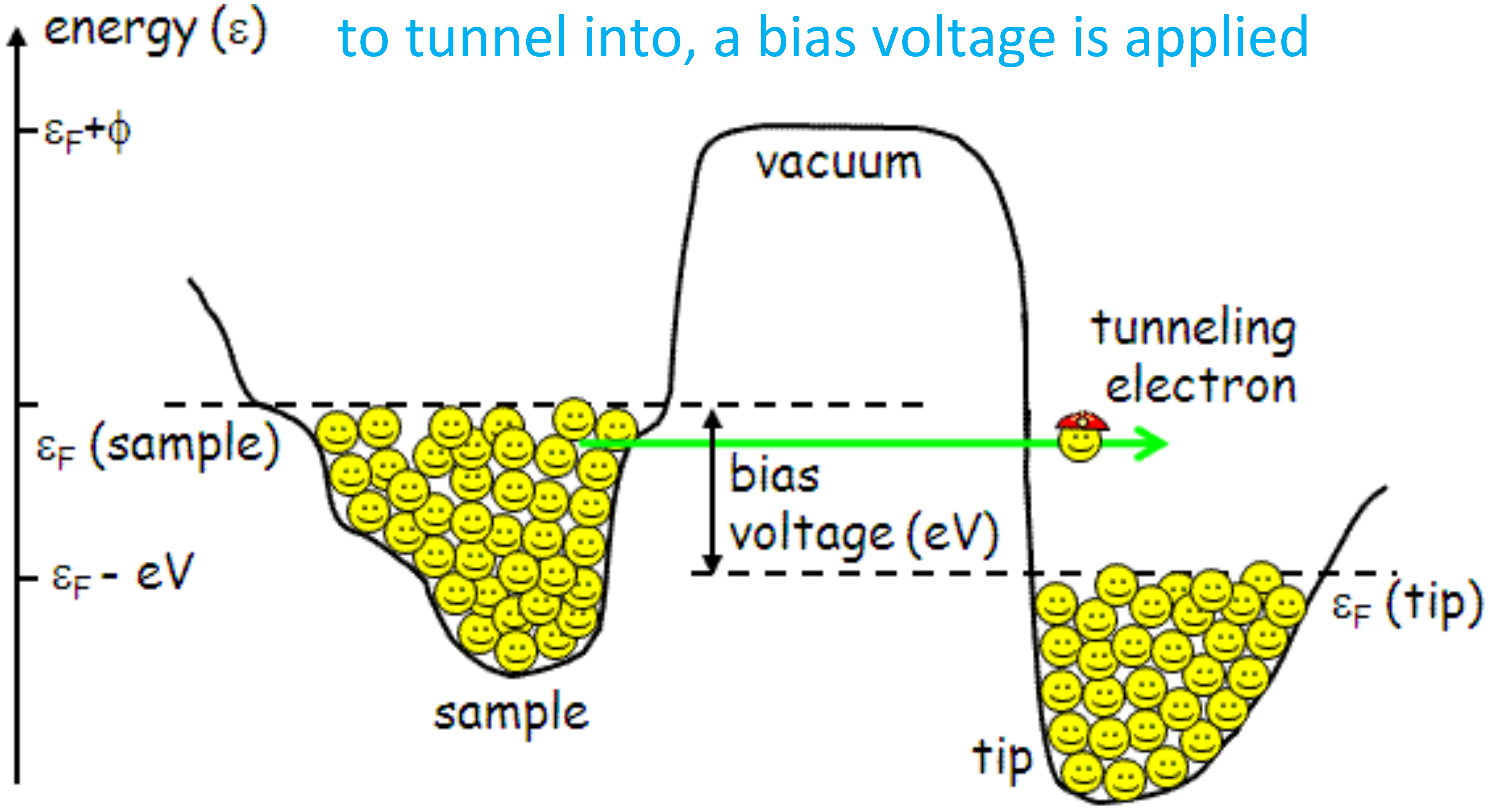
What is a Tunneling Current that Enables STM?



To create empty states for electrons to tunnel into, a bias voltage is applied



Tunneling current proportional to density of states in sample

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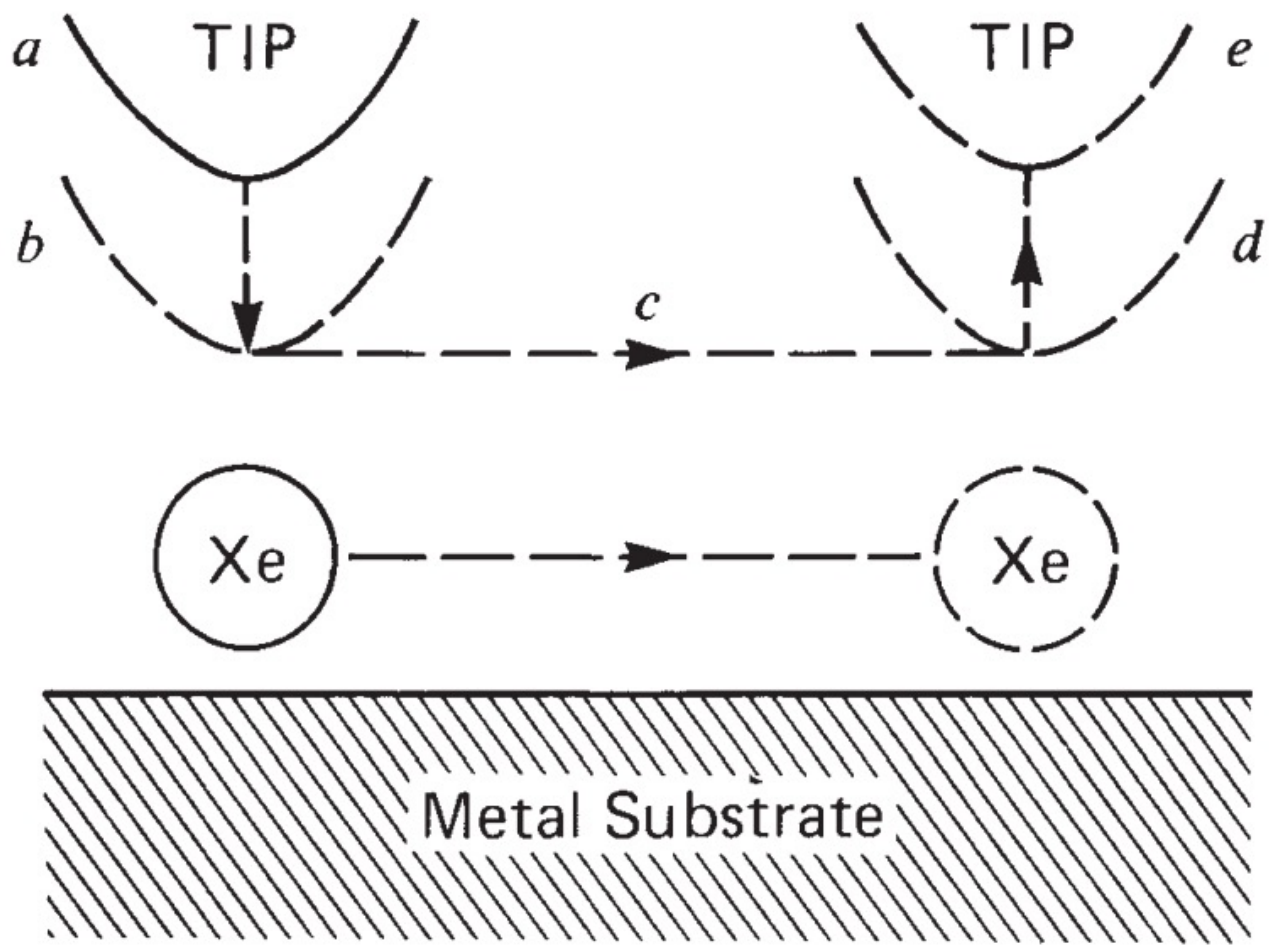
The Potential to Manipulate Atoms at the Nanoscale

Positioning single atoms with a scanning tunnelling microscope

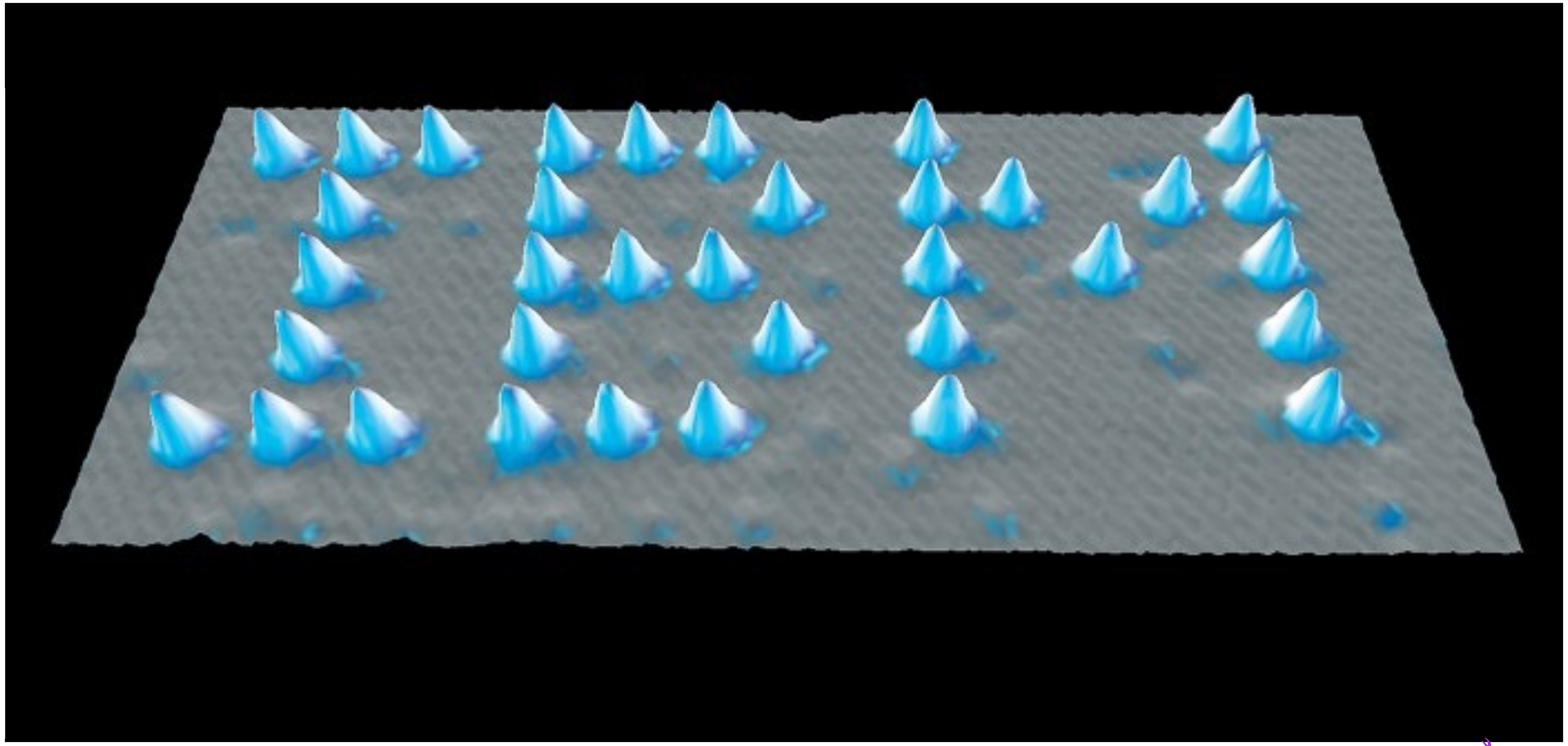
NATURE · VOL 344 · 5 APRIL 1990

D. M. Eigler & E. K. Schweizer*

IBM Research Division, Almaden Research Center, 650 Harry Rd, San Jose, California 95120, USA



Nickel (110)



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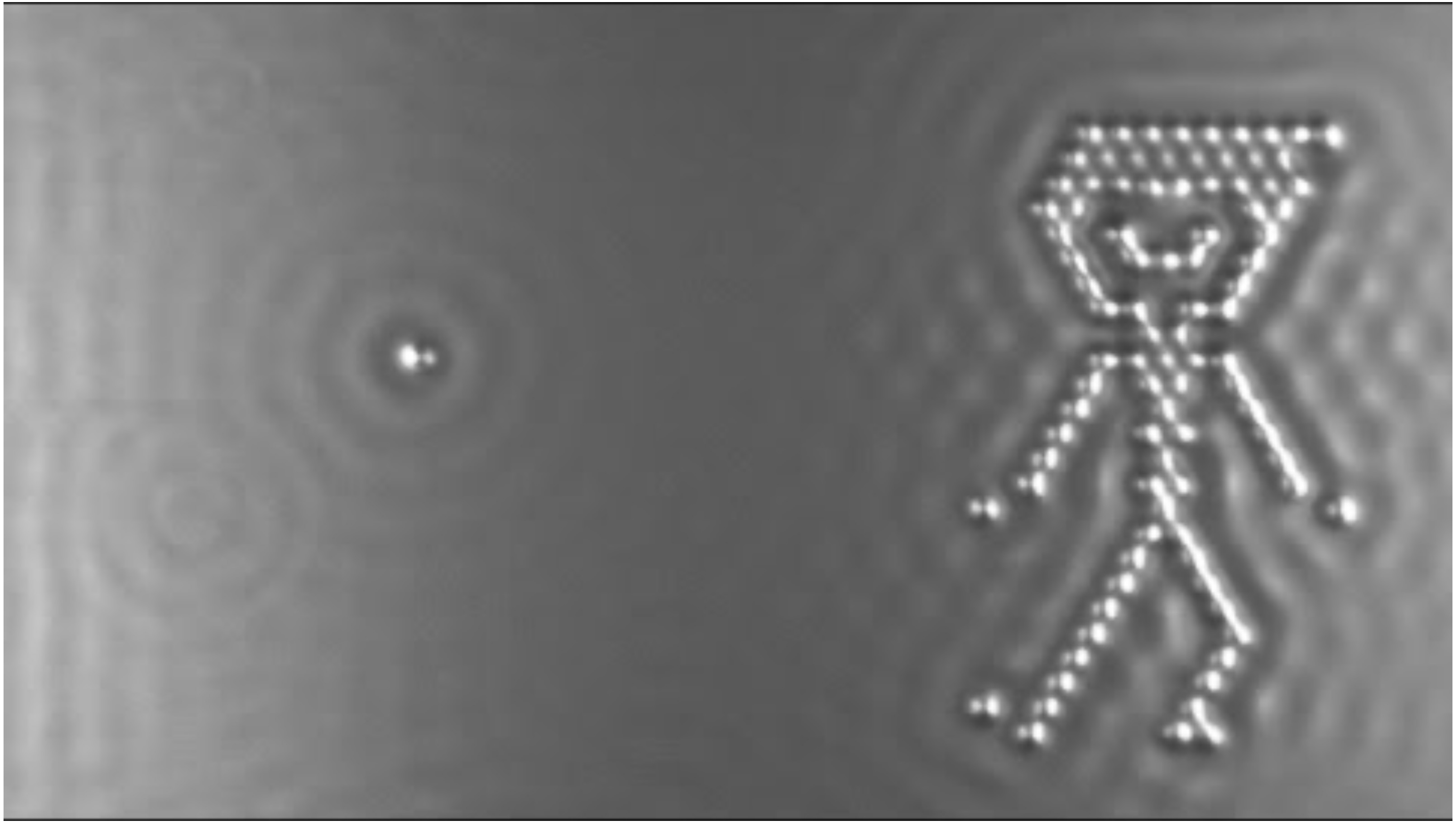
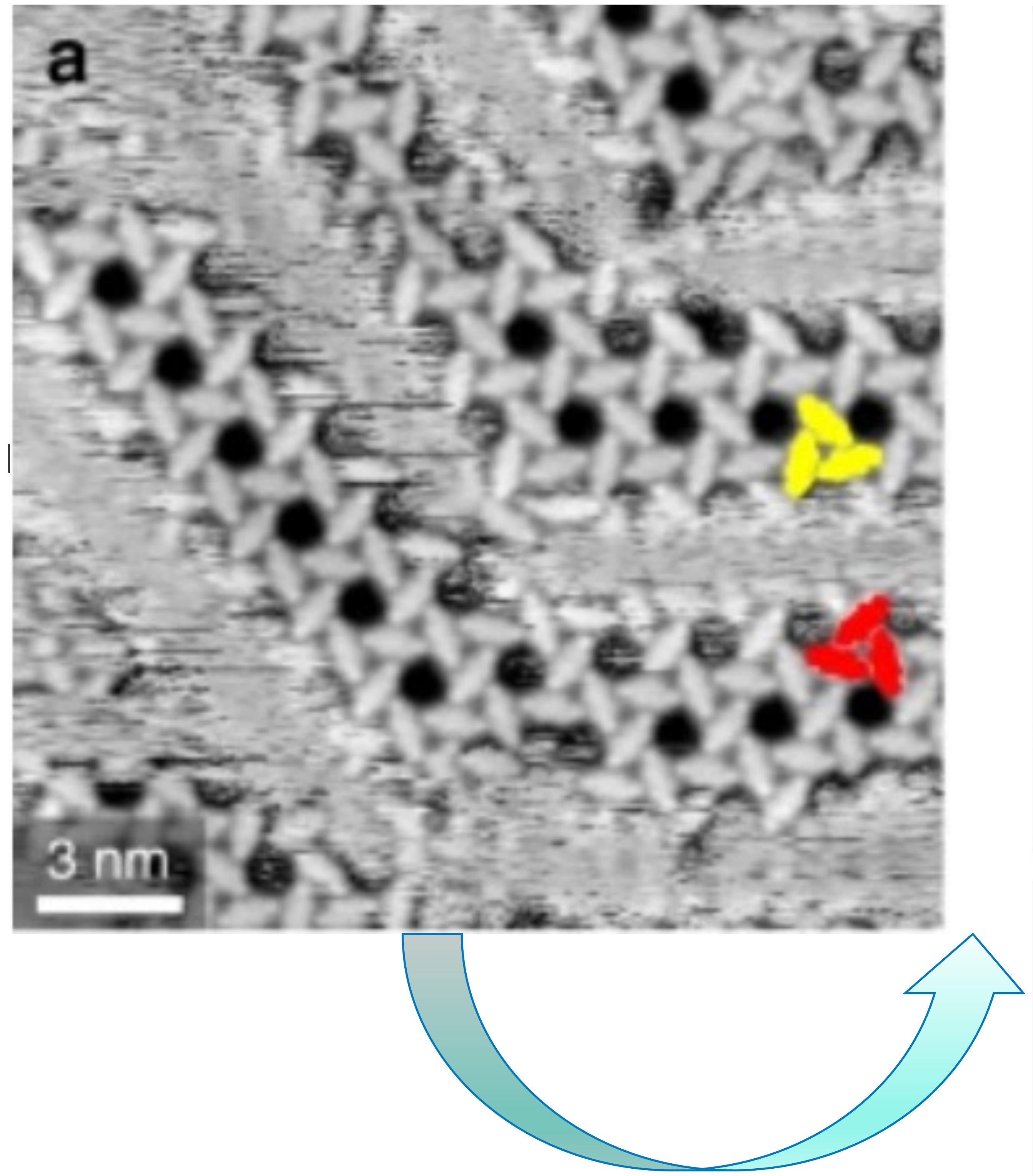
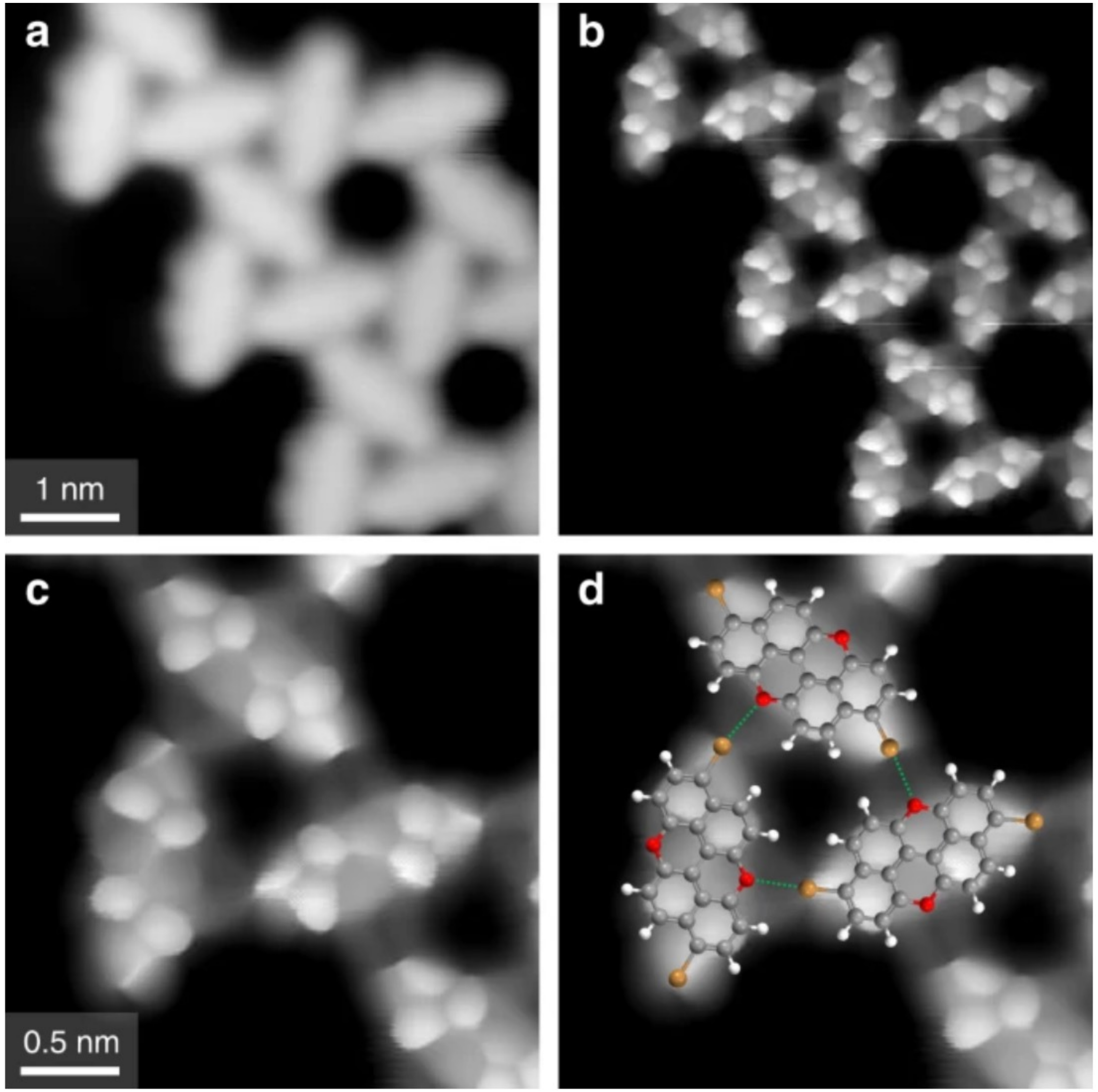
The World's Smallest Movie by IBM



The Power and Limitations of STM



Predicting intermolecular interactions with high-resolution STM



Lawrence *et al.* | *Nat. Commun.* | 2020

High resolution

Requires UHV and low temperature

Only conducting surfaces

Slow scanning

Sensitive to vibration

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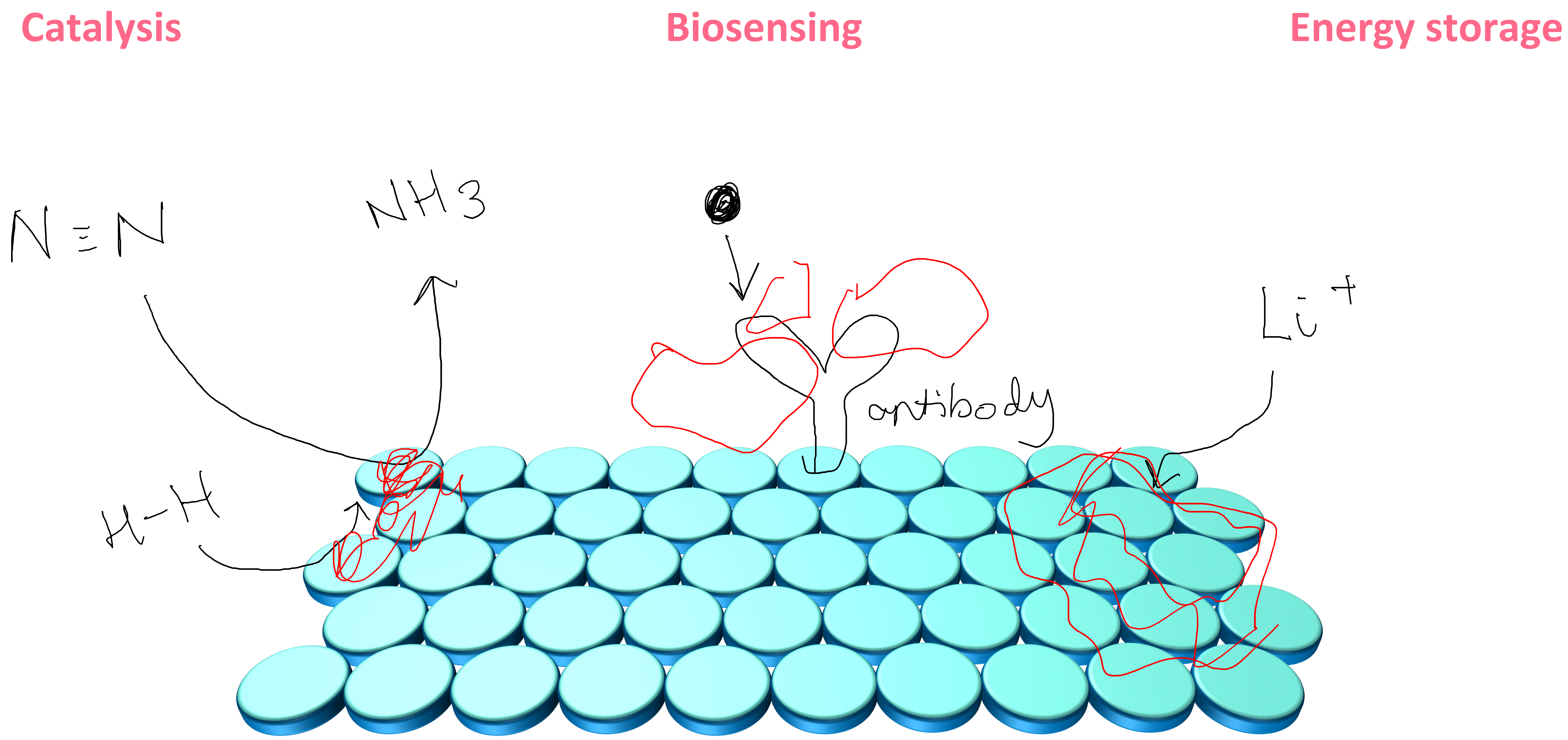
Ordered, Pristine Surfaces Do Not Last Long

Why Contamination on Surfaces is a Problem



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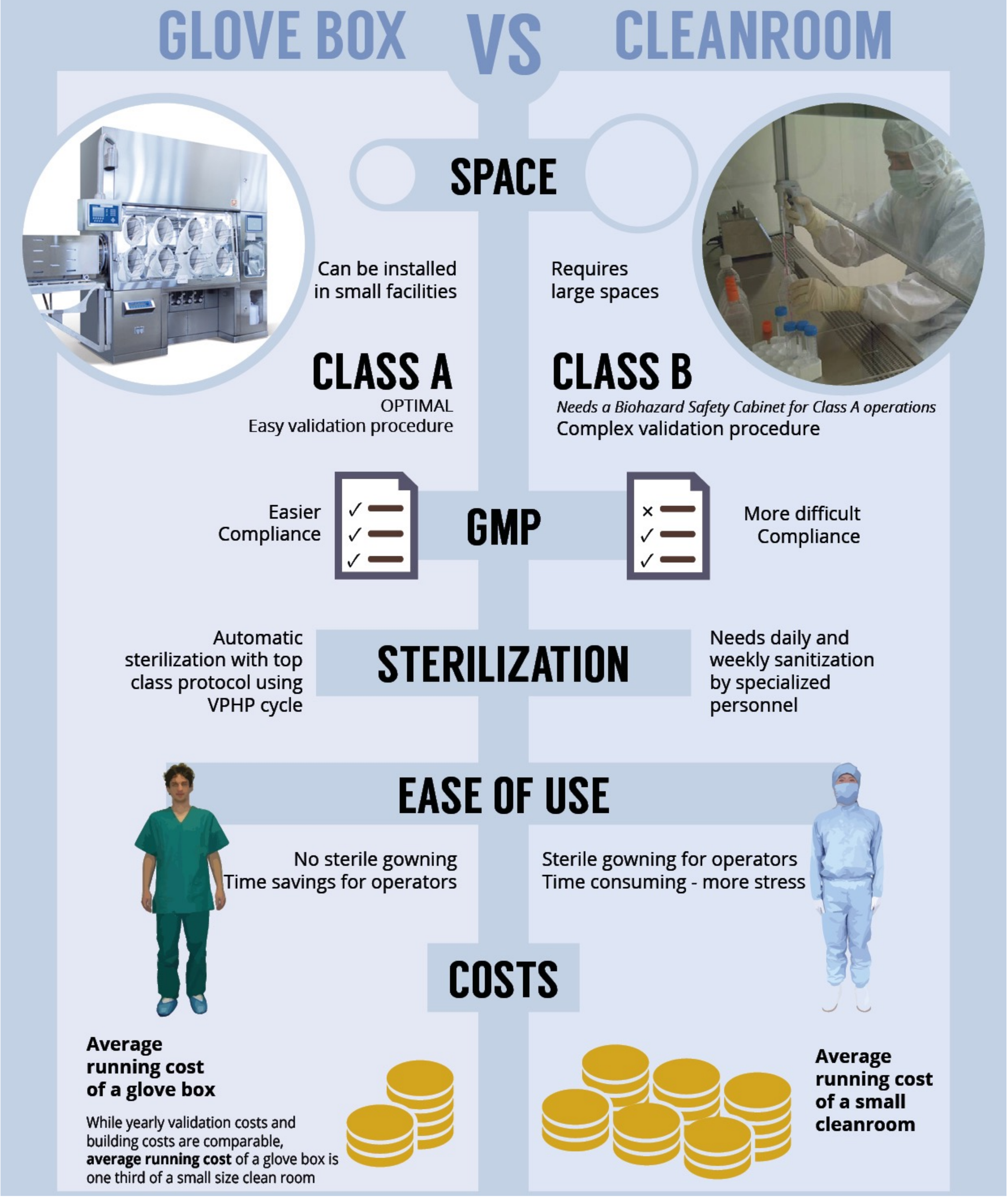
Controlled Environments to Limit Airborne Contaminants



COMECER an ATS company

Industries/applications

Pharmaceuticals

Biotechnology

Medical Devices

Nanotechnology

Semiconductor & Electronics

Aerospace

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Cleanroom: Controlled Environment to Limit Airborne Contaminants

Class	Maximum Particles/m³						FED STD 209E equivalent
	>0.1 um	>0.2 um	>0.3 um	>0.5 um	>1 um	>5 um	
ISO 1	10	2					
ISO 2	100	24	10	4			
ISO 3	1,000	237	102	35	8		Class 1
ISO 4	10,000	2,370	1,020	352	83		Class 10
ISO 5	100,000	23,700	10,200	3,520	832	29	Class 100
ISO 6	1,000,000	237,000	102,000	35,200	8,320	293	Class 1,000
ISO 7				352,000	83,200	2,930	Class 10,000
ISO 8				3,520,000	832,000	29,300	Class 100,000
ISO 9				35,200,000	8,320,000	293,000	Room Air

EPFL Center of MicroNano Technology (CMi)

EPFL CMi Cleanroom in the BM Building

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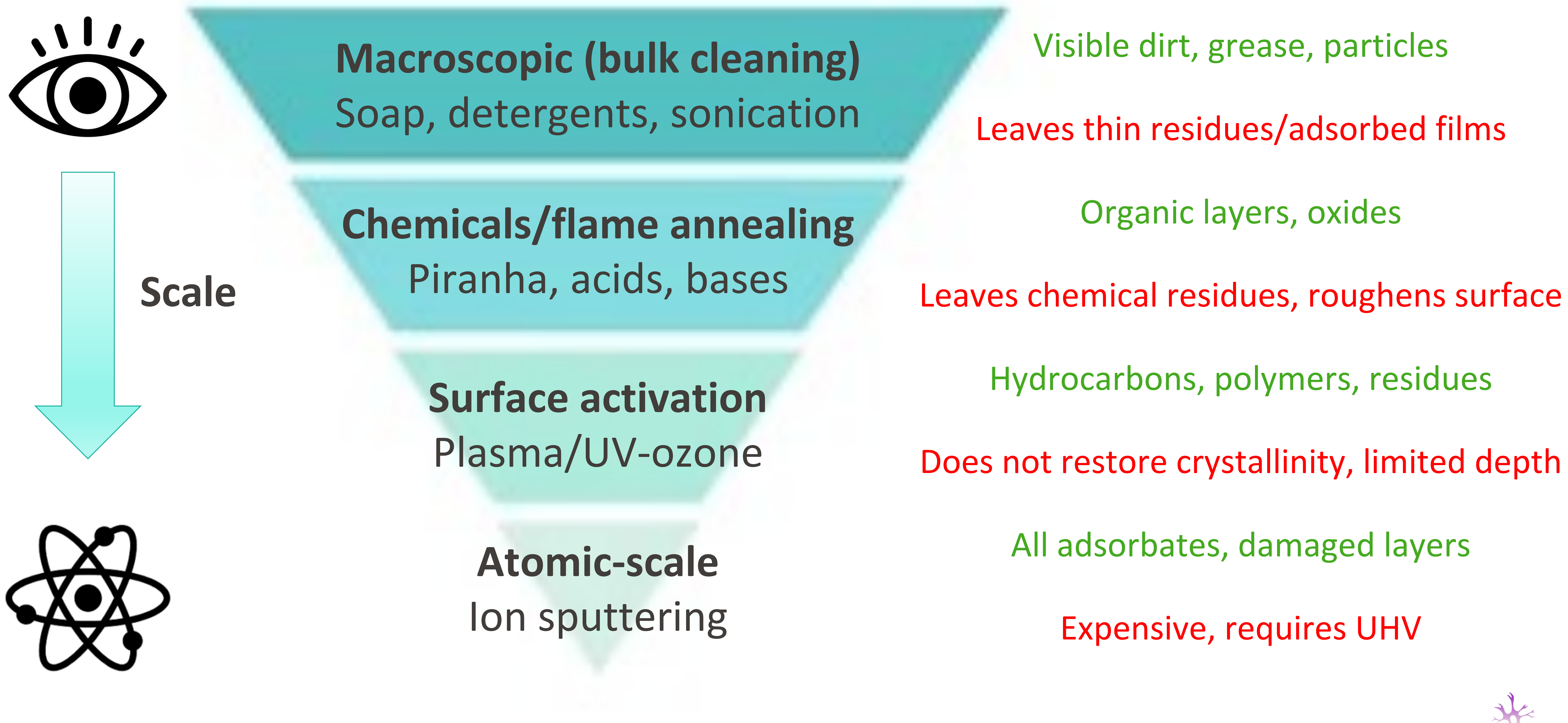
Surface Cleaning Hierarchy



Obtaining Clean Surfaces with Flame Annealing/Chemicals

Flame annealing of substrates

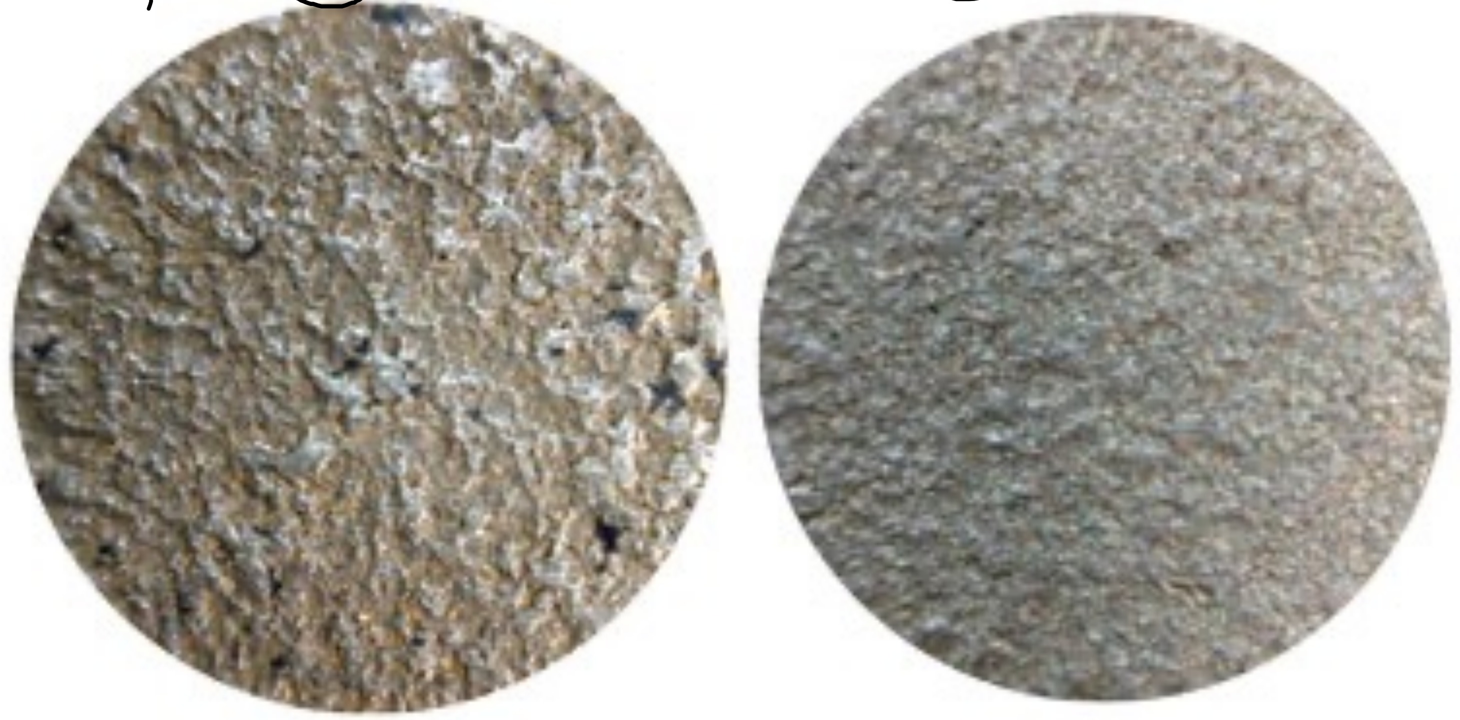
For samples covered by an oxide layer, which are not stable at high temperatures

Piranha cleaning

Concentrated sulfuric acid and hydrogen peroxide

$$H_2O_2 \xrightarrow{H_2SO_4} H_2O + O^{\bullet}$$

$$C-H + O^{\bullet} \rightarrow CO_2 + H_2O$$



Standard Vinegar Rinse | Weak Piranha Etch 30 minutes

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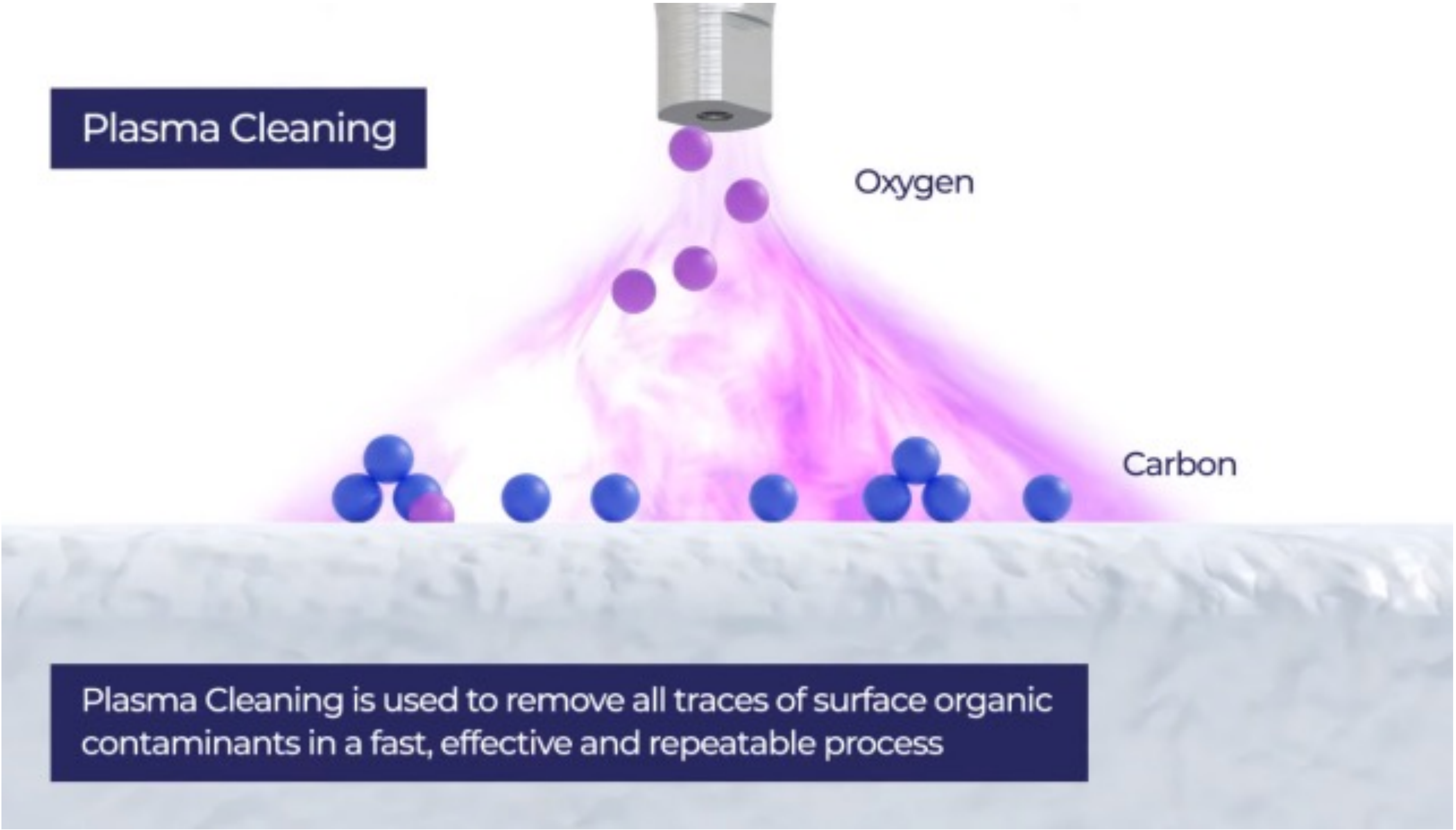
Obtaining Clean Surfaces with Plasma Cleaning

Plasma cleaning to remove surface contaminants



Plasma is generated by applying an electric field to a gas in a vacuum chamber

Oxygen radicals interact with carbon-based (organic) contaminants, breaking down into volatile compounds such as CO_2 and H_2O

Reaction products often in gas form are carried away by vacuum system

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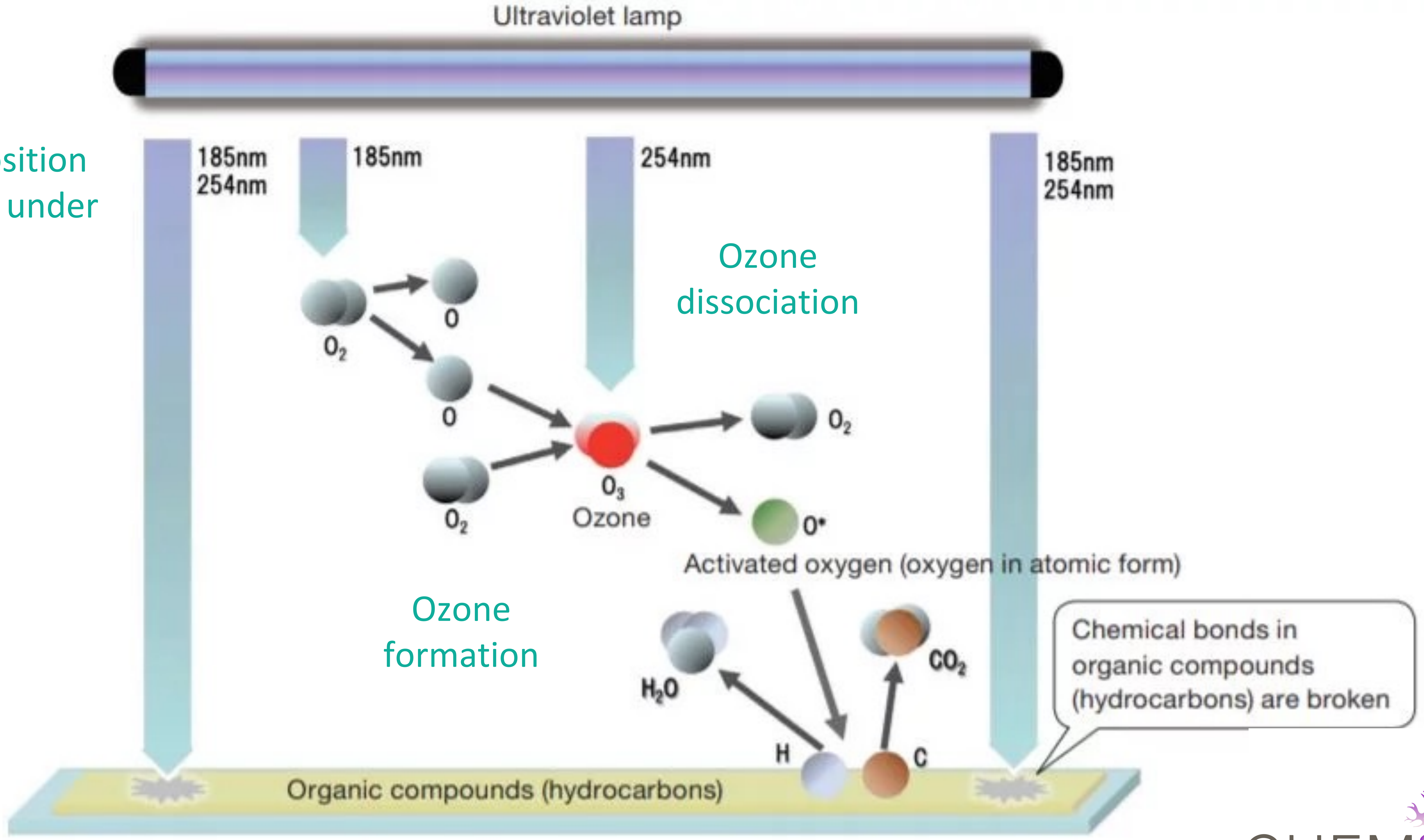
Obtaining Clean Surfaces with UV Ozone Cleaning

Direct decomposition of hydrocarbons under UV



Ozone dissociation

Ozone formation

STInstruments When Technology Matters

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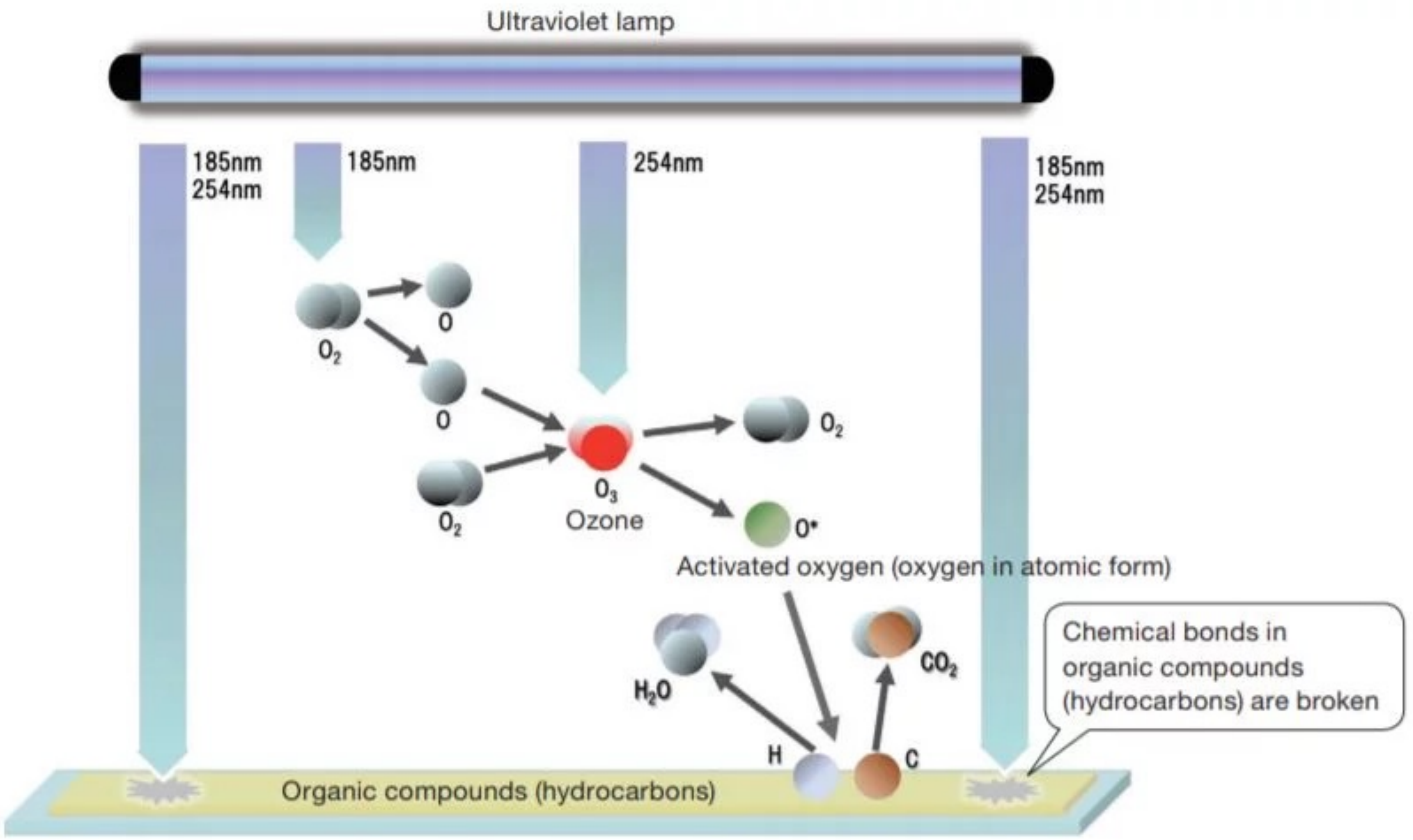
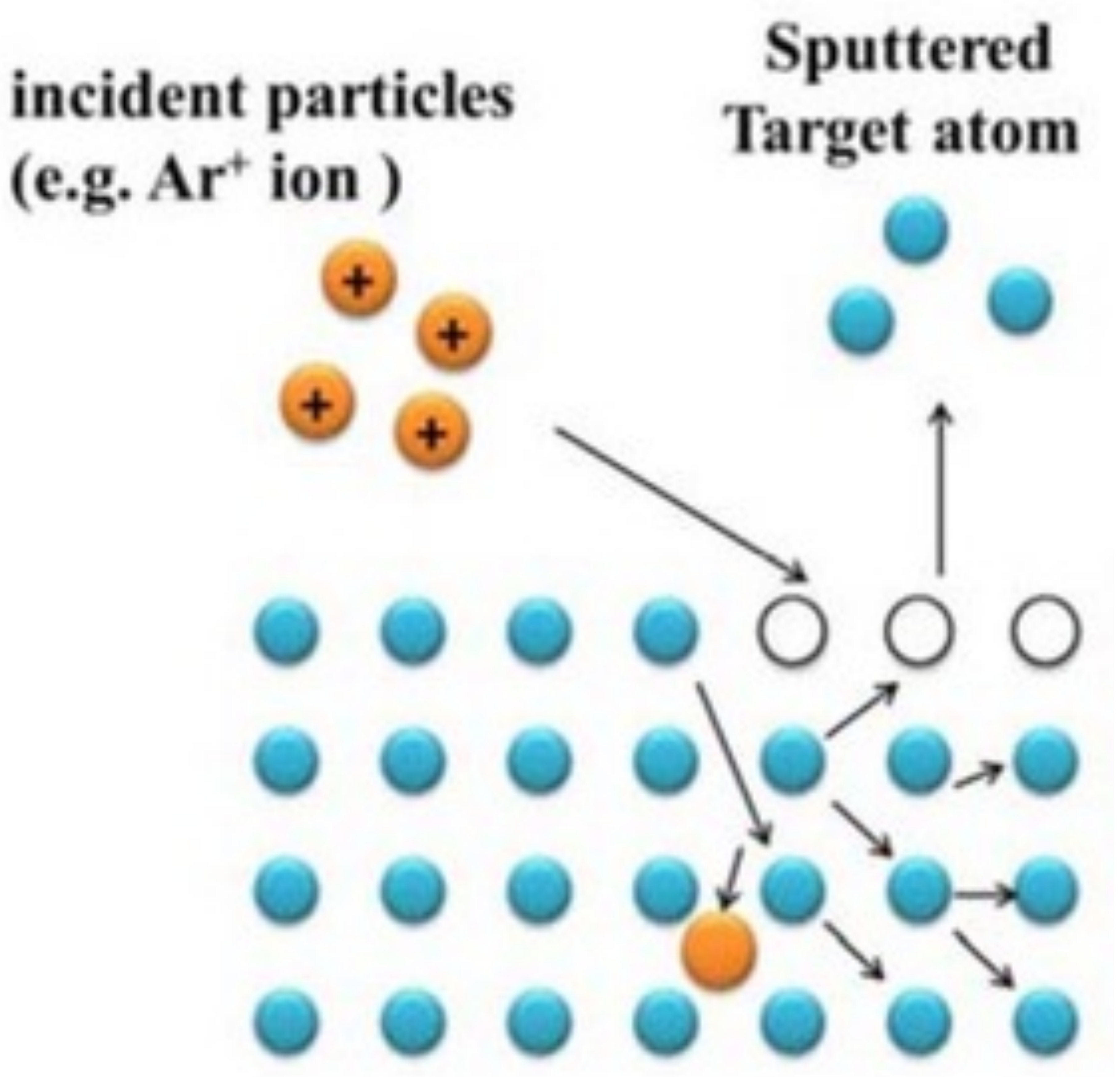
Comparing Plasma *vs.* UV Ozone Cleaning



Energy source	Electrical discharge	UV light (185, 254 nm)
Speed	Fast (seconds – minutes)	Slow (minutes – hours)
Aggressiveness	More aggressive, can etch surface	Gentler treatment, mainly oxidizes

Obtaining Clean Surfaces with Ion Sputtering

Argon sputtering removes the top layer of a sample by sputtering with Ar ions, with subsequent heating to remove surface defects



annealing

heat

Creating New Surfaces Rather than Cleaning

Fracture of a material: possible to obtain pure and very smooth surfaces (mica)

Newly cleaved surface atomically flat and clean

No solvents, plasmas, or chemicals required

Only works for materials with good cleavage planes (mica, graphine, silicon)

Clean surface contaminated if left in air

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Key Takeaways

Contamination on surfaces affect many areas of research

We can tackle contamination in controlled environments like the cleanroom

There are different methods to clean the surface from the macroscale to atomic-scale

It's important you can choose how to clean your surface depending on the contamination

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Summary of Today's Class

- Adsorption *vs.* Absorption
- Physisorption *vs.* Chemisorption
- Crystal lattice of substrates order adsorbates
- STM can visualize surfaces at atomic resolution
- How to tackle the challenge of contamination

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https://www.epfl.ch/labs/chemina/