



The Funny Thing About...

The Funny Thing About...Scientists

Scientist:

Here goes. (bang). God.

Scientist:

We need to be clear about what's going on in Graham's tank.

Music: out

Professor Hazel Rymer:

Science is a really exciting discipline and the reason is that it goes...

...from the most mathematical side, physics and chemistry through environmental and field sciences to biology...

... The whole lot is called science.

Hugh Laurie:

Now this should begin to give us some clues as to...

Stephen Fry:

Brian, I'm sorry (laughter). You said nought point five, six, seven, three, five, nine.

Hugh Laurie:

What's happened?

Stephen Fry:

You said nought point five, six, seven, three, five, nine.

Hugh Laurie:

Oh no I didn't did I?

Stephen Fry:

Yes! It should be nought point five, six, seven, three, nine, five.

Hugh Laurie:

I don't believe it!

Professor Hazel Rymer:

It's the normal parody of scientists isn't it? They just get so hung up over, you know, the ninth or tenth decimal place. Scientists find that just as funny as anyone else finds it. But you know that ninth or tenth decimal place, it really is important.

Scientists are passionate about their area of science...

...and for most scientists that involves measuring something, somewhere along the line.

My work involves monitoring active volcanoes.

One the lake's gone, the volcanic gases can come straight up to the atmosphere and that's when it starts to get really nasty.

We make very precise measurements on those volcanoes. We make very precise measurements on those volcanoes. We're measuring the gravity ...

...and the ground deformation. So as the ground goes up and down, and measuring the subsurface changes in mass below the volcano and these are the changes that happen before an eruption.
Volcano erupting

I think the important thing about the Fry and Laurie clip is that it shows exactly how we don't teach science and all the worst things about science really.
I mean it isn't just great long equations and you know, learning things by rote.

Man:

Of course we're doing our best to make these look as simple as possible.

Professor Hazel Rymer:

It's addressing real day issues and important topics.

Professor Denzil Dexter:

We took four cardboard tubes. The kind of tube you'd find in a regular brand of household toilet tissue and then proceeded to place them on the floor, making four columns equidistantly thus. We wanted to test if these cardboard tubes would support the average body weight of a human man. (Laughter). No.

Professor Hazel Rymer:

No scientist is ever going to make measurements that are pointless...

Why would they? Sometimes in the explanation to the public so much is lost that it appears to be a completely pointless topic and that is, of course, what is being parodied here.

People do tend to think that scientists are middle-aged men, often quite hairy and they wear white coats. Now, of course, there are a lot of those but ...

...there are also quite a lot of women, involved in science and they're not all old.

You look at the general population and you can find examples of those as scientists.

Music: in

It's really the passion. That's what scientists are. They're passionate about what they do. If you're interested in geosciences

... and that's the evolution of the earth then we can certainly teach you that teach that here at the Open University and it's part of the BSC in Natural Sciences which is available globally online.