

# WiFi at the Physical Layer

## How do 802.11 Protocols Work?

A deep dive into the 802.11 protocol family

# Who am I?

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NETCOREJSA

**Unimus**

# About Unimus

Unimus is a multi-vendor system for:

- Network Disaster recovery
- Change Management
- Network Automation
- Configuration Management
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# Note for posterity

If you find this presentation online in a .pdf, please watch the video

Proper explanations to every slide and much more information available

<https://www.youtube.com/c/TomasKirnak/videos>

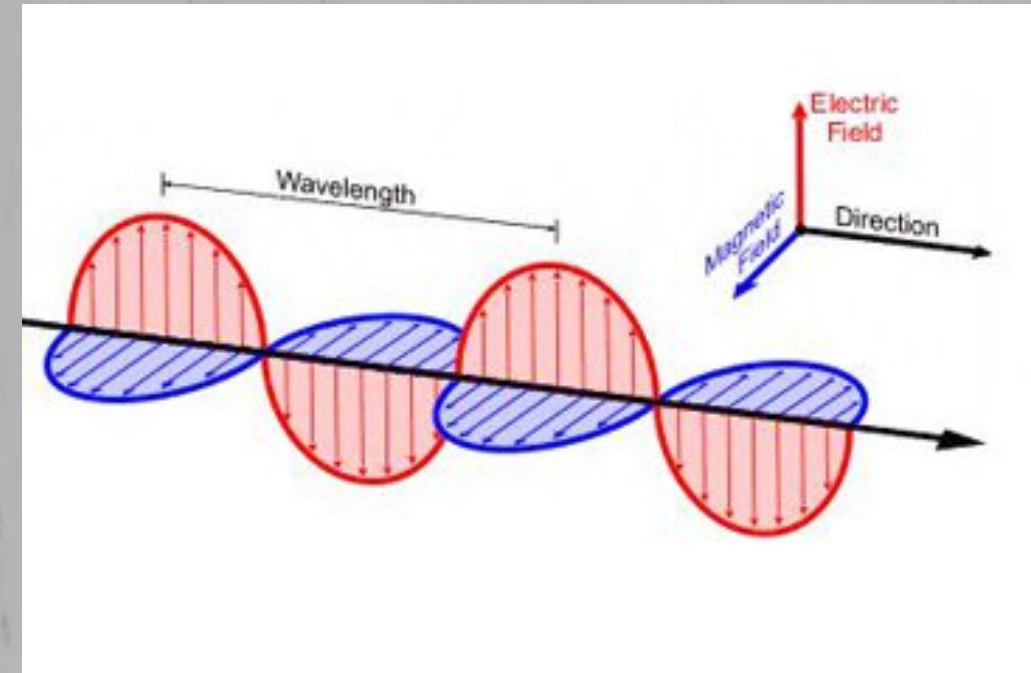
# Basics & Physics

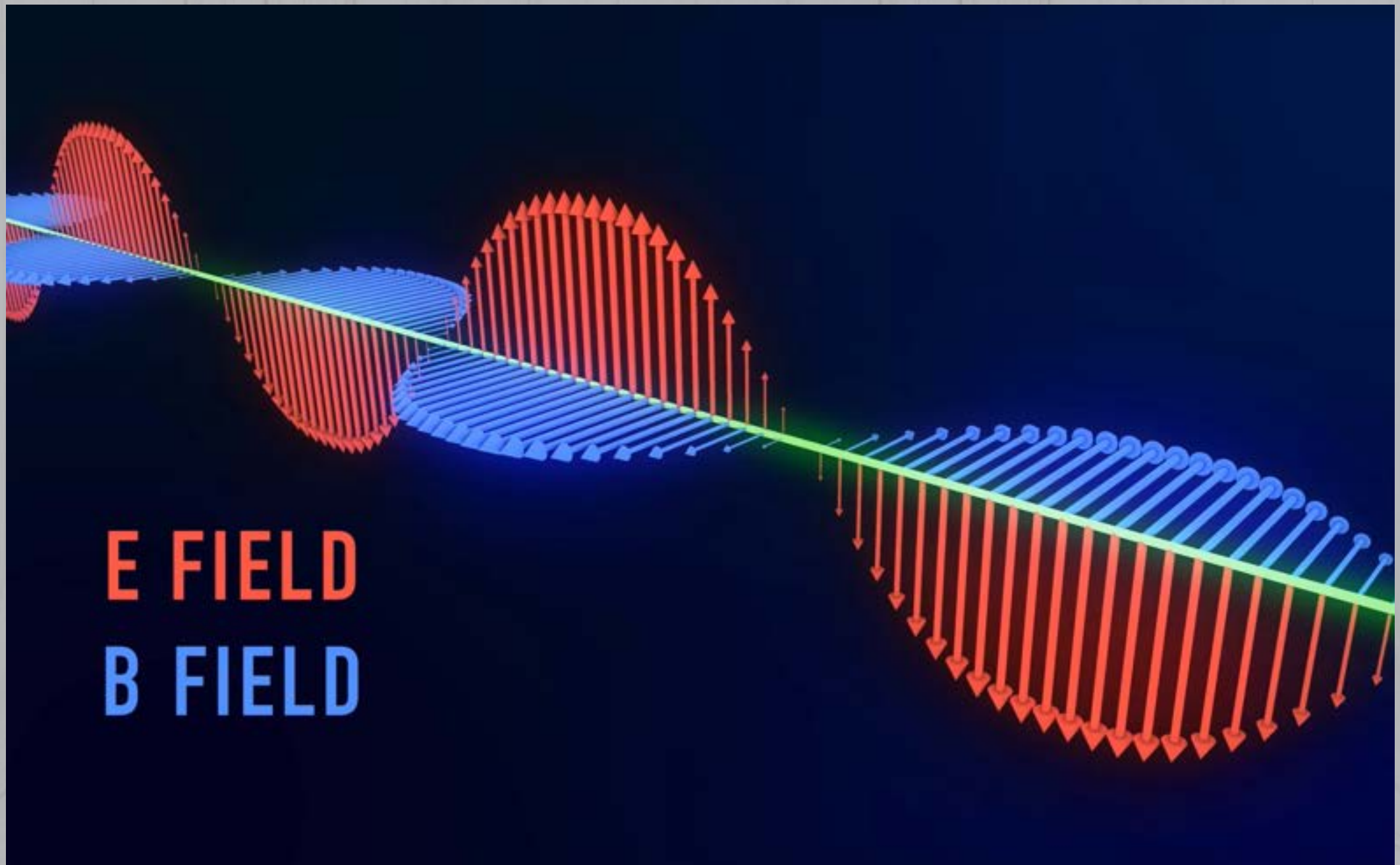
# What is wireless

- **Wireless communication** - prenos informácií medzi dvoma alebo viac bodmi ktoré nie sú prepojené elektrickým vodičom.
- Dáta prenášame pomocou elektro-magnetických vln
  - Dnes najpoužívaniejšie – pomocou **rádií**
- Iné možnosti:
  - FSO – free space optics

# What is EM radiation?

- EM radiation is a form of energy
  - Photons in their “wave” form
- An EM wave has an electric and a magnetic component





**E FIELD**  
**B FIELD**



# Physics that brought us here

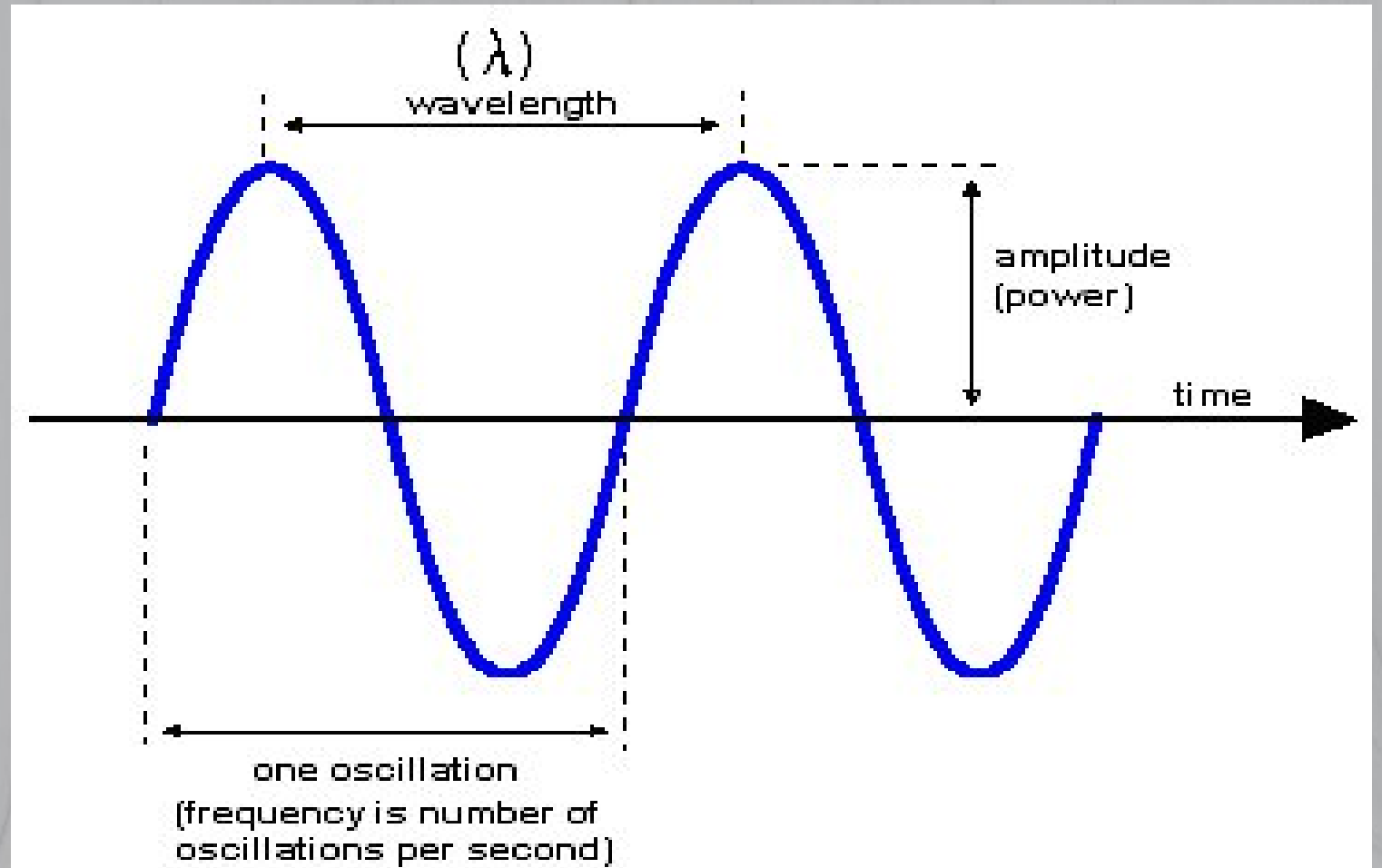
- 1865 – Maxwell predicted electromagnetic waves
- 1887 – Hertz generated and detected electromagnetic waves
  
- 1900 - Planck's Quantum Theory
- 1924 - Louis de Broglie's Wave-Particle Duality
- 1926 - Schrödinger Equation
  
- 1940s - Pauli, Richard Feynman – Quantum Electro Dynamics

# WiFi and quantum mechanics

- WiFi is quantum mechanics put into practical technology
- Quantum Electro Dynamics – the only full understood and fully described quantum theory
- QED is a part of Quantum Field Theory

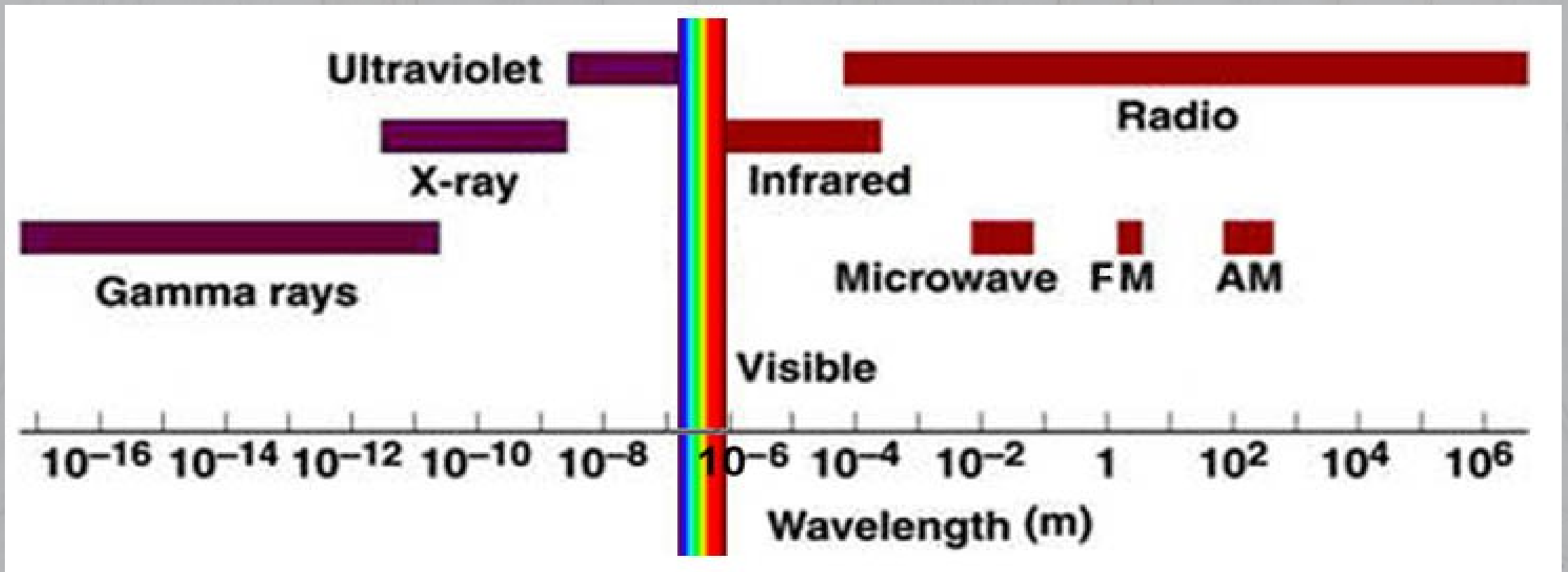
# Basic wave physics

- Vlna má:
  - Frekvenciu
  - Vlnovú dĺžku
  - Amplitúdu



# Wireless for us

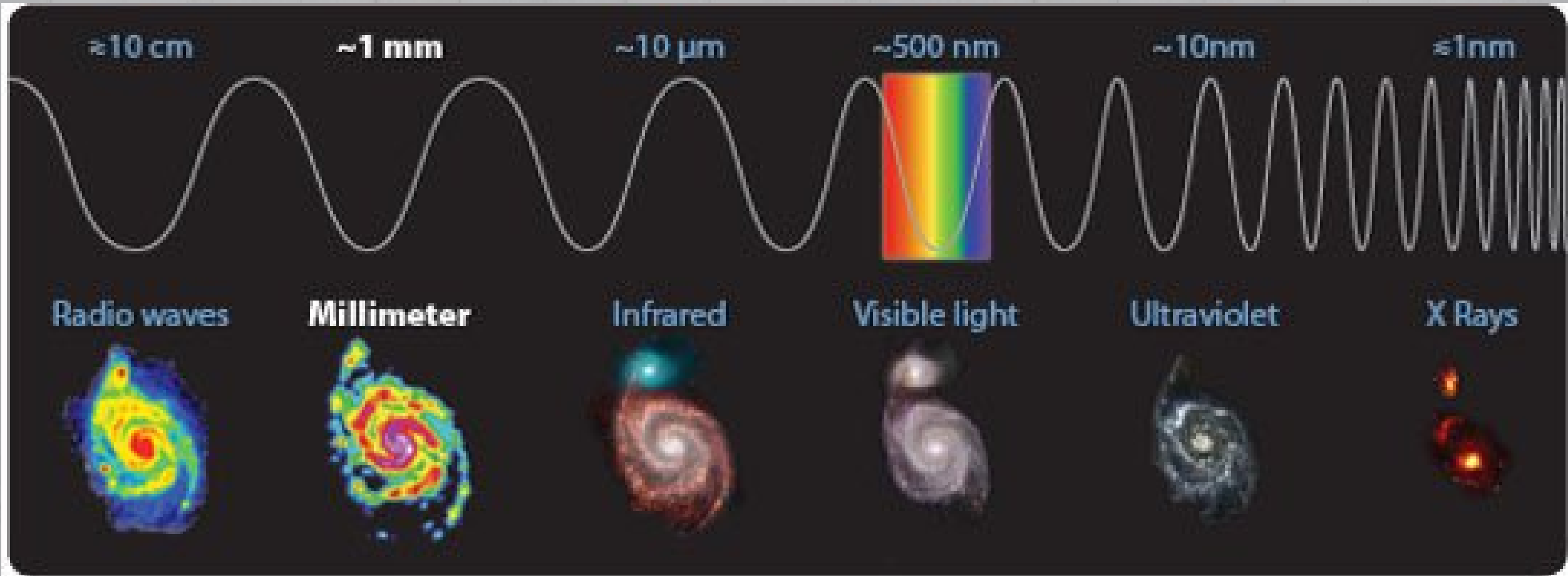
- Budeme hovoriť o bezdrátovej komunikácii použitím mikrovln



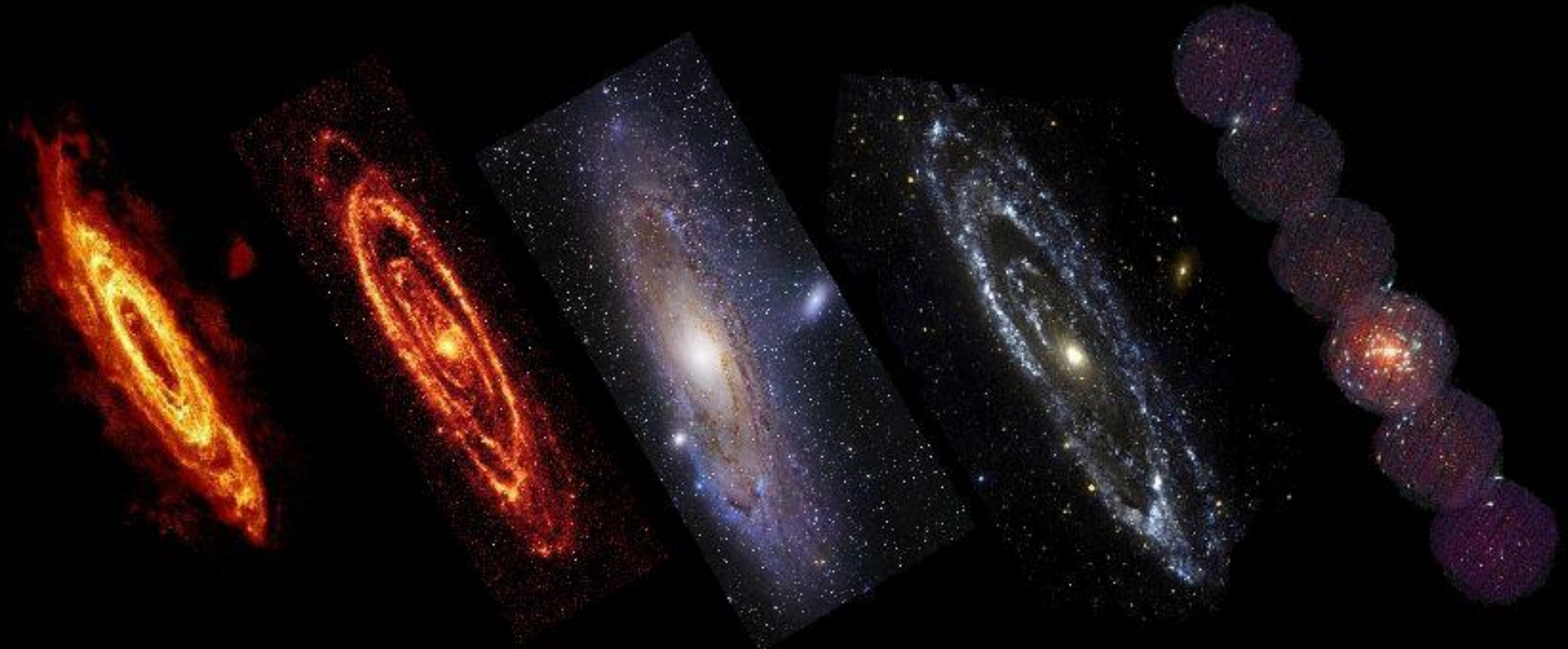
# About EM radiation

- EM radiacia v celom spektre je 24/7 vyzarovana slnkom
  - Aj vsetkymi ostatnymi hviezdami vo vesmire
- “Kozmicka” radiacia taktiez konstantne dopada na zem v celom spektre
- EM - Light is just a wave that carries energy from a point to a point.

# Space radiation



# Space radiation - Andromeda



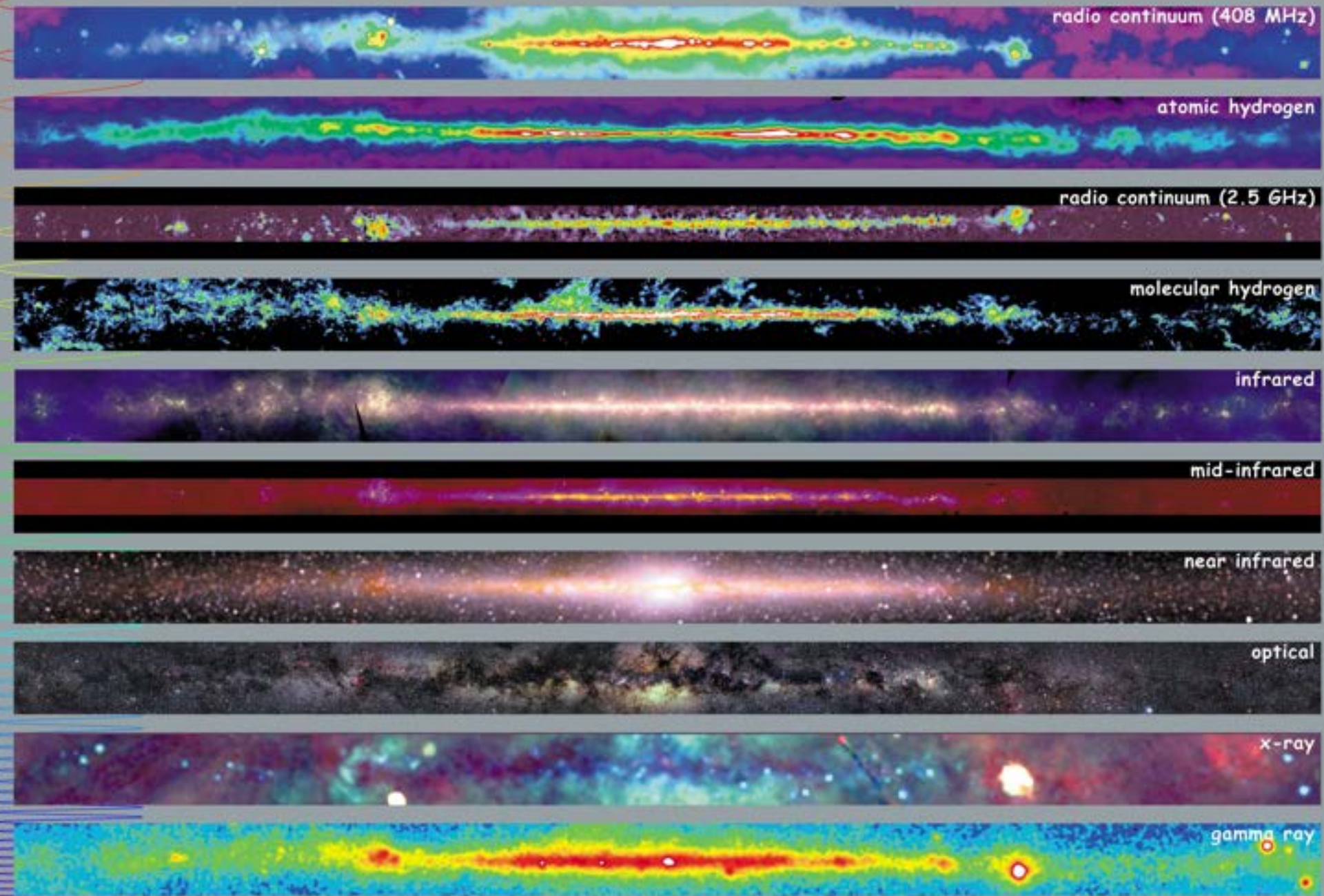
Radio

Infrared

Visible

Ultra-violet

X-ray



<http://adc.gsfc.nasa.gov/mw/>



# Multiwavelength Milky Way



# What are we actually using

- Mikrovlny – elektromagnetická radiácia
  - rovnaká ako normálne svetlo, iná frekvencia
- Ne-ionizujúca radiácia – bezpečná
  - Žiadne neziaduce účinky na žive bunky / DNA
  - minimalna interakcia s pevnou hmotou\*

\*Each substance has resonant frequencies

# Dangers of EM radiation

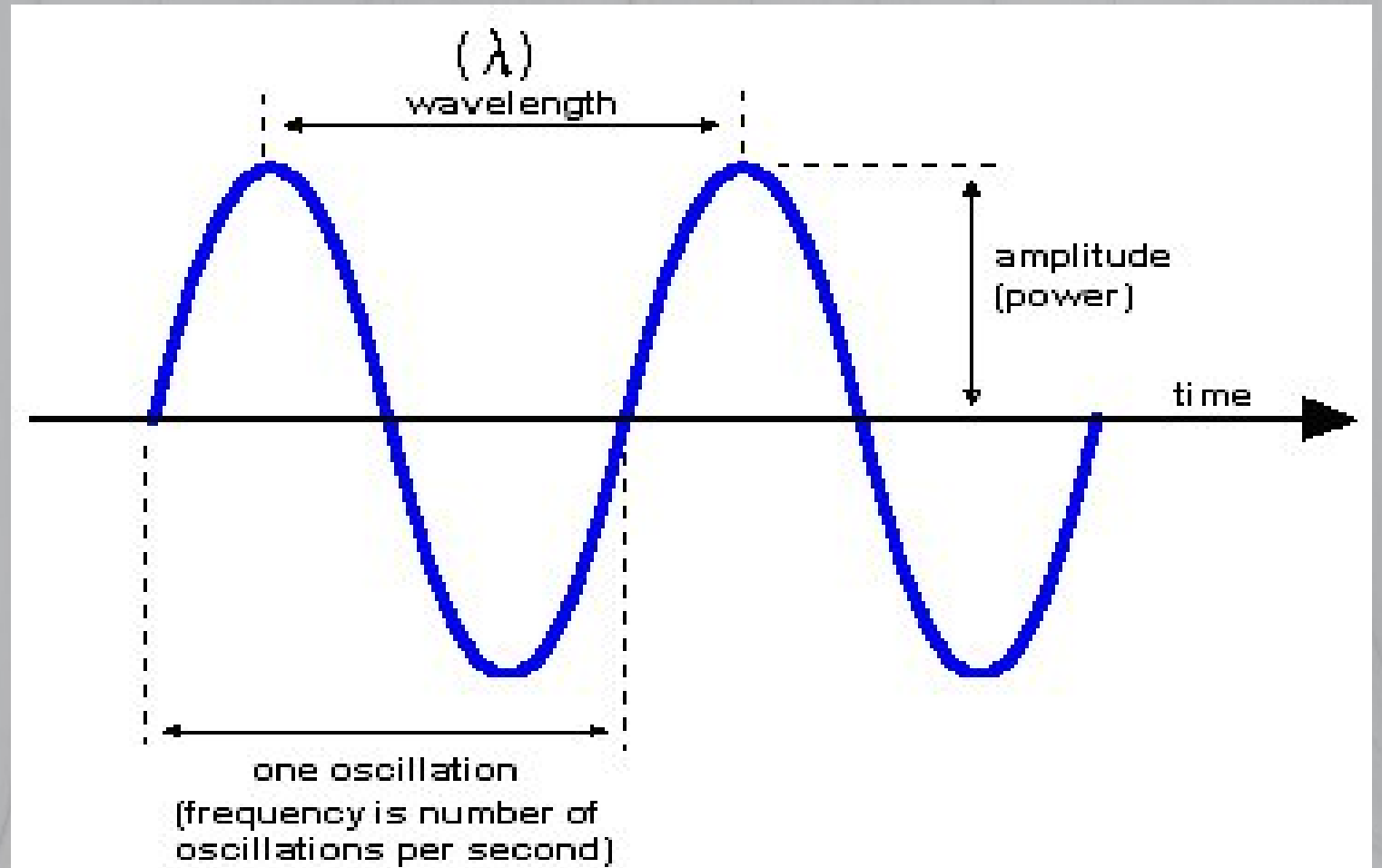
- Ionizing (high energy) EM radiation is dangerous because it ionizes atoms
  - It has so much energy it can knock electrons out of atoms
- This ionizes molecules, which damages molecular bonds - damages DNA and other living cells

# Why are we even alive

- Earth has an atmosphere and an geomagnetic field.
- These 2 phenomena filter (absorb and reflect) most ionizing radiation hitting our planet from space

# Back to basics...

- Vlna má:
  - Frekvenciu
  - Vlnovú dĺžku
  - Amplitúdu



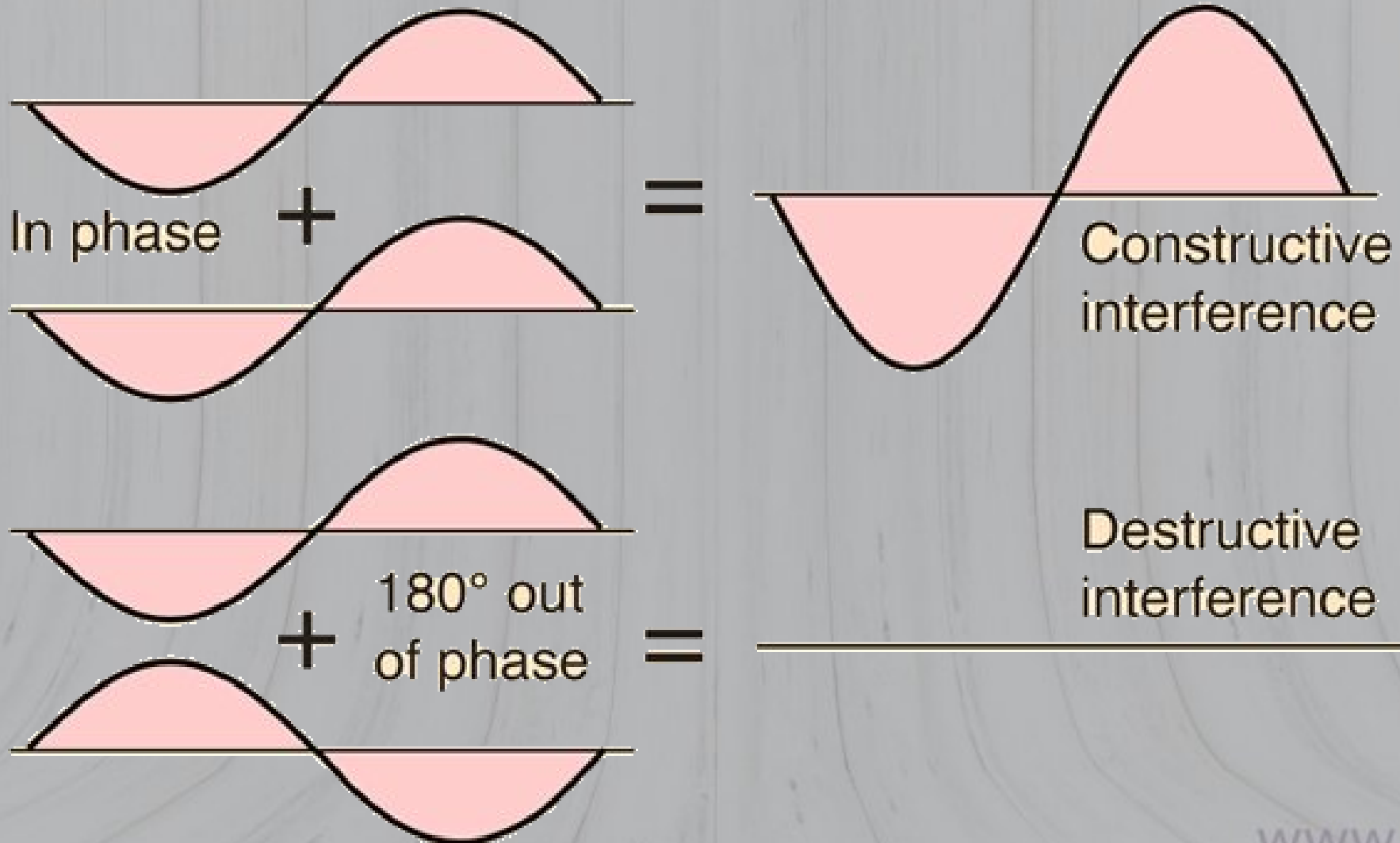
# The medium

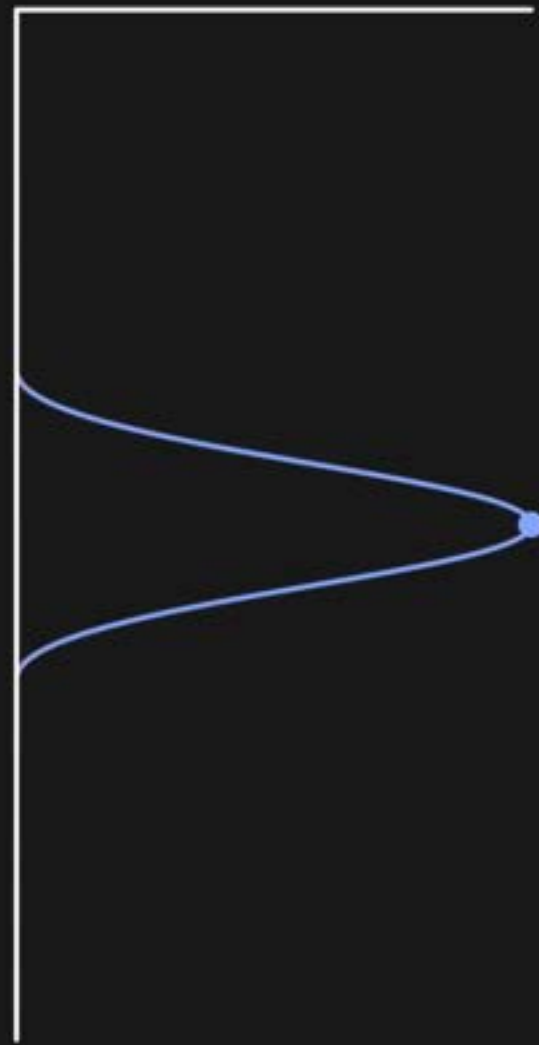
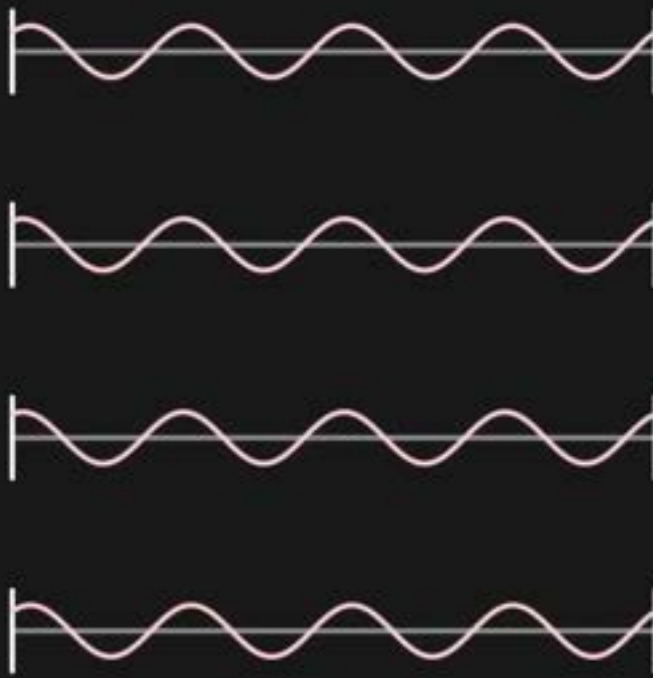
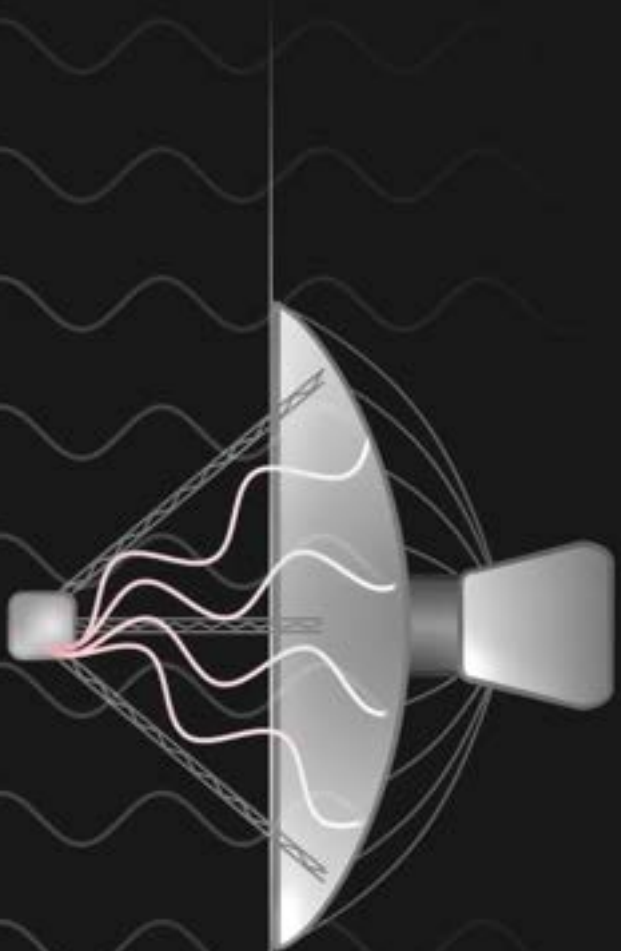
- All waves travel in a medium
  - for mechanical waves, this can be many things
  - for EM waves, its our space-time
- When we communicate over EM radiation, this means our EM waves share this medium with all other EM waves

# Interference

- All waves on the same frequency (and same polarization) interfere with each other
- In physics, this is not really interference, its wave combination...

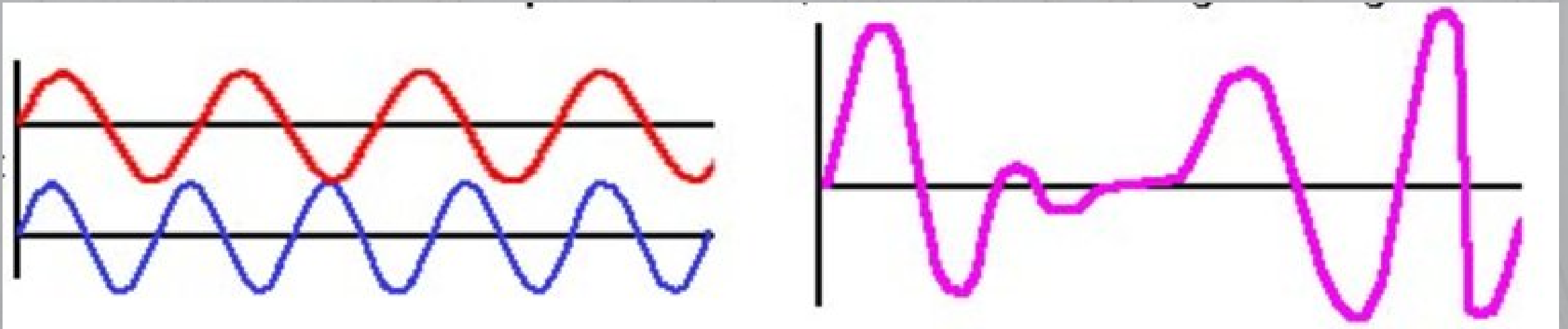
# Basics of interference







# Advanced interference



# Interference for us

- **Interference** is anything which modifies, or disrupts a signal as it travels along a channel/medium (air, vacuum, copper wire, fiberoptic strand) between a source and a receiver
- Prídavný/ďalší alebo nechcený signál ktorý prichádza s naším dobrým signálom

# Interference types

- Electromagnetic interference
  - Akákoľvek iná EM radiácia z akéhokoľvek zdroja na rovnakej frekvencii
- Co-channel interference
  - Nieкто používa rovnaký kanál (vysvetlené za chvíľku) ako ja, alebo časť môjho kanálu
- Adjacent-channel interference
  - Nieкто používa kanál ktorý je veľmi blízko môjmu
- Co-polarization interference
  - Viac o polarizácii za chvíľku...
- A kopa ďalších...

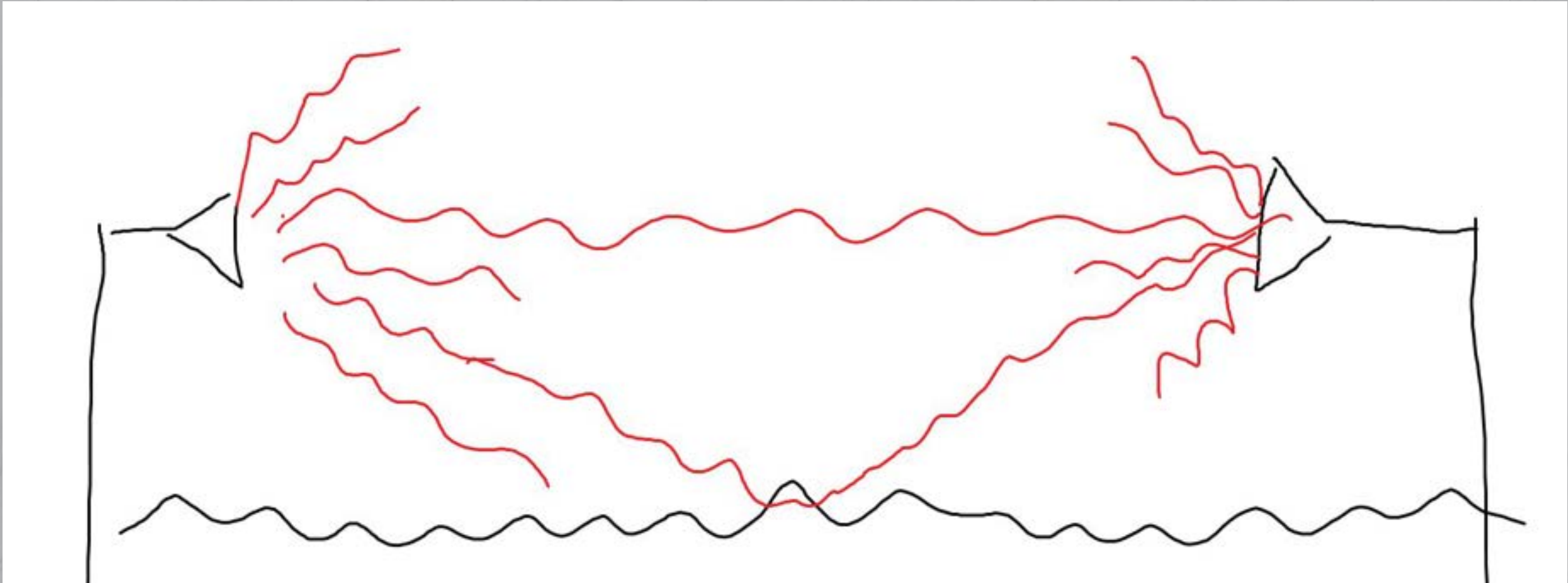
# Where is interference from?

- Self-caused interference
  - Zlý výber mojích vlastných kanálov (toto by sa Vám nikdy nemalo stať)
- Others causing interference
  - Nieko iný používa (alebo práve začal používať) rovnaký kanál ako ja
- Signal cancelation
  - Wireless cez telesá vody
- Space...
  - Kozmická/slnečná radiácia
  - Slnečné erupcie...

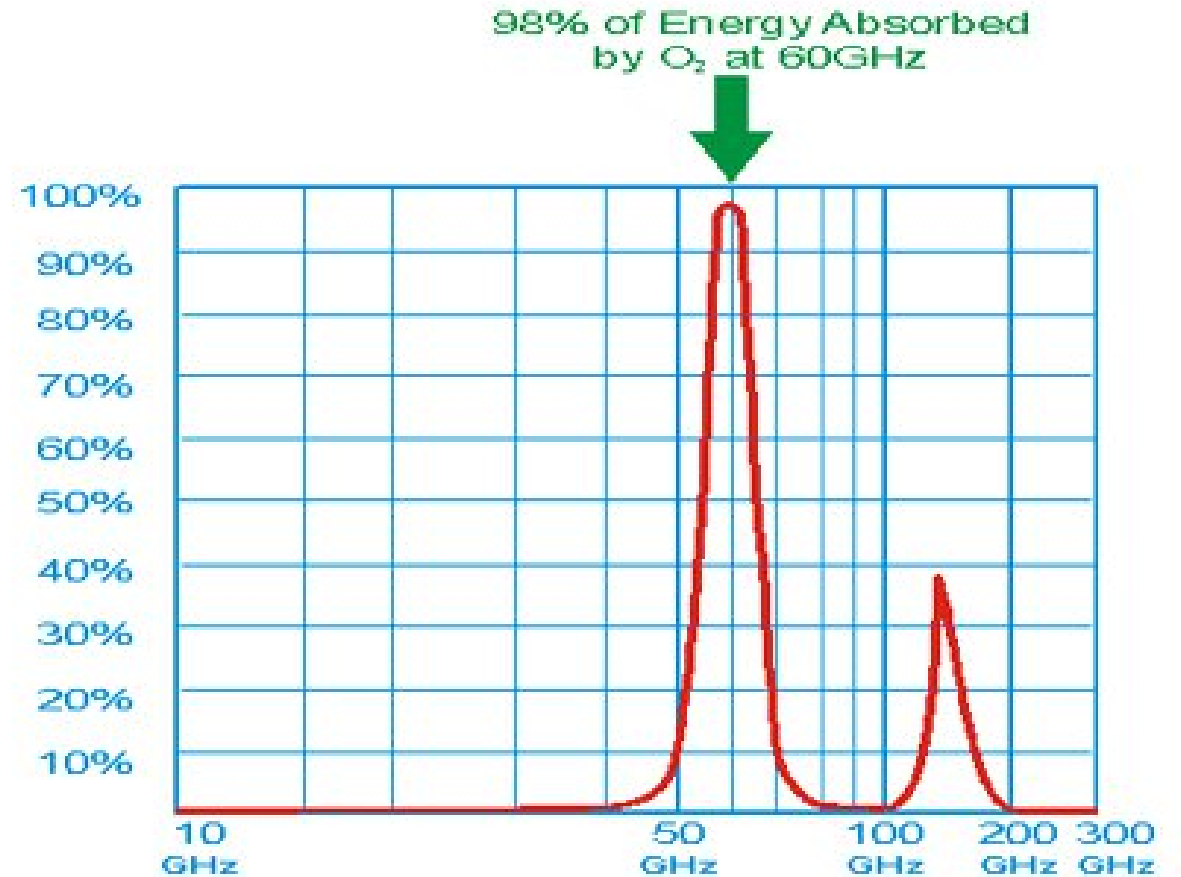
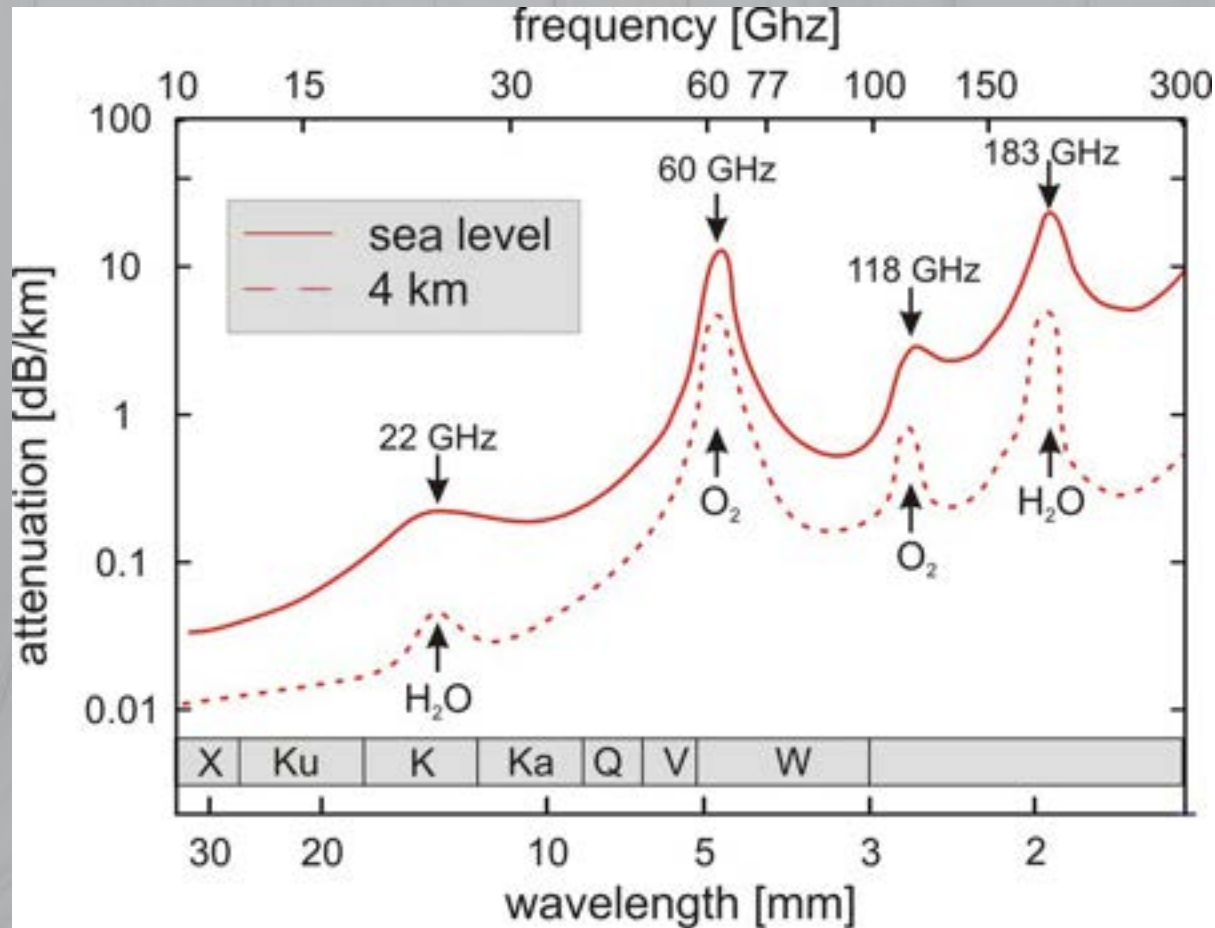
# Unexpected interference

- Signal cancellation over water
- Water reflections after rain
- Oxygen absorption bands

# Signal cancellation over water



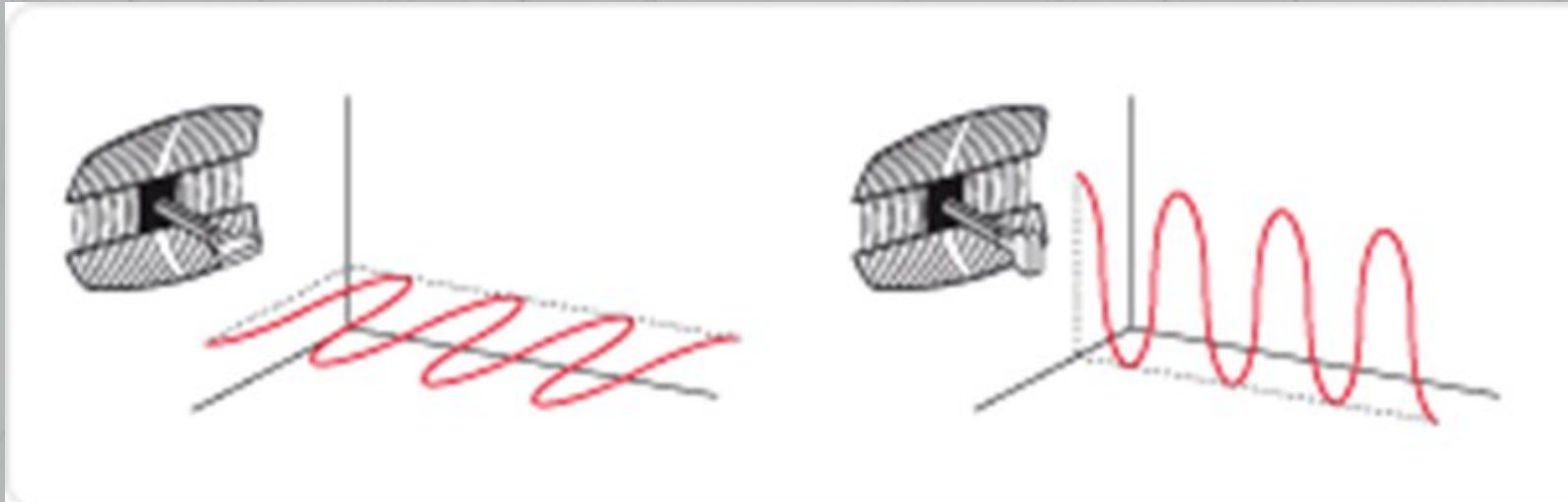
# Absorption bands



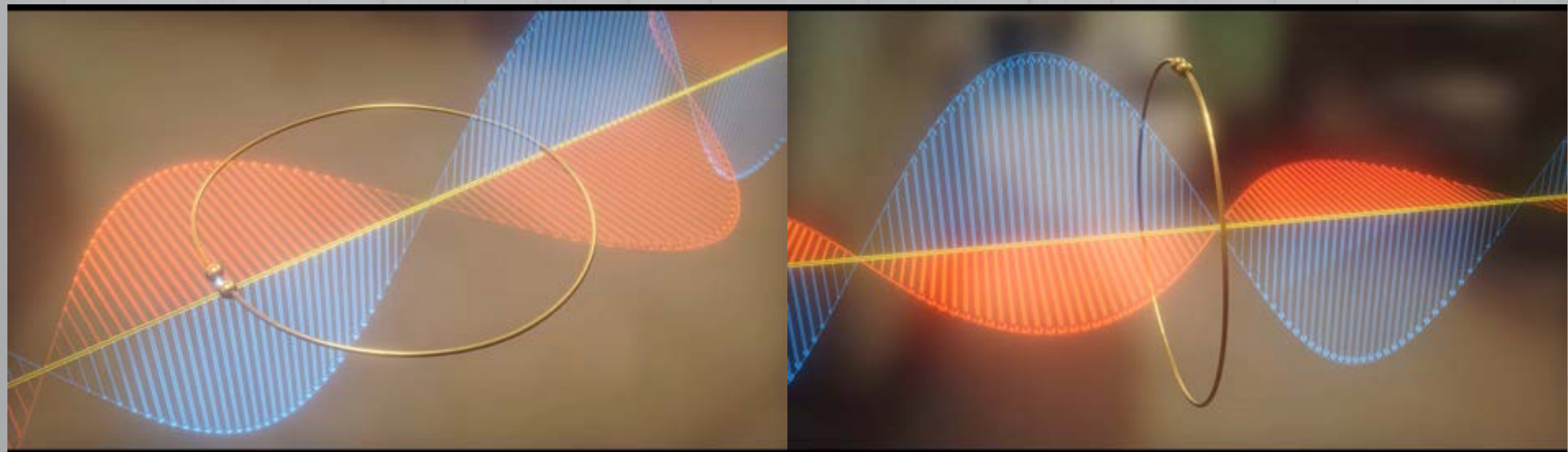
10db/km = 90% loss every 1 km

# Wave polarization

- Polarization is the “direction” of the wave
- Wave can have any directional polarization ( $0^\circ$  $90^\circ$ etc.)
- Waves with different polarization do not interfere with each other







# Progress of technology

- 1887 – Heinrich Hertz:
  - “I do not think that the wireless waves I have discovered will have any practical application.”
- 1895 – first wireless transmissions in Italy (Marconi)
- 1901 – first transatlantic radio transmission
- 1920 – first public Radio Station
- 1978 – GPS
- 1983 – First voice mobile network

# Wave polarization and interference

- In perfect situations - waves with different polarization do not interfere with each other
  - This assumes total polarization differential =  $0^\circ$  vs.  $90^\circ$
- But co-polarization interference is also possible
- This happens when 2 waves are close enough to each other to interfere with each other
  - Example =  $0^\circ$  vs.  $15^\circ$

# Why are we talking about this?

- Using 2 differently polarized waves, and sending different data on each one concurrently, we can double our speed!
  - We call this using multiple spatial streams.
- In reality, wireless antennas do exactly this to increase capacity or a wireless link.
- Modern antennas have multiple arrays internally to leverage this, connectors are marked for example H and V.

# Wording clarification

- Ak používame jednu polarizáciu, používame jeden Spatial Stream.
- Spatial stream = wireless chain.
  - Každý vysiela ináč polarizované vlny aby nebola interferencia

# Wireless chains example

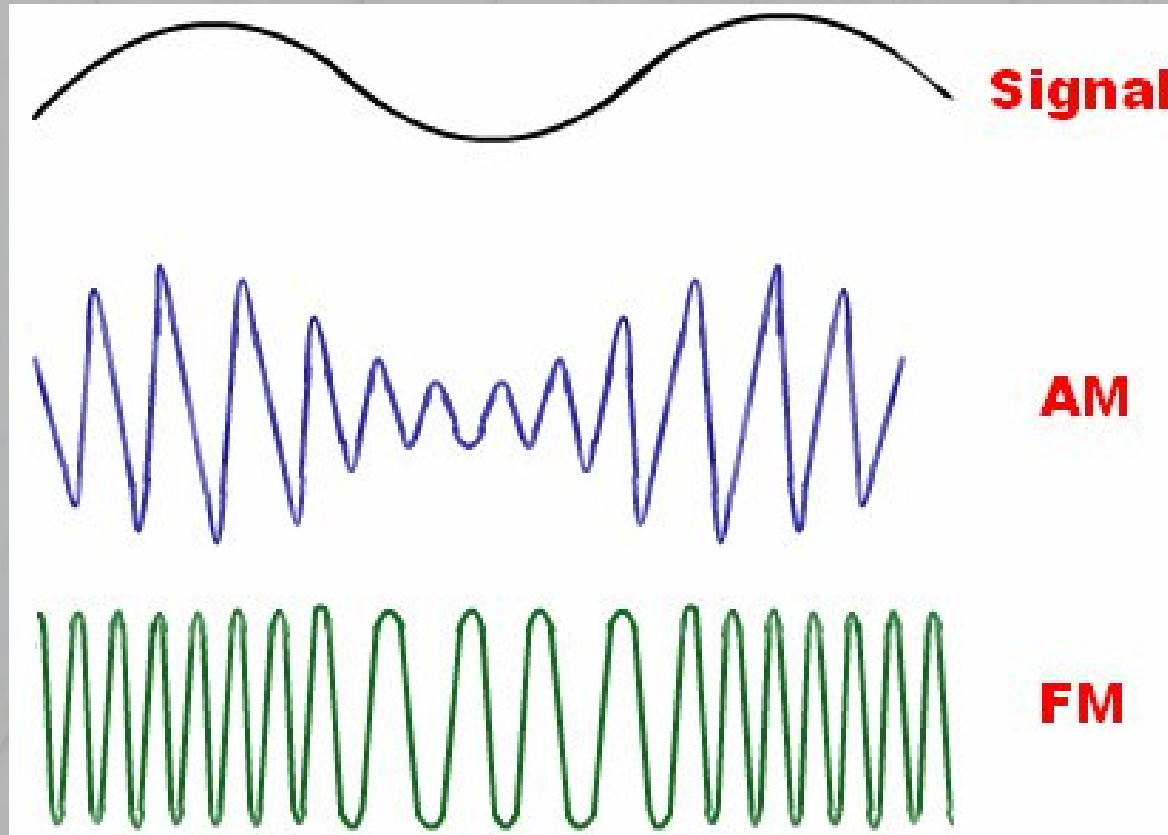
- Using 2 chains, your card can broadcast 2 independent data streams
  - 2 data streams = 2x data rate
- To avoid self-interference, these signals have to be physically separated
- We have a dual-polarity antenna. We connect each chain to a different polarity on the antenna.
- Using horizontal and vertical polarization, we achieve complete physical separation and avoid self-interference.

# Wireless channel

- A channel is a frequency range needed for communication
- Any frequency range can be considered a channel
  - 2400 – 2402 MHz -2 MHz channel
  - 5820 – 5860 MHz -40 MHz channel

# Analog vs. digital

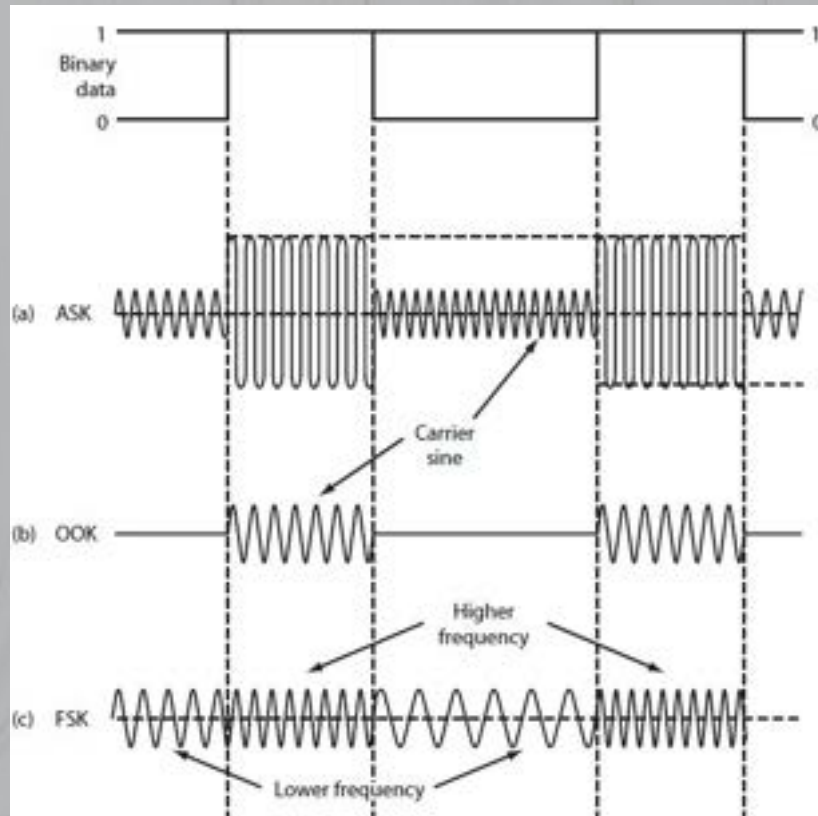
- Wireless signál je analóg-ový





# Encoding

- How to represent binary data using analog wireless signal?



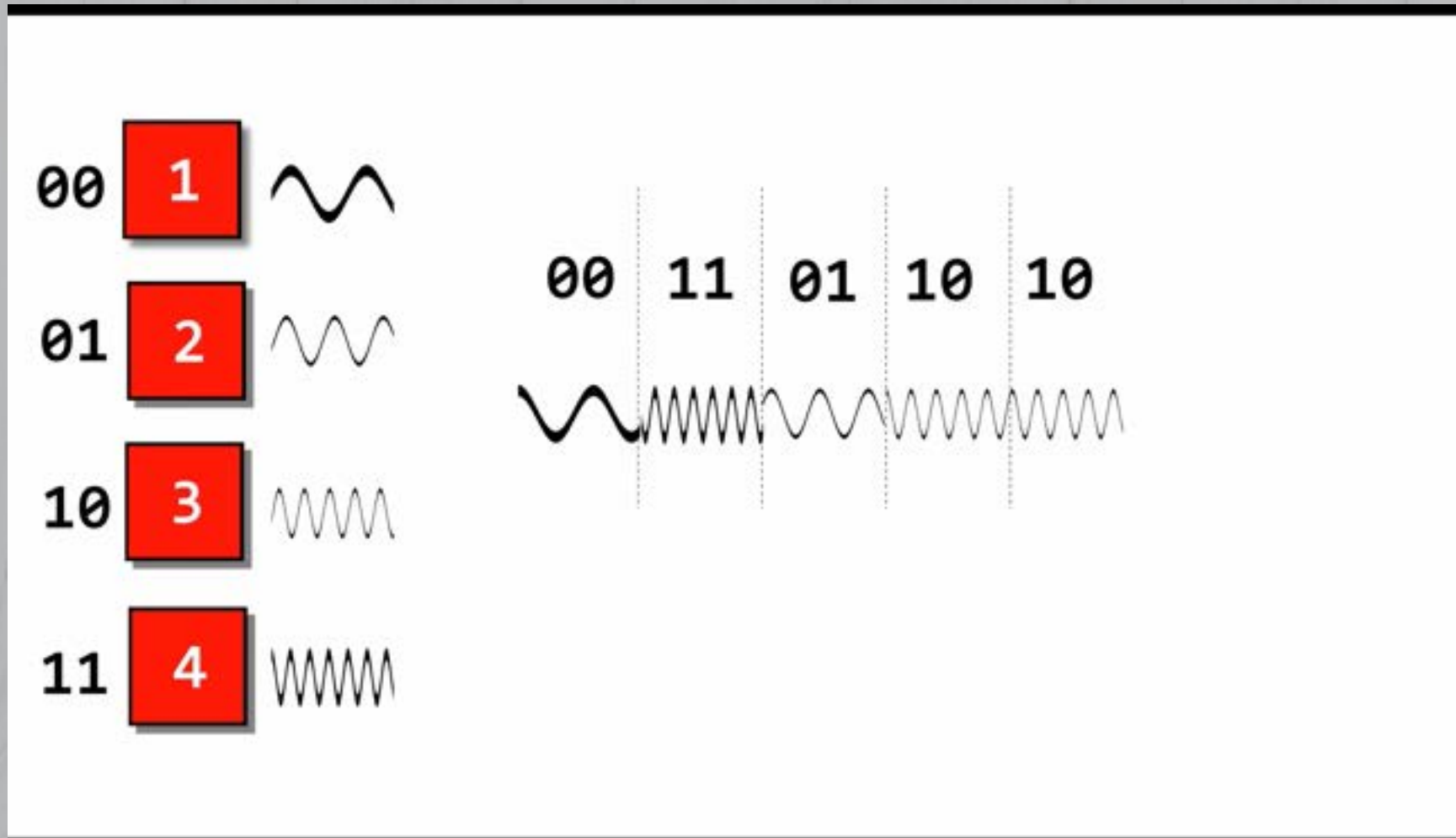
Zdrojové binárne dáta

Použitie amplitúdneho enkódovania

Použitie on/off enkódovania

Enkódovanie na základe frekvenčnej zmeny

# Frequency shift keying modulation

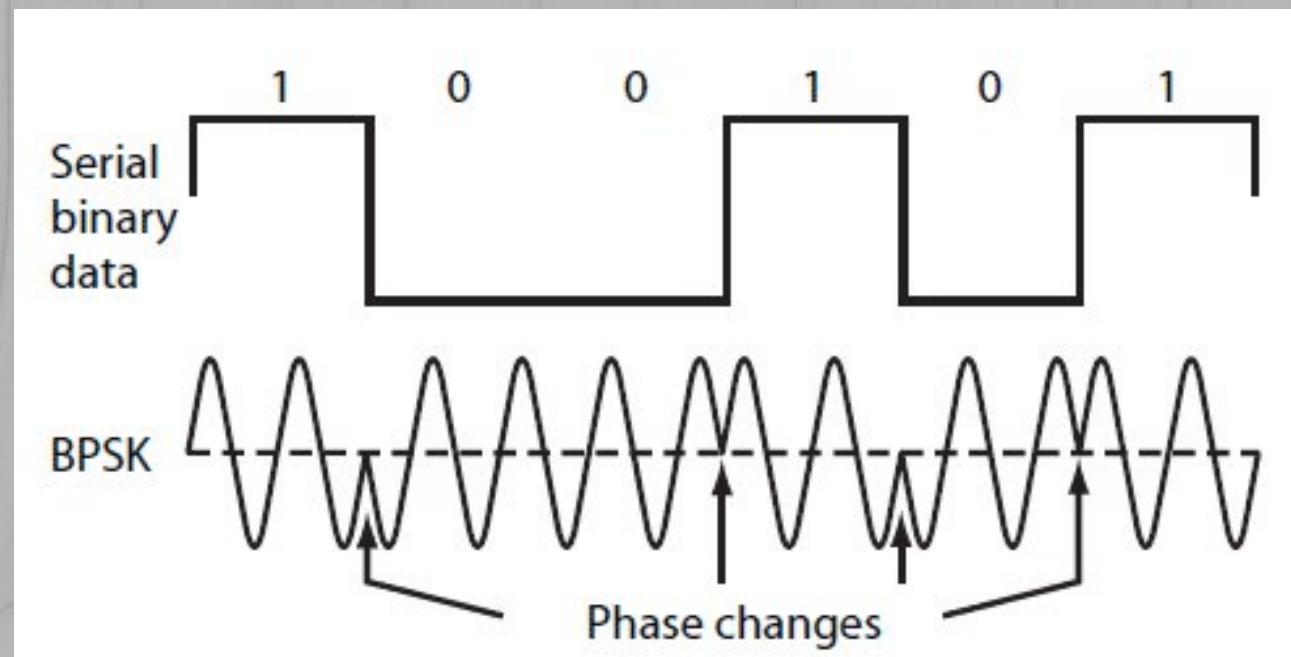


# Encoding problems

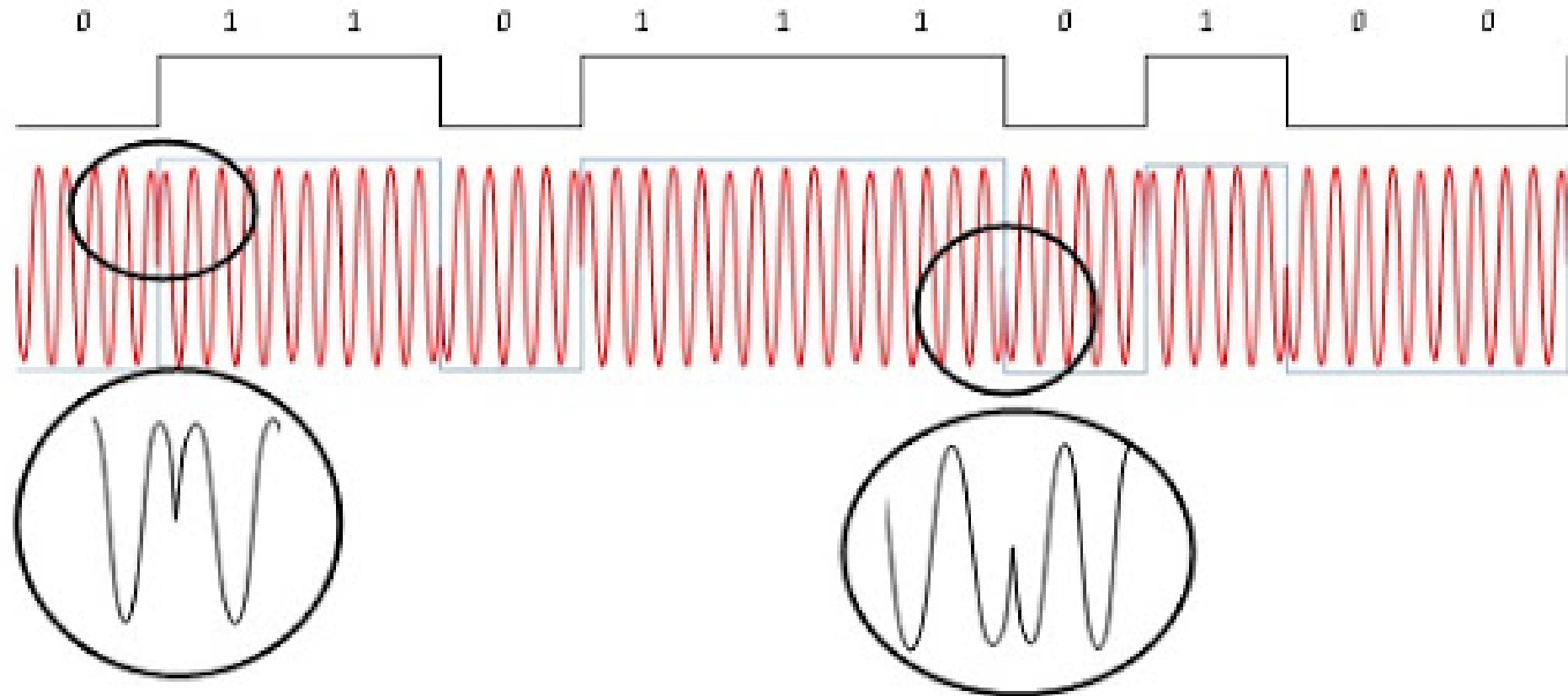
- All of the previously mentioned encoding schemes have their problems:
  - Amplitúdneho enkódovanie by bolo veľmi ľahko narušiteľné interferenciou
  - On/off enkódovanie by vyžadovalo nemožne presné časovanie (+ opäť problém s interferenciou)
  - Freq. enkódovanie by si žiadalo extrémnu kontrolu freq. Spktra (+ interferencia...)

# Better encoding

- A better option, phase change/reversal encoding
- Same technology used in HDDs
  - In HDDs – magnetic field reversal – flux reversal

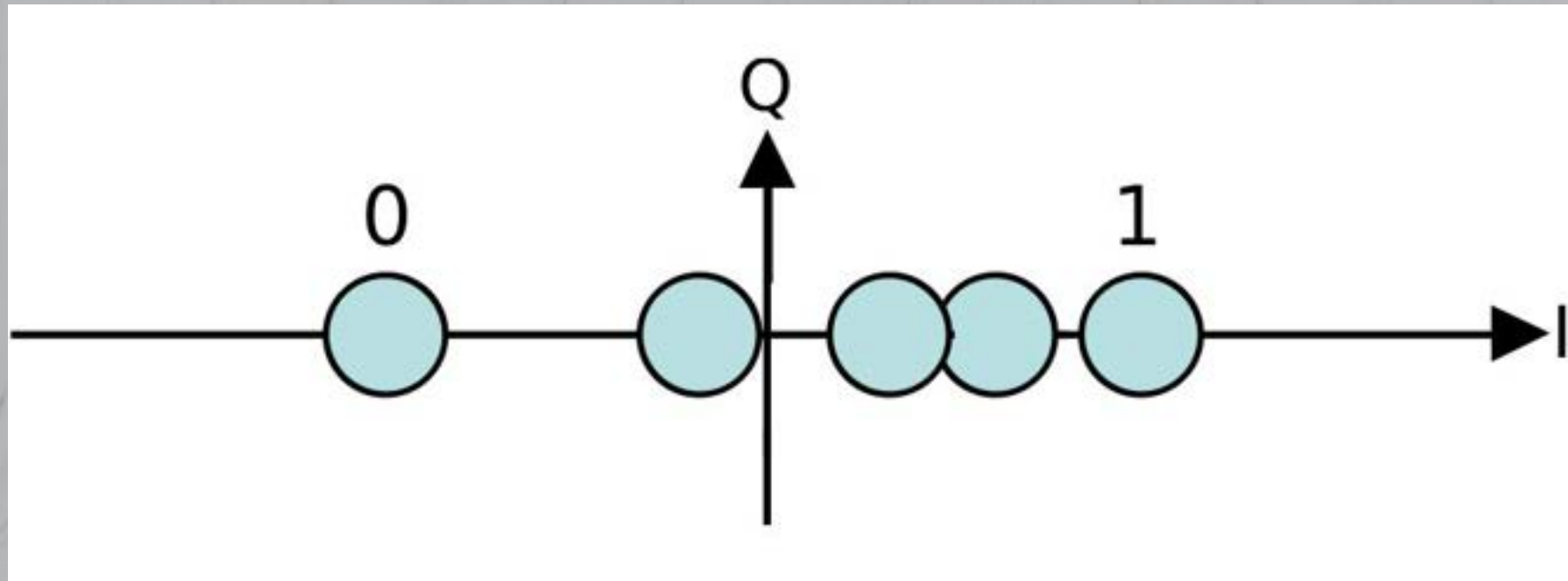


# More detailed

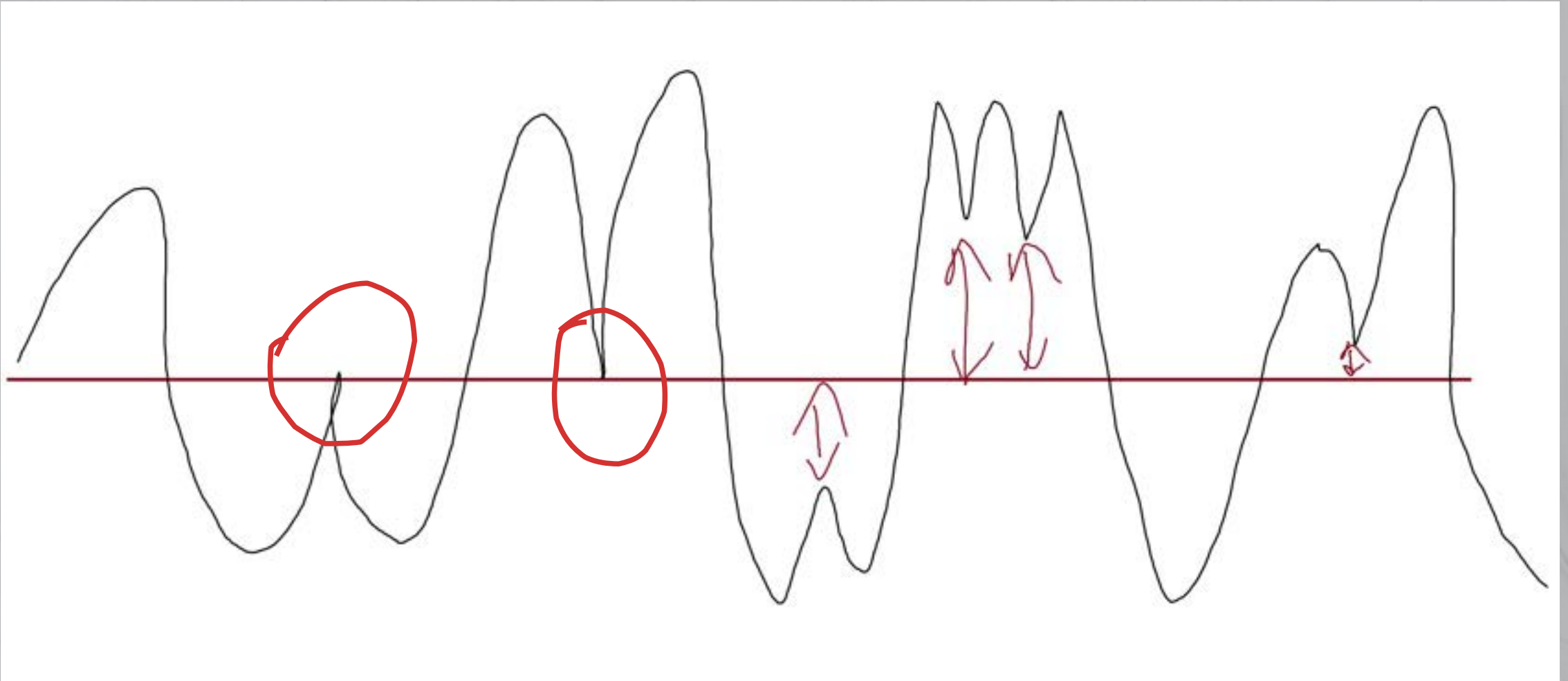


# Constellation diagram

- Constellation diagram je reprezentácia signálu modulovaného digitálnou modulačnou schémou.

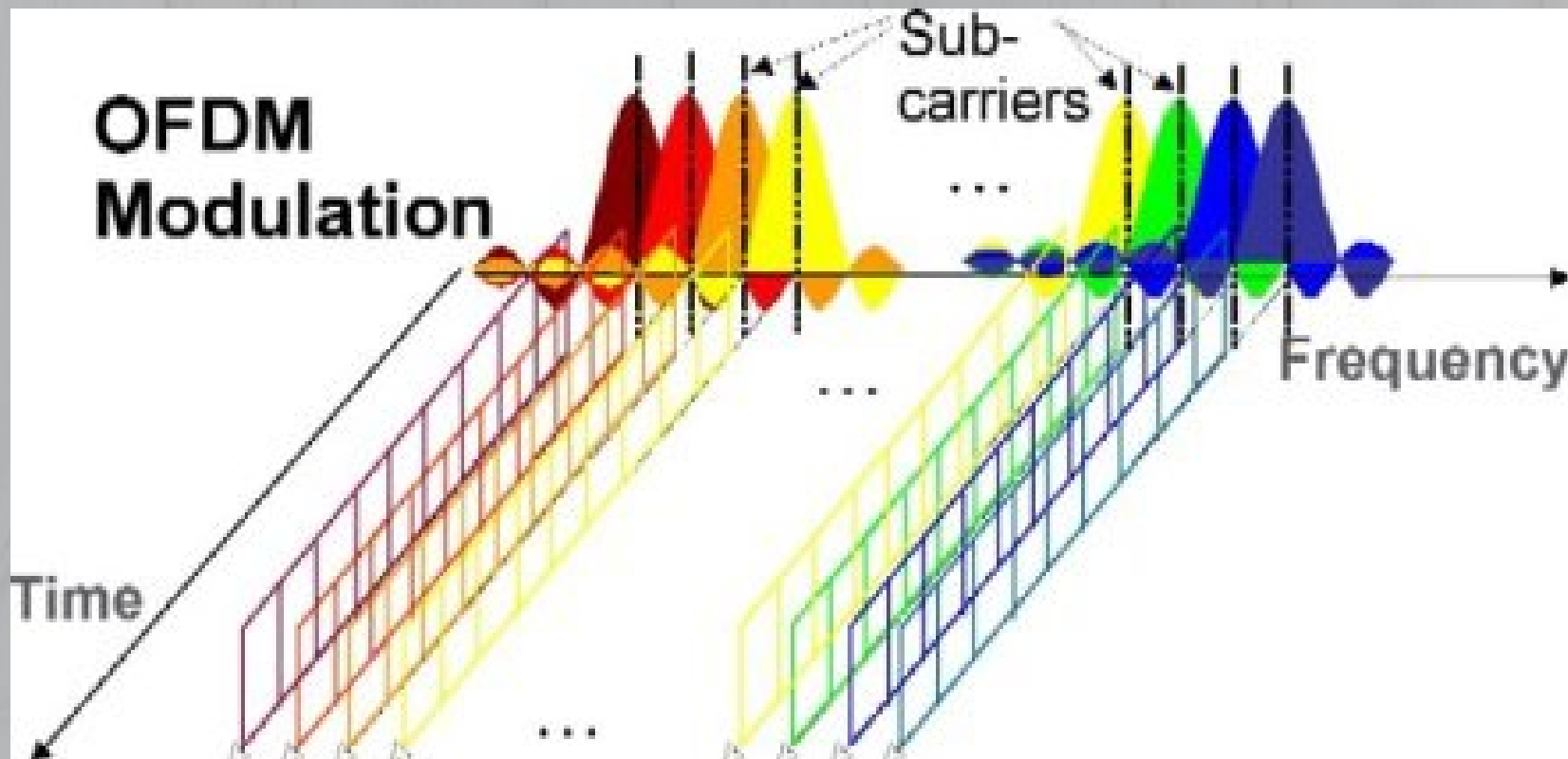


# Missmatch example



# More encoding tricks

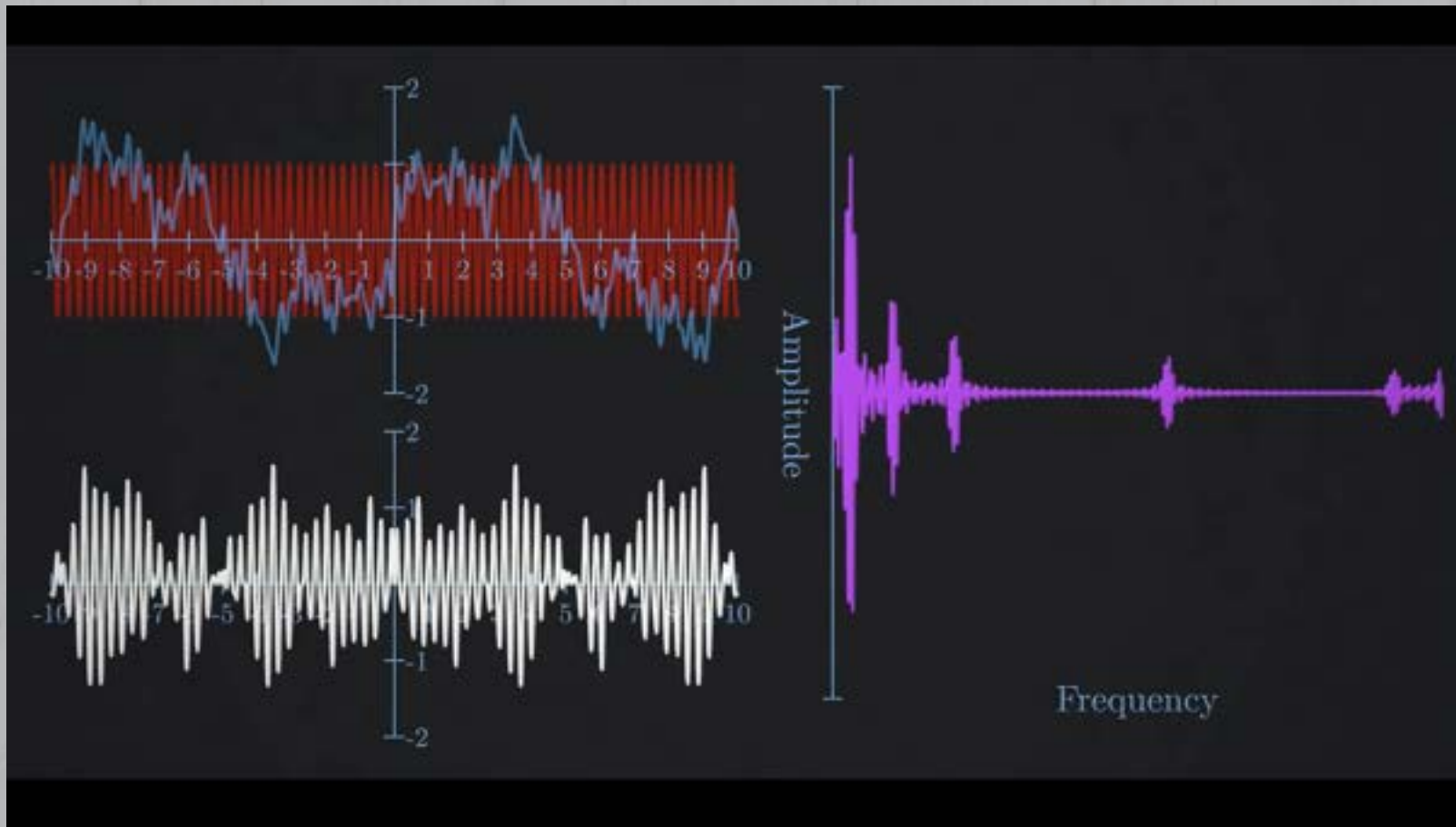
- A channel is split into multiple sub-channels, and each sub channel carries data – **OFDM** (Orthogonal Frequency Division Multiplexing)





# How does OFDM work?

- Fourier transformations



# What encoding means for us

- Pointa
  - Lepšie enkódovanie = lepšia rýchlosť
- Čím menej oscilácií je potrebných pre prenos jedného bit-u, tým viac bitov môžeme preniesť za jednotku času (lepšia rýchlosť)

# Even better encoding

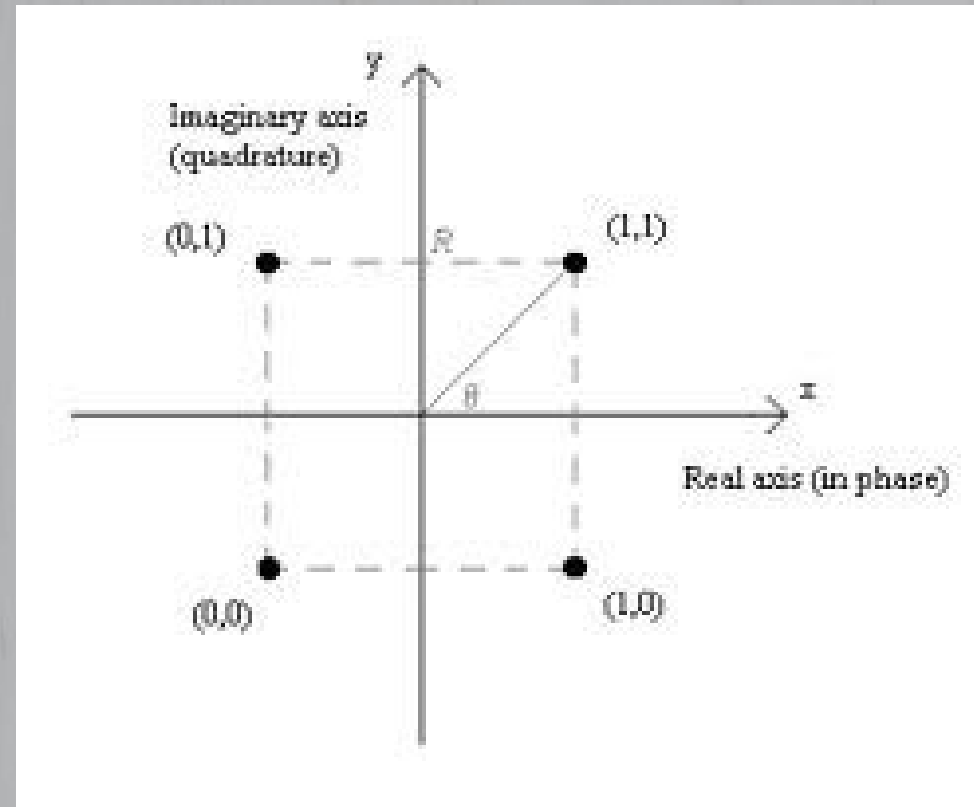
- As technology evolved, some of the previous drawbacks were eliminated.
- Most advanced encoding schemes combine multiple of these techniques to achieve even better encoding rates
- Phase change, amplitude based encoding and channel splitting into sub-carriers is combined in QAM

# QAM

- Quadrature Amplitude Modulation

- **4 QAM**

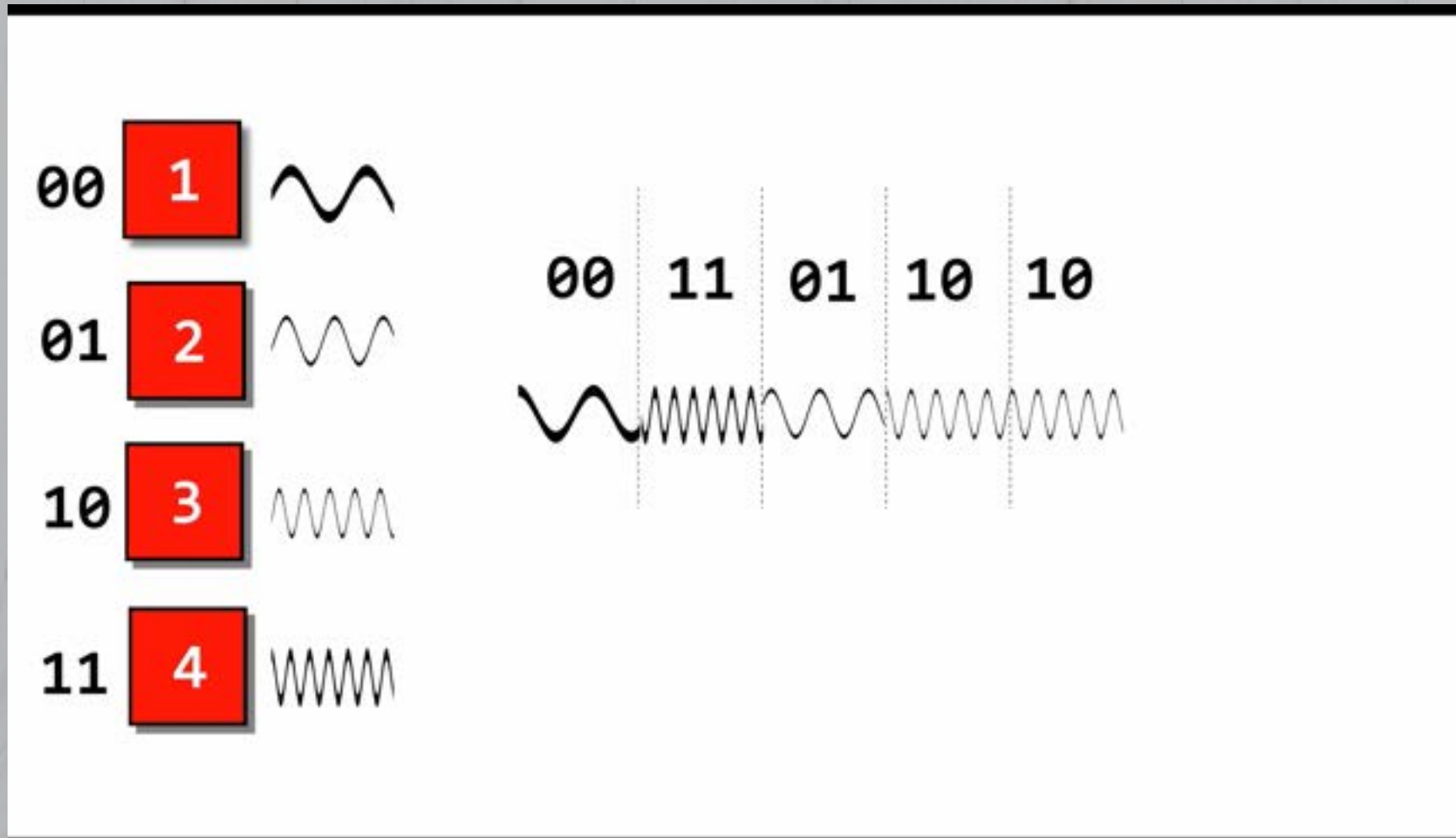
- splitting the signal
- into 4 segments



# Symbols

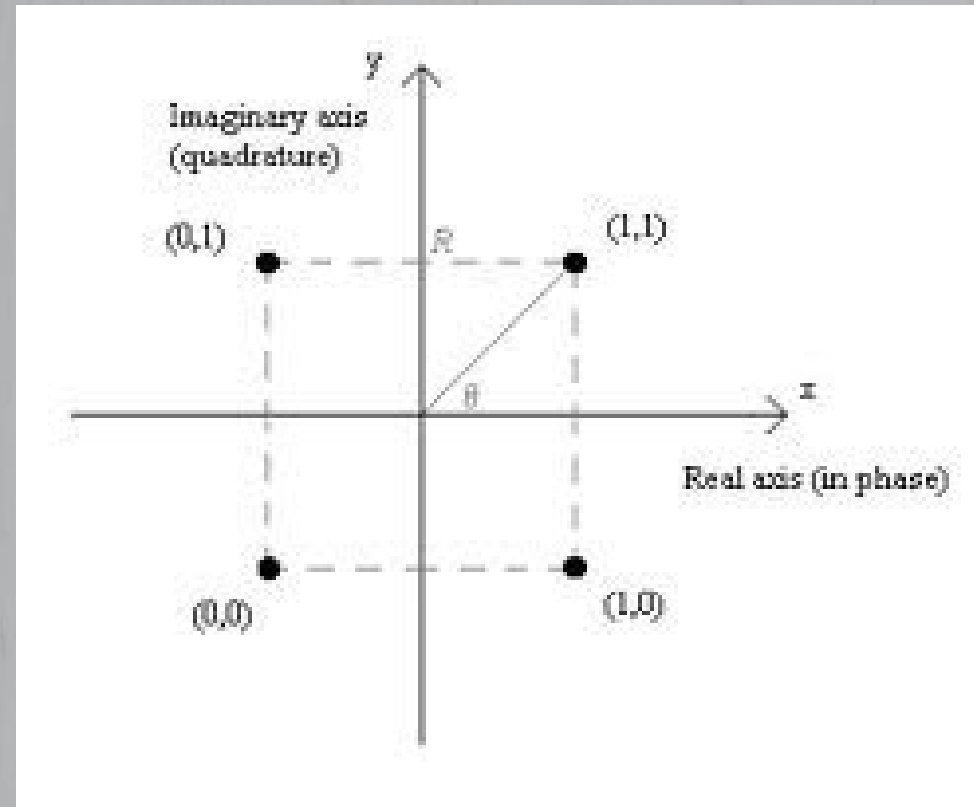
- A **symbol** represents the basic unit of information.
- Each symbol is a distinct signal that conveys one or more bits of information.
- In BPSK, 2 symbols – positive or negative phase shift
- This is limiting, so modulations schemes get creative.

# We actually already saw symbols!



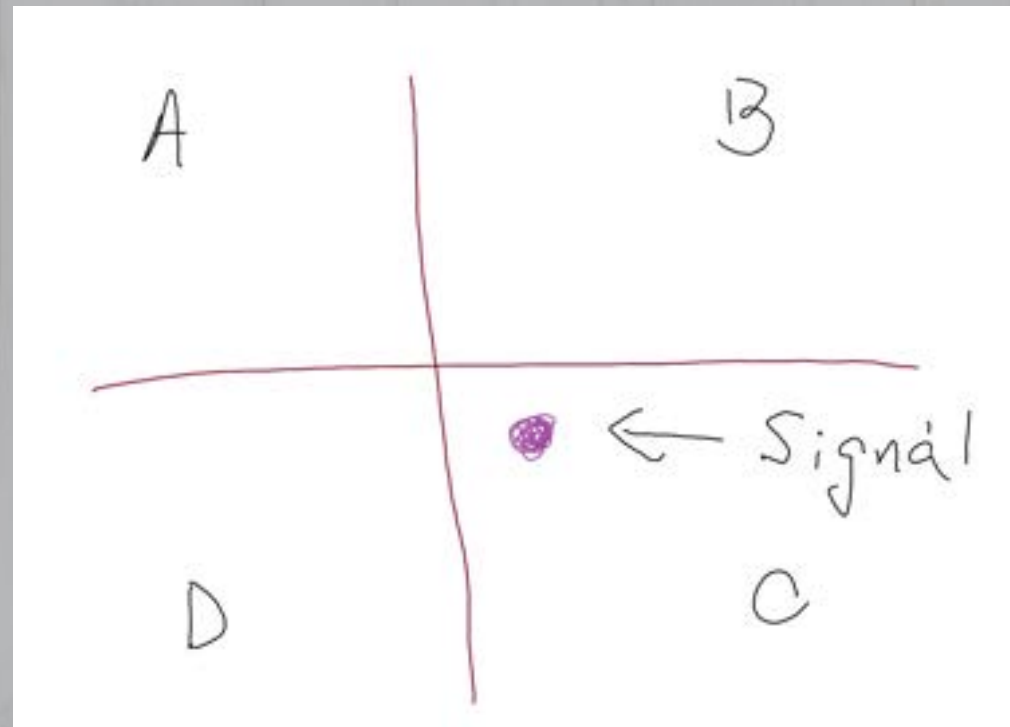
# QAM simplified

- QAM kombinuje viacero sposobov ako vycitat 4 mozne stavy zo signalu
- 4 symboly
- Prenost 2 bit-ov naraz



# Interference...

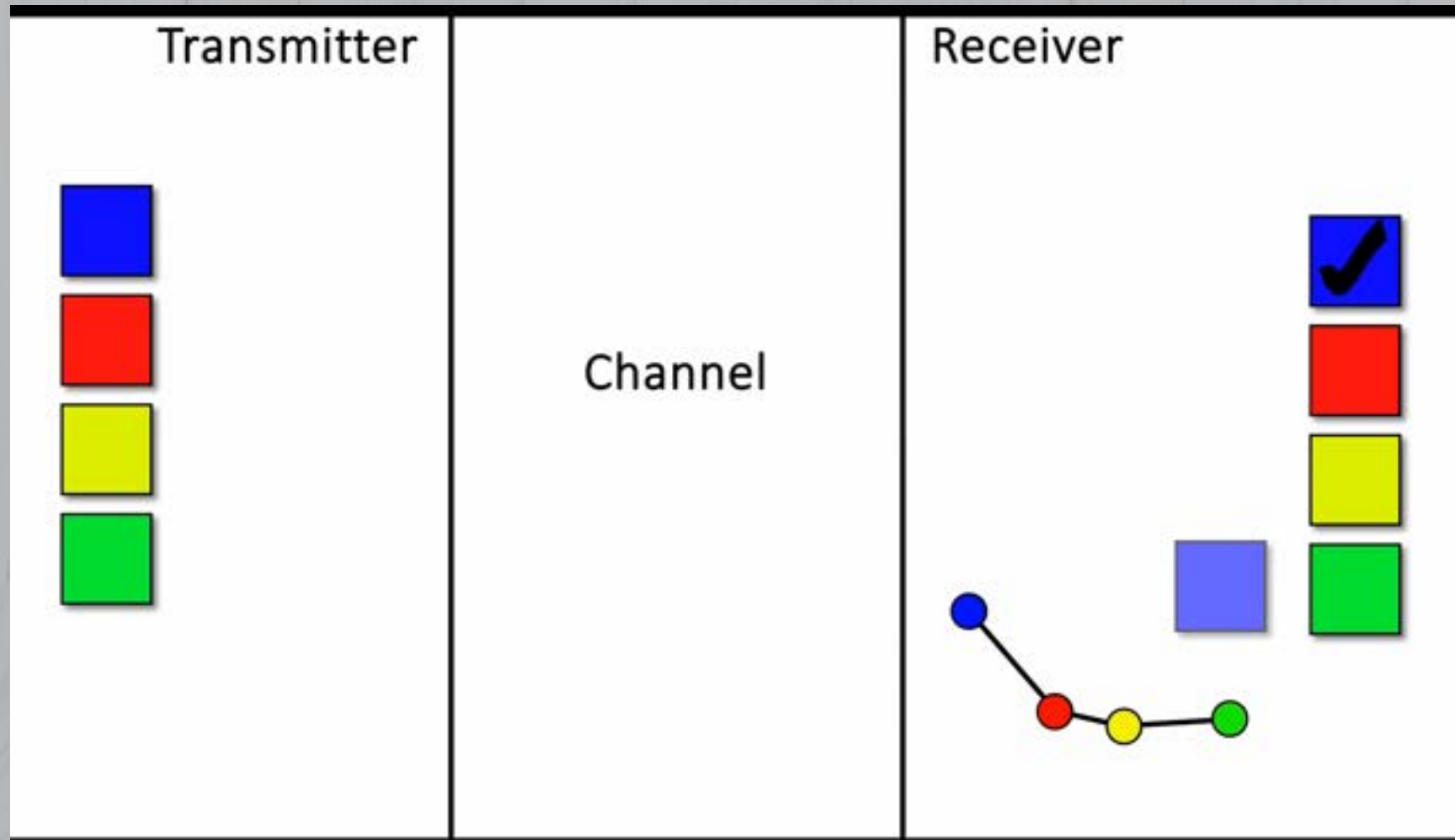
- Hovorili sme ze QAM je schopny identifikovat 4 body v signale. Co vsak ked signal nepasuje presne na nejaky bod?





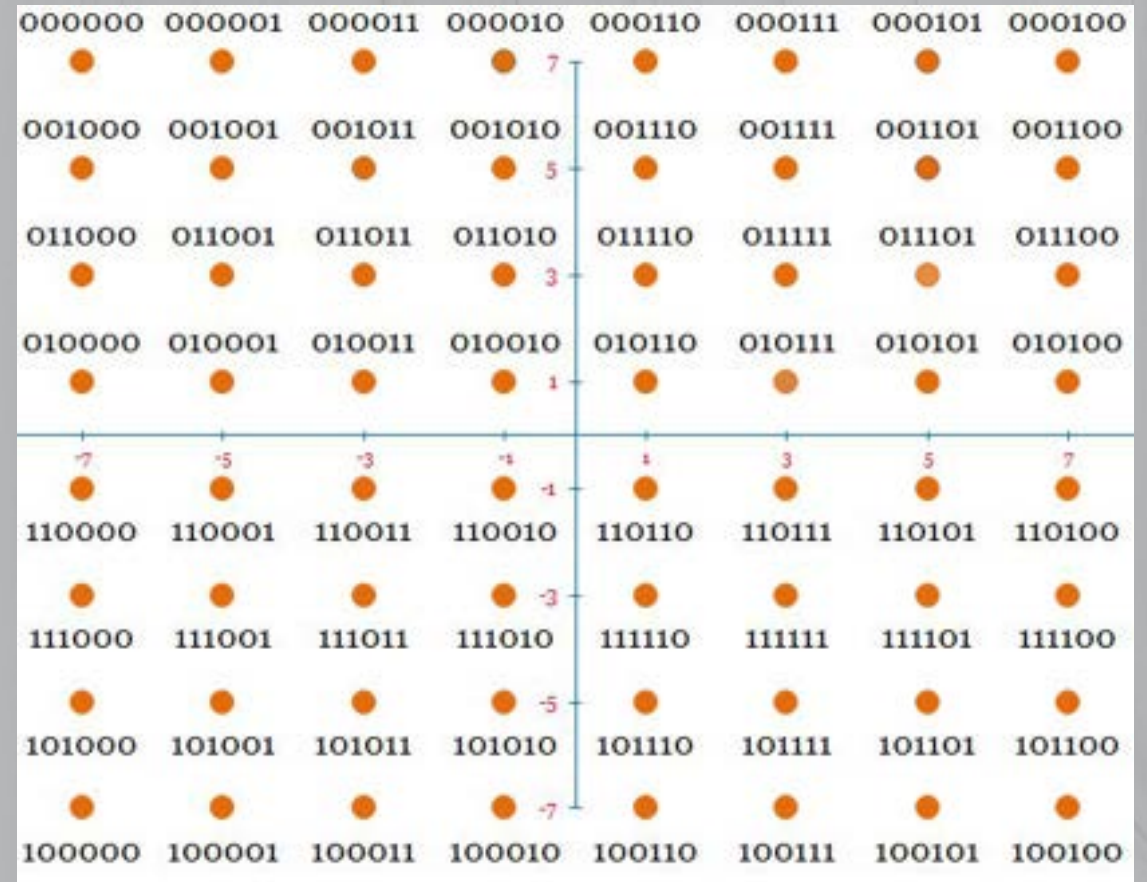
# Signal correlation

- Text



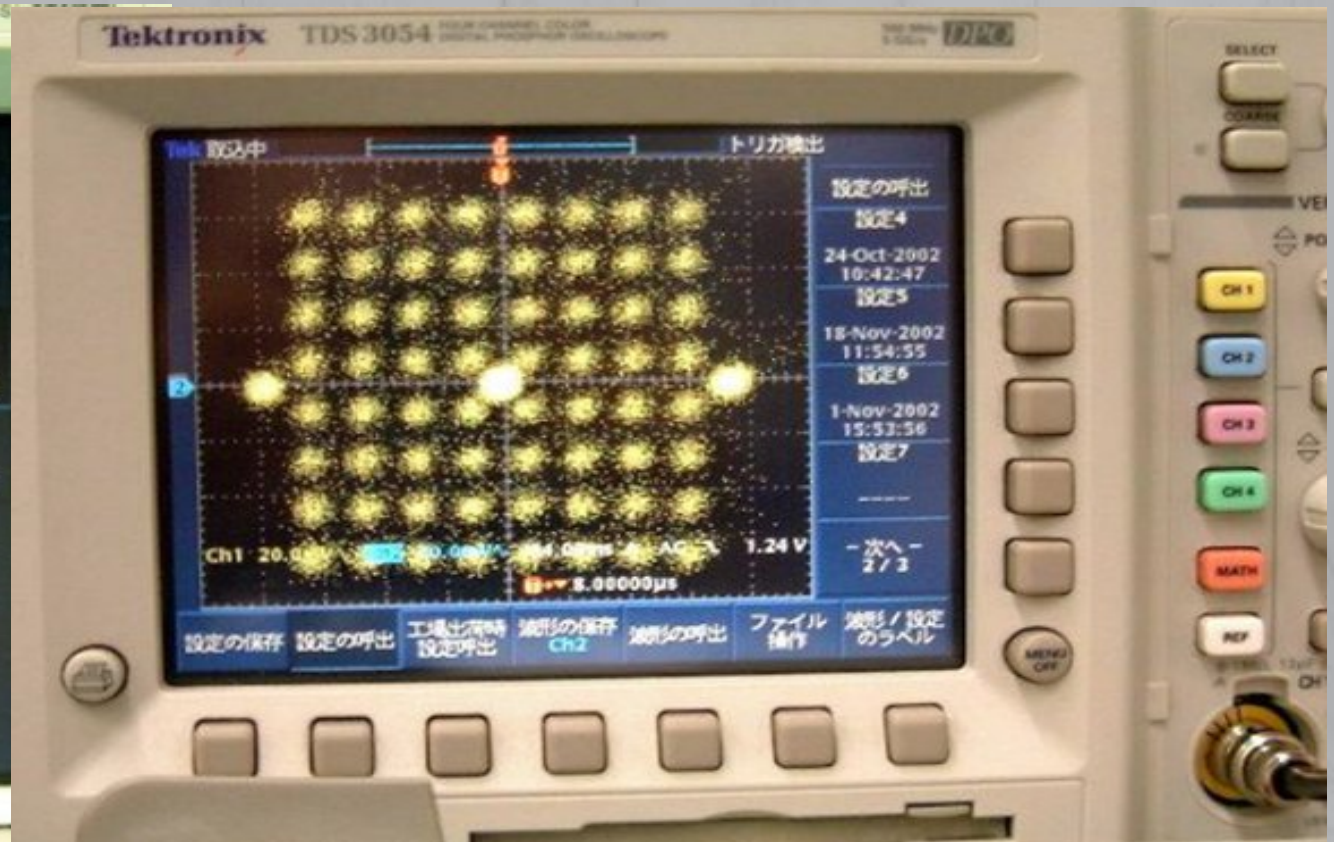
# Better QAM

- **64 QAM**
- Kombinácia rôznych enkódovacích technológií a matematických algoritmov



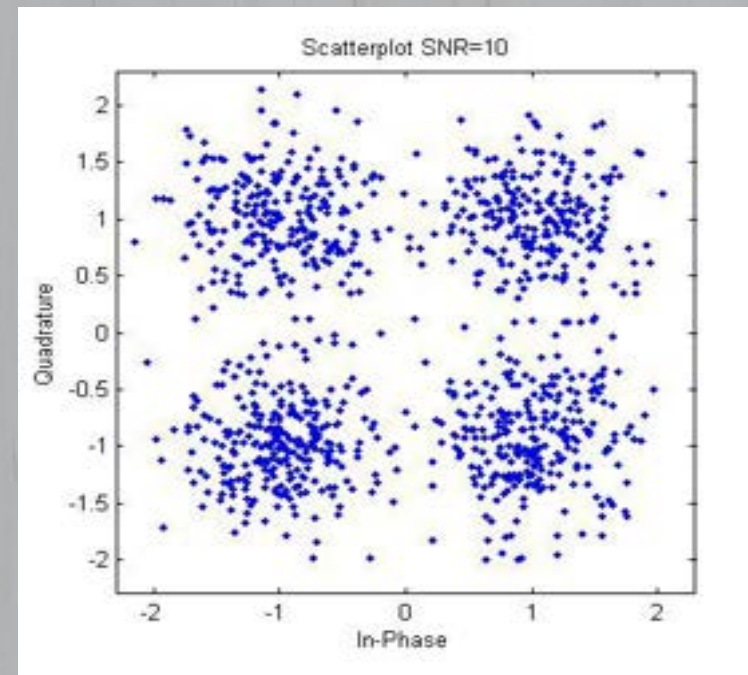
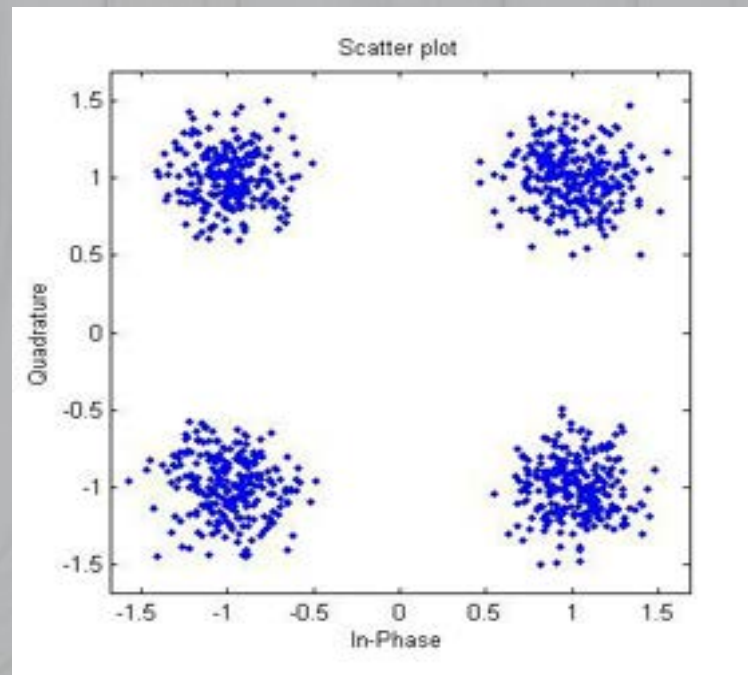
# Better QAM

- Actual 64 QAM with -35 and -65 signal strength



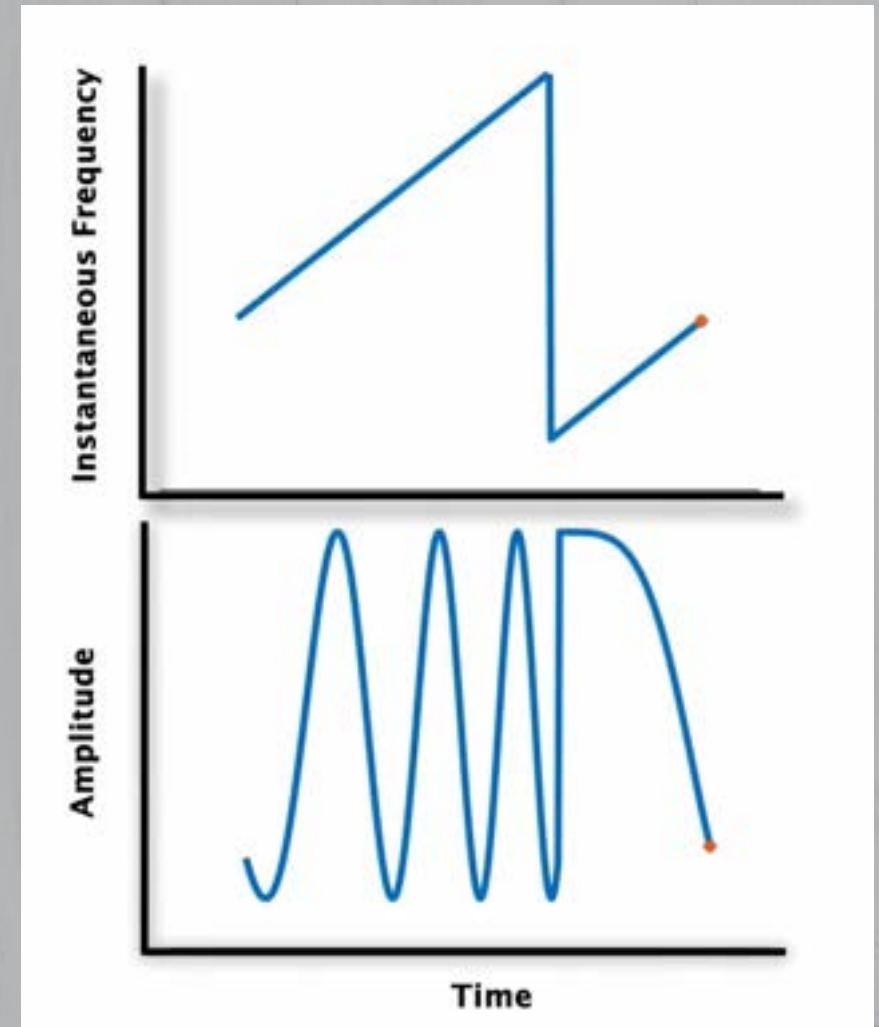
# Noise vs. encoding

- With higher encoding, we need higher quality signal
- Here is how noise (interference) affects 4QAM



# Other interesting encoding

- Many encoding schemas exist.
- For example, LoRa :
  - Frequency Shift Chirp Modulation



# What encoding means for us

- Bottom line:
  - For best speed, we need best possible signal strength
  - For best speed, we need least possible interference
- Its possible for better encoding to produce less actual speed
  - why?

# Guard interval

- **Guard interval** (GI) is used to ensure that distinct transmissions do not interfere with one another
- The purpose of the guard interval is to introduce immunity to propagation delays, echoes and reflections
- Lower GI gives better speed, but less protection
- Link with bad signal will therefore choose to run at higher GI – lower speed

# Mapping encoding to data rate

MCS index	Spatial streams	Modulation type	Coding rate	Data rate (Mbit/s)			
				20 MHz channel		40 MHz channel	
				800 ns GI	400 ns GI	800 ns GI	400 ns GI
0	1	BPSK	1/2	6.50	7.20	13.50	15.00
1	1	QPSK	1/2	13.00	14.40	27.00	30.00
2	1	QPSK	3/4	19.50	21.70	40.50	45.00
3	1	16-QAM	1/2	26.00	28.90	54.00	60.00
4	1	16-QAM	3/4	39.00	43.30	81.00	90.00
5	1	64-QAM	2/3	52.00	57.80	108.00	120.00
6	1	64-QAM	3/4	58.50	65.00	121.50	135.00
7	1	64-QAM	5/6	65.00	72.20	135.00	150.00



# Wireless networking standards

# Wireless standards

- Physical Layer (Layer 1) štandardy, umožňujú komunikáciu cez EM radiáciu (žiarenie)
- Vrchné layer-y môžu byť čokoľvek (Ethernet na L2, PPPoE na L2, IP na L3, atď.)

# Wireless standards

- IEEE 802.11b
  - 2.4GHz frekvencia, 11Mbps
- IEEE 802.11g
  - 2.4GHz frekvencia, 54Mbps
- IEEE 802.11a
  - 5GHz frekvencia, 54Mbps
- IEEE 802.11n
  - 2.4GHz alebo 5GHz, 600Mbps (produkty dostupné na 300Mbps)
- IEEE 802.11ac
  - 5GHz, 6.9Gbps
- IEEE 802.11ax
  - Wifi 6, 9.6Gbps
- IEEE 802.11be
  - Wifi 7, 23Gbps

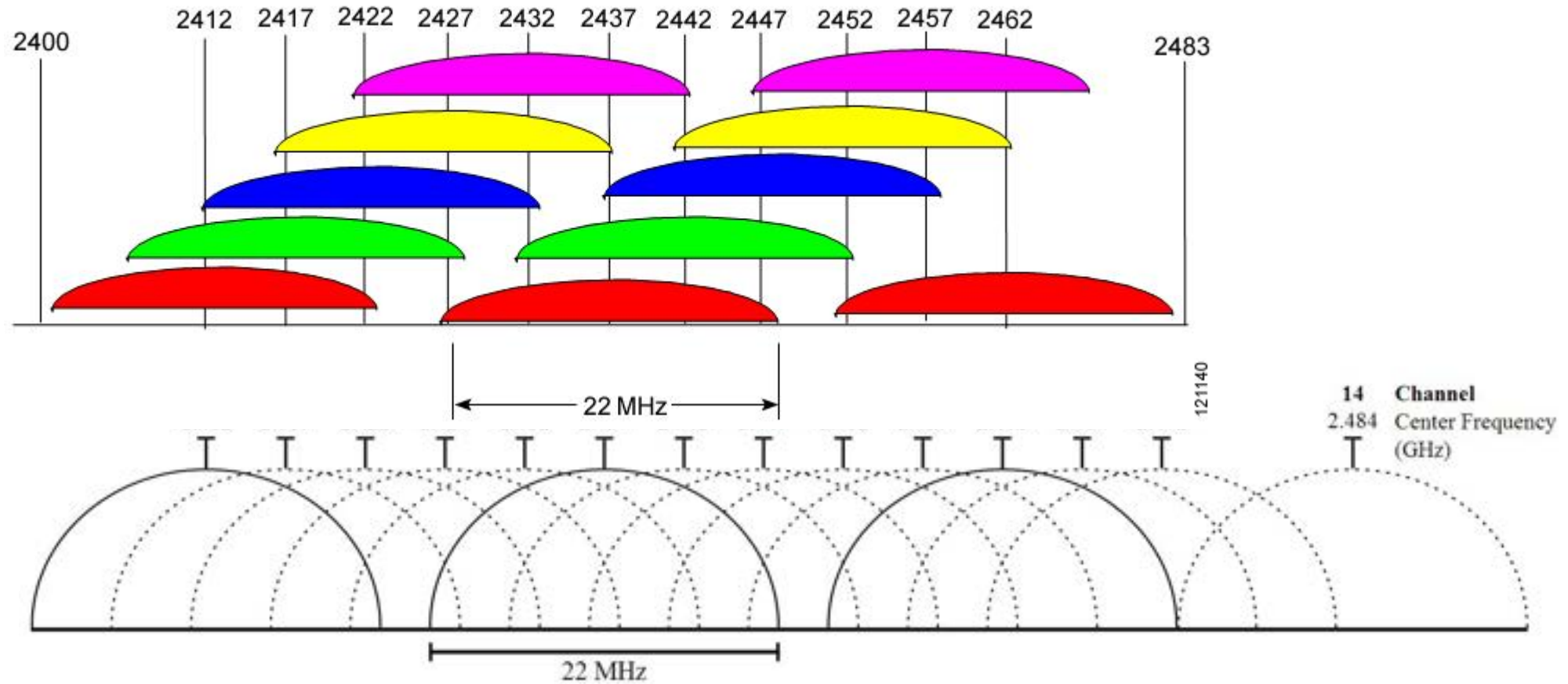
# Compatibility

- All wireless protocols are backwards compatible
- If a client can run a higher protocol than the AP, the client will fall down
- If an AP can run higher protocol than the client, the AP will fall down

# 802.11b/g

- 22 MHz potrebných pre komunikáciu – nazývané channel (kanál)
- Frekvencia – 2.4 GHz
- Jeden spatial stream
- Podľa regulácií v krajine nasadenia
- 2400 – 2499 MHz

# 2.4 GHz channels

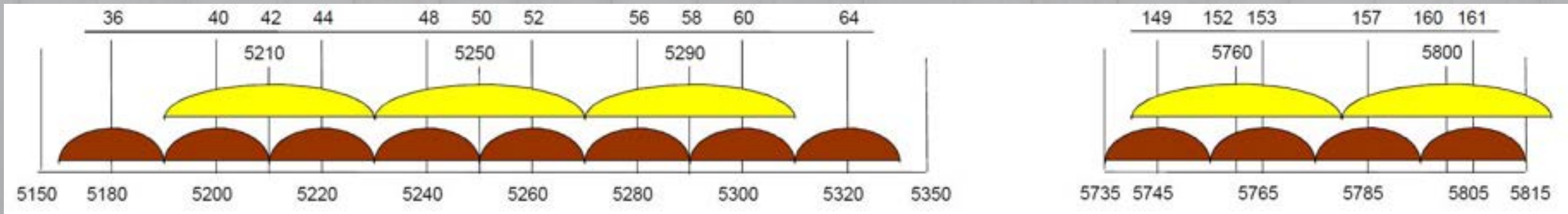


# 802.11a

- 22 MHz needed to communicate
- Frequency – 5 GHz
- One spatial stream
- .11a is just a 5GHz implementation of .11b/g

# 5 GHz channels

- 12x 20 MHz non-overlapping channels
- 5x 40 MHz non-overlapping channels



- May be more depending on your country regulations on free wireless spectrum



# 802.11n

- 20 MHz potrebných pre komunikáciu
  - Vie združiť 2x 20 MHz kanály do 40 MHz kanálu
- Dual-channel = 2x rýchlosť
- Up to 4 spatial streams = 4x rýchlosť
  - Produkty nikdy neboli dostupné s viac ako 3 – ale 2 je známi .11n 300MBit štandard
- Frekvencia – 2.4 GHz alebo 5 GHz

# 802.11n

- .11n single spatial stream encoding table

MCS index	Spatial streams	Modulation type	Coding rate	Data rate (Mbit/s)			
				20 MHz channel		40 MHz channel	
				800 ns GI	400 ns GI	800 ns GI	400 ns GI
0	1	BPSK	1/2	6.50	7.20	13.50	15.00
1	1	QPSK	1/2	13.00	14.40	27.00	30.00
2	1	QPSK	3/4	19.50	21.70	40.50	45.00
3	1	16-QAM	1/2	26.00	28.90	54.00	60.00
4	1	16-QAM	3/4	39.00	43.30	81.00	90.00
5	1	64-QAM	2/3	52.00	57.80	108.00	120.00
6	1	64-QAM	3/4	58.50	65.00	121.50	135.00
7	1	64-QAM	5/6	65.00	72.20	135.00	150.00

# 802.11ac

- 20 MHz channel as well
  - Can bond for 20/40/80/160 MHz channels
- Octal spatial streams + 256 QAM
- Frequency – 5 GHz only

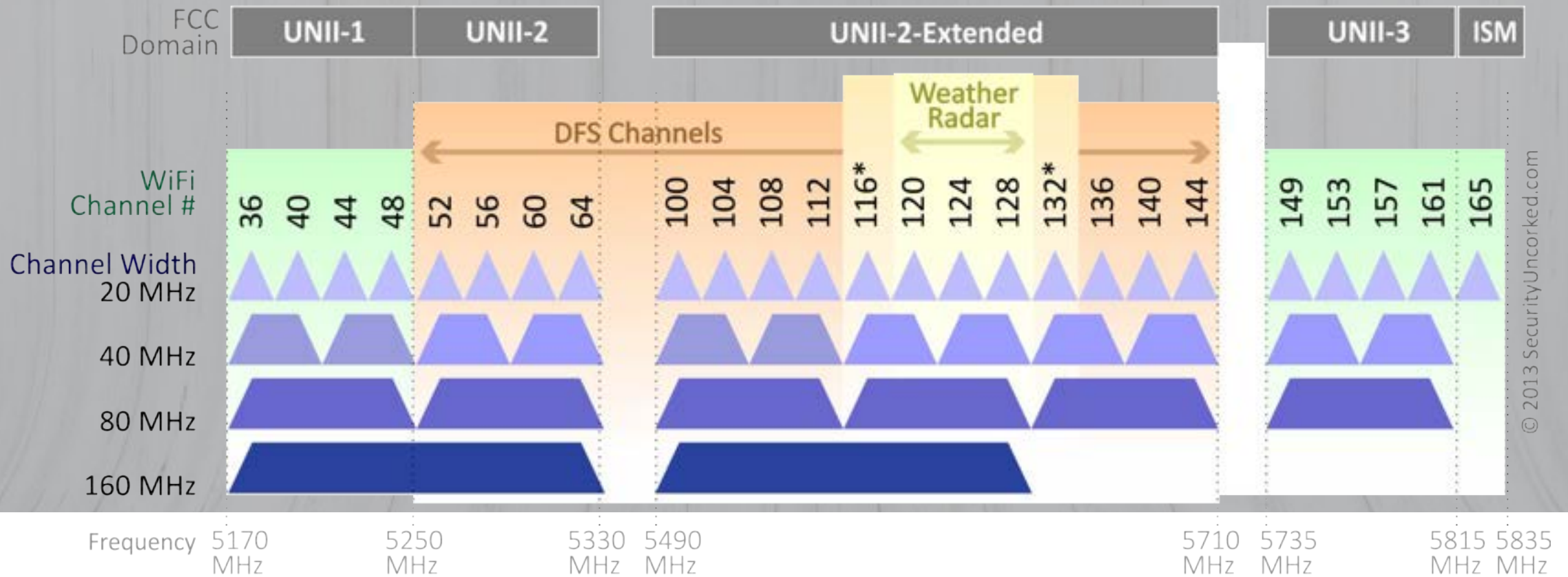
# 802.11ac

- .11ac single spatial stream encoding table

Theoretical throughput for single Spatial Stream (in Mbit/s)										
MCS index	Modulation type	Coding rate	20 MHz channels		40 MHz channels		80 MHz channels		160 MHz channels	
			800 ns GI	400 ns GI	800 ns GI	400 ns GI	800 ns GI	400 ns GI	800 ns GI	400 ns GI
0	BPSK	1/2	6.5	7.2	13.5	15	29.3	32.5	58.5	65
1	QPSK	1/2	13	14.4	27	30	58.5	65	117	130
2	QPSK	3/4	19.5	21.7	40.5	45	87.8	97.5	175.5	195
3	16-QAM	1/2	26	28.9	54	60	117	130	234	260
4	16-QAM	3/4	39	43.3	81	90	175.5	195	351	390
5	64-QAM	2/3	52	57.8	108	120	234	260	468	520
6	64-QAM	3/4	58.5	65	121.5	135	263.3	292.5	526.5	585
7	64-QAM	5/6	65	72.2	135	150	292.5	325	585	650
8	256-QAM	3/4	78	86.7	162	180	351	390	702	780
9	256-QAM	5/6	N/A	N/A	180	200	390	433.3	780	866.7

# 802.11ac channel coverage

## 802.11ac Channel Allocation (N America)



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\*Channels 116 and 132 are Doppler Radar channels that may be used in some cases.

Real life

# Promises vs. reality

- Data-rates presented in these tables are only "air rates". This is the rate of binary transmit on the wireless interface.
- This number does however not represent real wireless speed which your link will run at.
- Wireless is half-duplex and uses ACKs - CSMA/CA
- Frame corruption can occur due to interference.
- Collisions and re-transmits happen **a lot**

# Promises vs. reality

- What to really expect:
  - With standardized wireless (.g/.n/.ac) at maximum (in optimal conditions) 60% of the air-rate can be expected as real L4 udp throughput.
- TCP will be less (due to duplicate ACK-ing)
  - Usually 45-50% as TCP throughput.
- There are options – proprietary protocols



# Your homework

# Are you ready padavan?

- Here is the full MCS index table for all wireless protocols:
- <https://mcsindex.net/>



That's it, thank you!

# Q&A session