Introduction to MRI Physics

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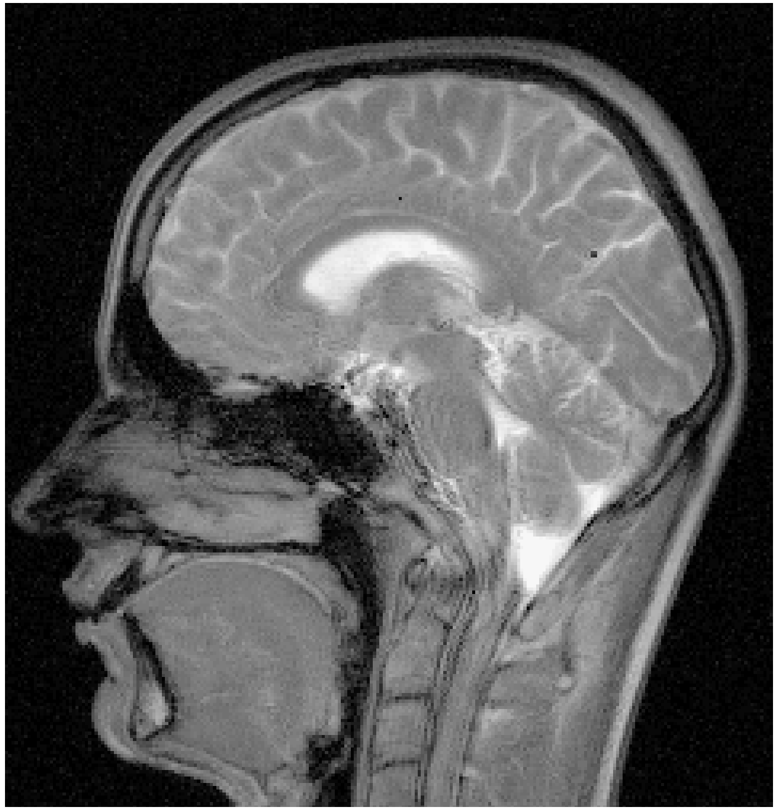
Overview

- Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Imaging (NMR)
    - Basic Principles
    - Excitation, Relaxation and Signal

- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)
    - Spatial Encoding in MRI
    - Image formation and k-space
    - Image contrast

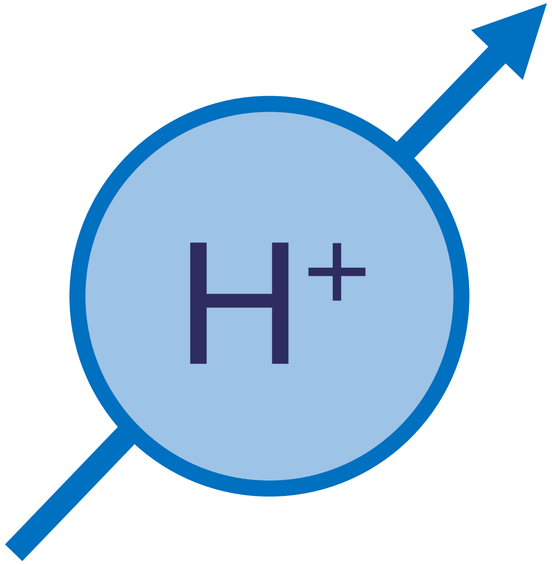
Part I:
Nuclear Magnetic Resonance
(NMR)

MR images: What do we see ?



- MRI images are usually based on the signal from protons
- A proton is the nucleus of the hydrogen atom
- Hydrogen is the most common element in tissue
- The signal from protons is due to their *spin*

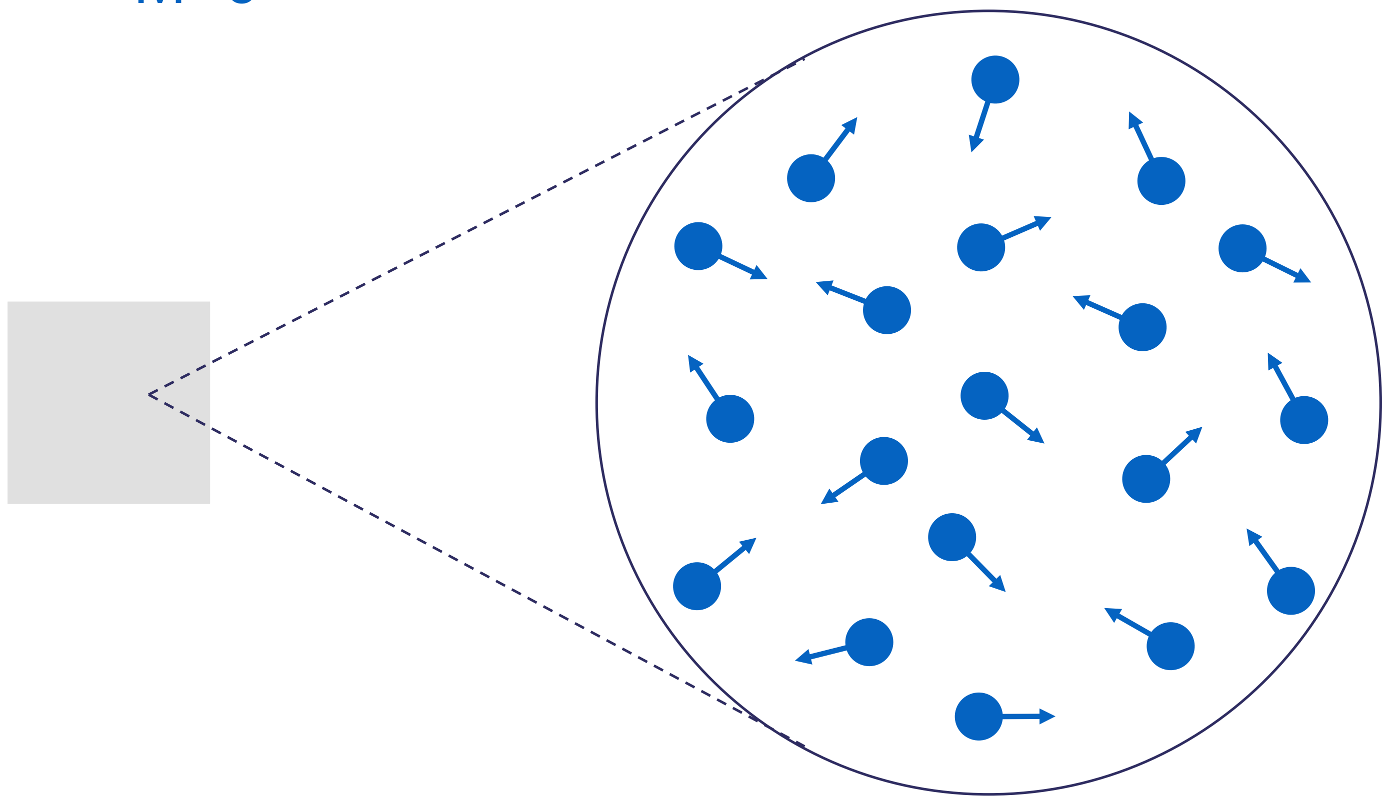
The Nuclear spin



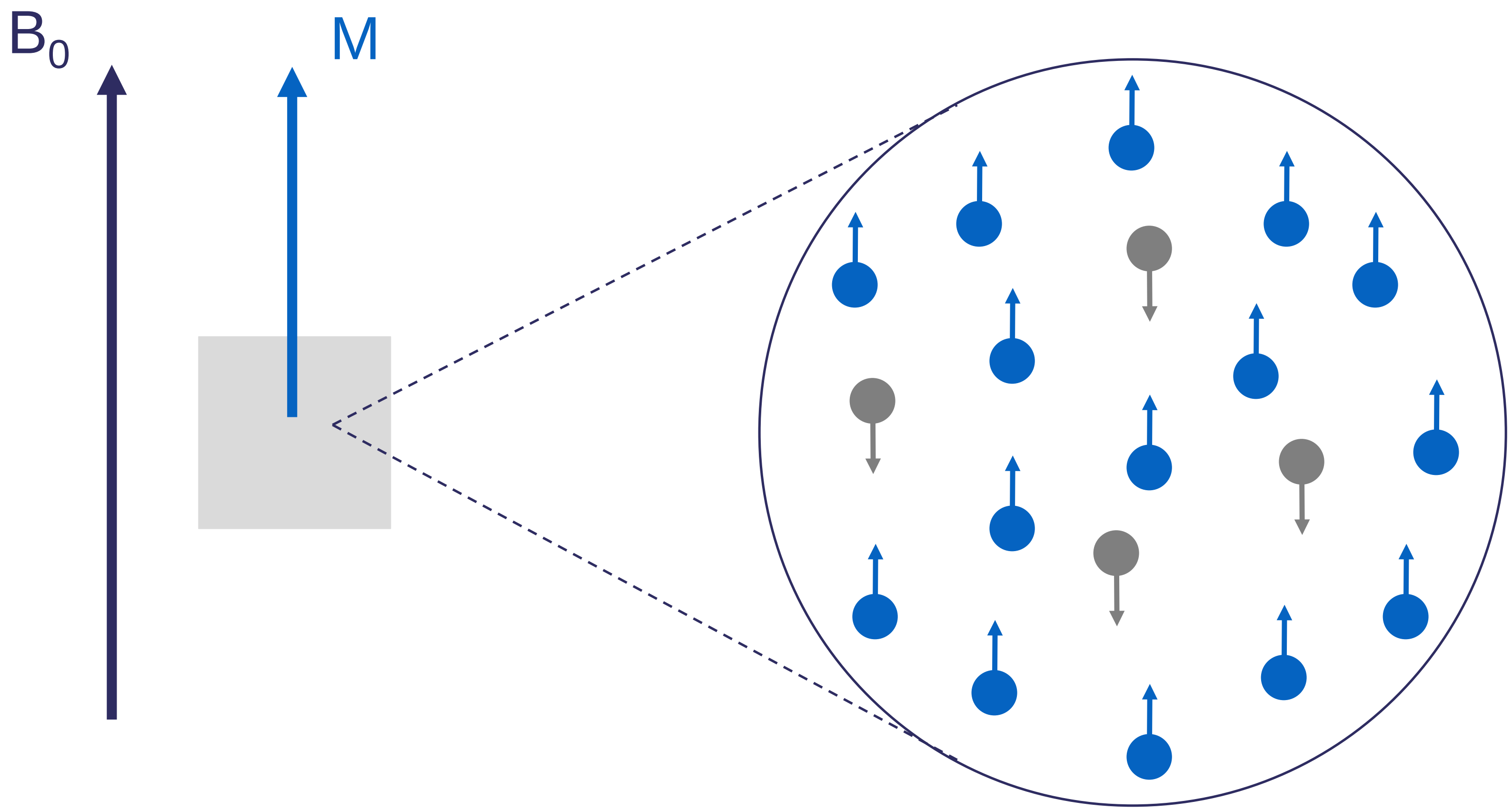
- Elementary property of an atomic nucleus
- Each spin carries an elementary magnetization
- Spins align in an external magnetic field (like a compass needle)

Macroscopic sample

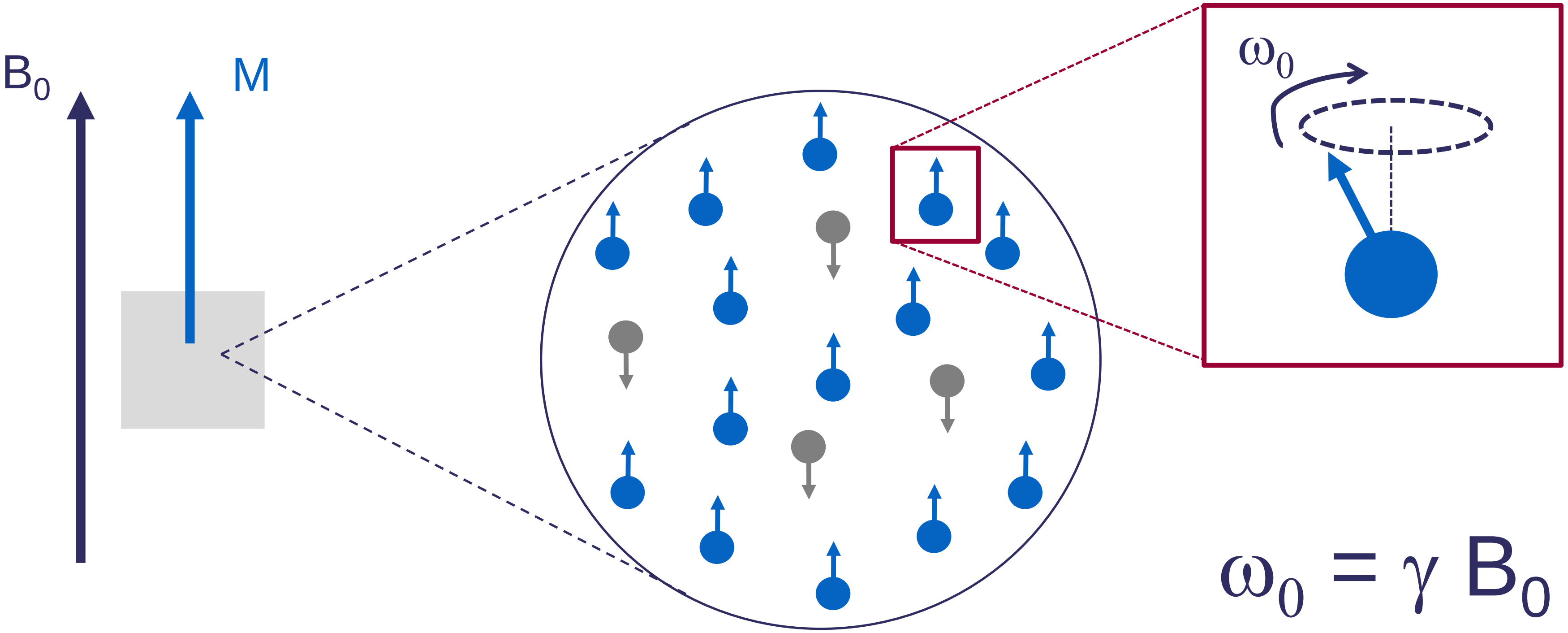
M=0



Macroscopic sample

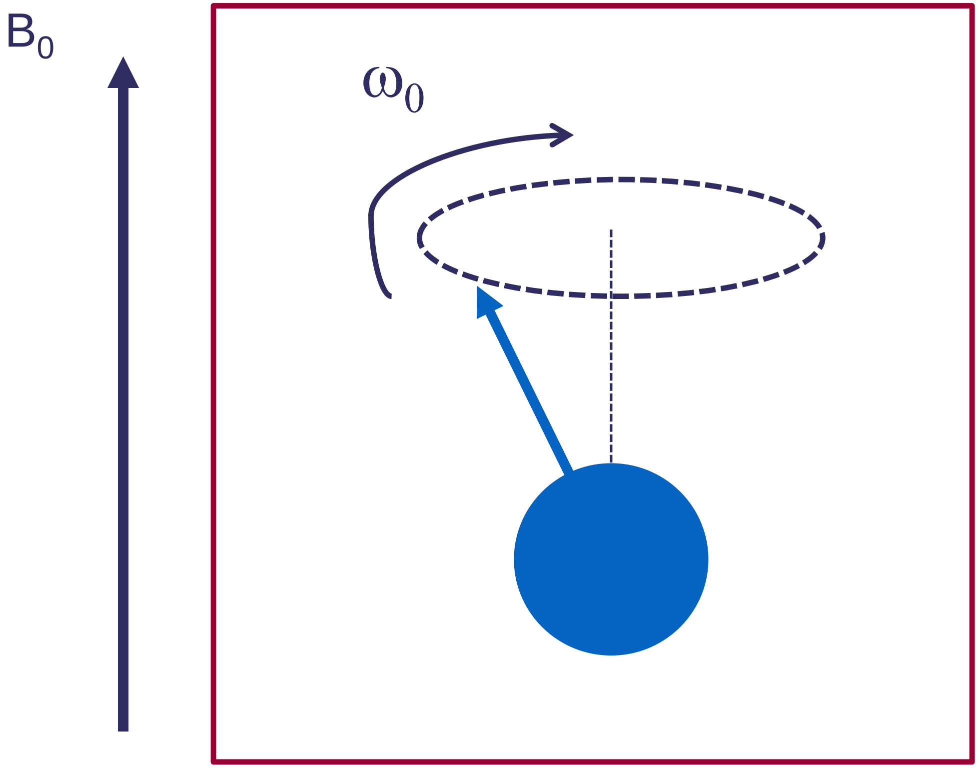


Precession and Larmor Frequency



$$\omega_0 = \gamma B_0$$

Precession and Larmor Frequency



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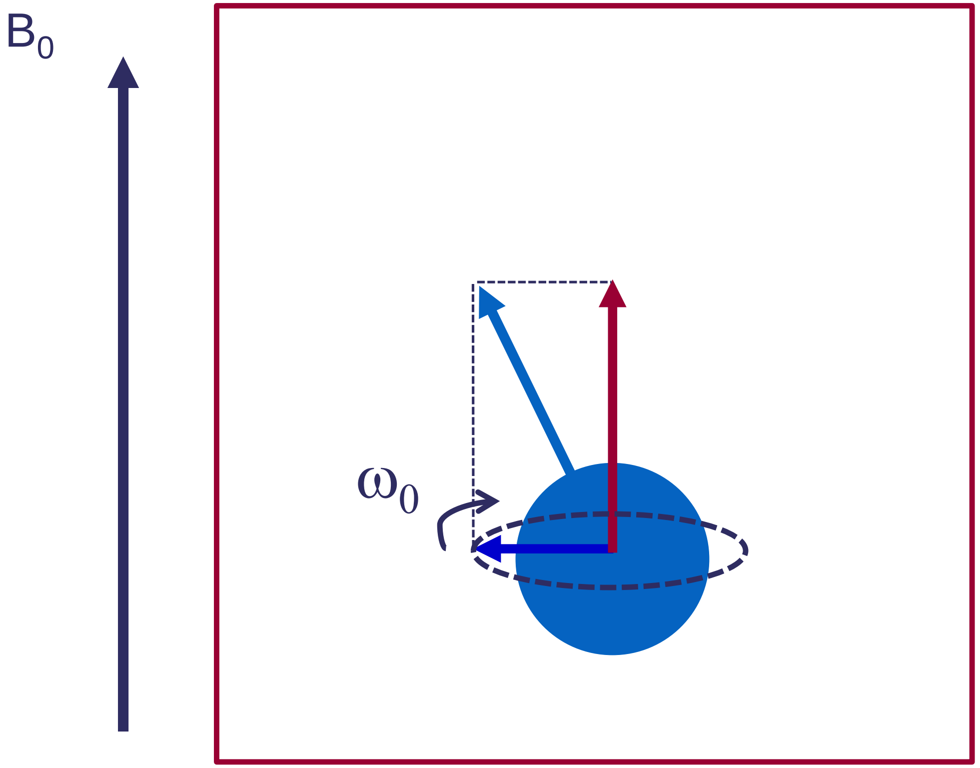
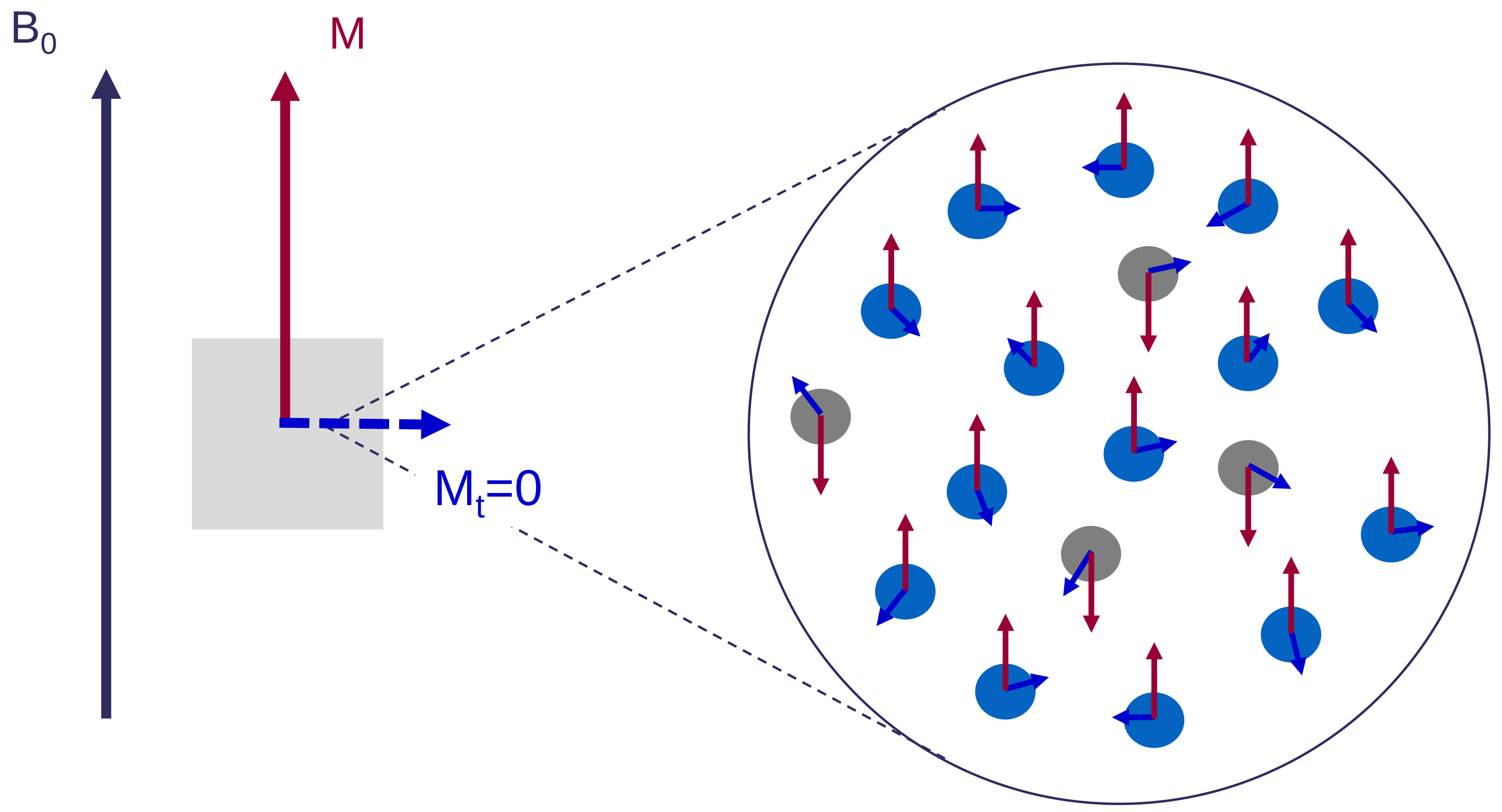
Precession and Larmor Frequency

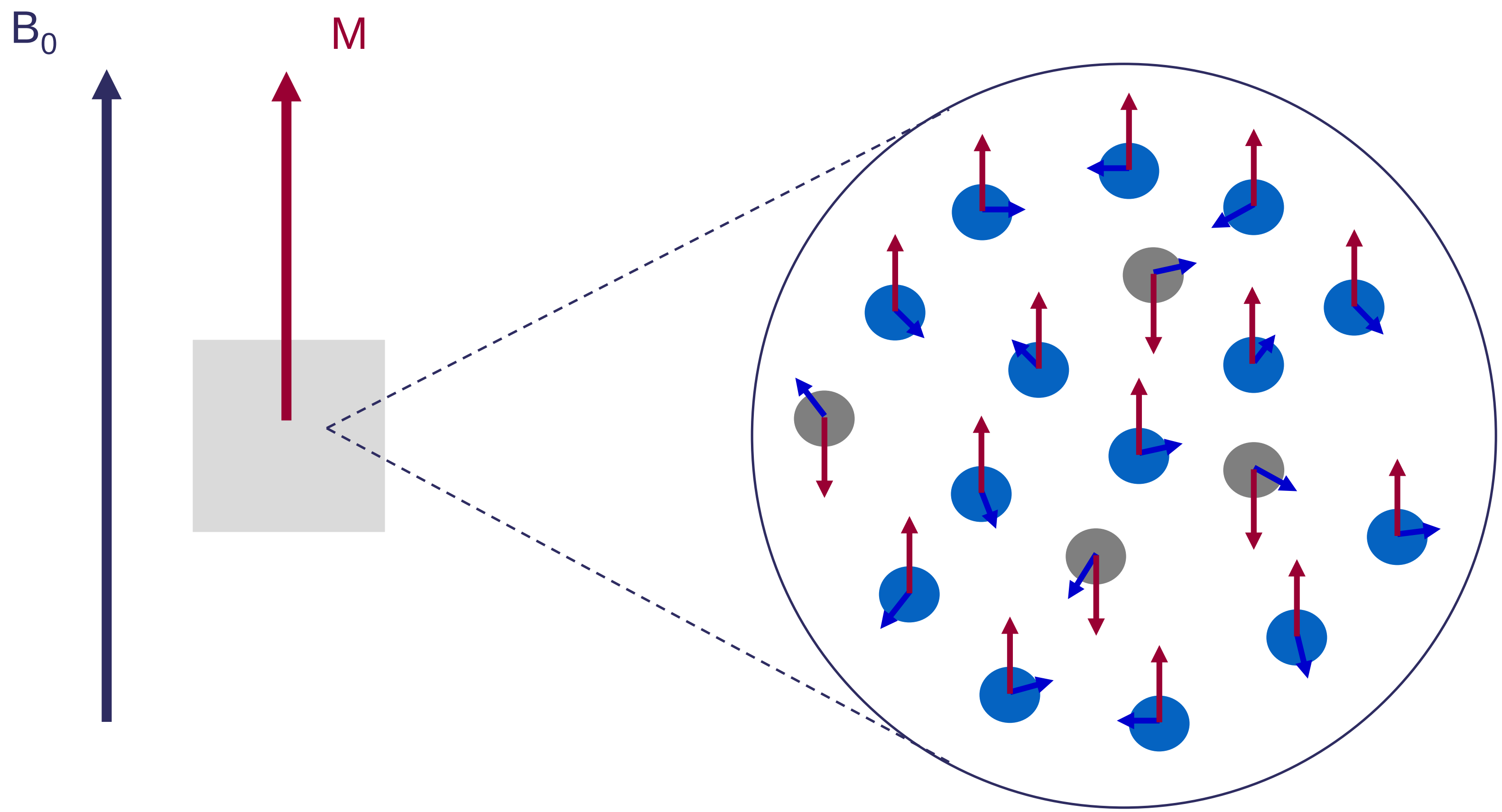


$$\omega_0 = \gamma B_0$$

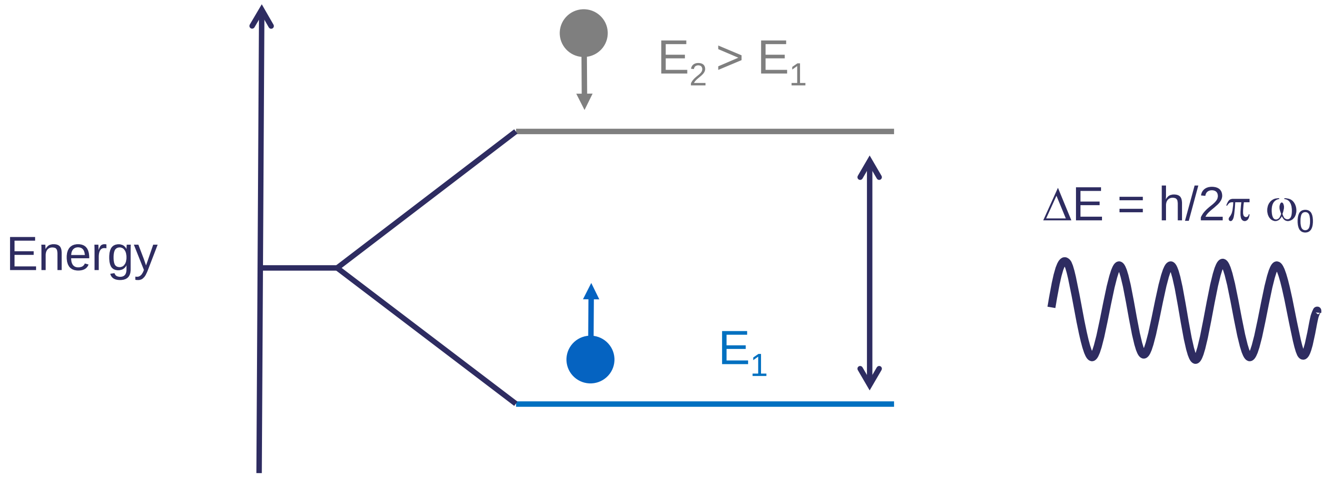
Macroscopic sample

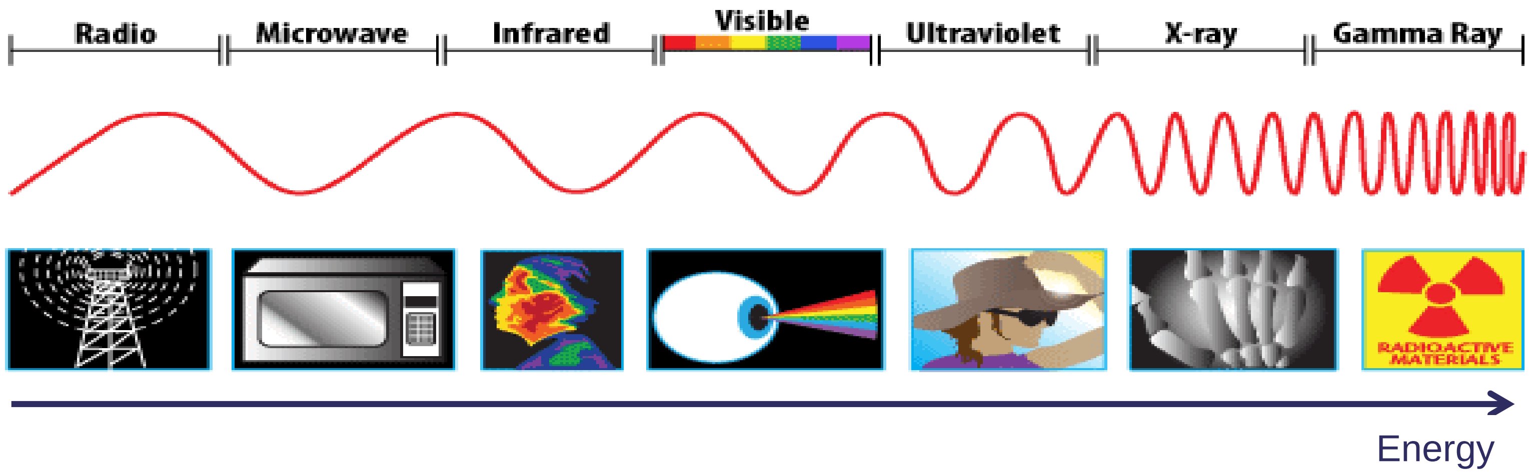


Macroscopic sample

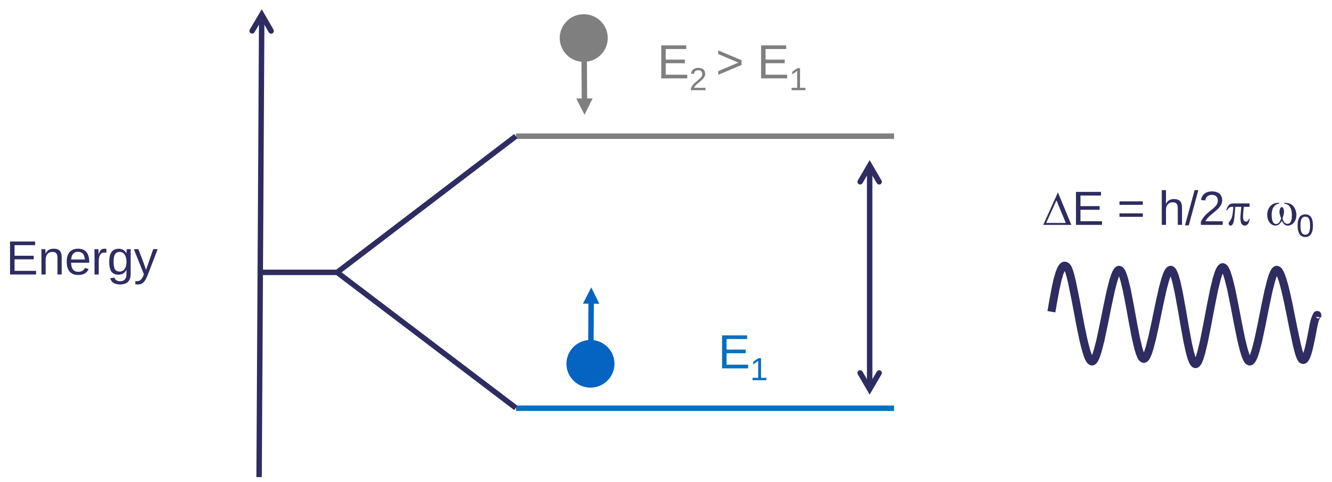


Magnetic Resonance



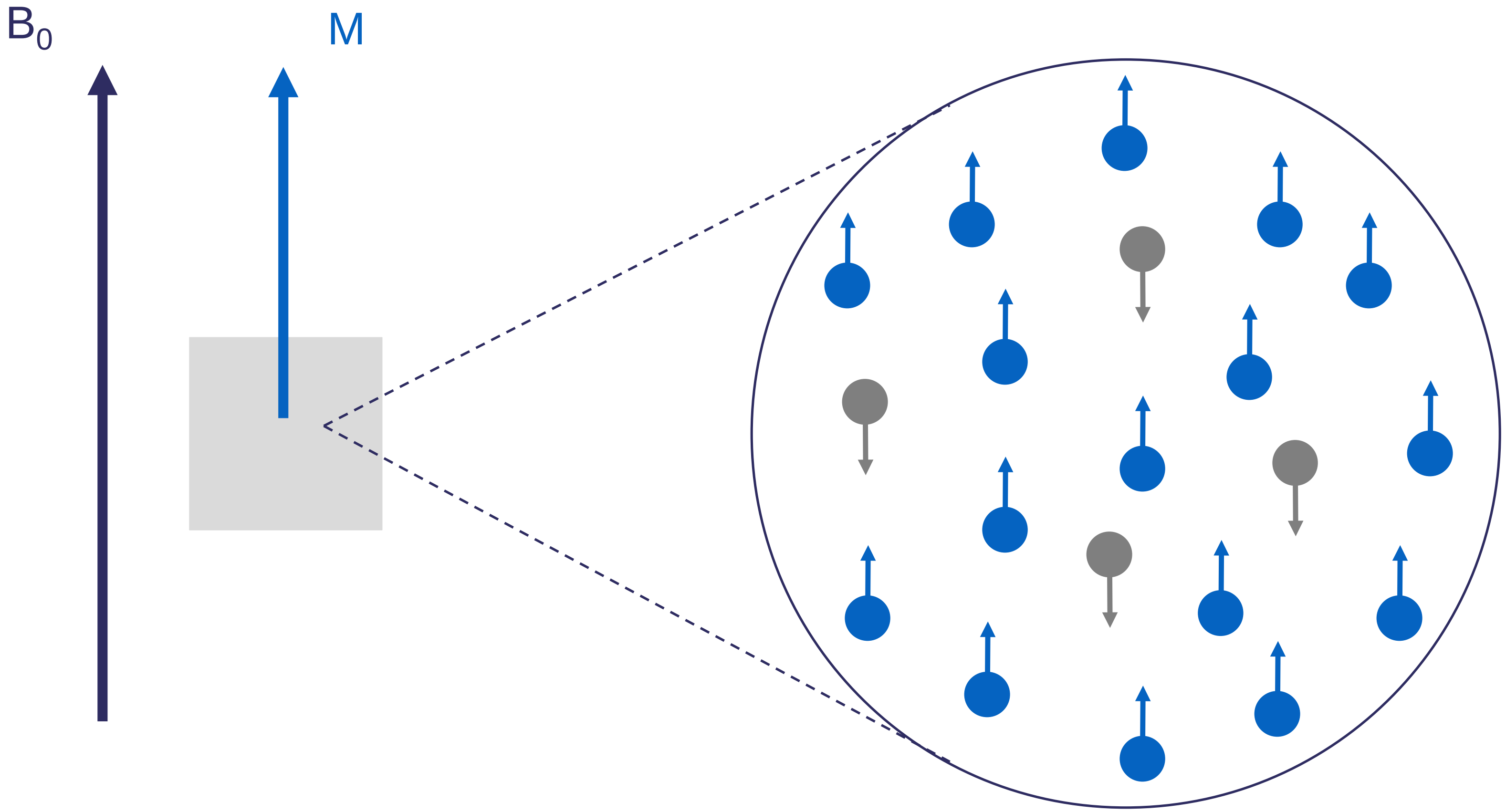


Magnetic Resonance

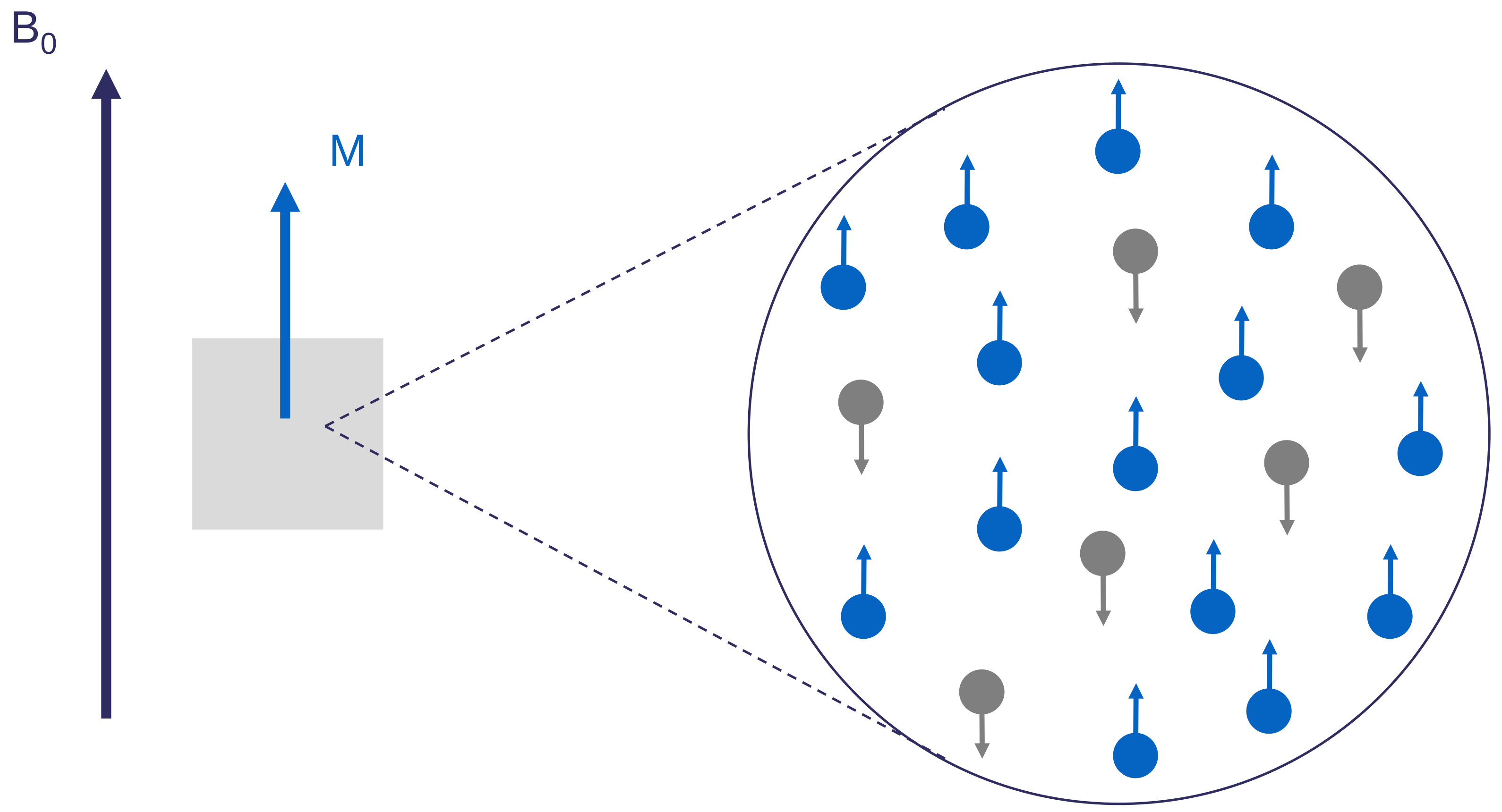


- Exchange of energy between two systems at a specific energy is called **resonance**.
- **Magnetic resonance** corresponds to the energetic interaction between **spins** and **electromagnetic radiofrequency** (RF).
- Only protons that spin with the **same frequency** as the electromagnetic **RF pulse** will respond to that RF pulse.

Macroscopic sample + RF pulse (Energy)



Macroscopic sample + RF pulse (Energy)



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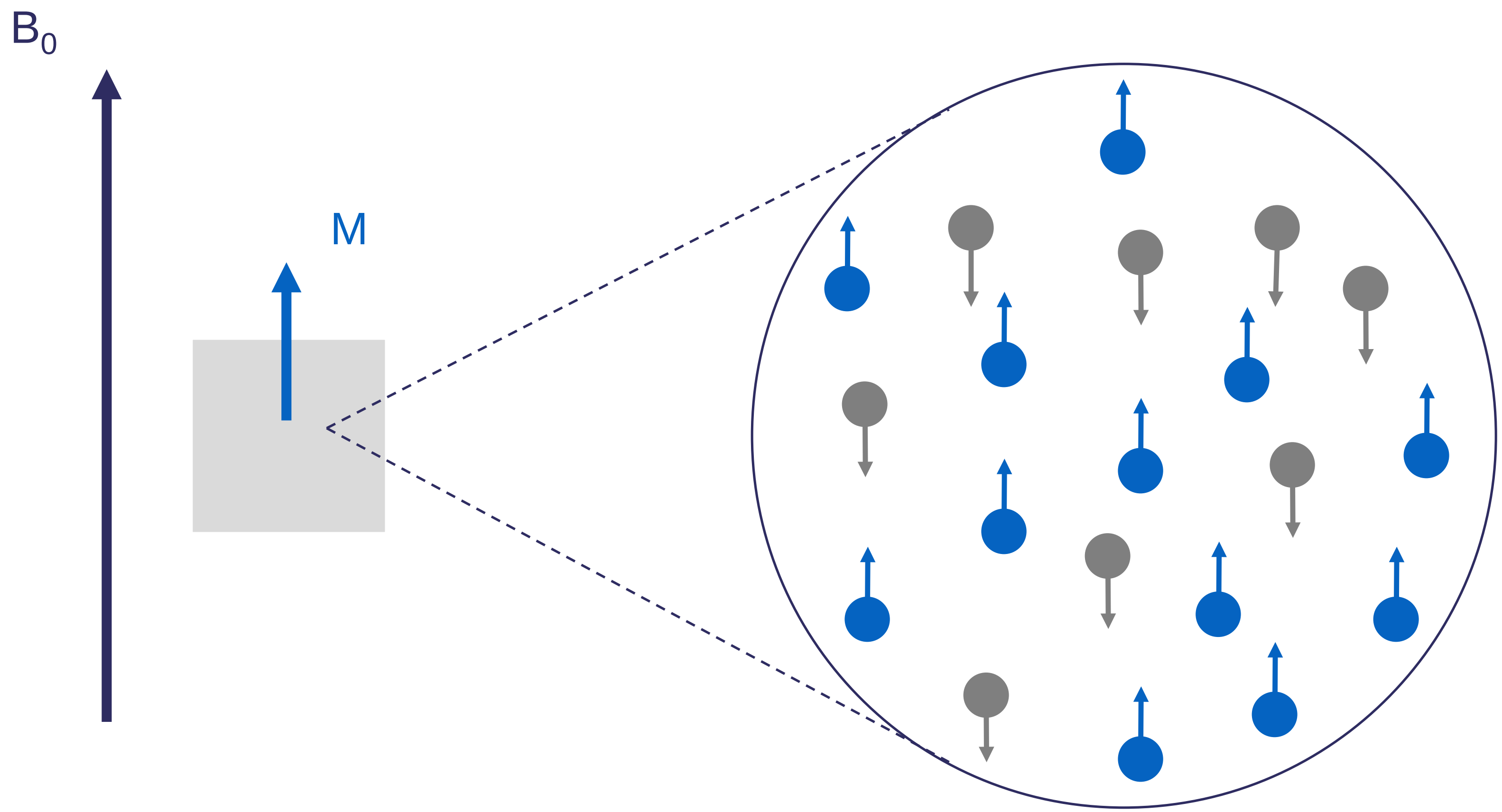
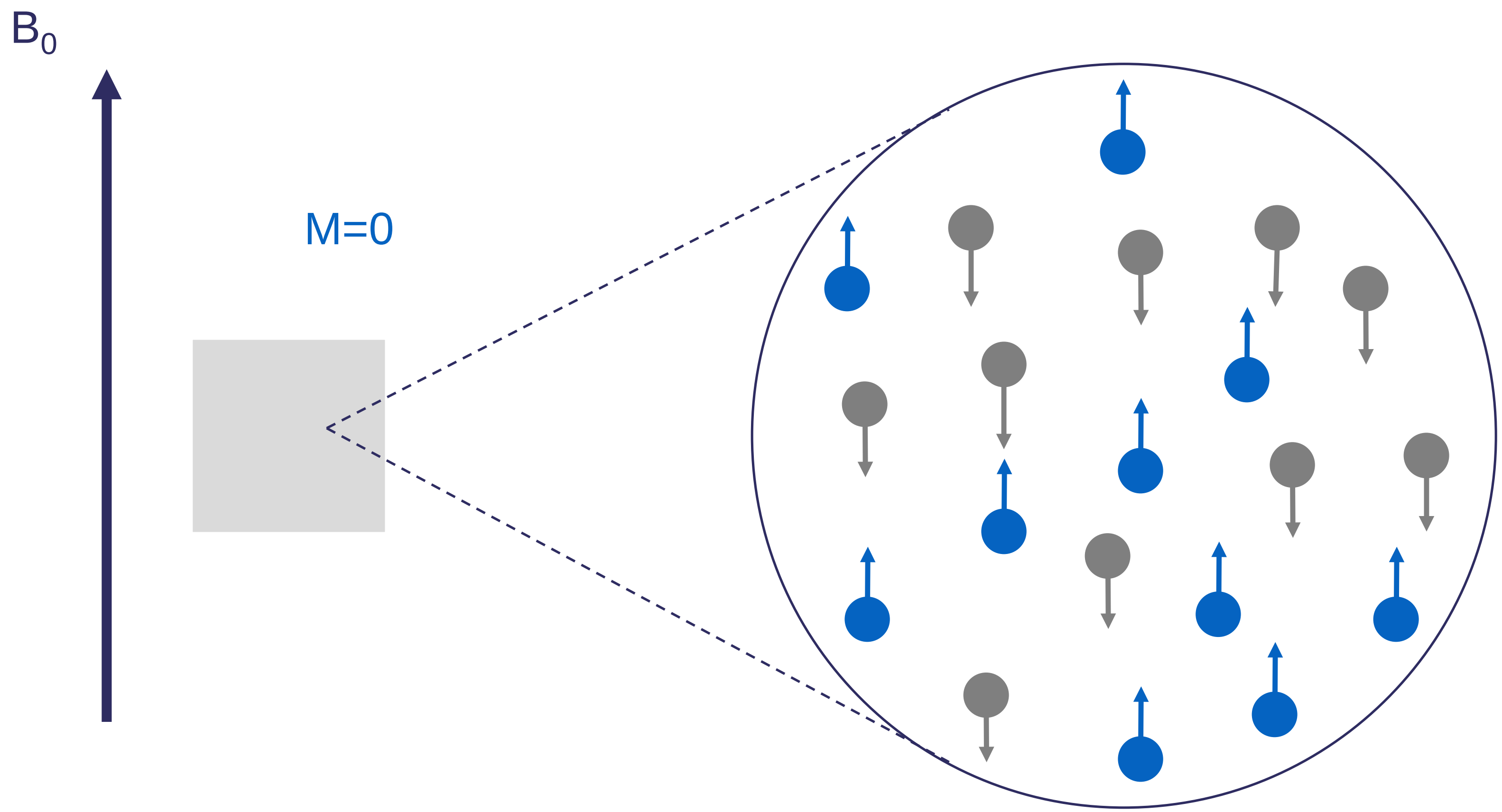
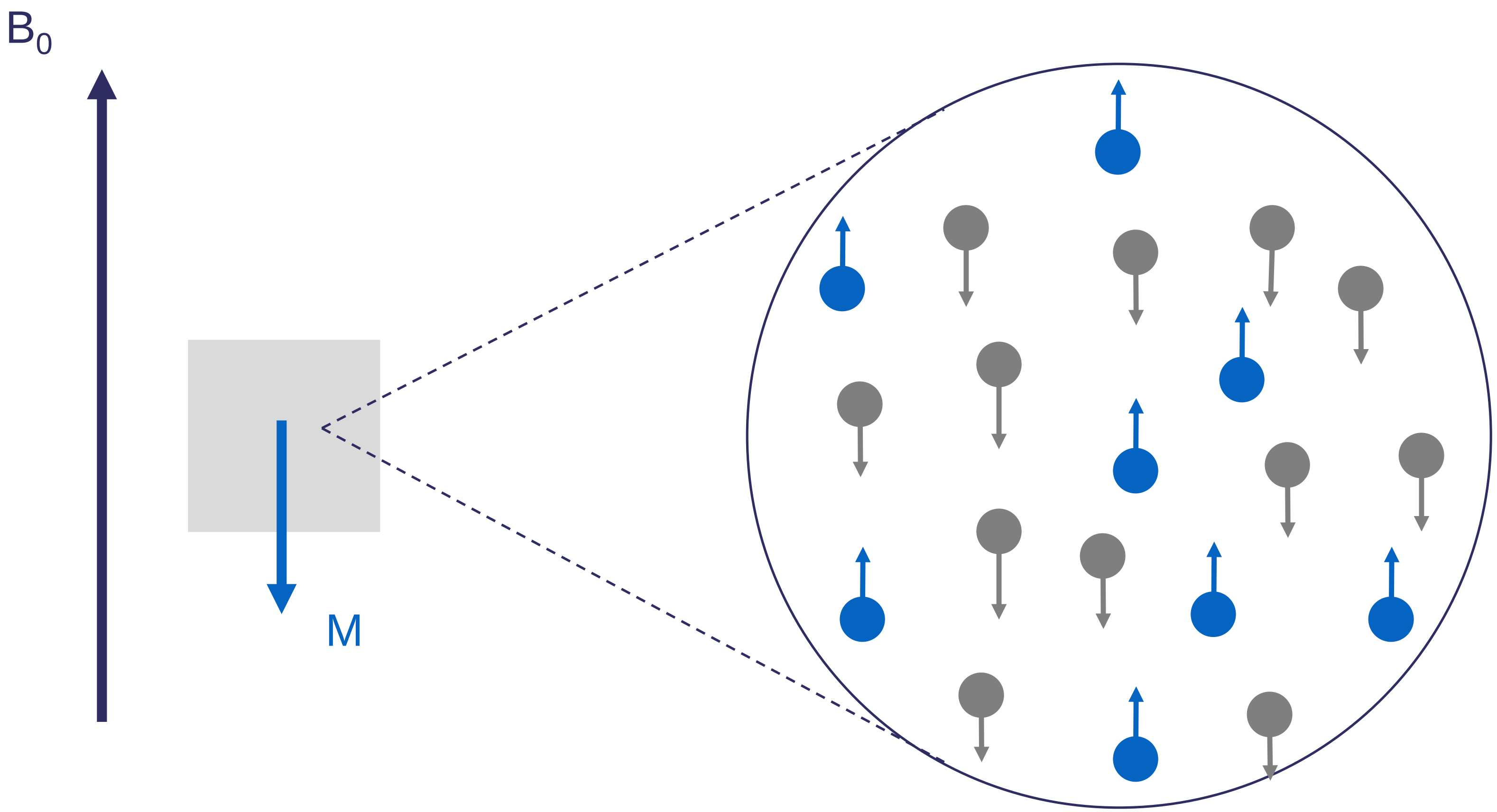


Macroscopic sample + RF pulse (Energy)

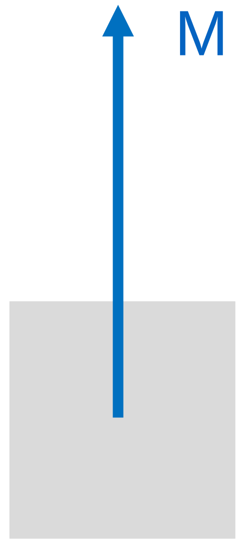


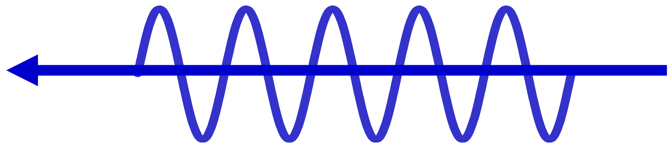
Macroscopic sample + RF pulse (Energy)



Excitation, Relaxation and Signal Formation

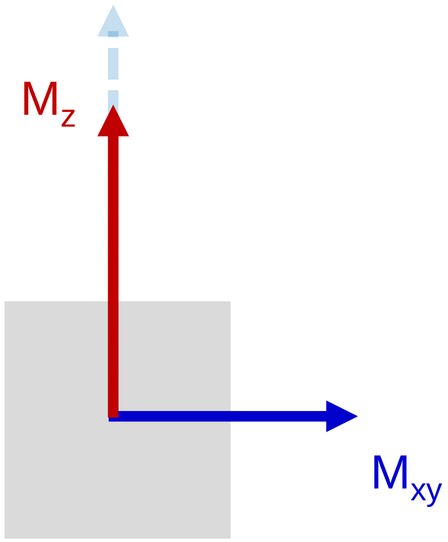
Excitation



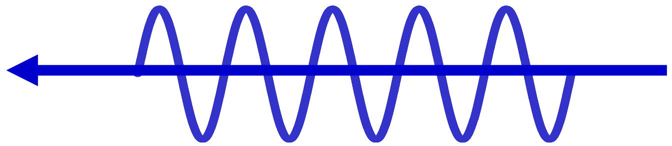


$$\omega_0 = \gamma B_0$$

Excitation



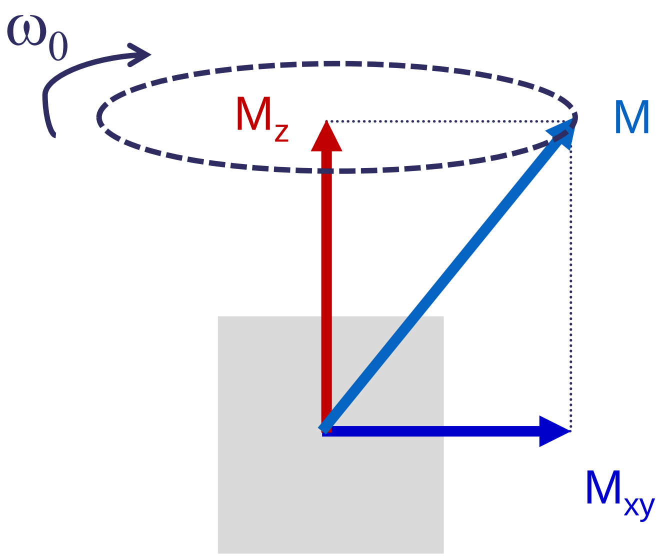
- During excitation, longitudinal magnetization decreases and a transverse magnetization appears.



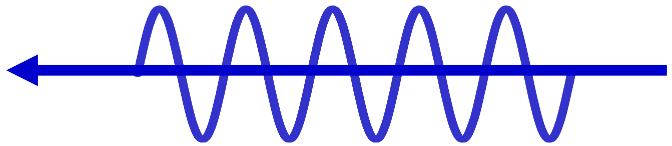
$$\omega_0 = \gamma B_0$$

- Longitudinal magnetization decrease is due to a difference in the number of spins in parallel and anti-parallel state.
- Transverse magnetization is due to spins getting into phase coherence.

Excitation



- During excitation, longitudinal magnetization decreases and a transverse magnetization appears.



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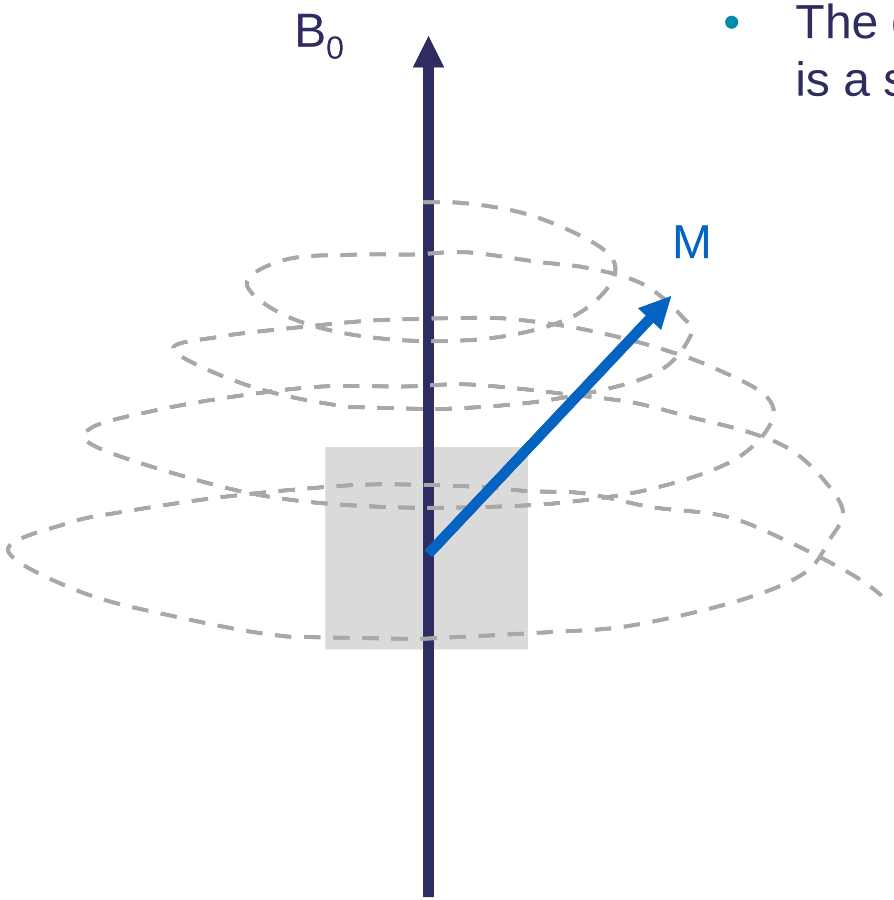
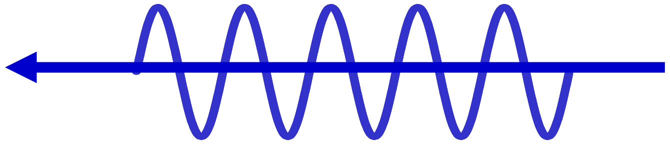
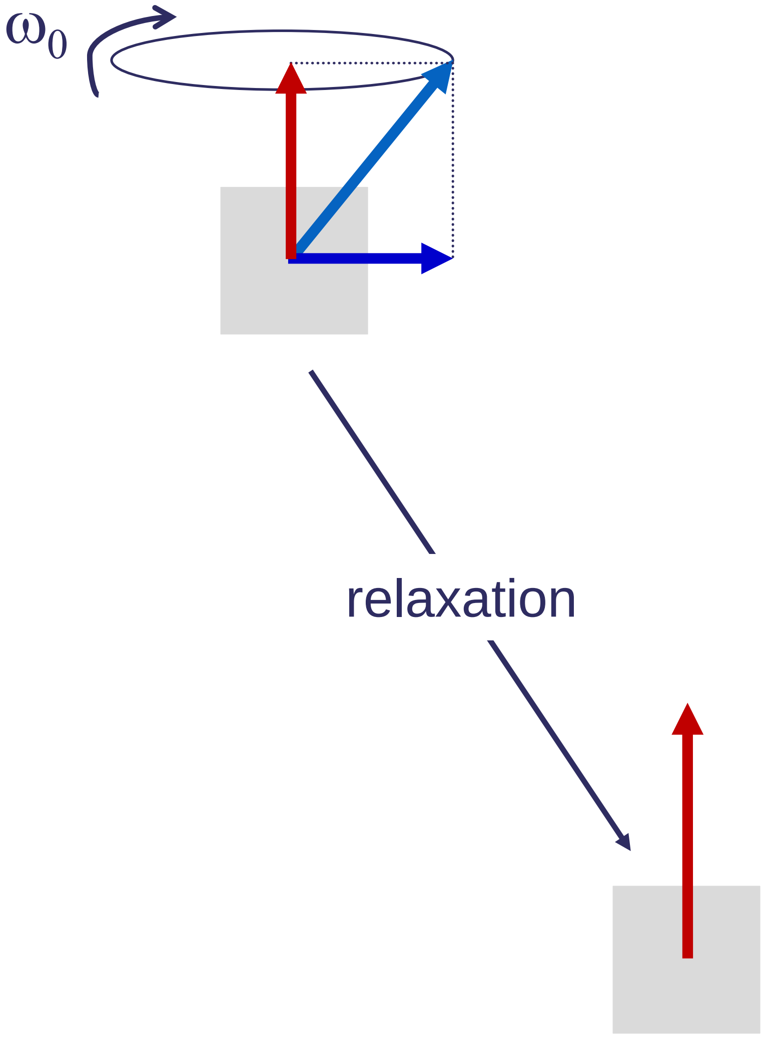


- The consequence on the macroscopic net magnetization is a spiral movement down to the XY plane.



$\omega_0 = \gamma B_0$

Relaxation



Two independent relaxation processes:

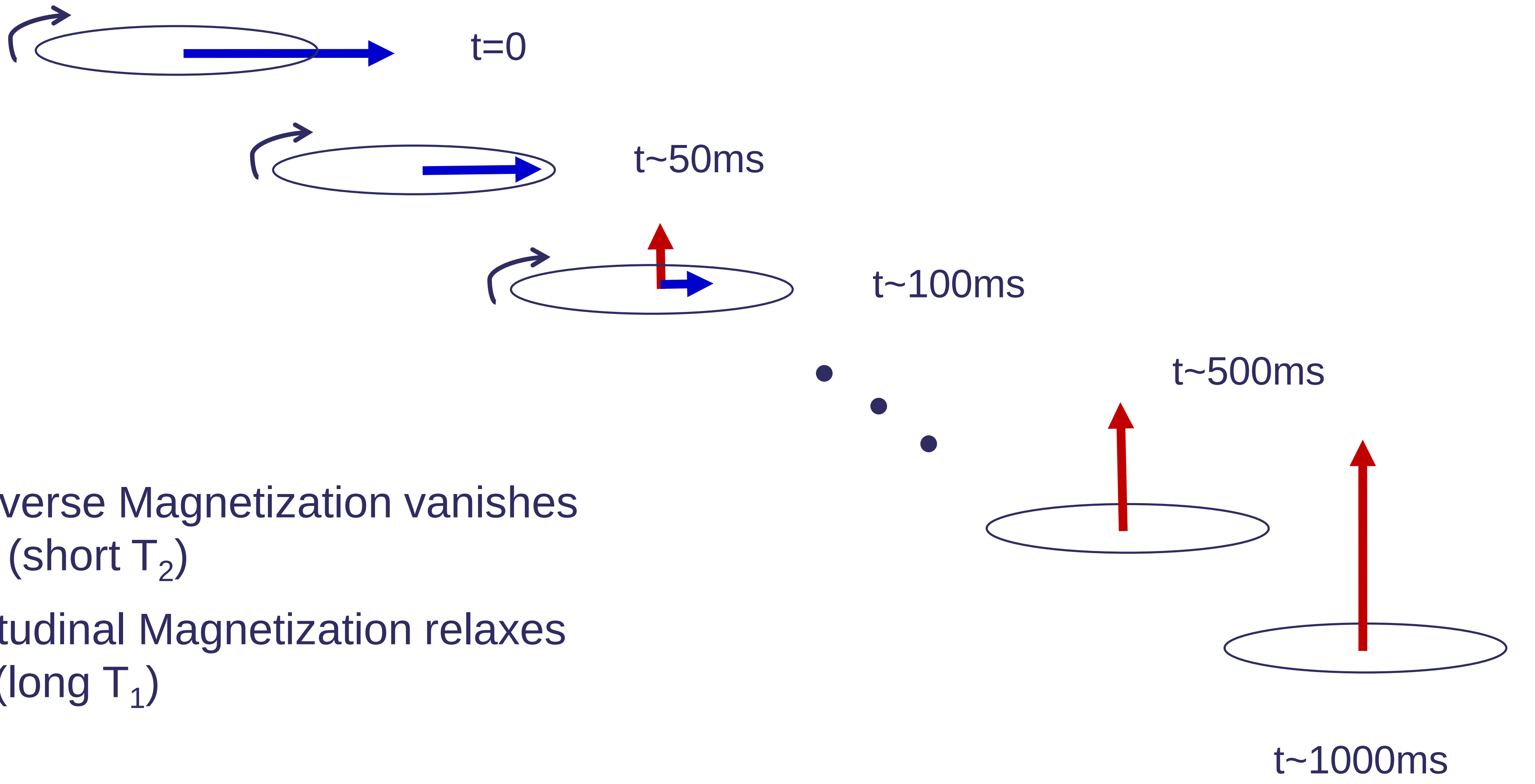
① $M_l \xrightarrow{T_1} M_0$

② $M_{xy} \xrightarrow{T_2} 0$

T_1: "*longitudinal relaxation time*"
(≈ 1 s) - energy exchange between spins and their surroundings

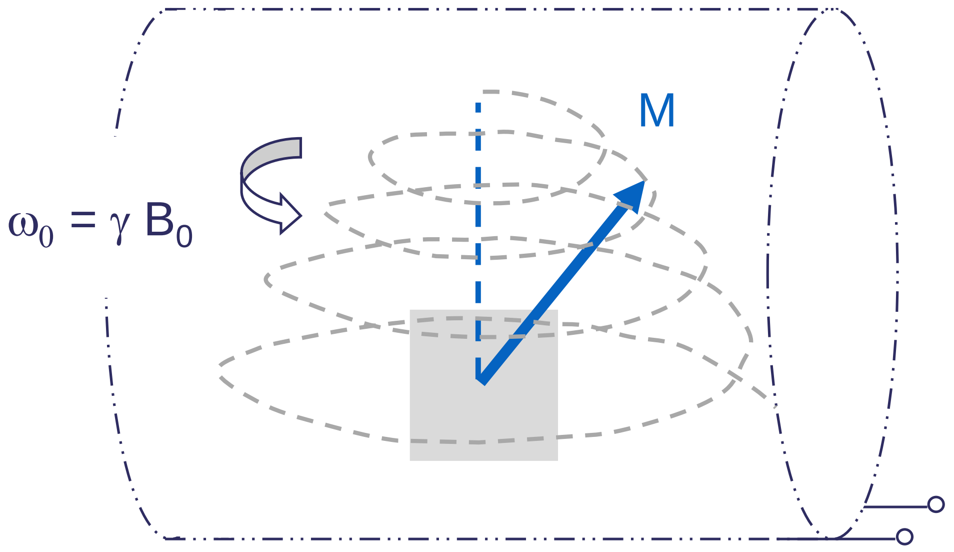
T_2: "*transverse relaxation time*"
(≈ 100 ms) – dephasing due to spin/spin interactions

Relaxation



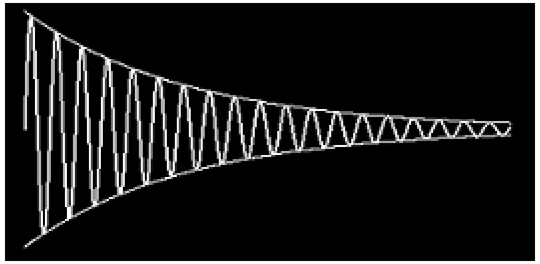
- Transverse Magnetization vanishes quickly (short T_2)
- Longitudinal Magnetization relaxes slowly (long T_1)

Precession and signal induction



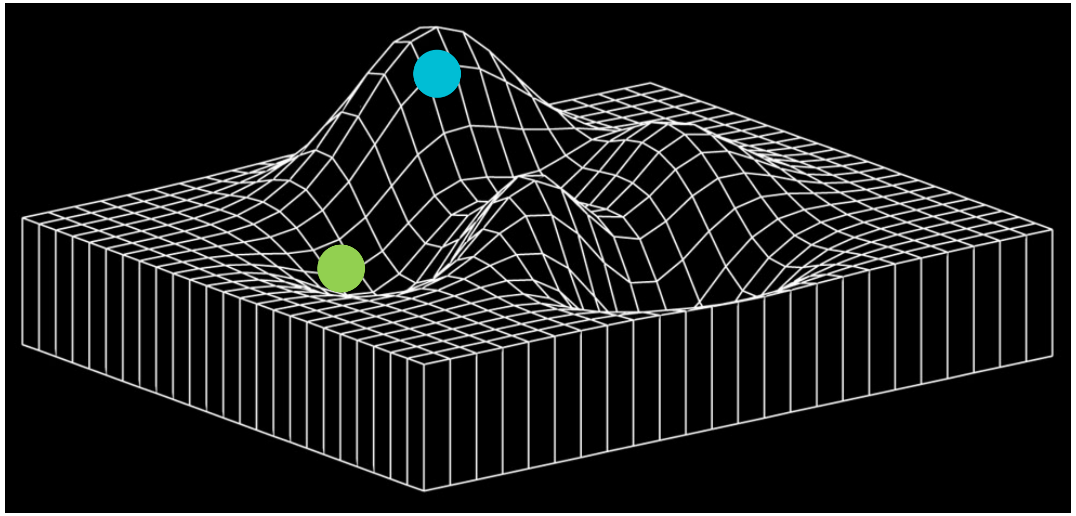
receiver coil

123 MHz @ 3T



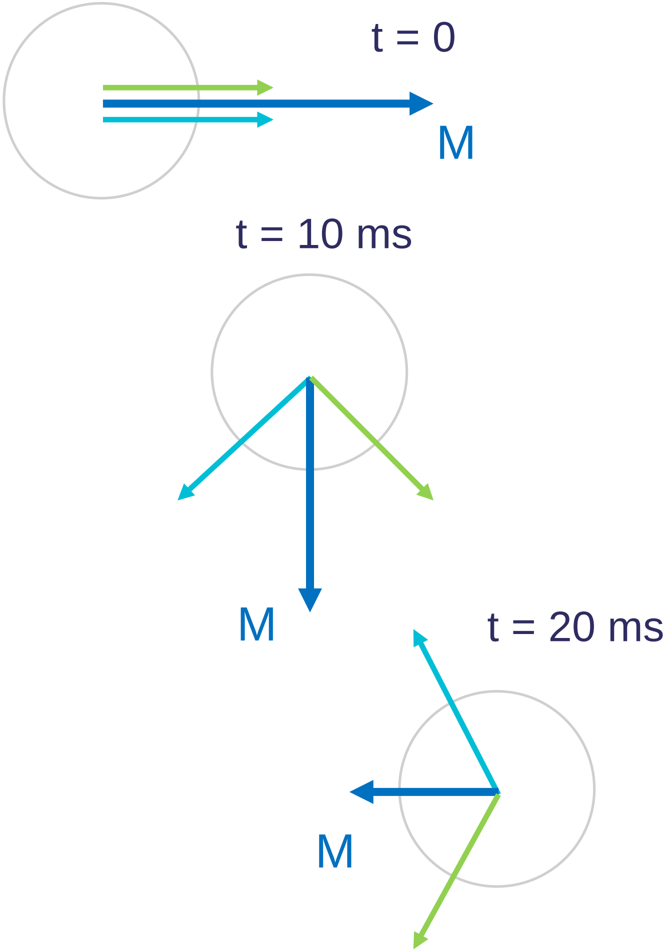
NMR signal

Signal loss due to B_0 inhomogeneity

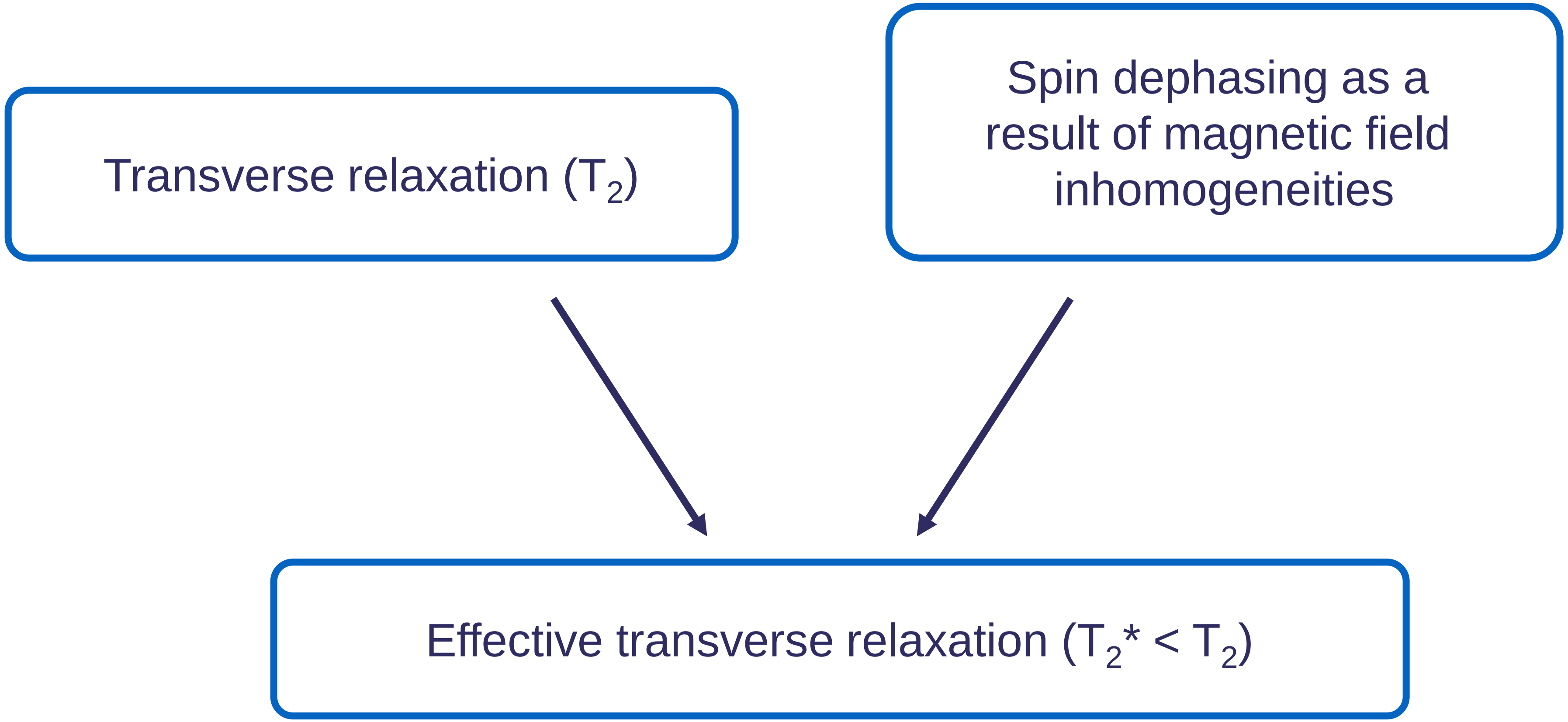


$$\omega_0 = \gamma B_0$$

● has higher frequency than ●



Effective transverse relaxation (T_2^*)

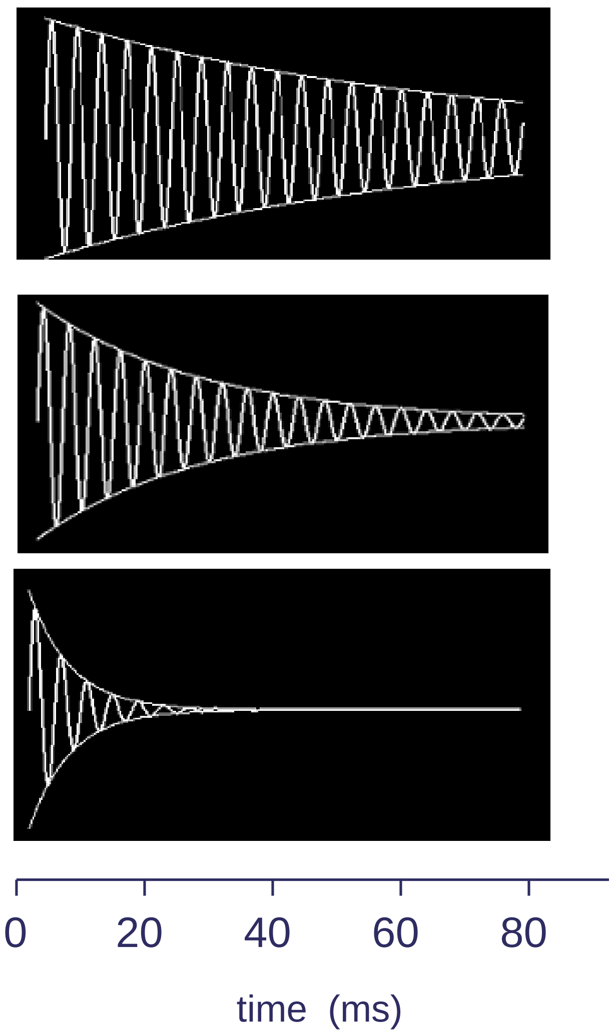


Effective transverse relaxation (T_2*)

No inhomogeneities
(T_2*= T_2 = 100 ms)

Moderate inhomogeneities
(T_2* = 40 ms)

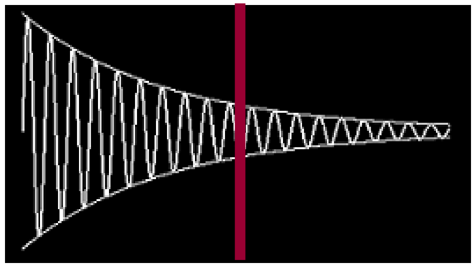
Strong inhomogeneities
(T_2* = 10 ms)



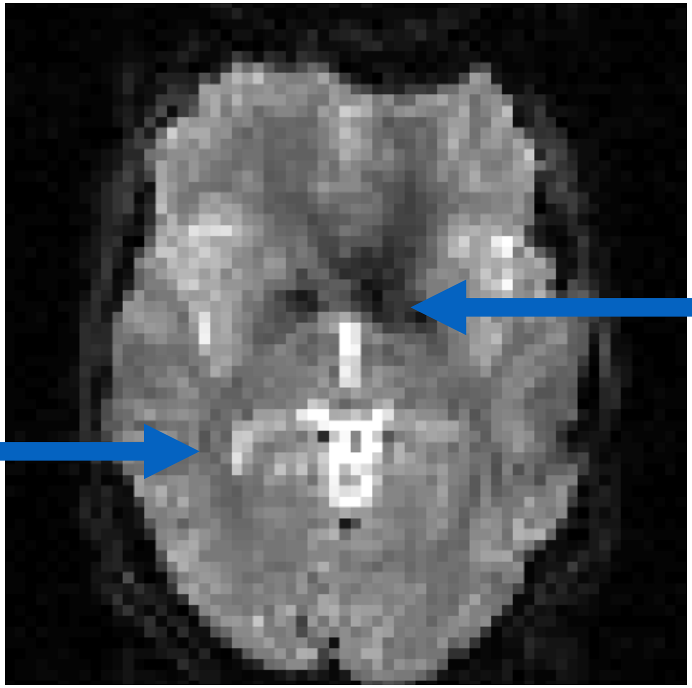
T_2^* related signal dropouts

T_2^* reduction due to local field inhomogeneities
$\Rightarrow$ signal dropouts

normal T_2^*
(about 40 ms)

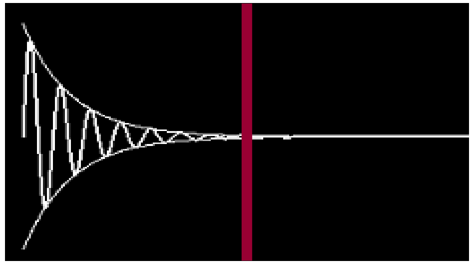


TE



EPI image

reduced T_2^*



TE

Part II:
Magnetic Resonance Imaging
(MRI)

Spatial Encoding in MRI

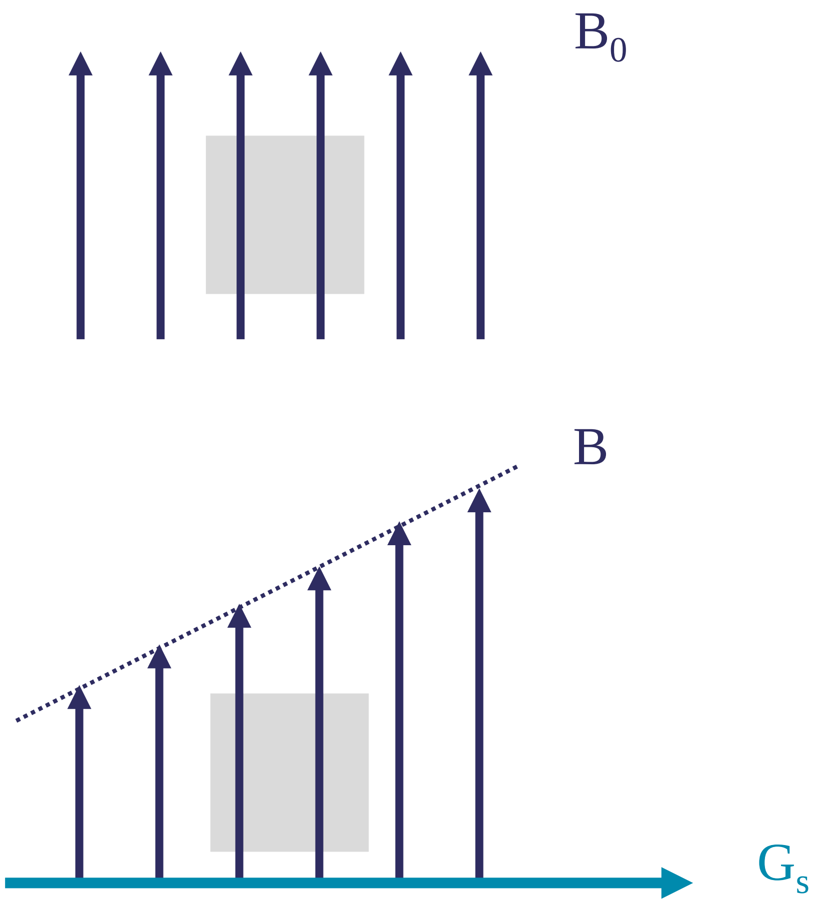
The principles of MRI

Homogeneous magnetic field

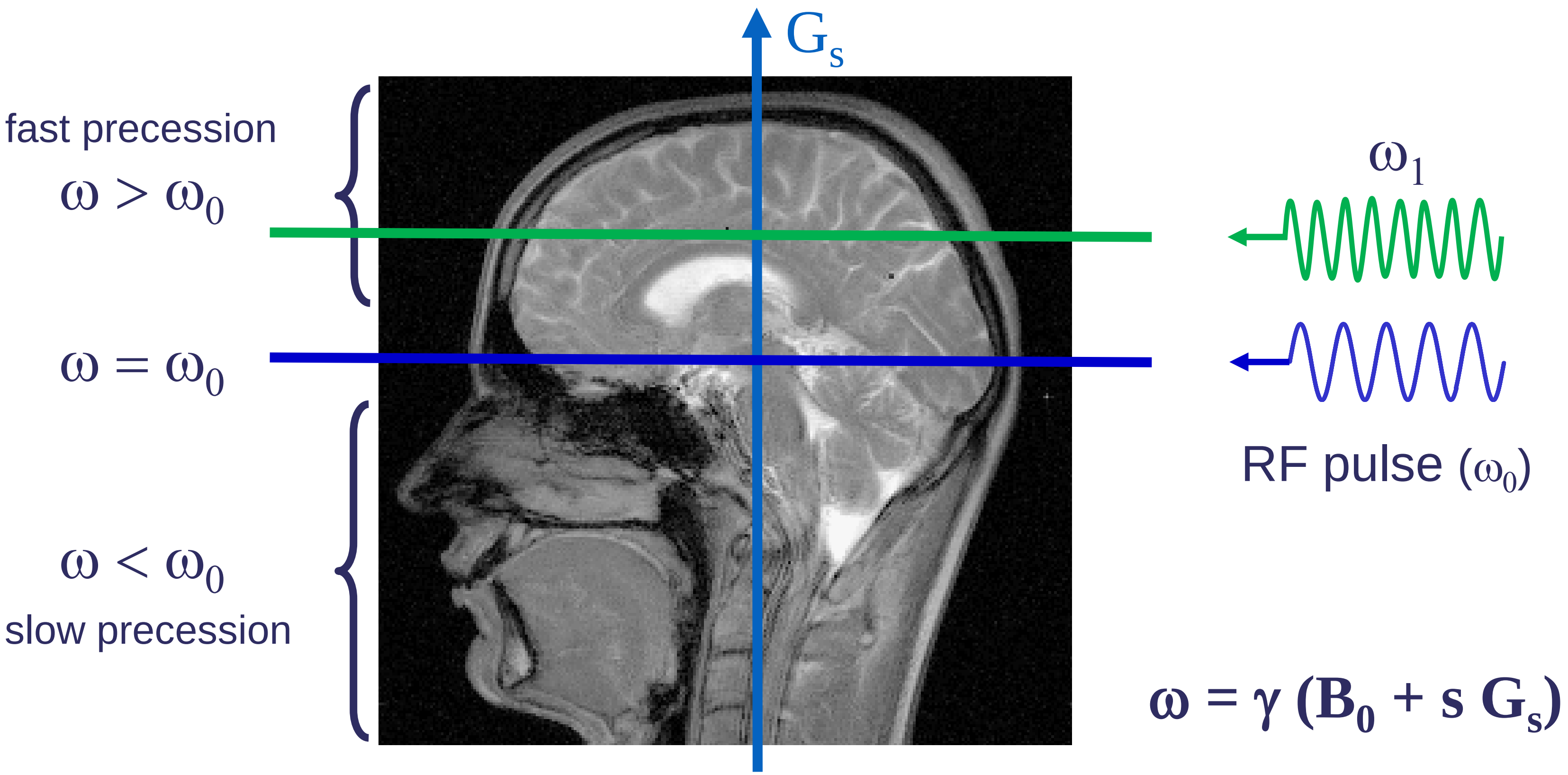
$$\omega_0 = \gamma B_0$$

Add magnetic field gradient

$$\omega = \gamma (B_0 + s\, G_s)$$

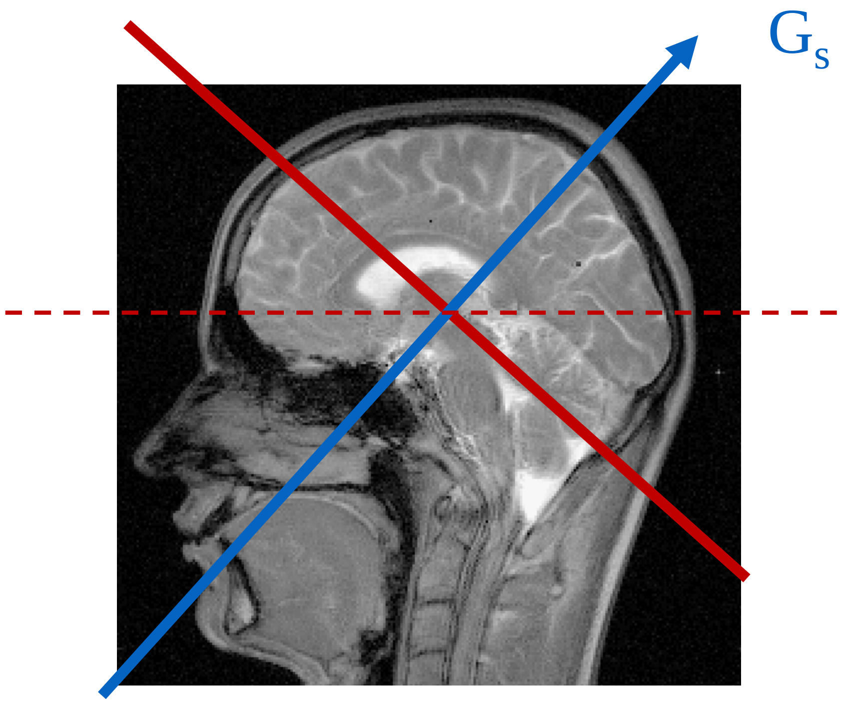


Slice selective excitation



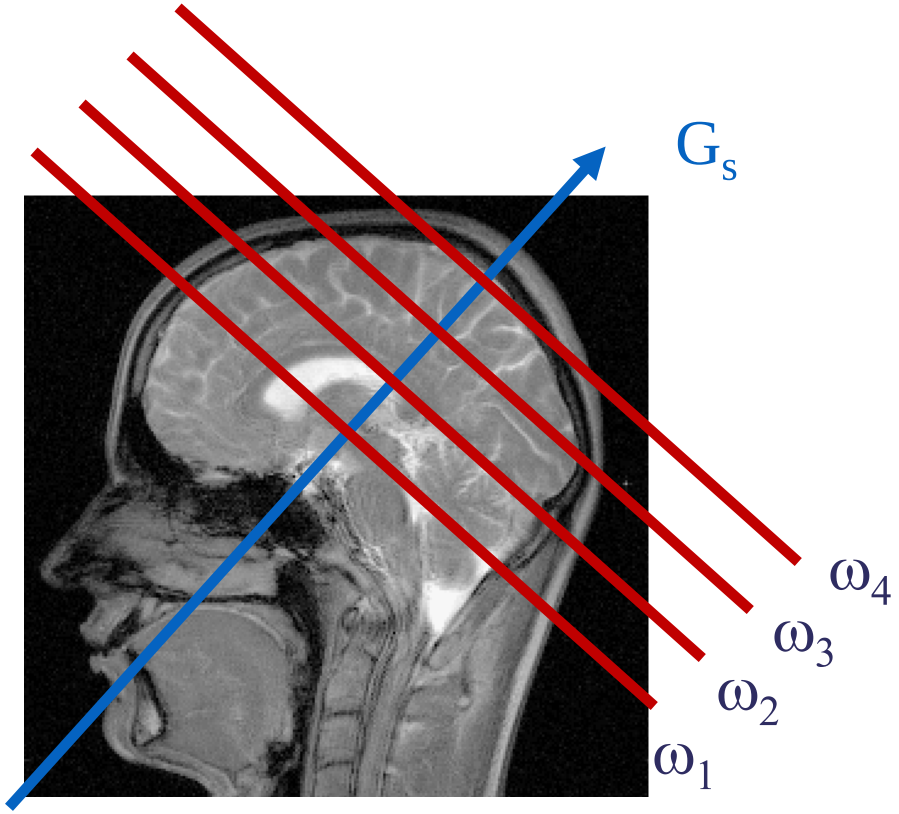
- Only spins in the slice of interest have frequency ω_0
- RF pulse with frequency ω_0 excites only spins in slice of interest

Slice orientation



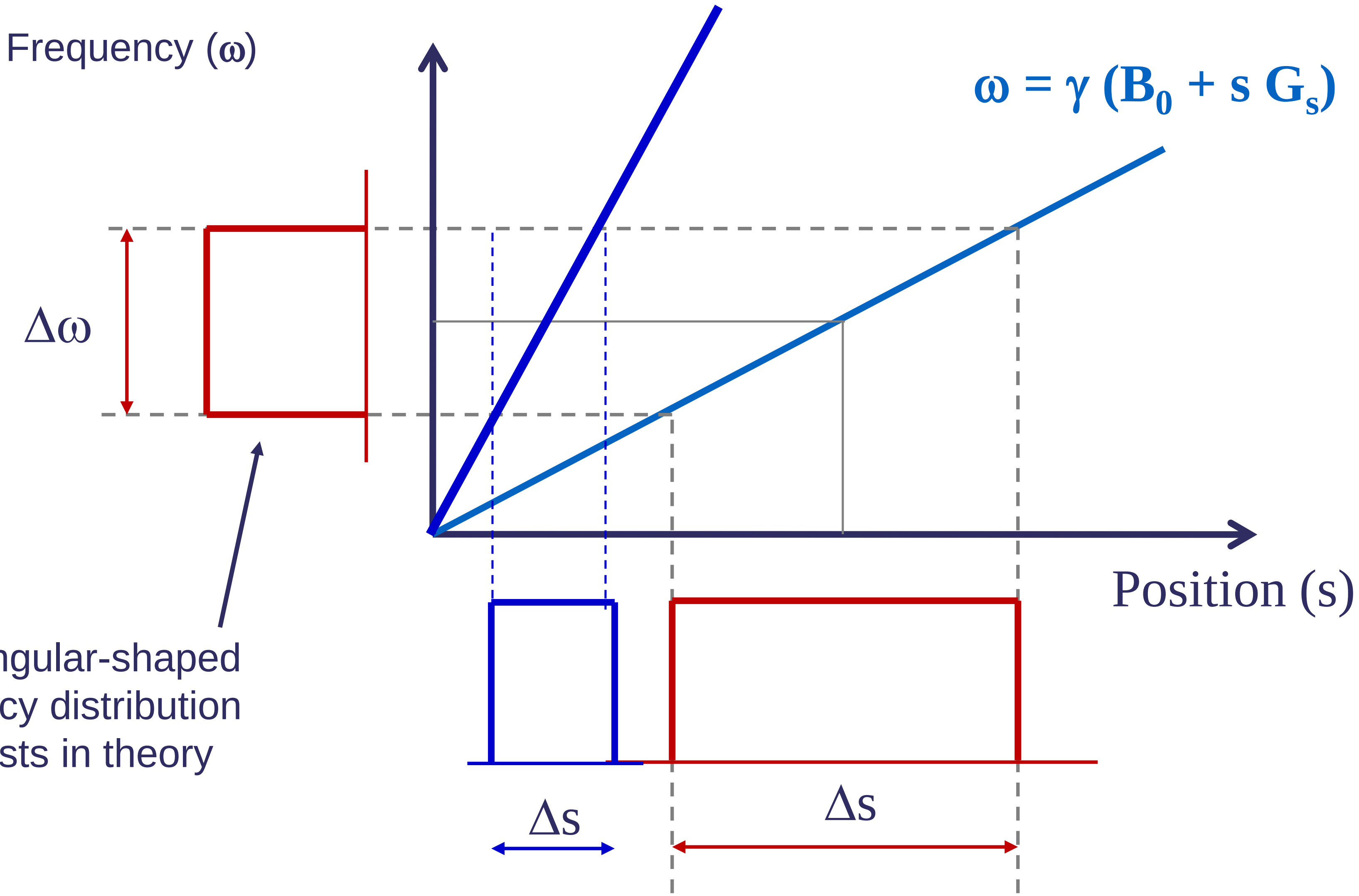
$$\omega = \gamma\ (B_0 + s\ G_s)$$

Multi-slice MRI



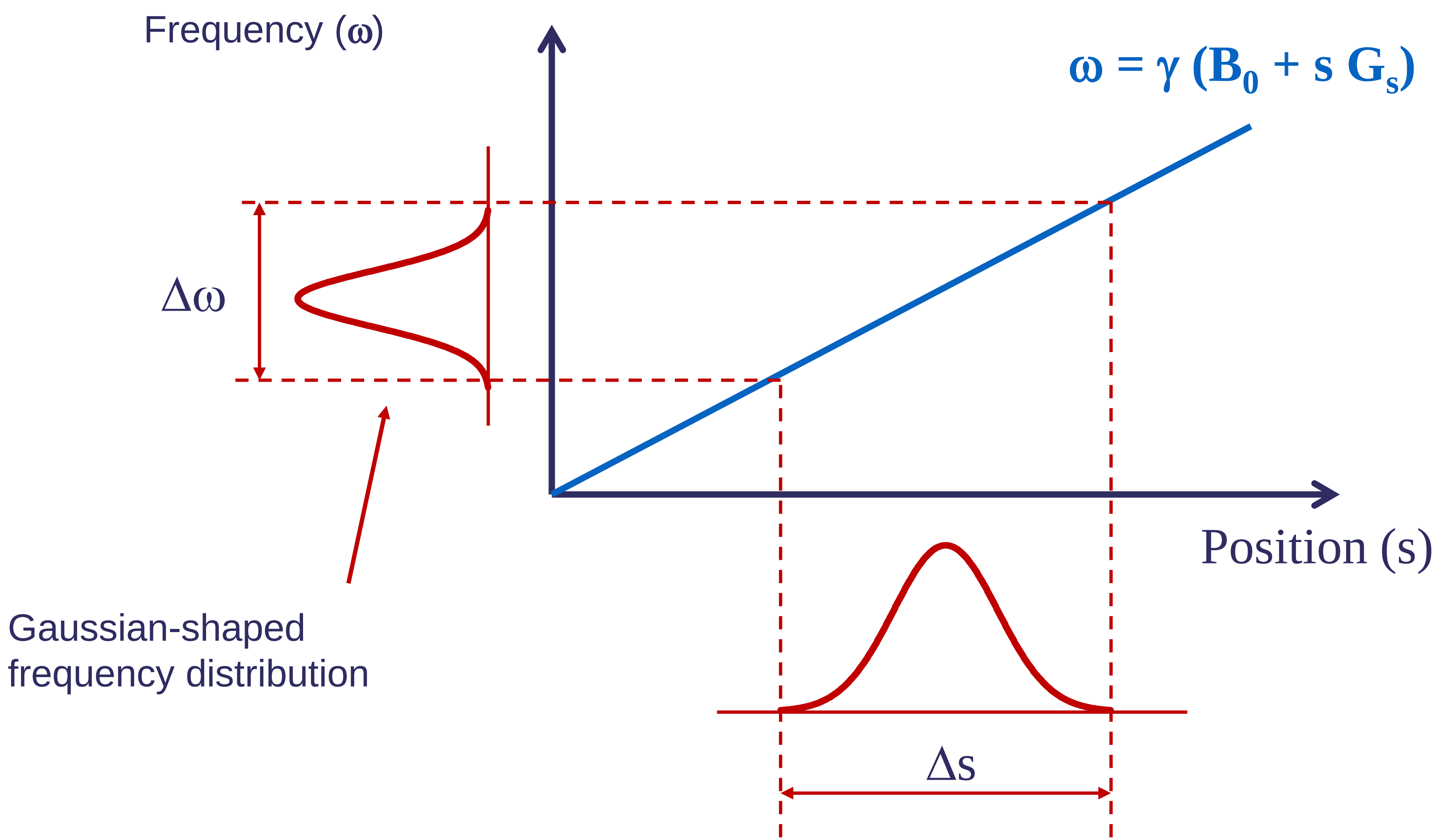
$$\omega = \gamma\,(B_0 + s\,G_s)$$

Slice profile

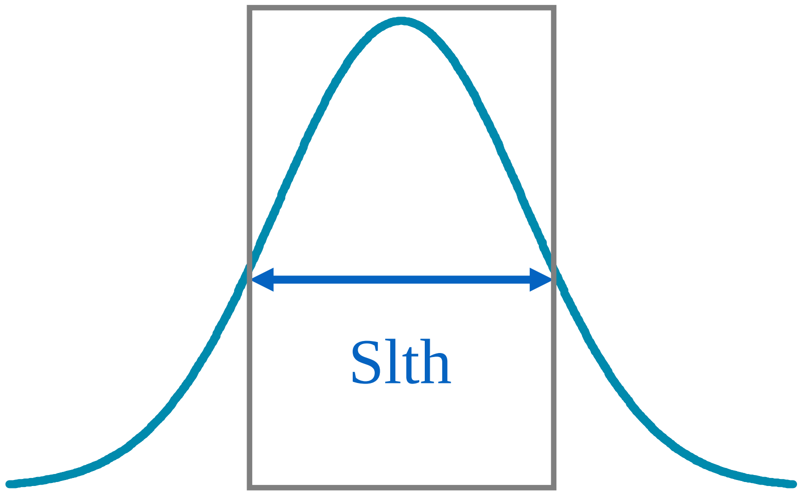


A rectangular-shaped frequency distribution only exists in theory

Slice profile

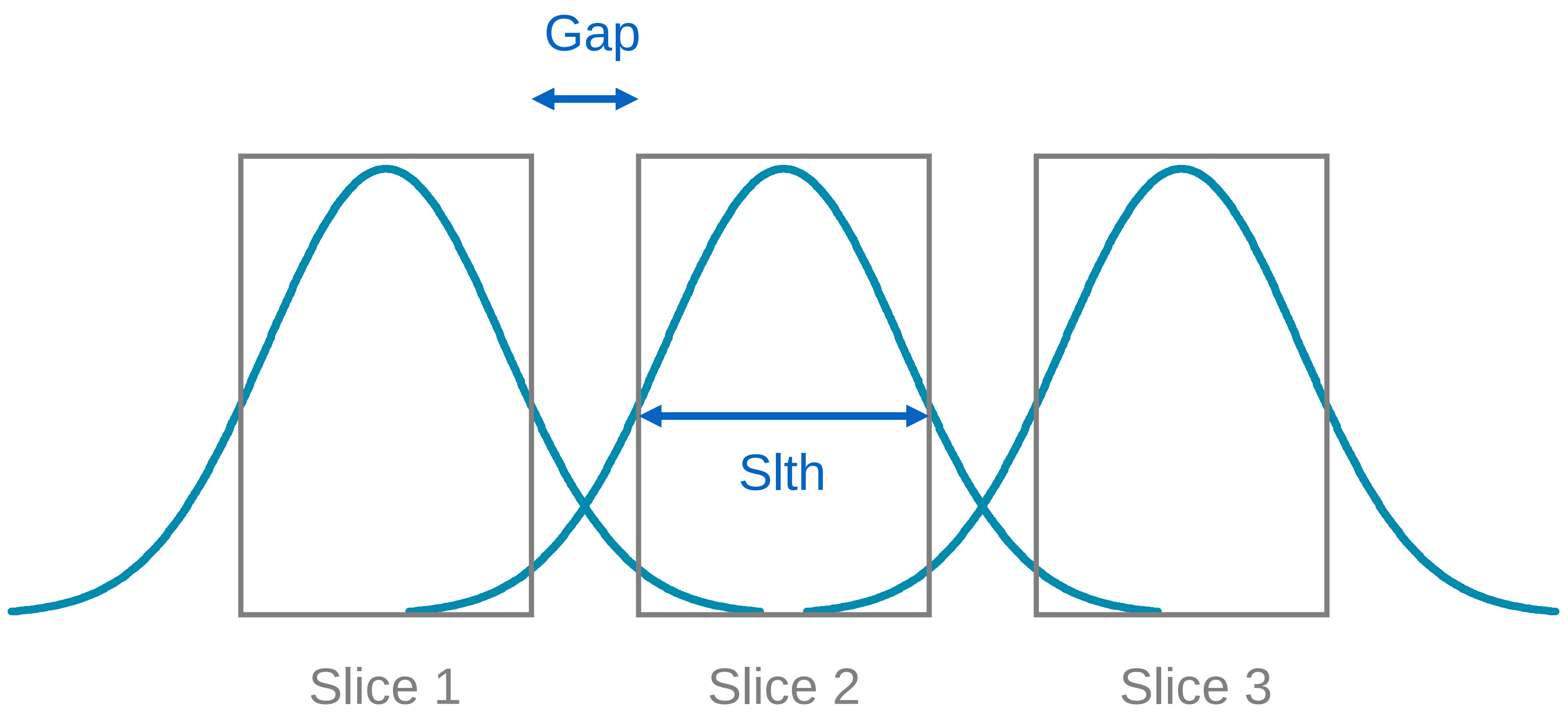


Slice thickness



Slth= Full width at half maximum of the slice profile

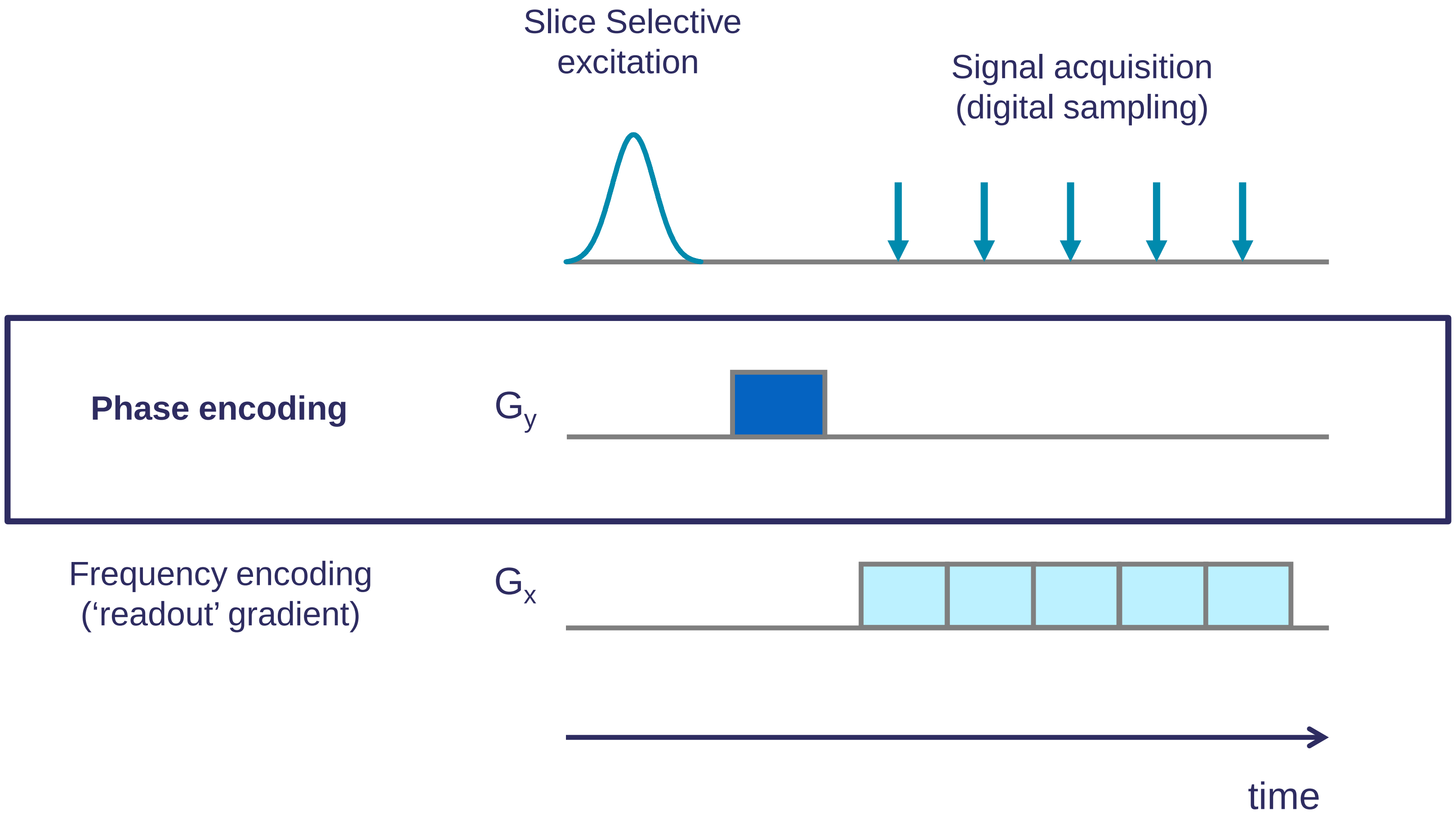
Multi-slice MRI



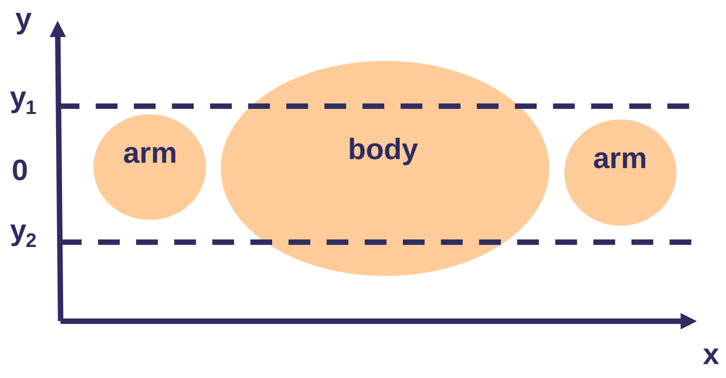
Tissue in the inter-slice gap contributes to the signal of the adjacent slices

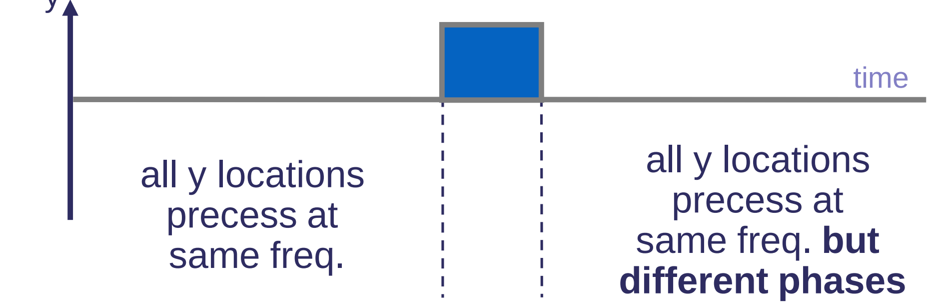
Frequency and phase encoding

Phase encoding

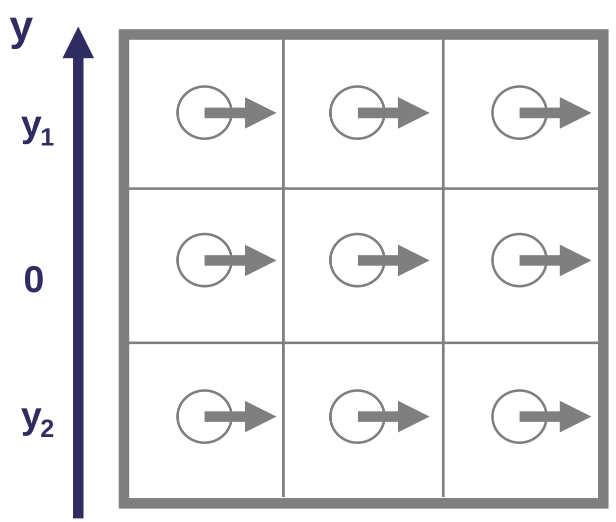


Phase encoding and spatial information

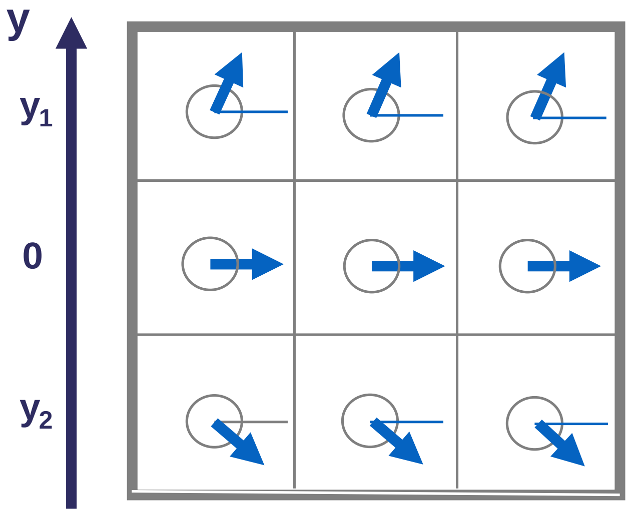




After RF



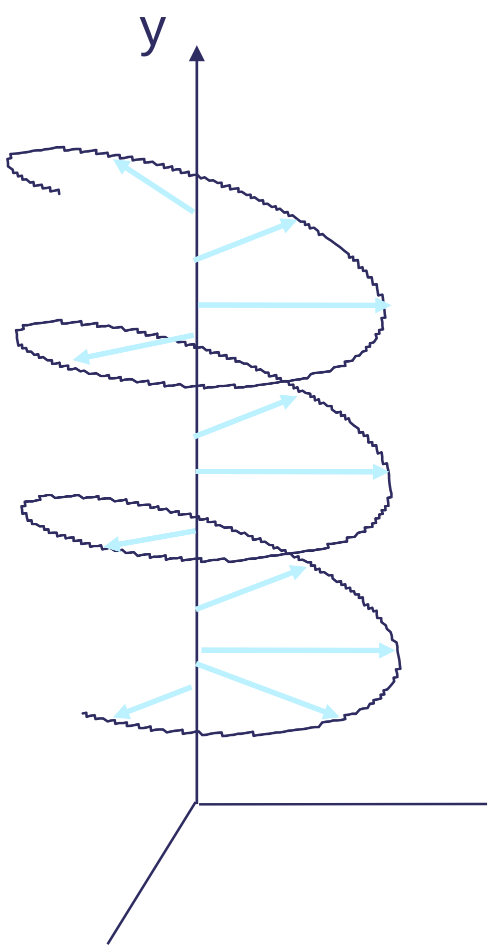
After the phase encoding gradient



How does phase encoding translate into spatial information?

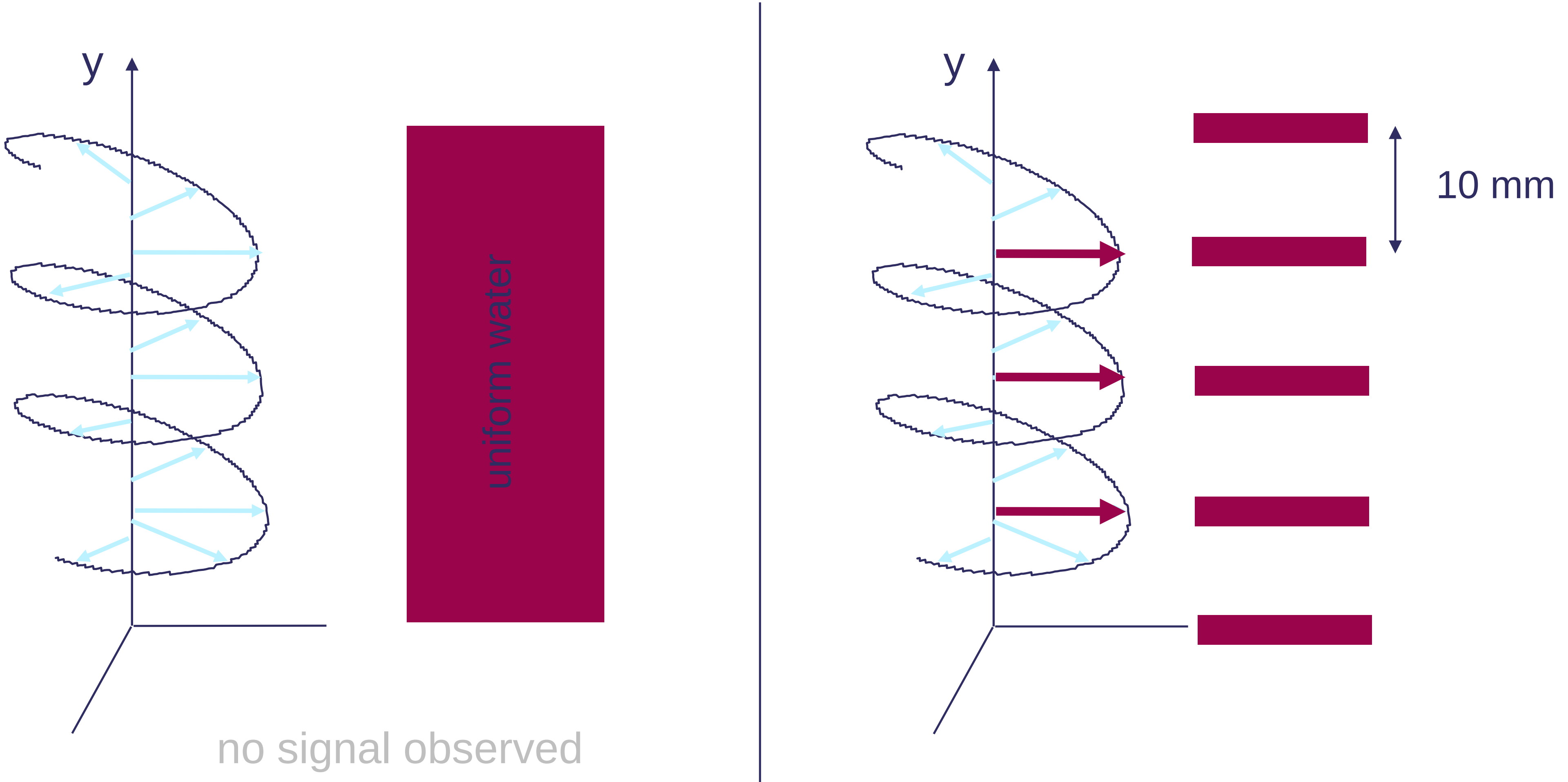
- The magnetization in the xy plane is wound into a helix directed along y axis.

- Phases are ‘locked in’ once the phase encode gradient is switched off.



From Larry Wald

Signal after phase encoding



From Larry Wald

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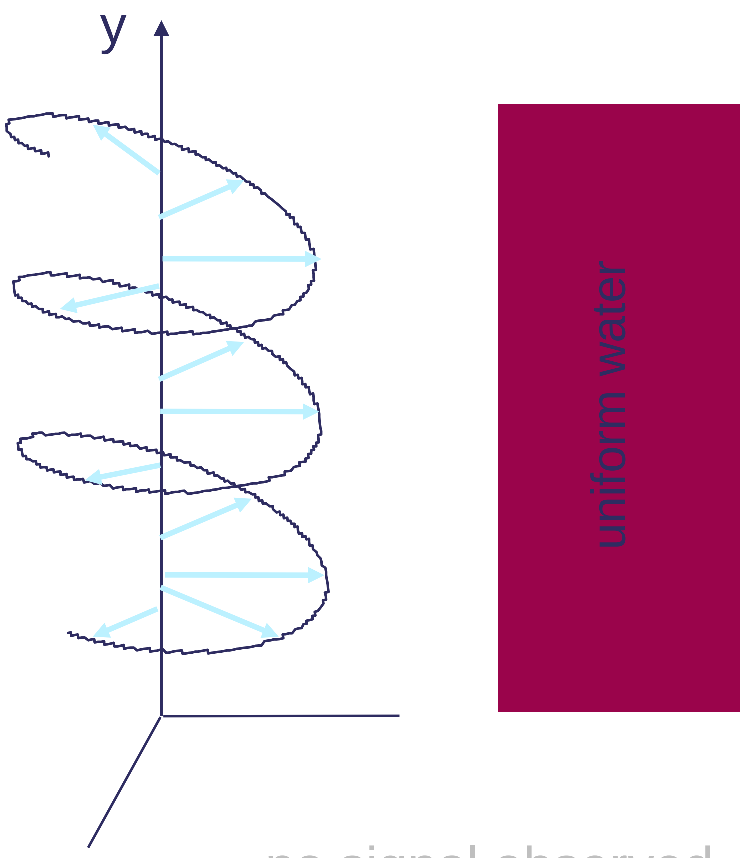
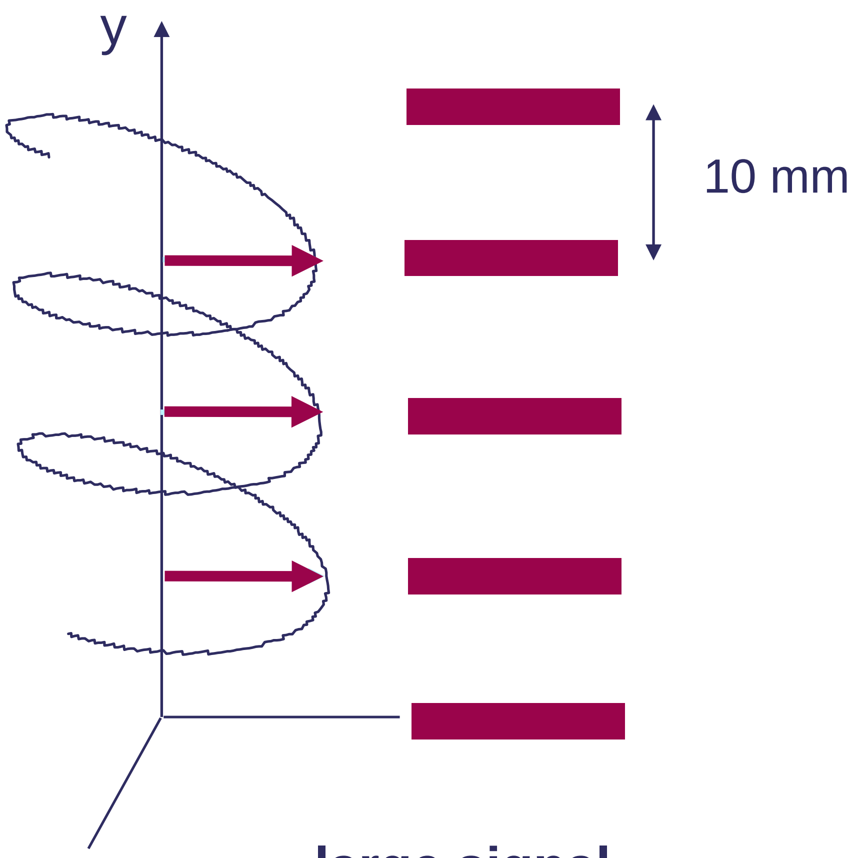


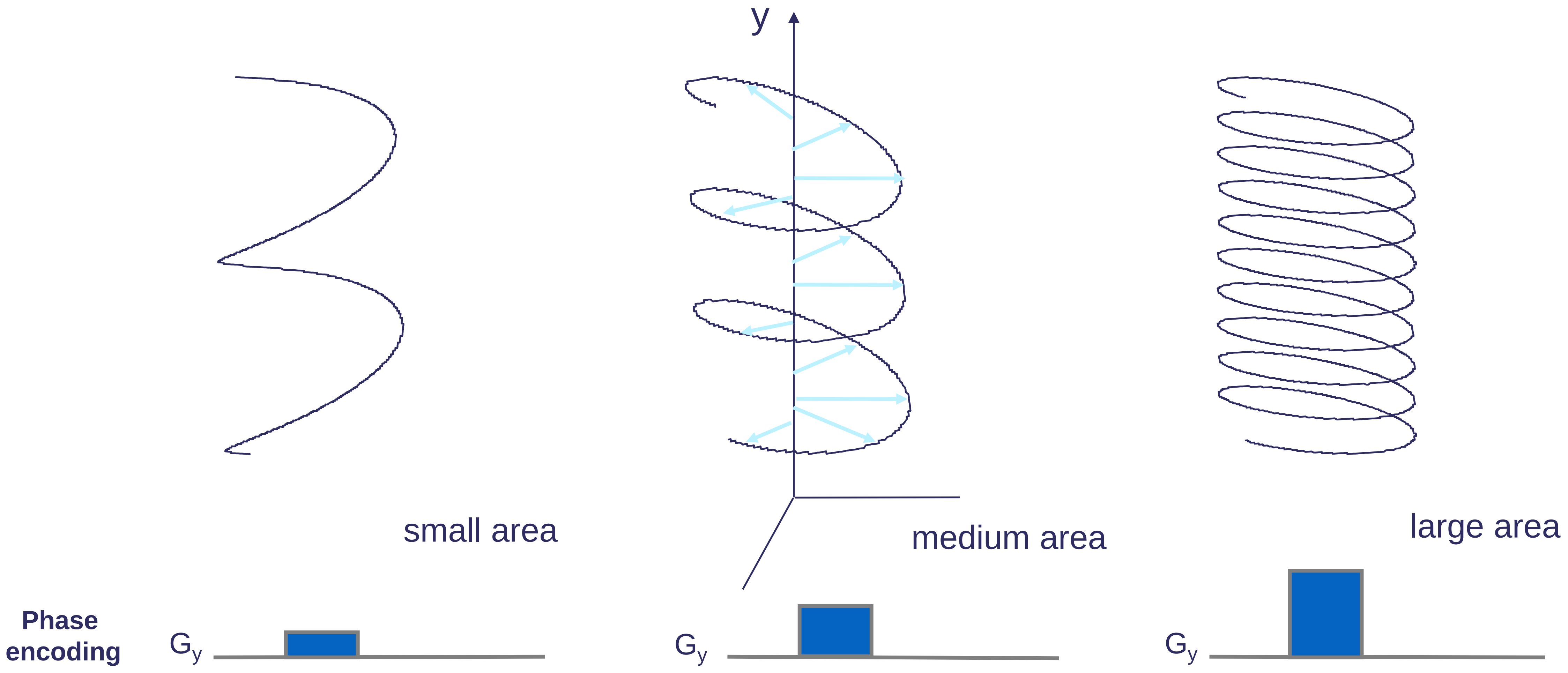
no signal observed



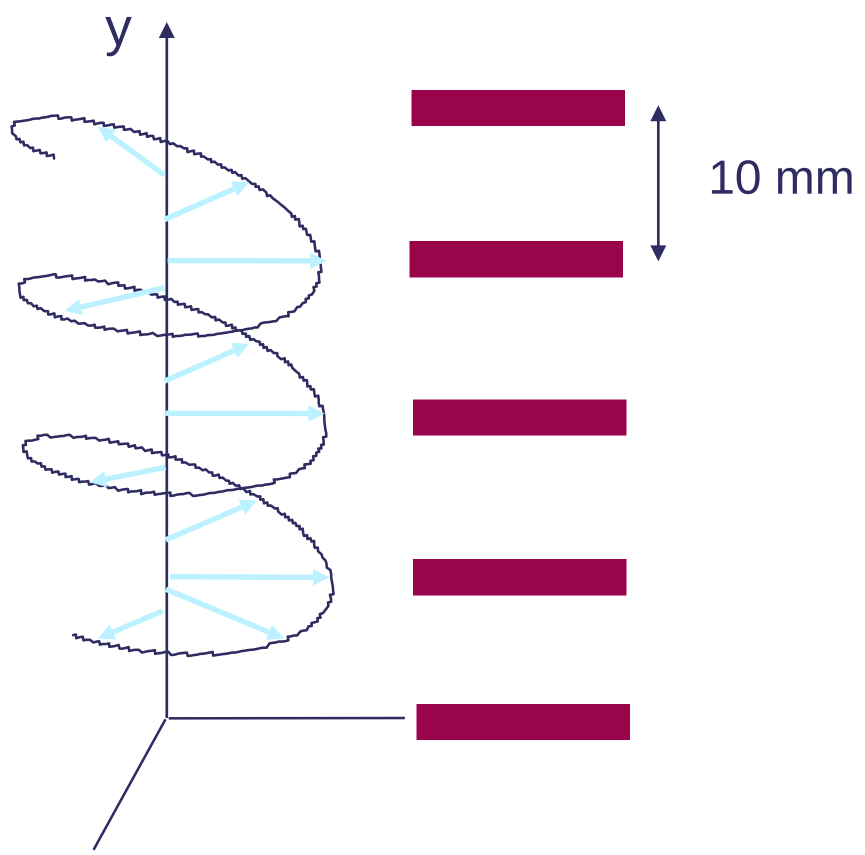
large signal

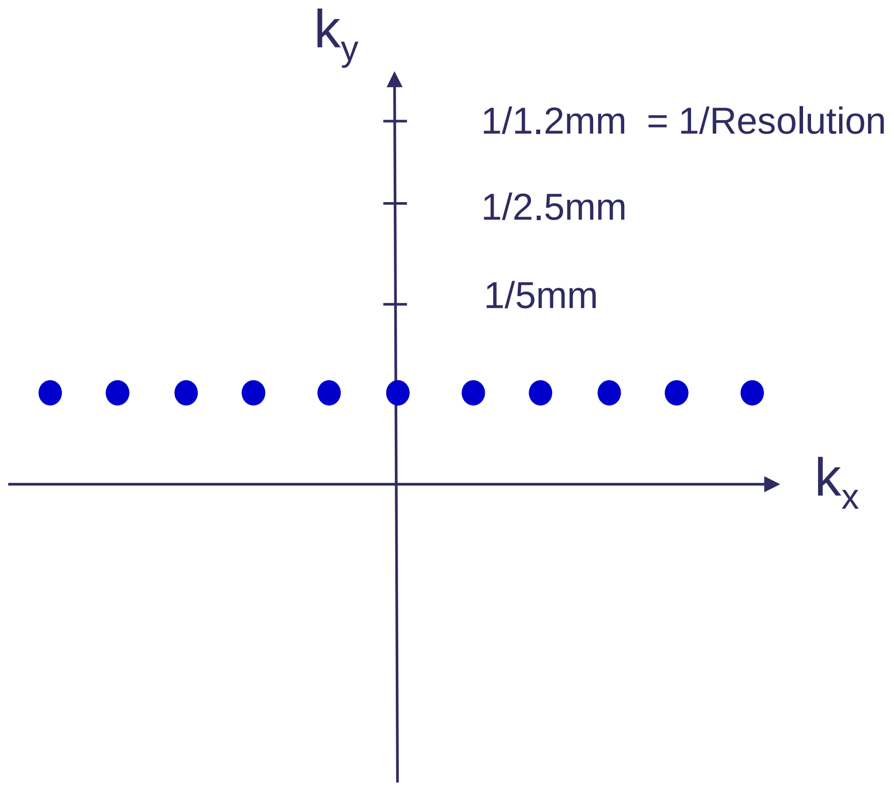
From Larry Wald

Gradient area and helix shape



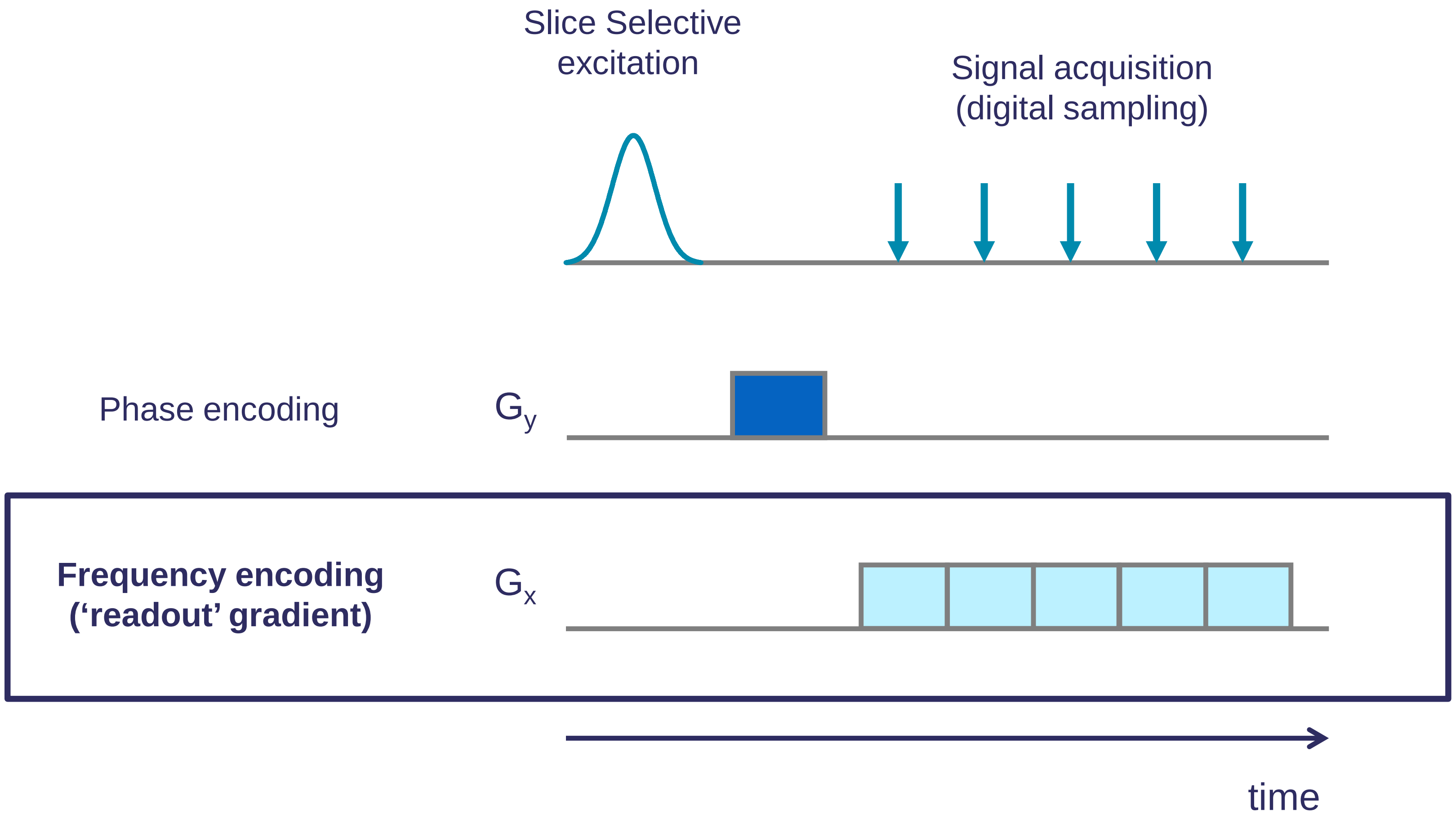
Signal intensity measured at a spatial frequency



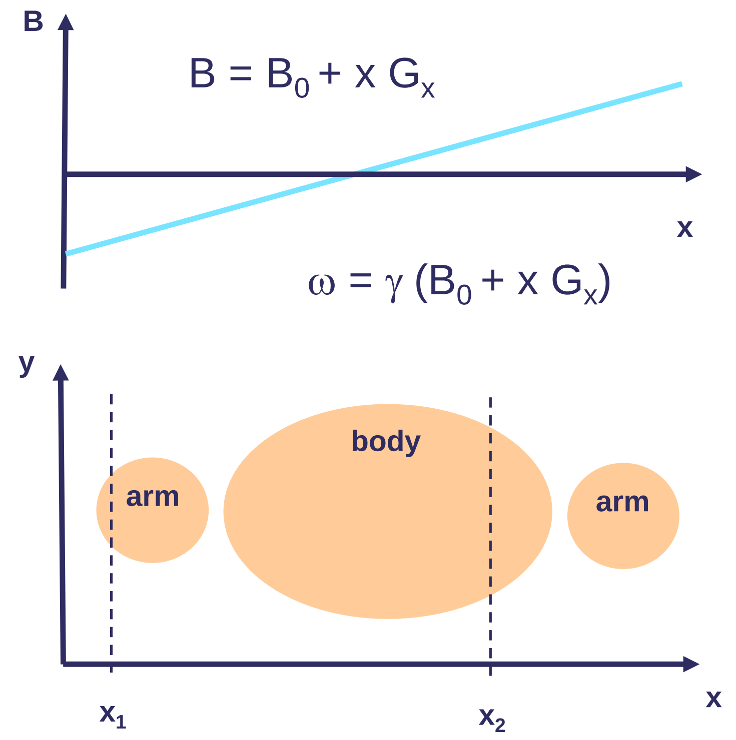


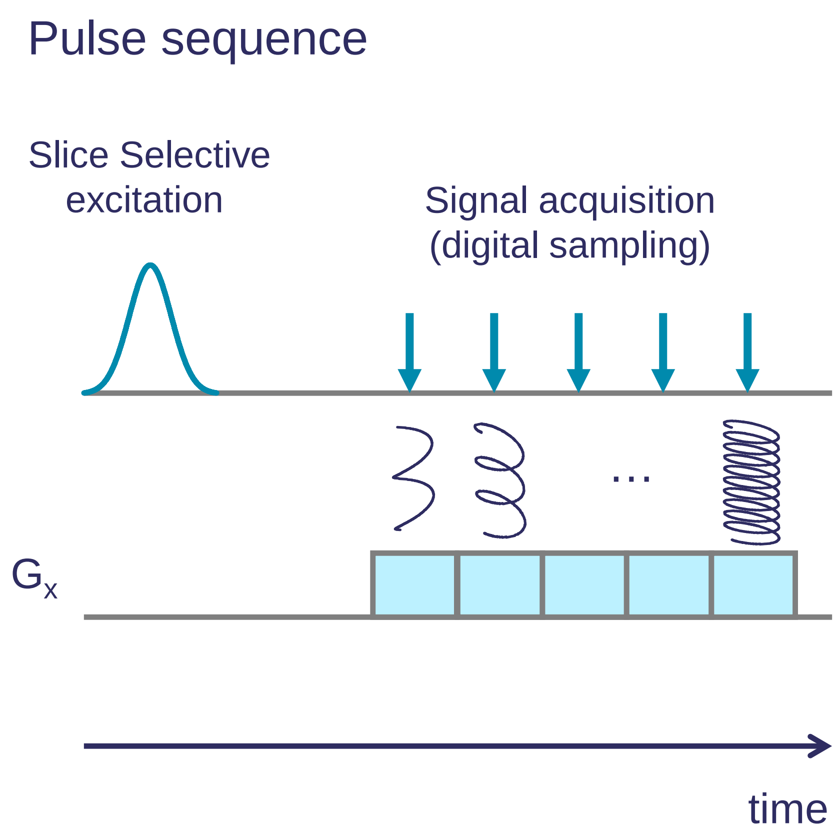
Add frequency encoding

Frequency encoding



Frequency encoding

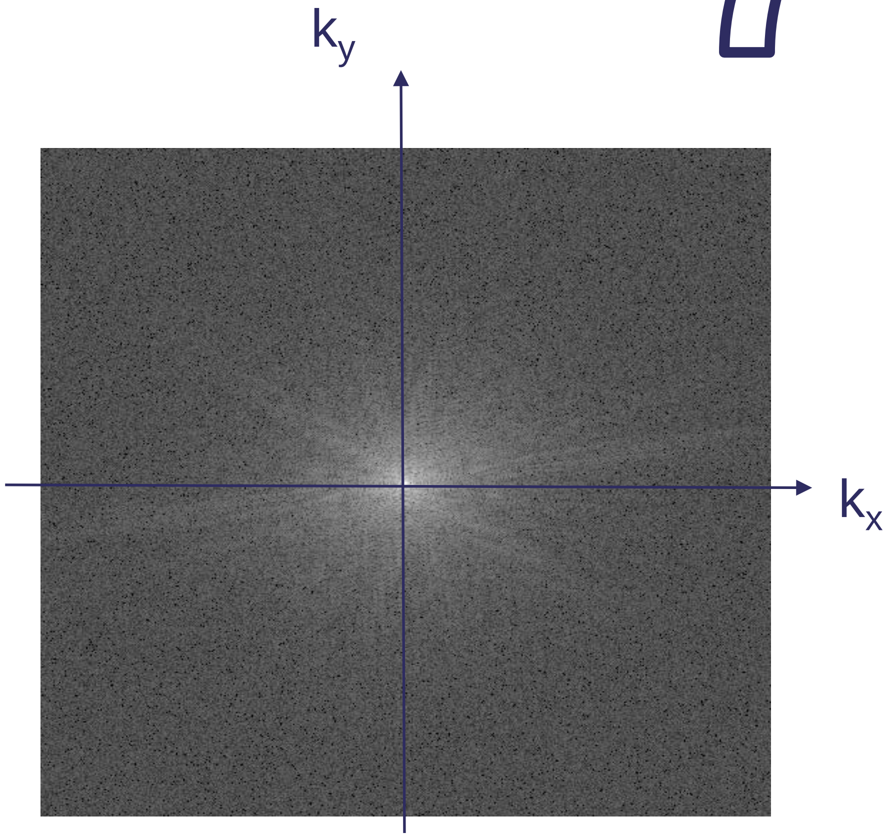


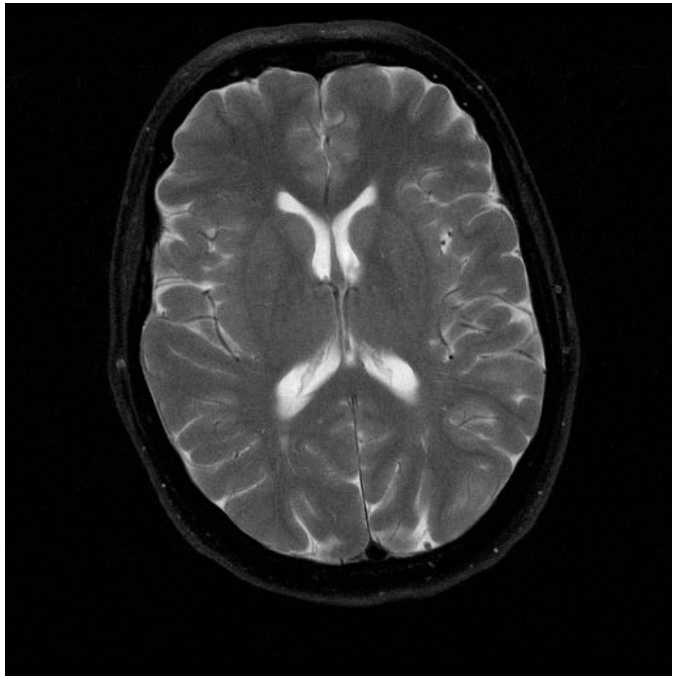


- Spins in position x_1 and x_2 experience different B field and will get out of phase.
- The longer the gradient is applied for, the larger the phase difference.

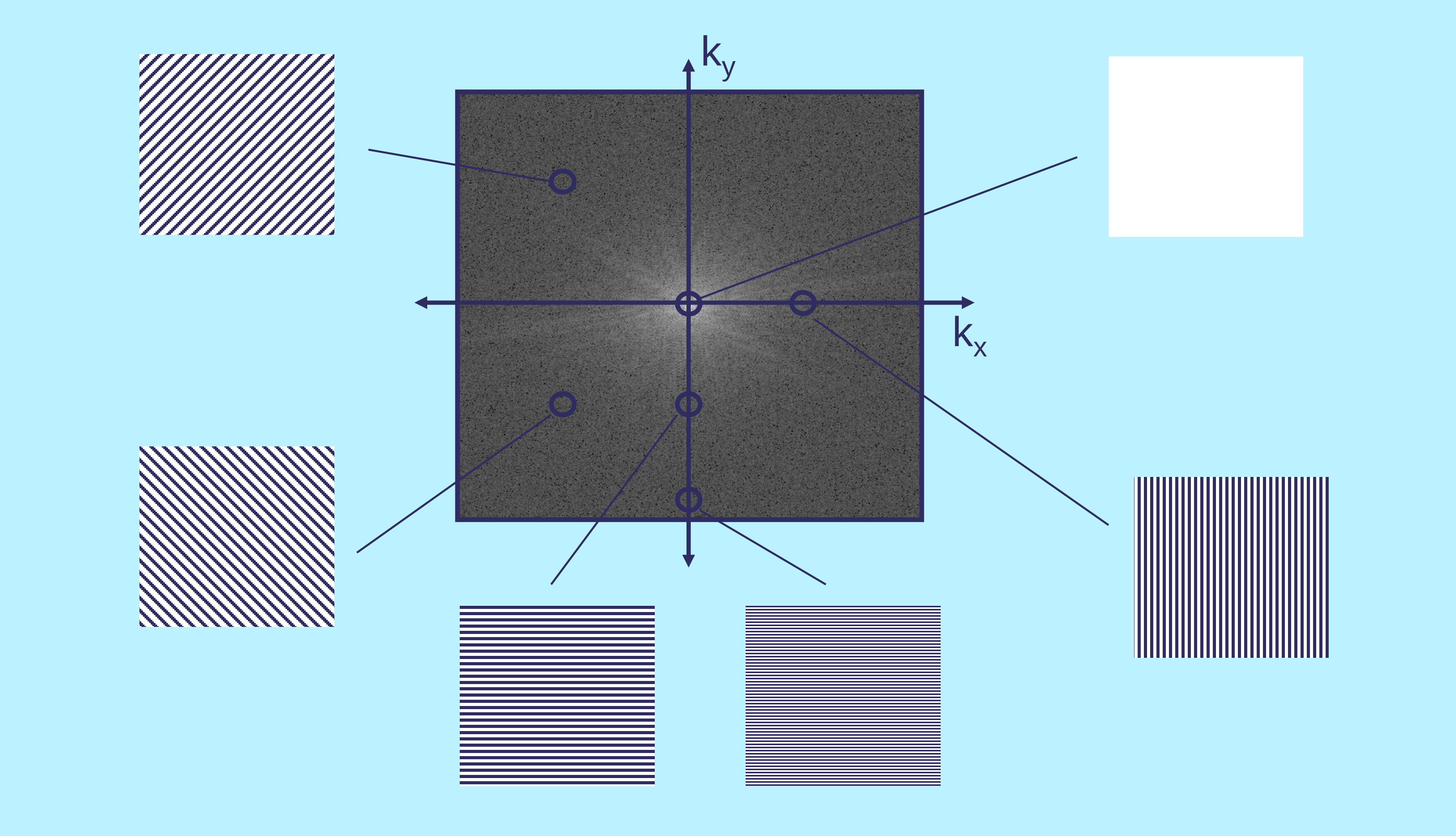
Image reconstruction and k-space

Fourier Transform

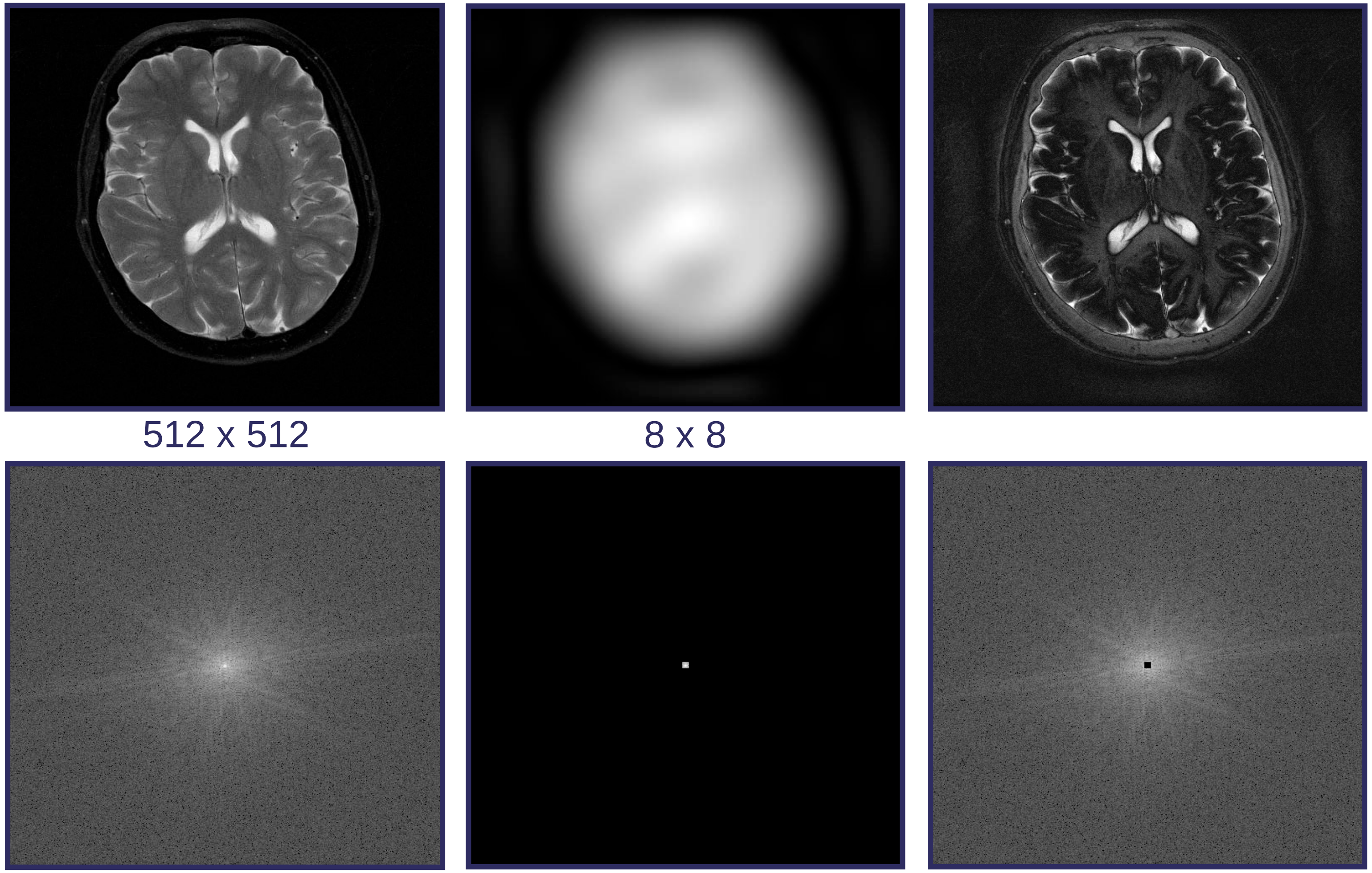




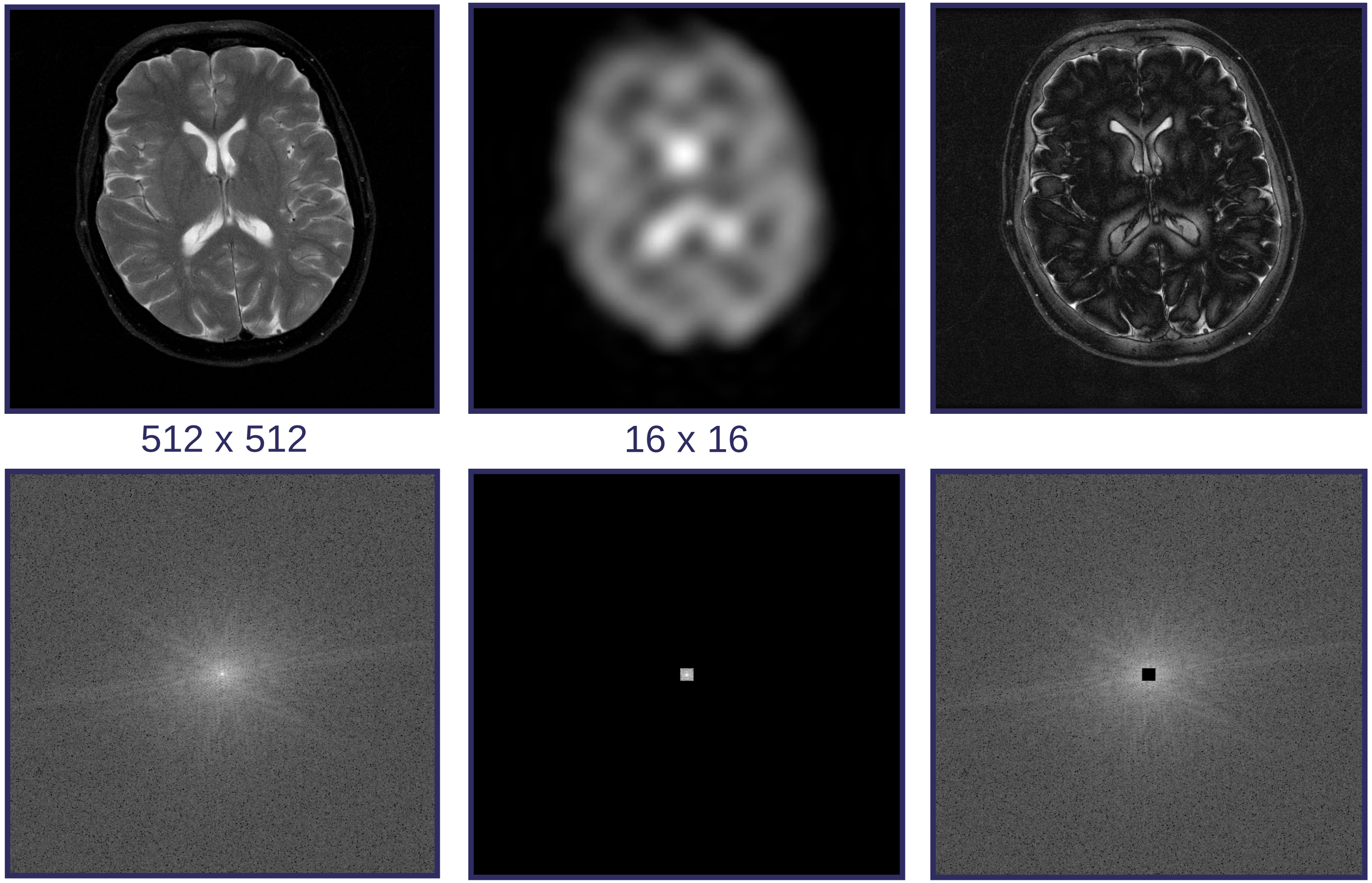
k-space



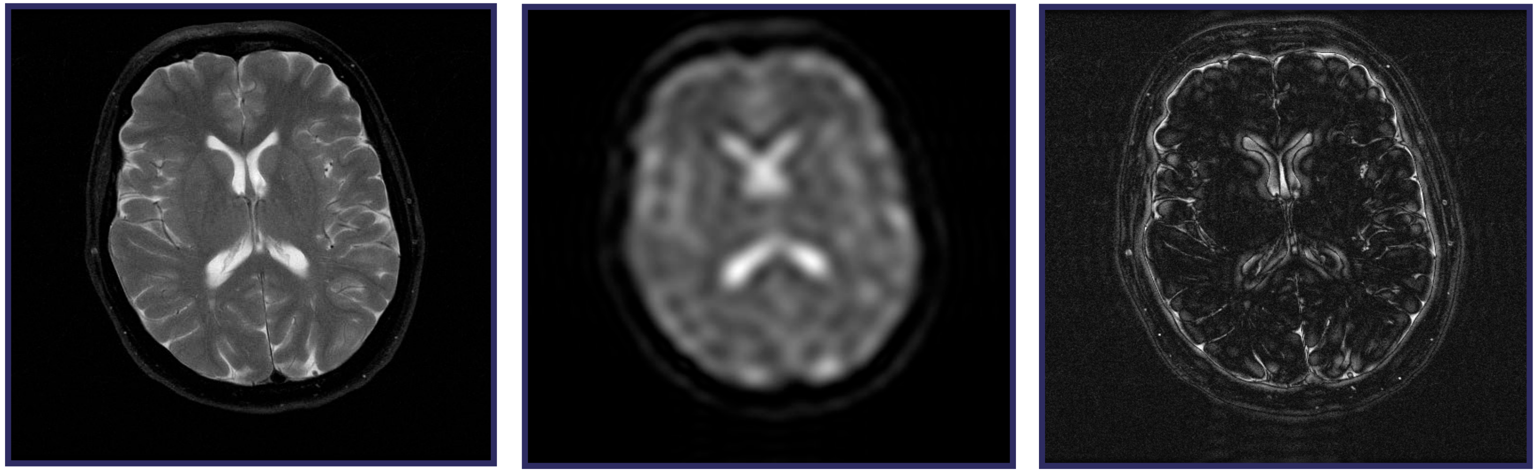
Spatial frequency and contrast



Spatial frequency and contrast

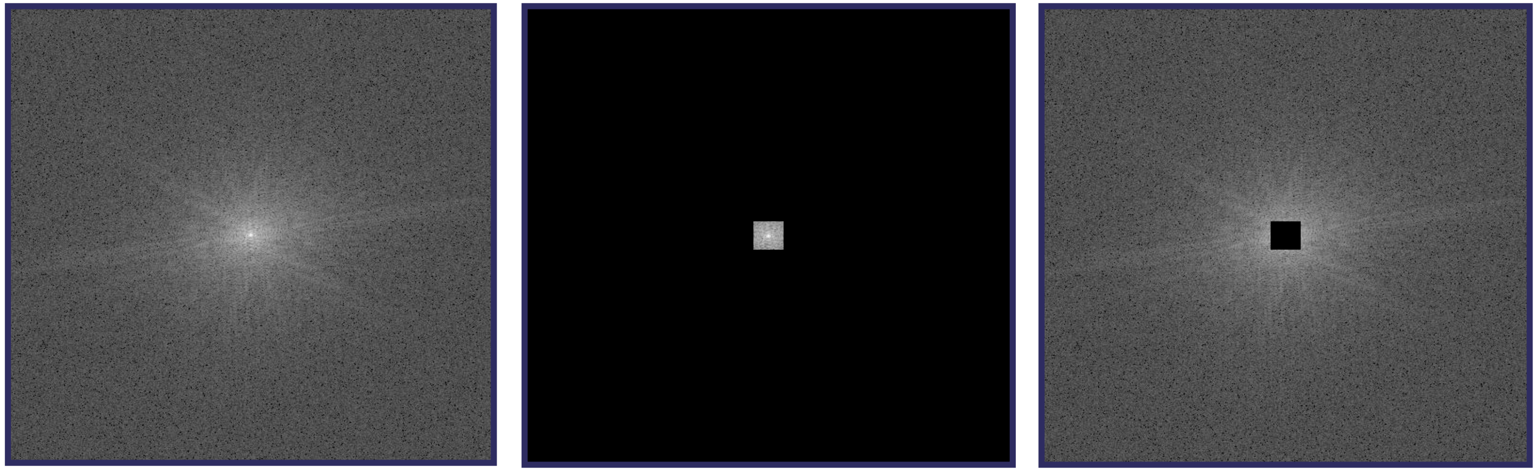


Spatial frequency and contrast

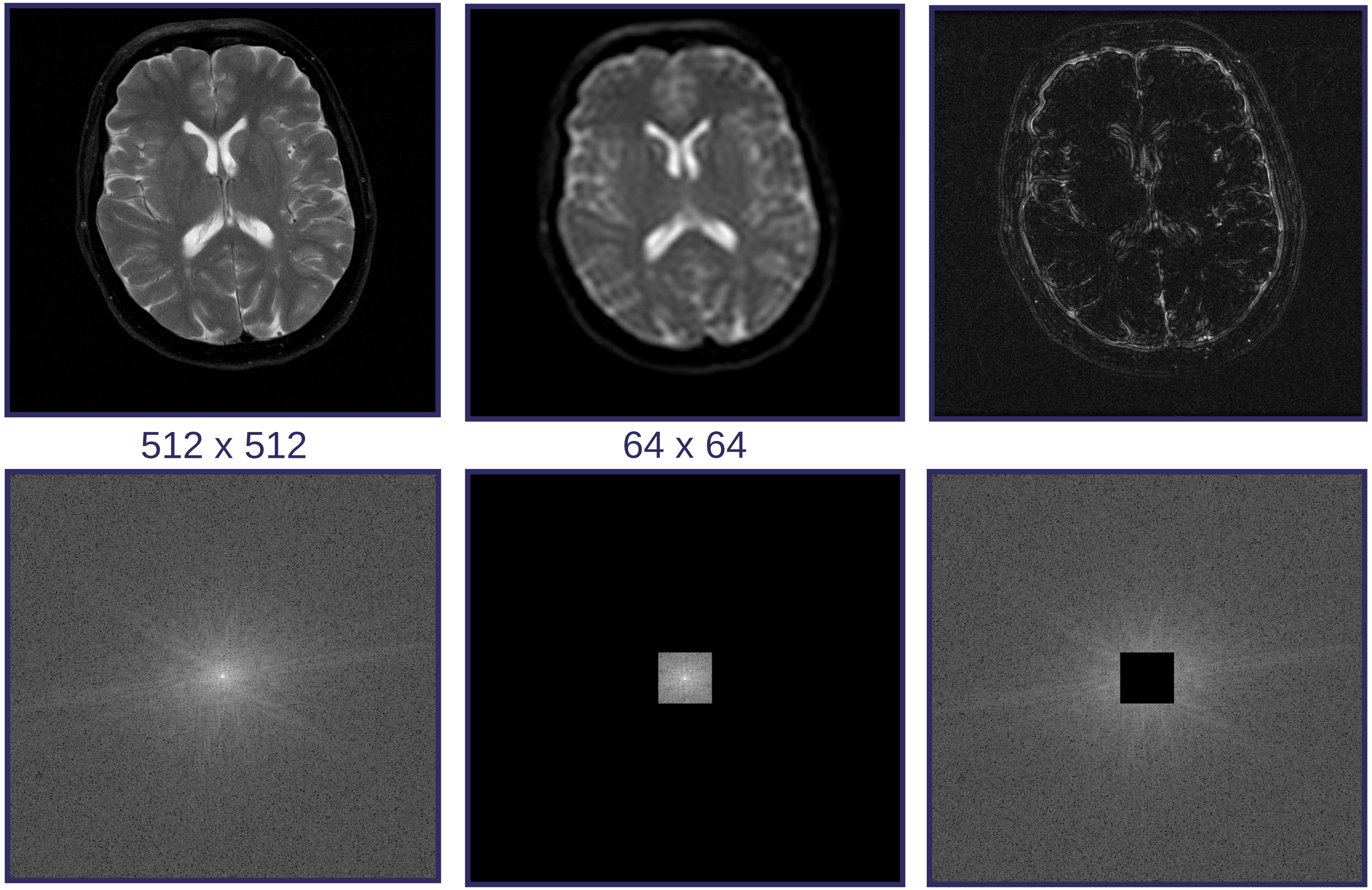


512 x 512

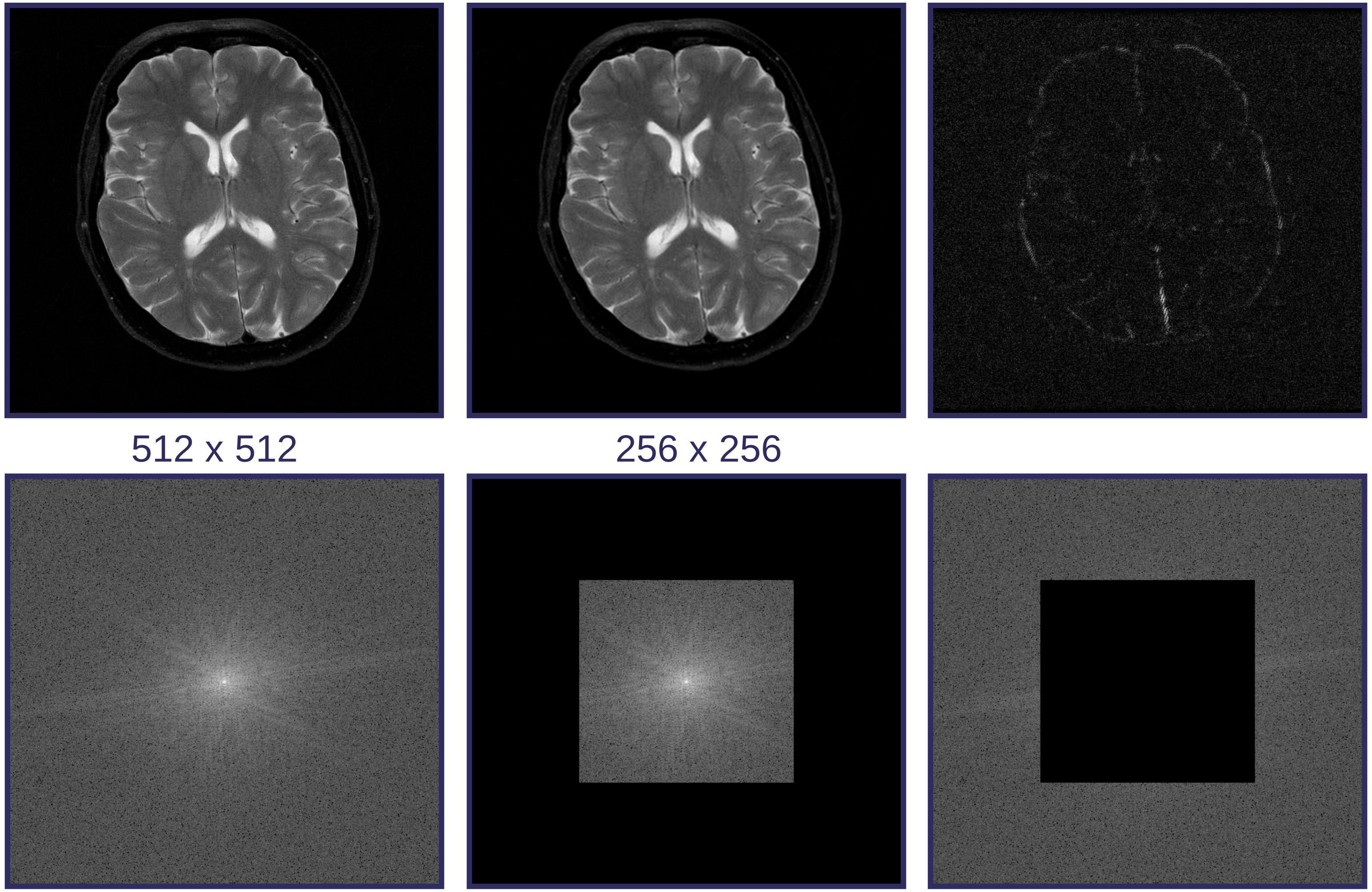
32 x 32



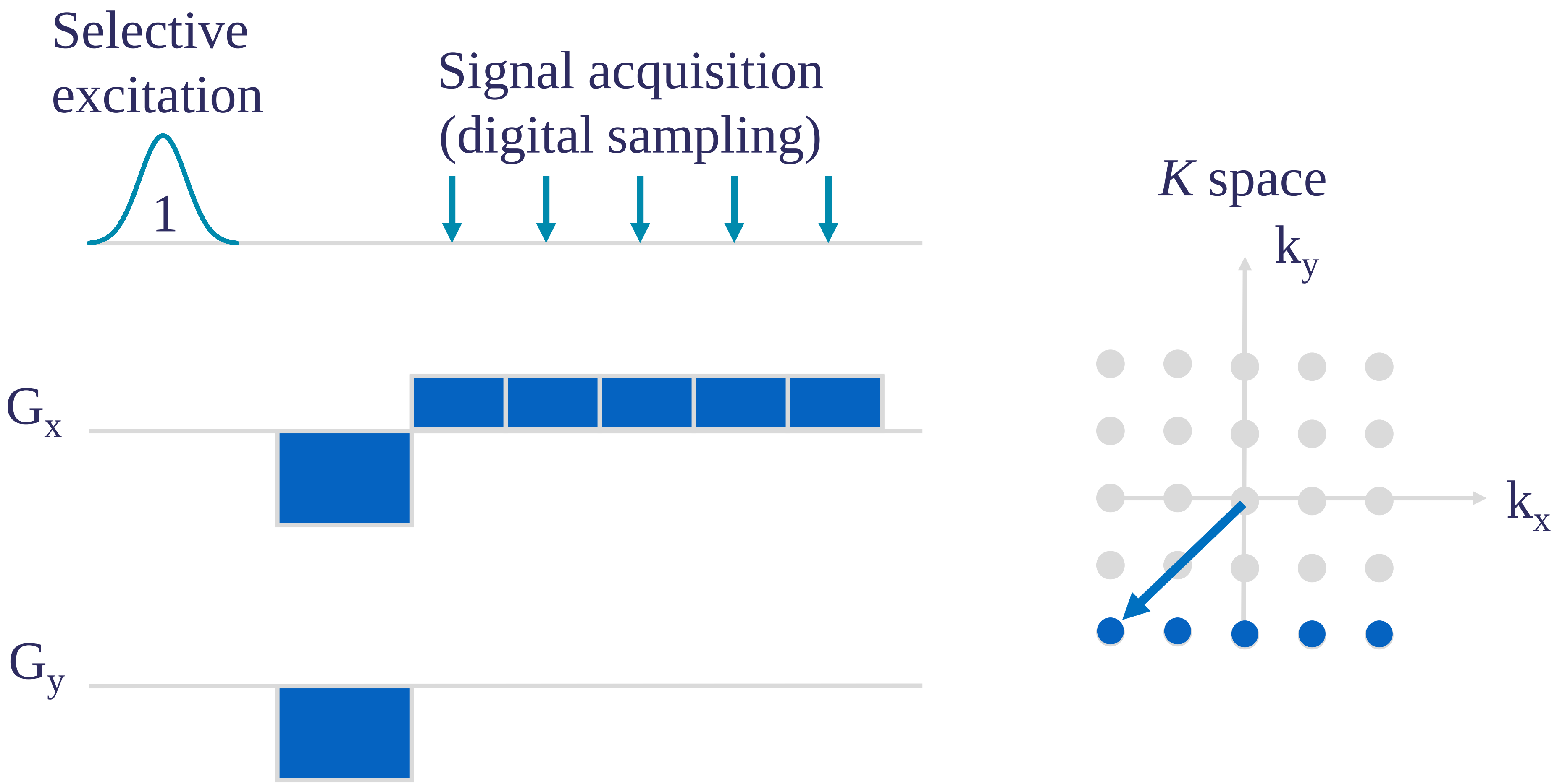
Spatial frequency and contrast



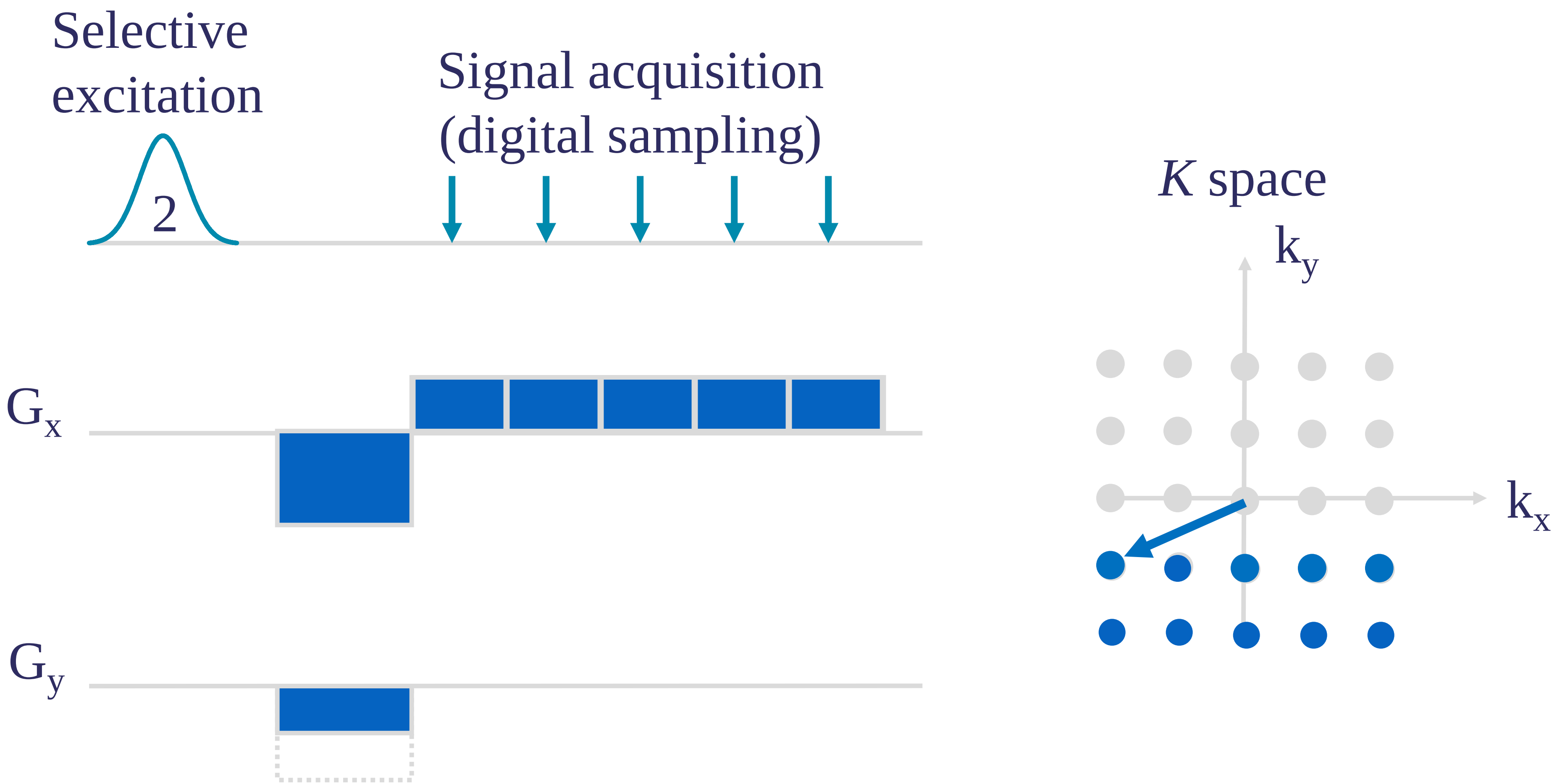
Spatial frequency and contrast



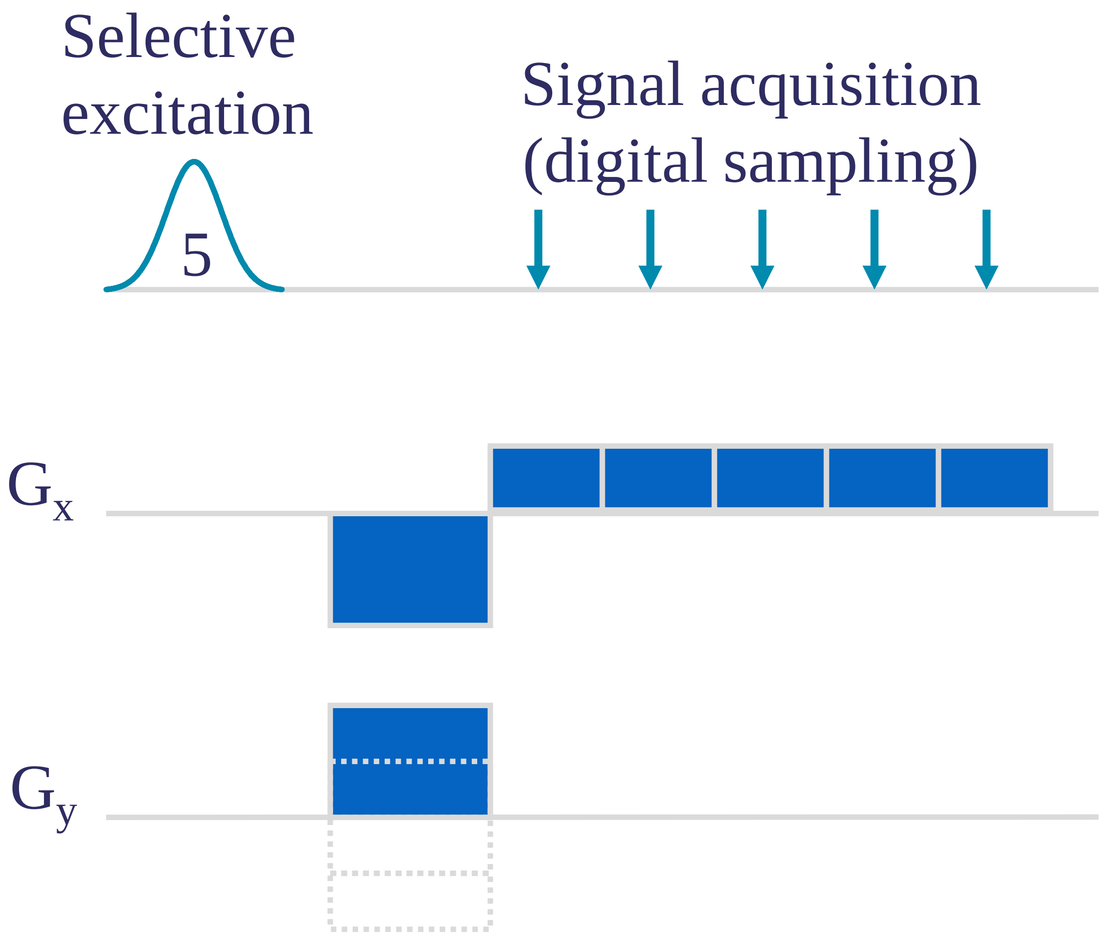
k-space acquisition – Structural Imaging (FLASH)

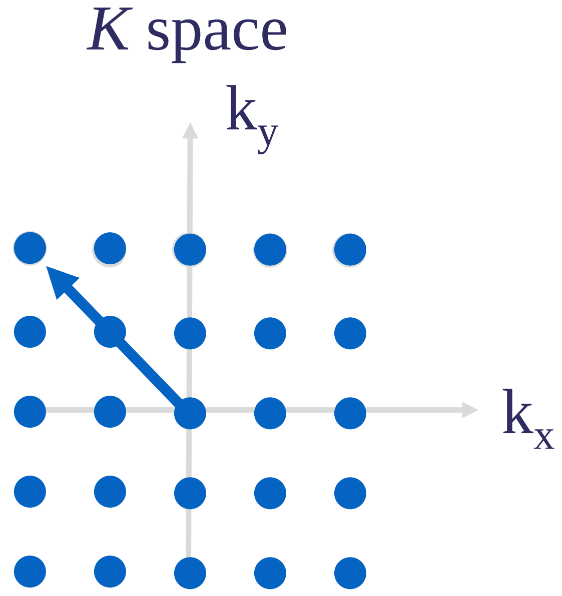


k-space acquisition – Structural Imaging (FLASH)

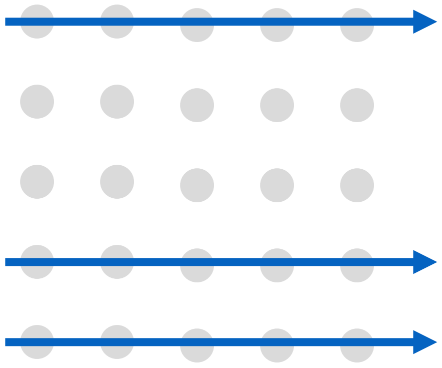


k-space acquisition – Structural Imaging (FLASH)





k-space acquisition – Structural Imaging (FLASH)



n^{th} excitation

2^{nd} excitation

1^{st} excitation

<u>Problem:</u> This sequence is rather slow

- *K* space is sampled line by line
- After each excitation one must wait for the longitudinal magnetization to recover

<u>Example:</u> n = 256, TR = 2s ⇨ T = n TR = 8.5 min

Echo Planar Imaging (EPI)

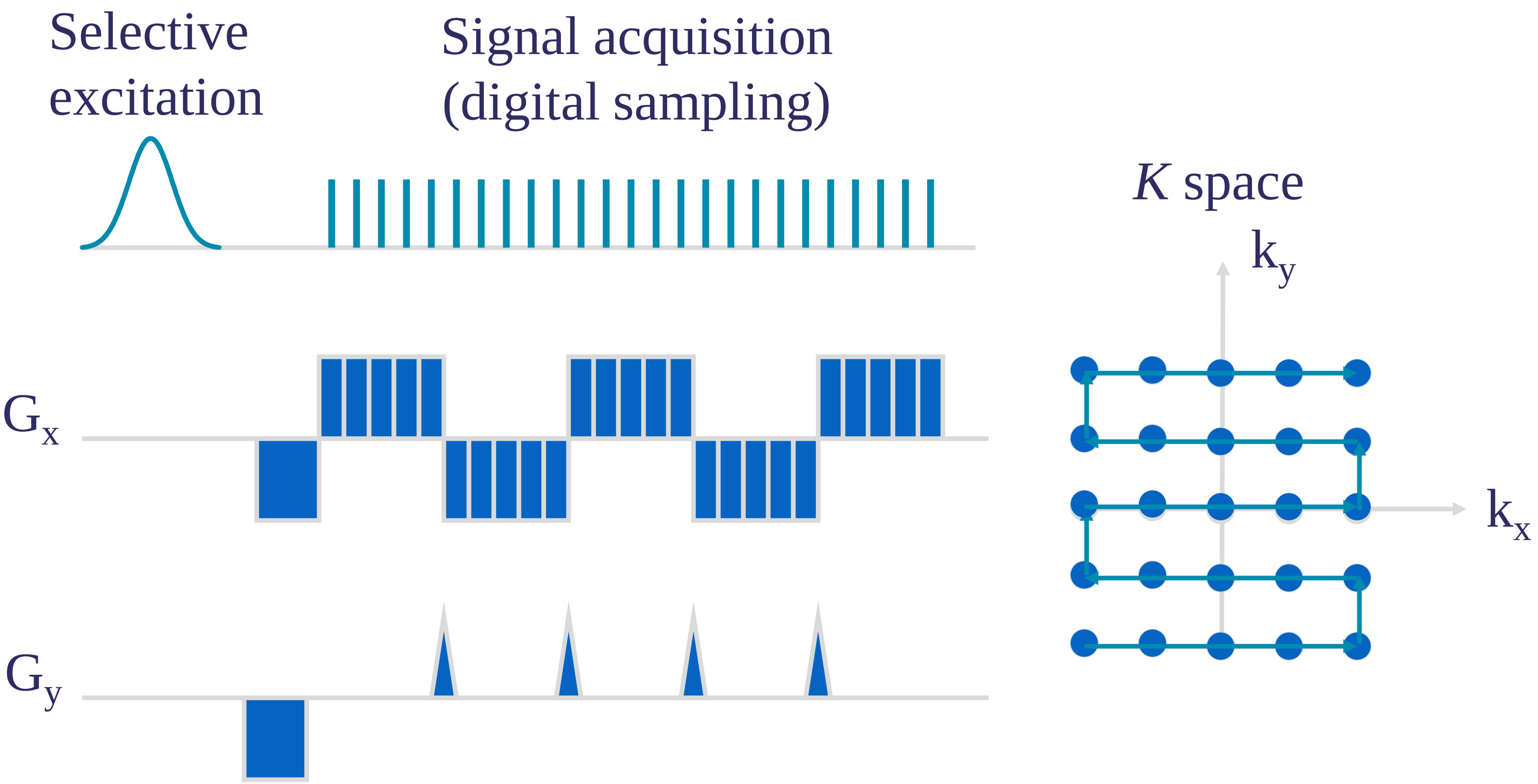
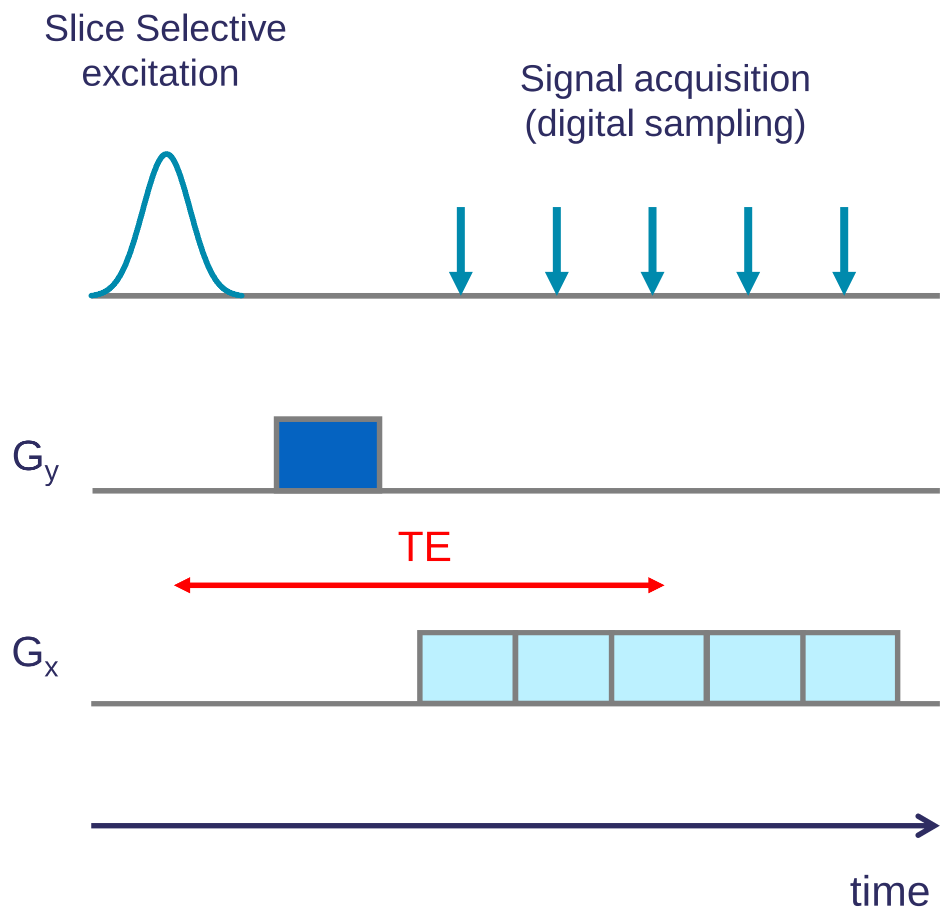
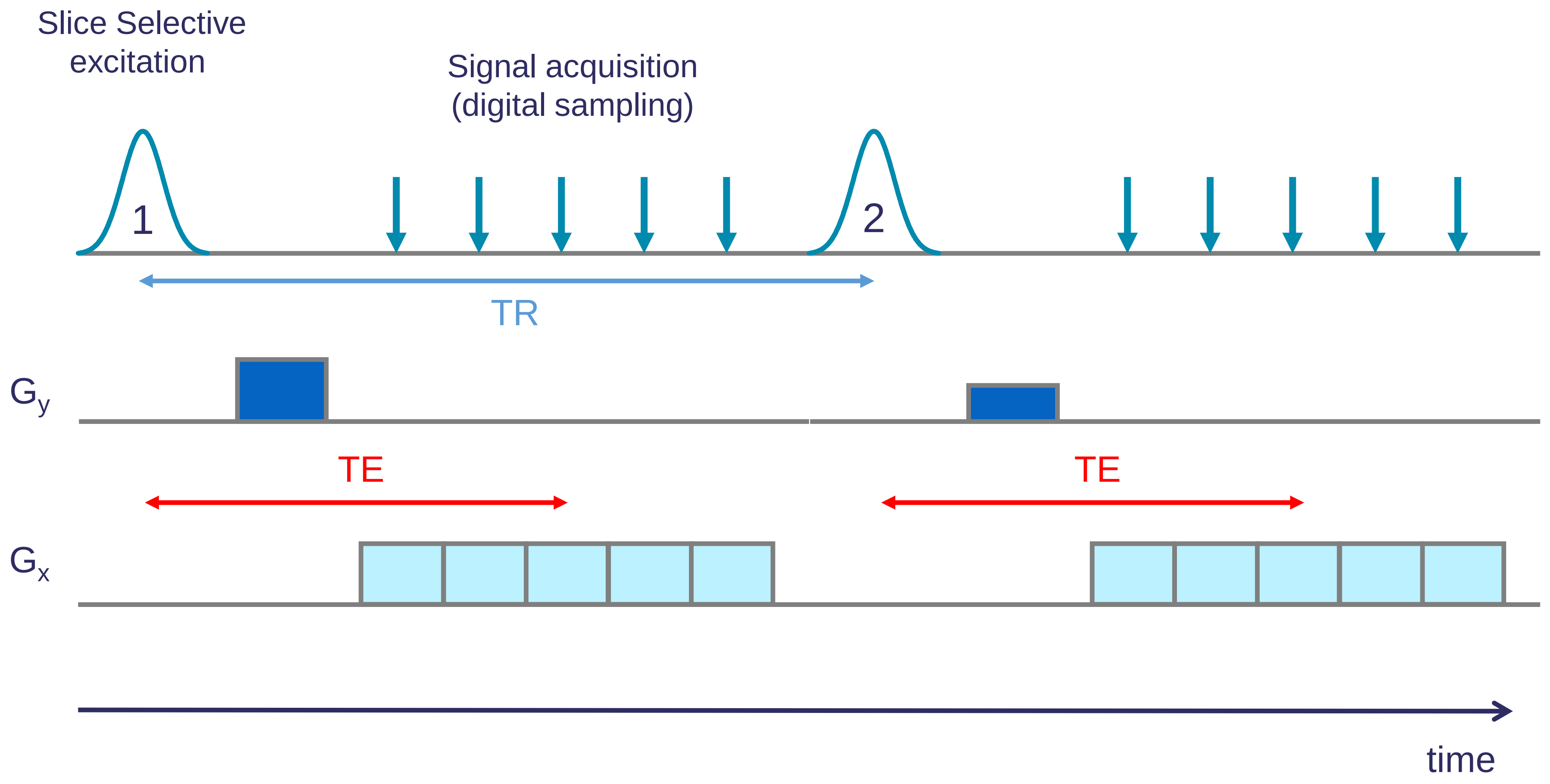


Image Contrast

Echo Time (TE) and Repetition Time (TR)

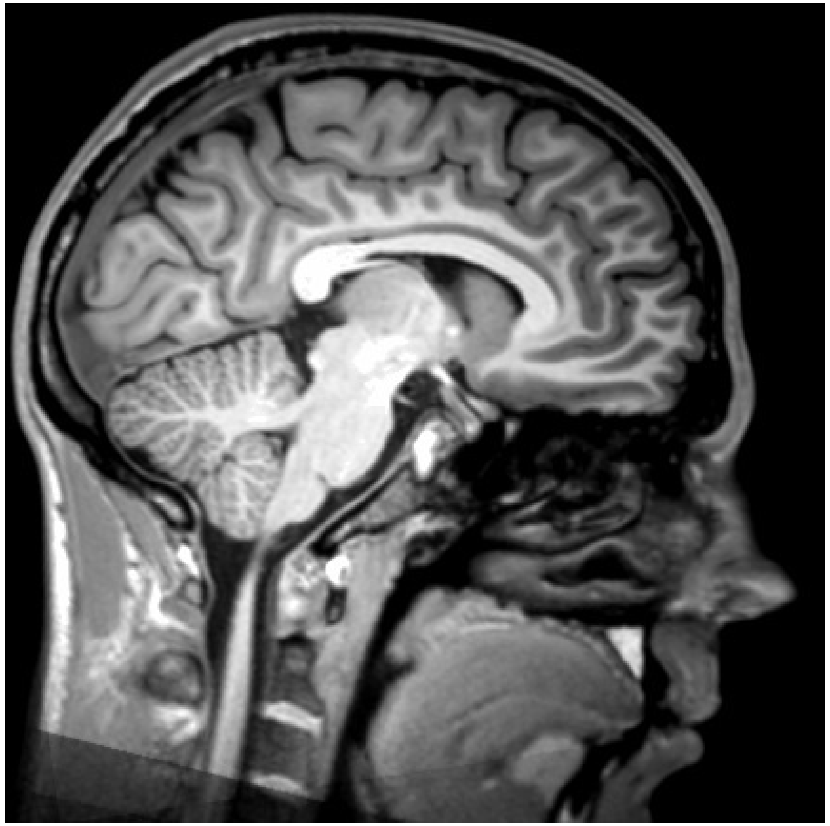


Echo Time (TE) and Repetition Time (TR)

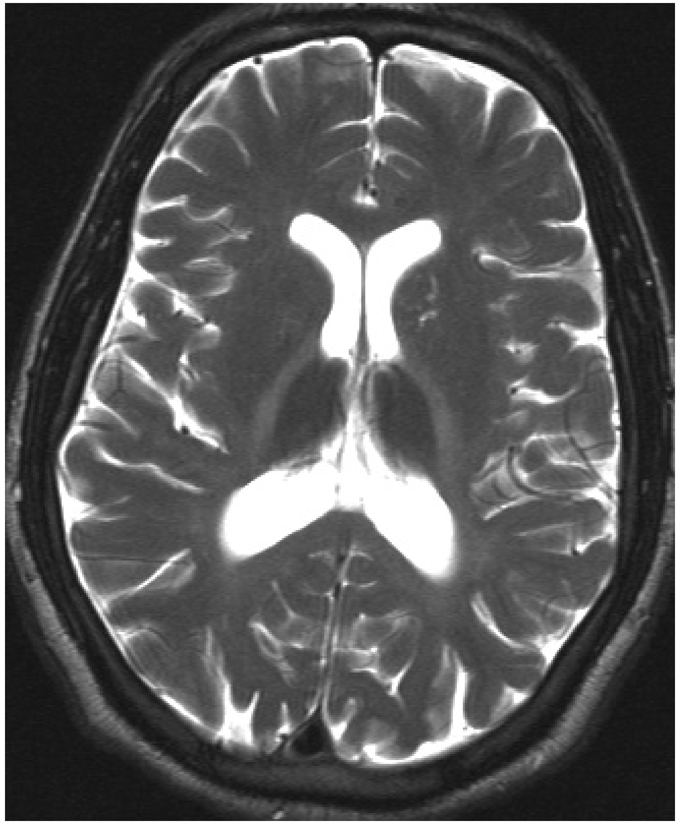


Tissue Contrast

T1-weighted
Bright **fat, Short** TR & TE



T2-weighted
Bright **fluid, Long** TR & TE



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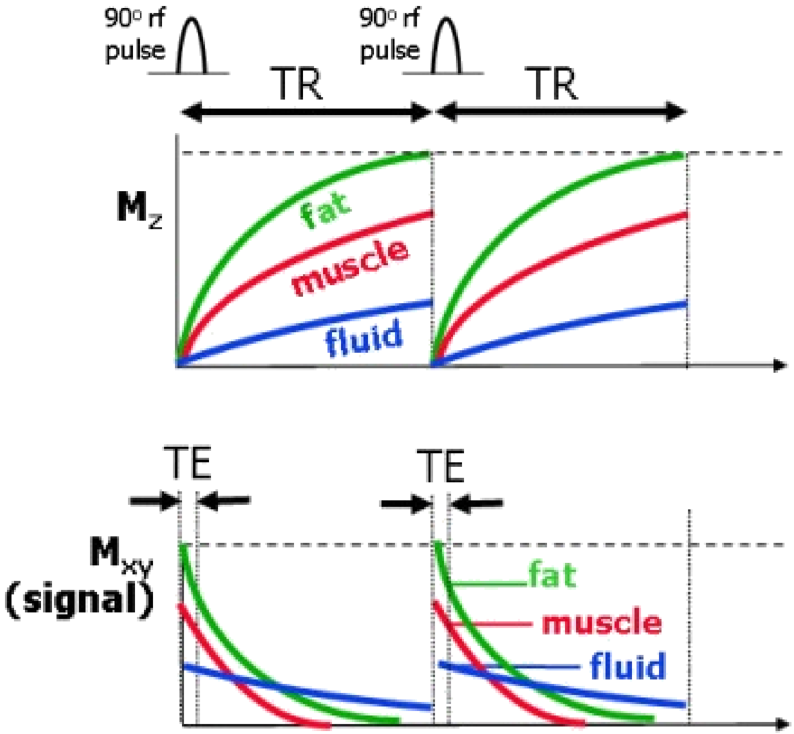
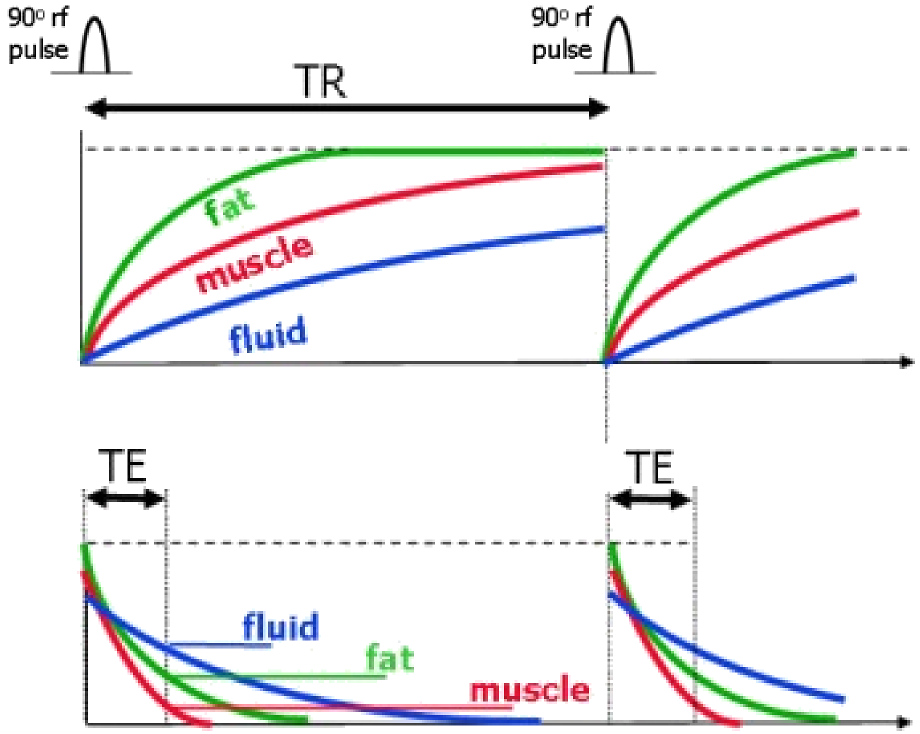
Tissue Contrast

T1-weighted
Bright **fat, Short** TR & TE



T2-weighted
Bright **fluid, Long** TR & TE



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