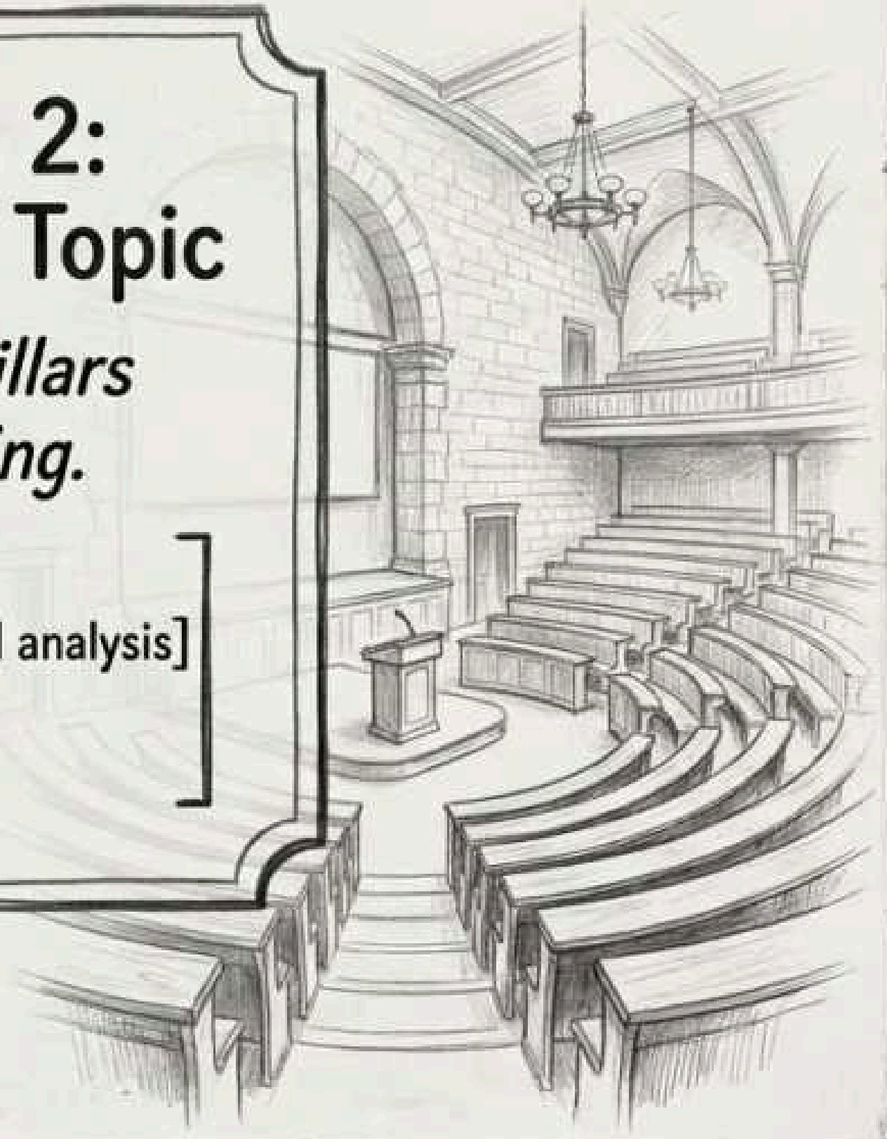


COMM 101 B Lecture 2: Audience, Purpose, and Topic

A visual guide to the three pillars of audience-centered speaking.

At a glance:

- Demographic, psychological, and situational analysis]
- General and specific purposes]
- Topic narrowing, timing, and ethics]



The Three Foundational Questions

Every successful speech is built before a single word is written.

The Blueprint Equation:

$$S = f(W_1, W_2, W_3)$$

- W_1 — Who am I speaking to? (Audience)
- W_2 — Why am I speaking? (Purpose)
- W_3 — What exactly will I say? (Topic)

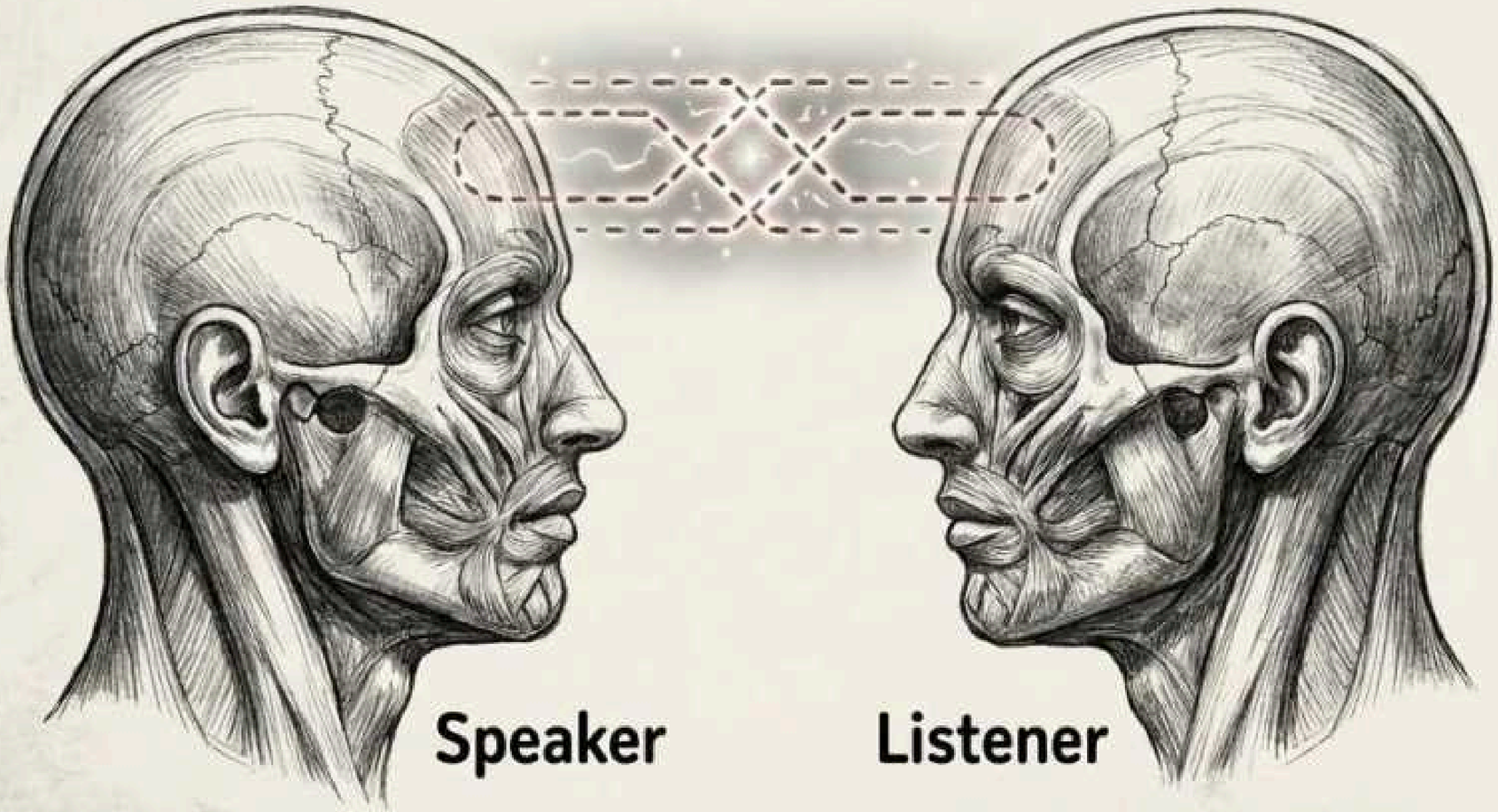
Note: The order is sequential. The audience and purpose must dictate the topic.

The First Principle of Speaking

¶ 2.3

A speech succeeds or fails in the minds of the listeners, not the speaker.

The Objective: Idea Extraction → Idea Insertion



Audience-Centered Checklist:

- ☐ Who are they?
- ☐ What do they already know?
- ☐ What do they care about?
- ☐ What is the final takeaway?

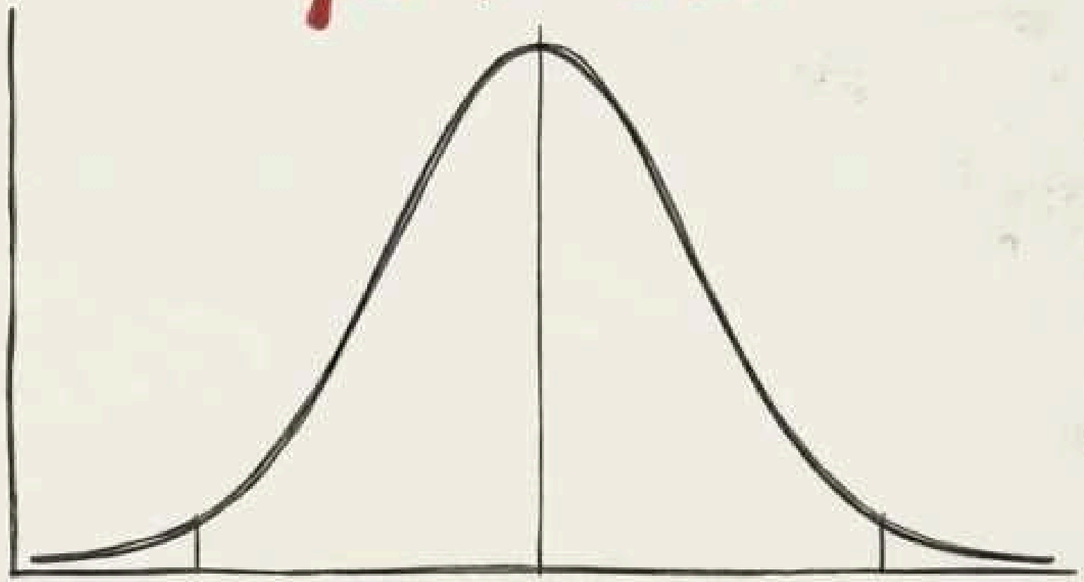
Audience Analysis I: Demographics

The Variables:

- Age
- Education
- Occupation
- Culture
- Group Memberships

The Rule: Demographics suggest, they do not determine.

$$\mu \neq \forall x$$



Warning: Assuming a monolithic mindset based on a demographic average is a stereotype—and a fatal mistake for a speaker.

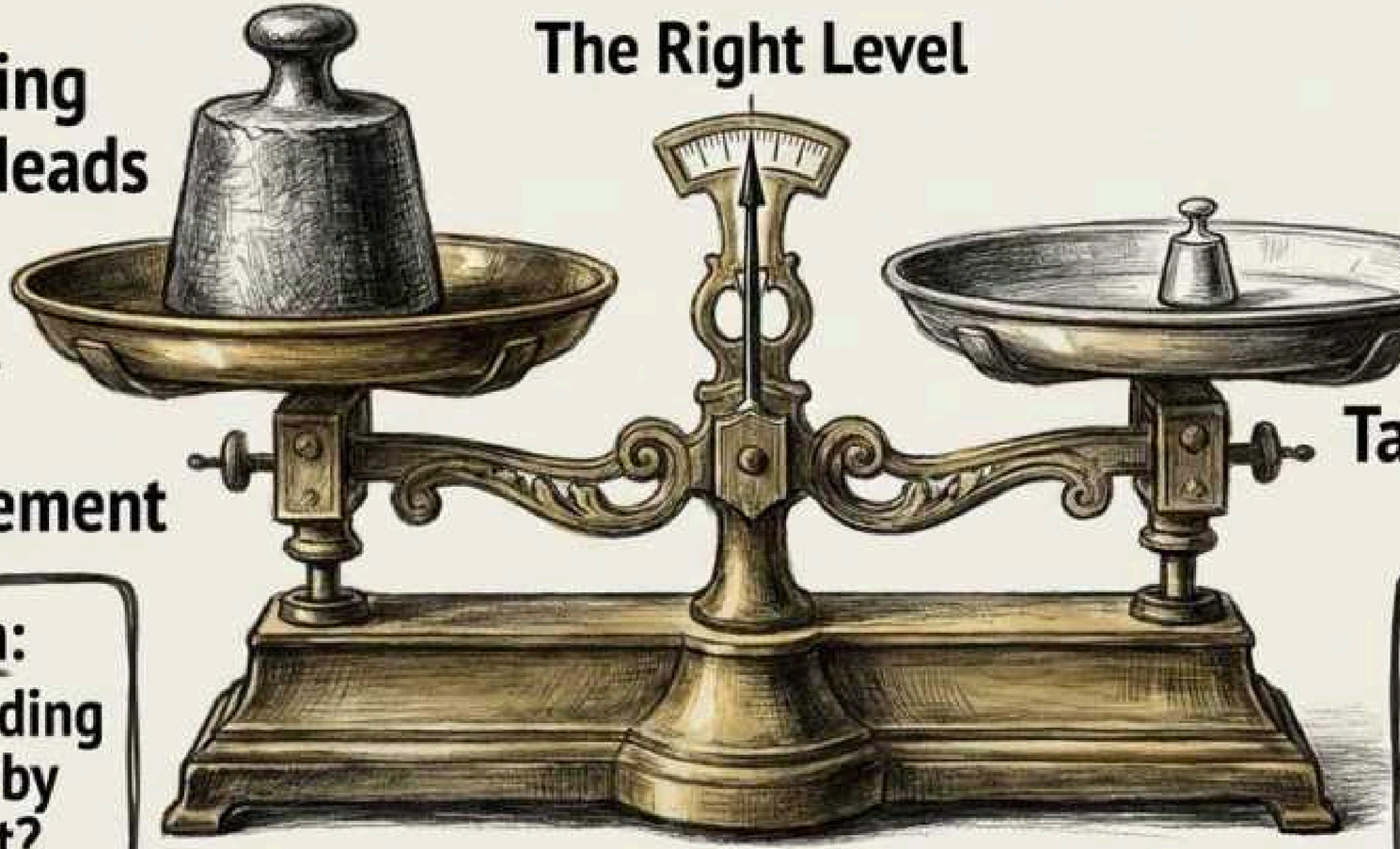
Audience Analysis II: Psychology

Assess the inner state of the room before stepping on stage.

Talking Over Heads

The Right Level

Insult



Disengagement

Talking Down

Motivation:
Are they attending by choice or by requirement?

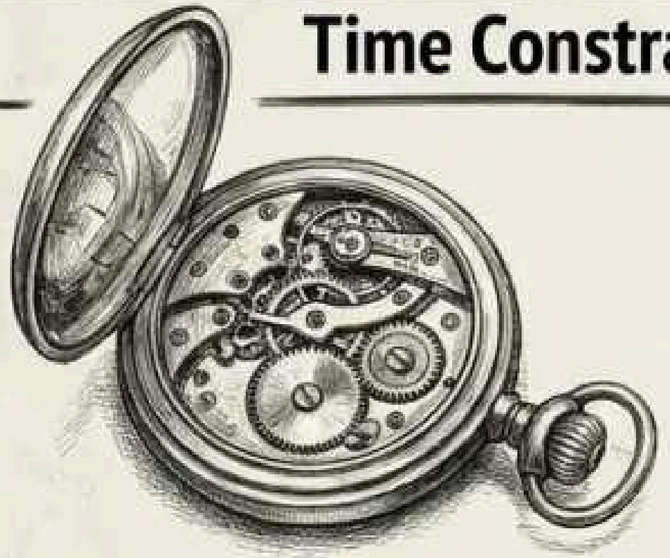
Mental State:
Analyze baseline attitudes, beliefs, and values.

Calibration: Aim precisely for the intersection of their current knowledge and their capacity to learn.

Audience Analysis III: The Situation

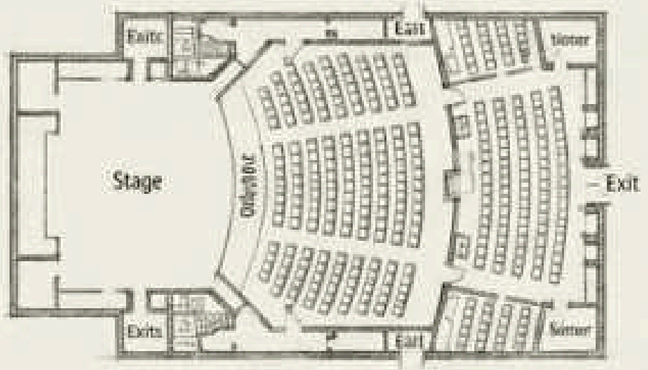
¶ 2.6

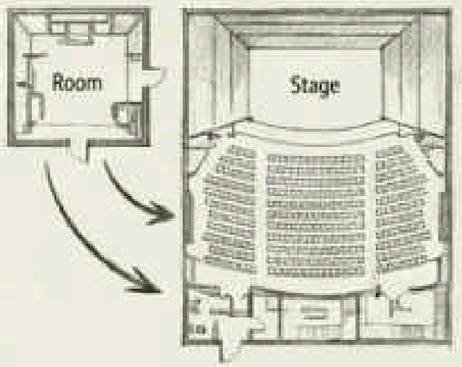
Time Constraints



Boundaries are absolute.

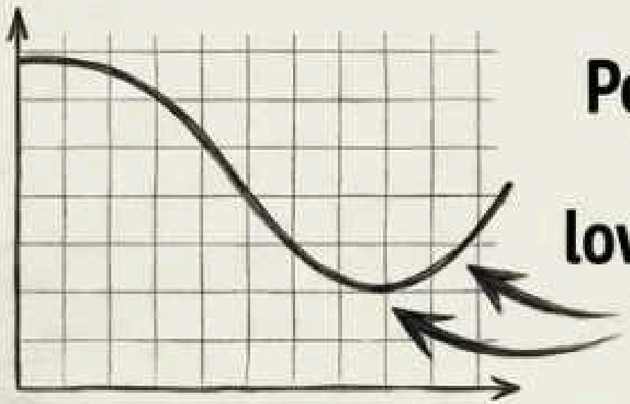
Space





Small room (intimate tone) vs. Large hall (vocal projection).

Chronobiology



Post-lunch energy is notoriously low—requires high-vitality delivery.

A speech of twenty minutes when given ten is not a gift, but a theft.

Real-Time Discovery & Adaptation

Pre-Speech: Ask organizers, survey attendees.



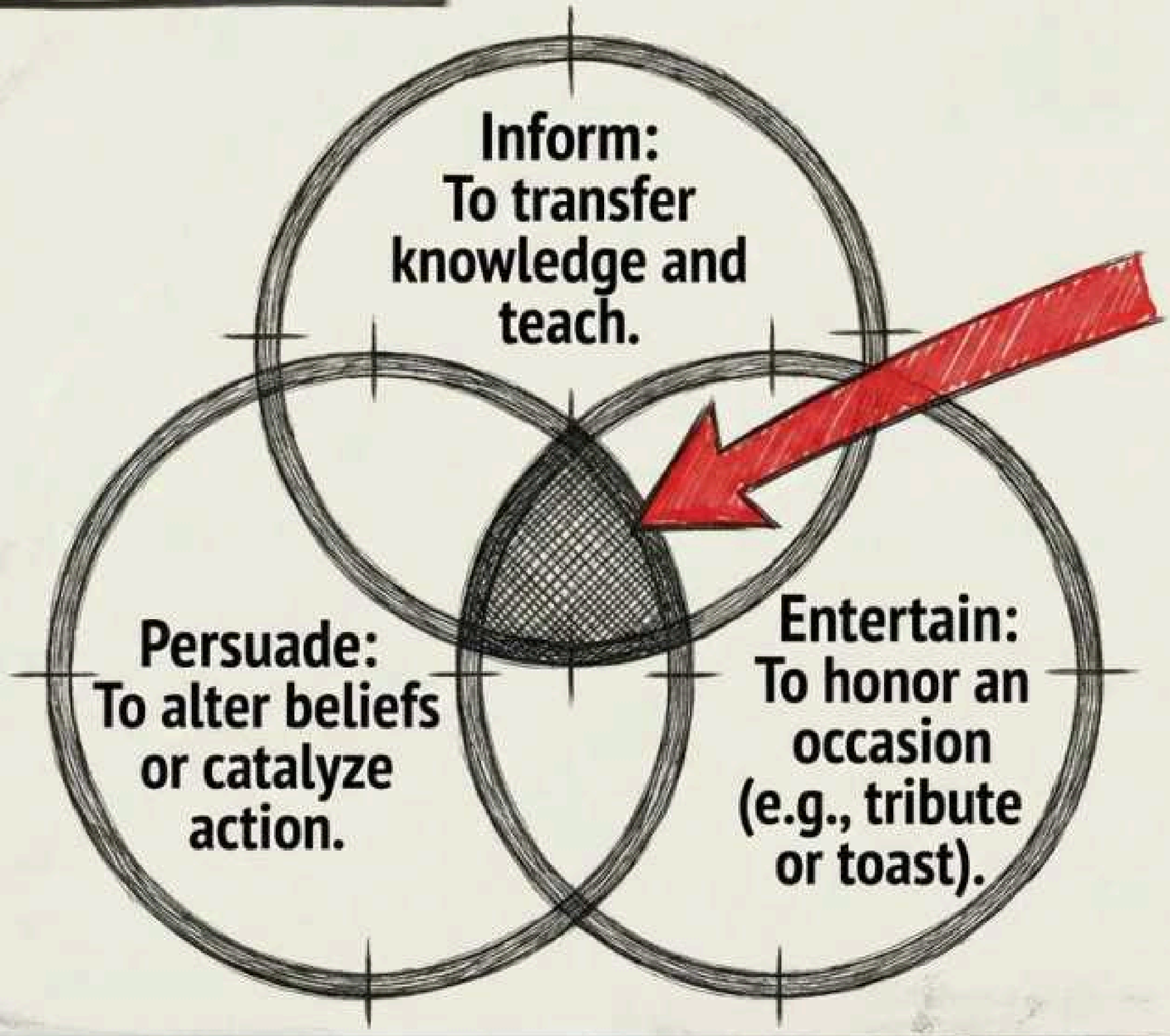
Mid-Speech Feedback Loop:

→ If faces show puzzlement
⇒ Re-explain immediately.

→ If faces show restlessness
⇒ Accelerate pace or inject a narrative.

Adaptation is not a disruption; it is part of the skill.

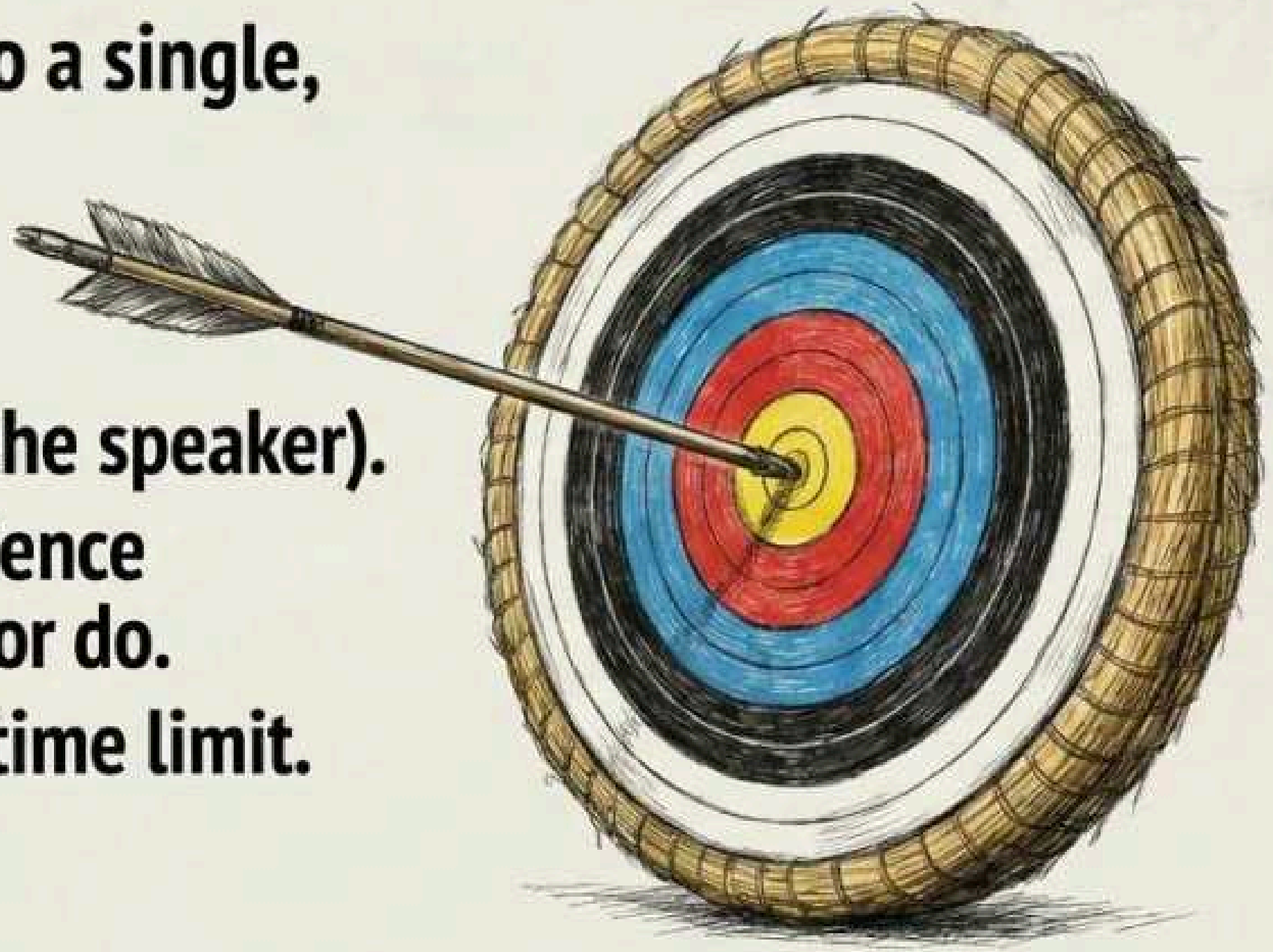
The General Purpose



Real speeches often blend elements, but ONE overarching purpose must lead.

The Specific Purpose

Sharpen the general purpose into a single, precise sentence.



- **Requirements:**
  - Aimed at the audience (not the speaker).
  - States exactly what the audience should understand, believe, or do.
  - Achievable within the strict time limit.

Specific Purpose = 1 Sentence + 1 Audience Action

Example: To persuade my audience that every adult should learn basic first aid.

The Central Idea (The Thesis)

The singular core message that summarizes the entire speech.

Specific Purpose	Central Idea
What you want from the audience.	What you will tell the audience. Example: Basic first aid is quick to learn, widely available, and capable of saving a life.



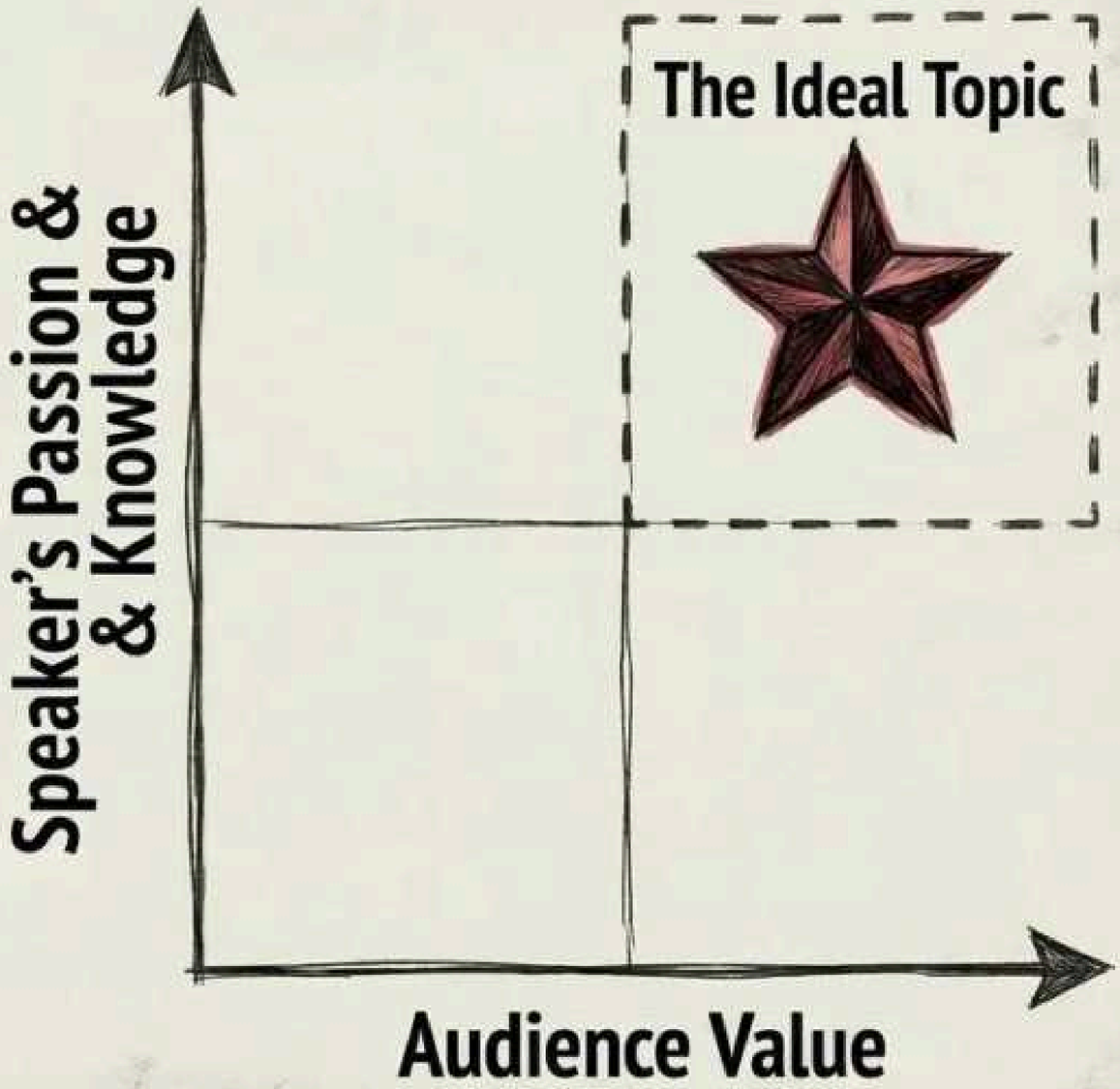
The Diagnostic Test: If it cannot fit into a single sentence, the speech is not ready.

Choosing a Topic

1. Internal Audit: Brainstorm without judgment (experience, work, puzzles, angers, delights).

2. External Filter: What does the audience find valuable?

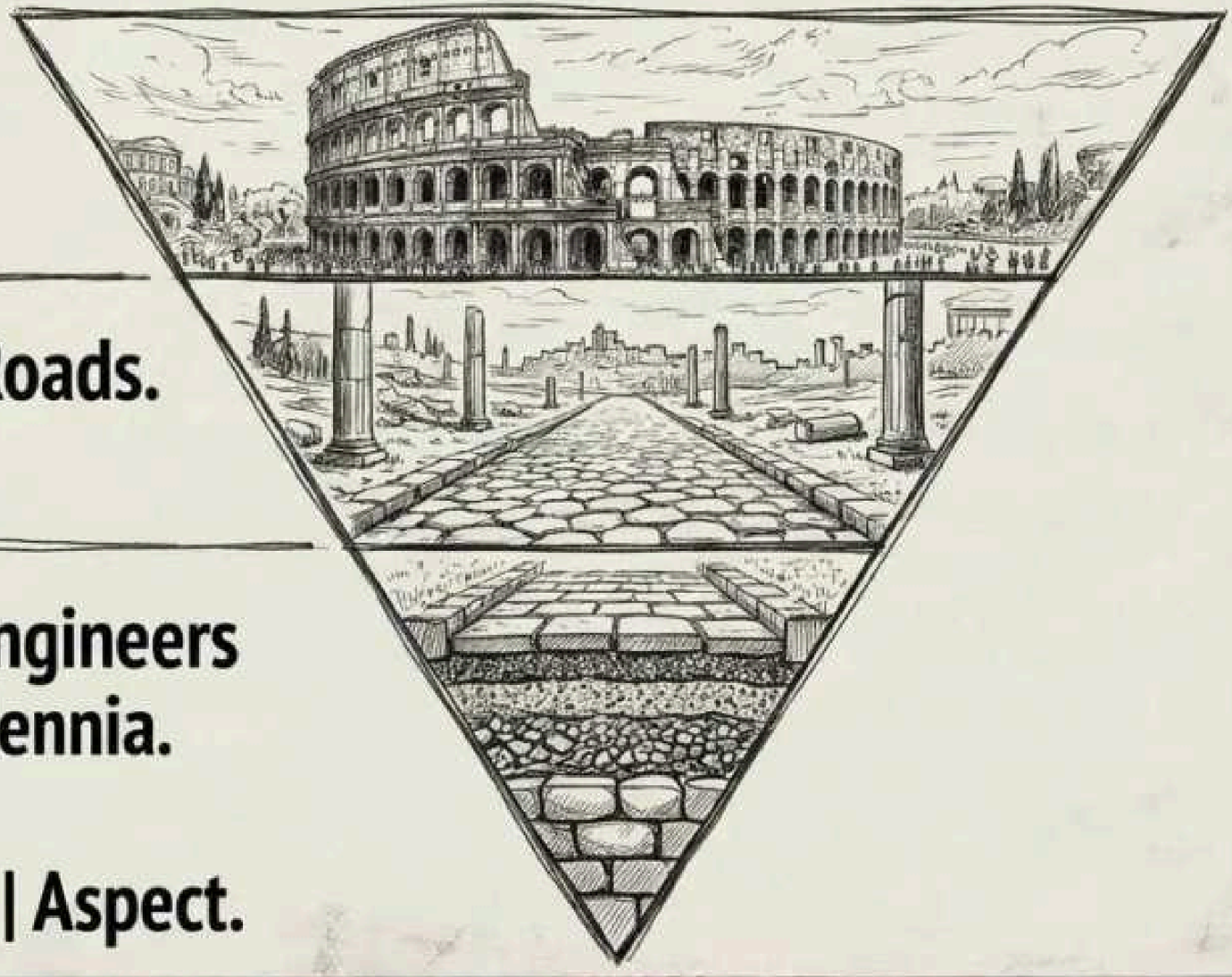
The Catalyst: Enthusiasm is highly contagious. Choose something you care about—a speaker bored by their own subject ensures a bored room.



The Power of Narrowing

Rule: A narrow topic, well explored, beats a broad one skimmed.

Broad: The Roman Empire (Too large for 7 minutes).



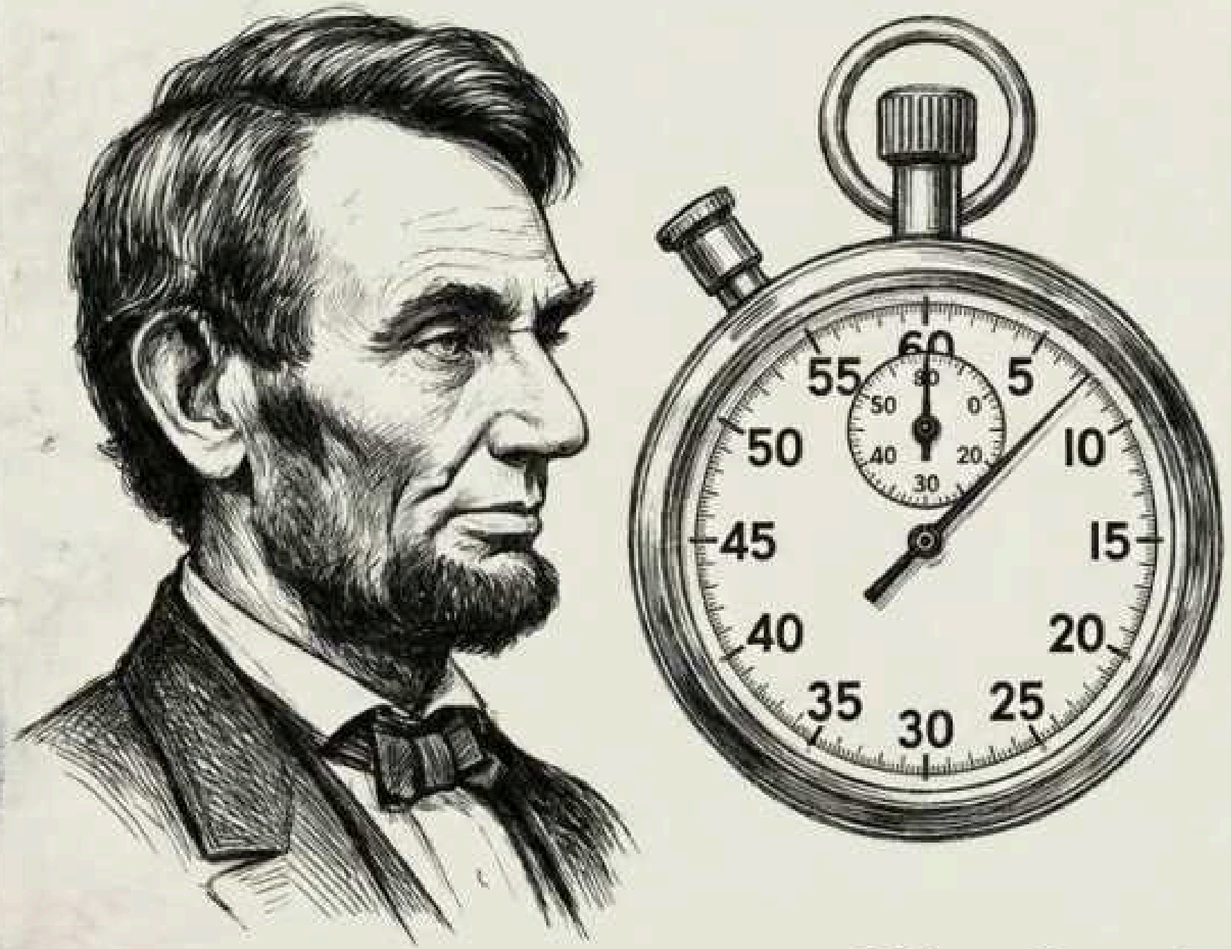
Narrowed by Aspect: Roman Roads.

Hyper-Focused: How Roman engineers built roads that lasted two millennia.

Narrow topics by: Time | Place | Aspect.

The Mathematics of Time

Time is a hard limit. Plan mathematically.



Average Speaking Rate:
≈ 130 words per minute (WPM).

5 minutes = ≈ 650 words.

The Gettysburg Lesson (1863):

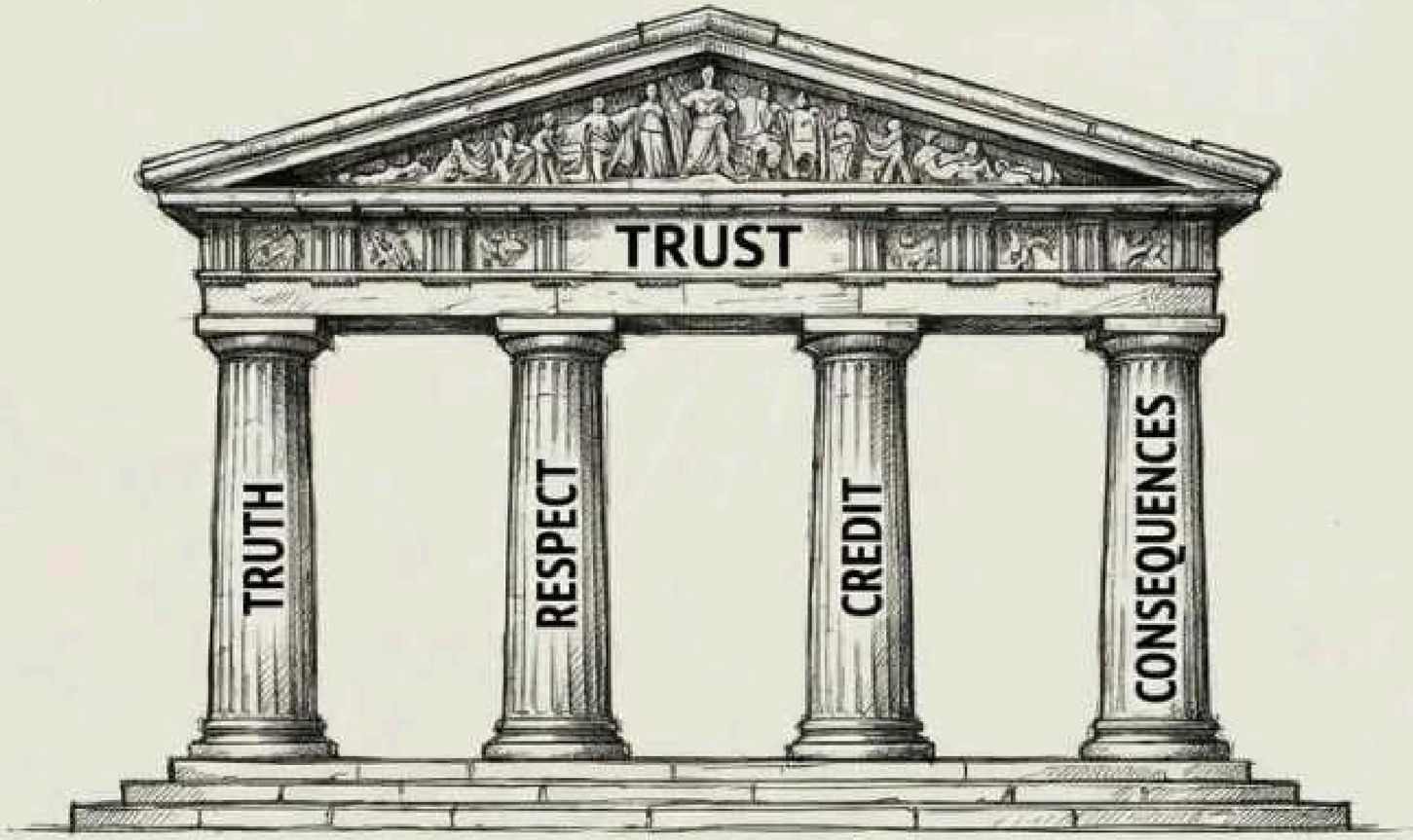
Edward Everett: ~2 hours. (Forgotten)

Abraham Lincoln: ~2 minutes / 270 words. (Immortal)

Words = Time × 130

The Ethical Imperative

A speaker wields power over an audience. Power demands responsibility.



The NCA Credo Mandates

The Ultimate Test: Would the audience still trust you if they knew everything you knew?

Research & Evidence

Research begins only after purpose and thesis are firmly set.



Sources
- (Gather from: experience, books, databases, interviews)

↓

Notes
(Record the exact origin of every fact)

↓

Citations
(Ensure absolute traceability).

(Note: Lecture 4 will cover source evaluation in depth)

Synthesis: A Worked Example

¶ 2.16

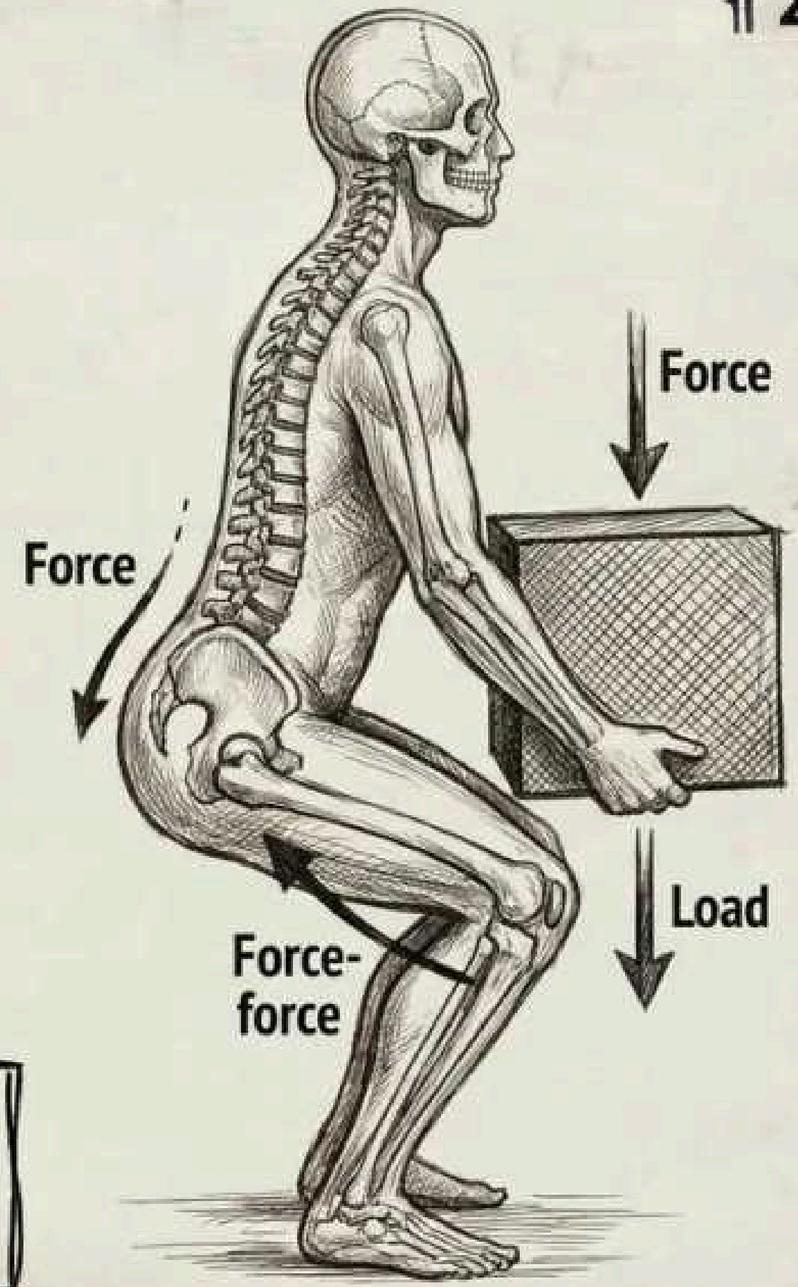
Audience: New company employees.

General Purpose: To inform.

Topic Narrowing:
Workplace Safety → Safe Lifting.

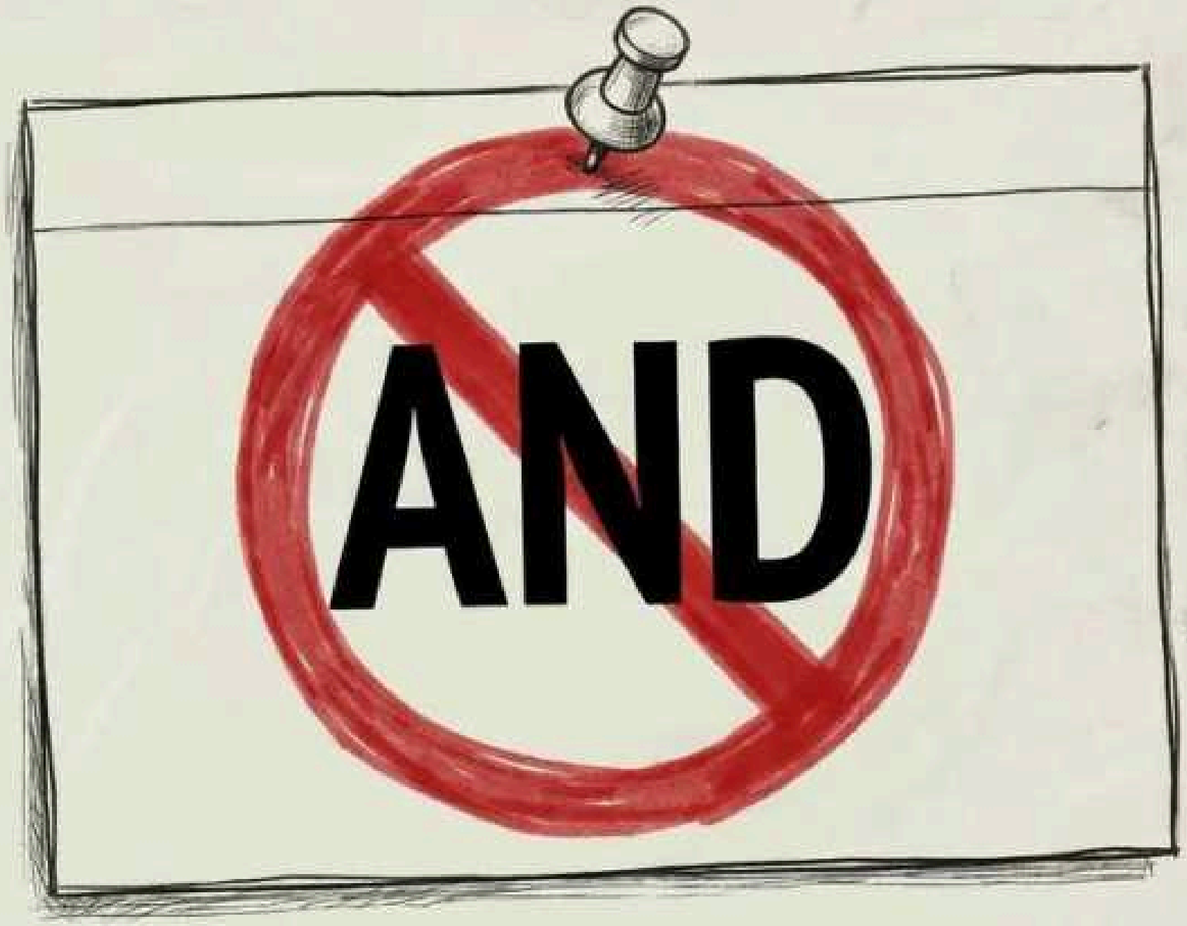
Specific Purpose: Explain 3 steps for lifting heavy objects without injury.

Central Idea: Bending knees, keeping the load close, and avoiding twisting will protect your back.



The Practice Task

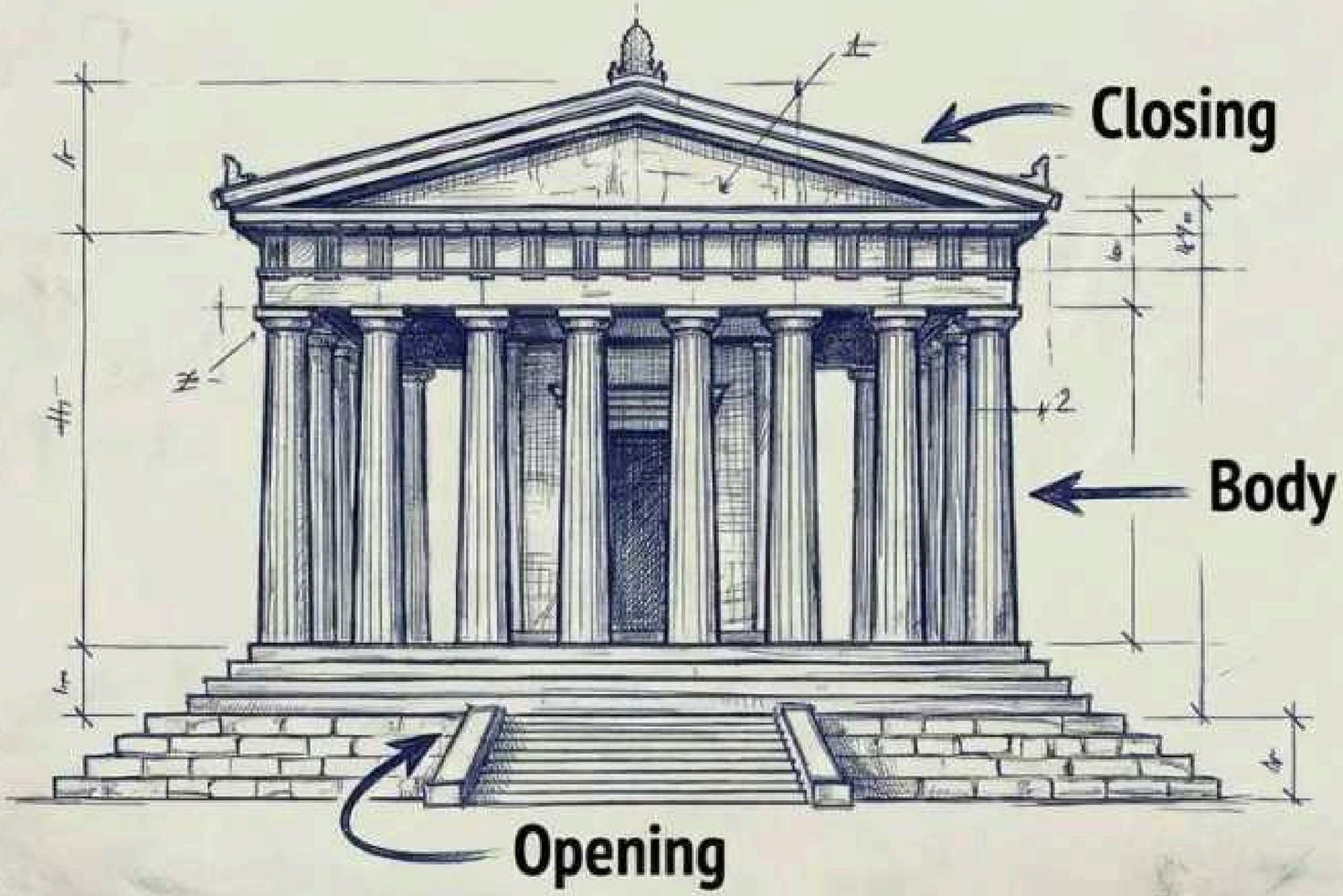
1. Identify: A subject you know well that others could use.
2. Draft: A Specific Purpose and a Central Idea for a 5-minute talk.
3. The ‘AND’ Test: If either sentence requires the word ‘and’ more than twice, it contains multiple ideas. Narrow it further.



Count(‘and’) ≤ 2

Looking Ahead to Lecture 3

With the audience analyzed, the purpose defined, and the topic narrowed, we have our materials.



Next Module: The Shape of a Speech.

- We will cover how to organize the body, and how to successfully open and close your presentation.