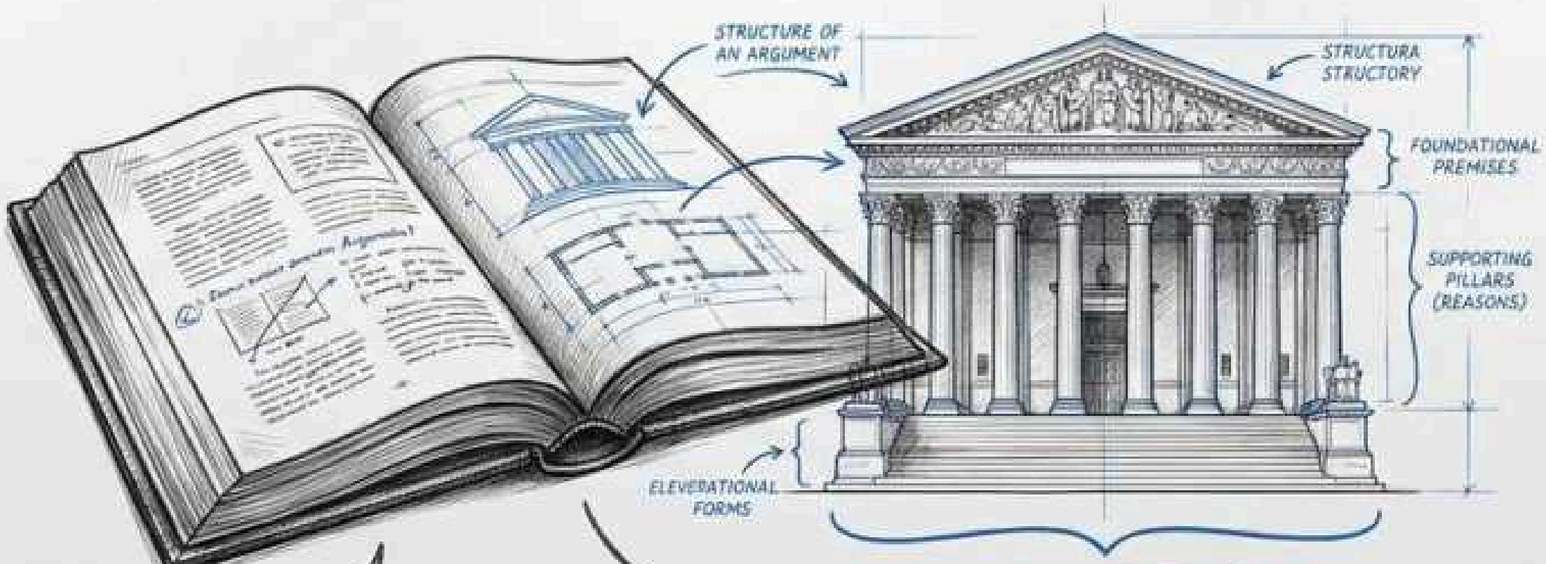
Thesis and Argument

Building a Defensible Claim



An Argument = A Claim + The Sum of its Reasons.

$$A = C + \sum(R)$$

A (Argument, Outcome) C (Claim, Core Stance) \sum(R) (Sum of Valid Reasons, Evidence, and Logic)

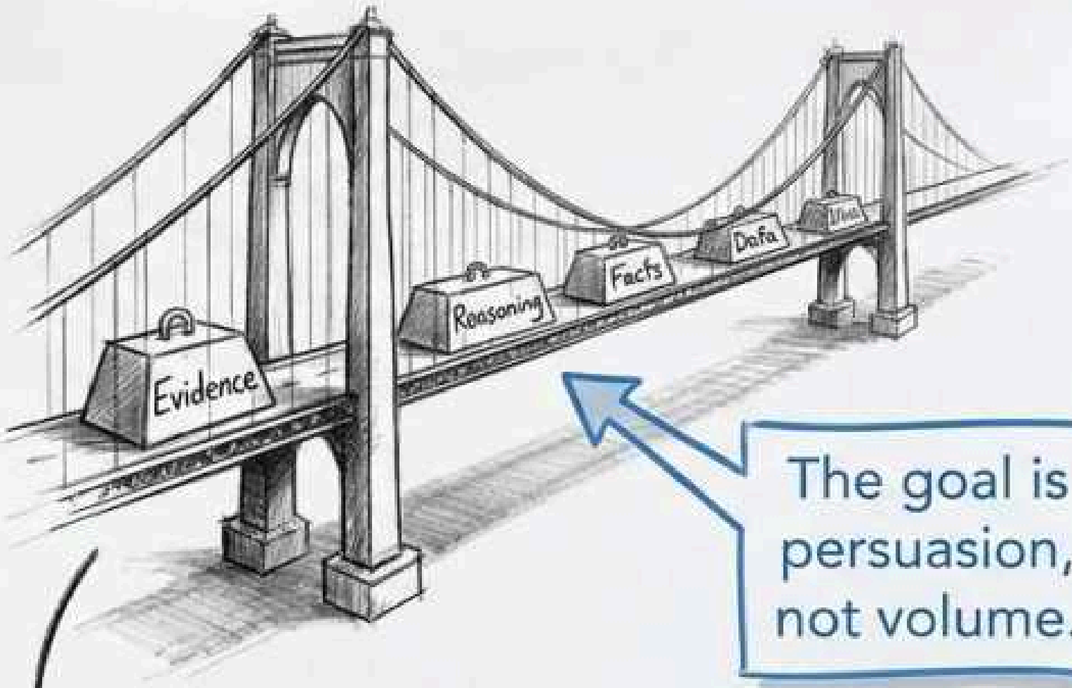
Argument ≠ Anger

¶ 3.2



Everyday Speech

- Loud
- Angry
- A quarrel



The goal is persuasion, not volume.

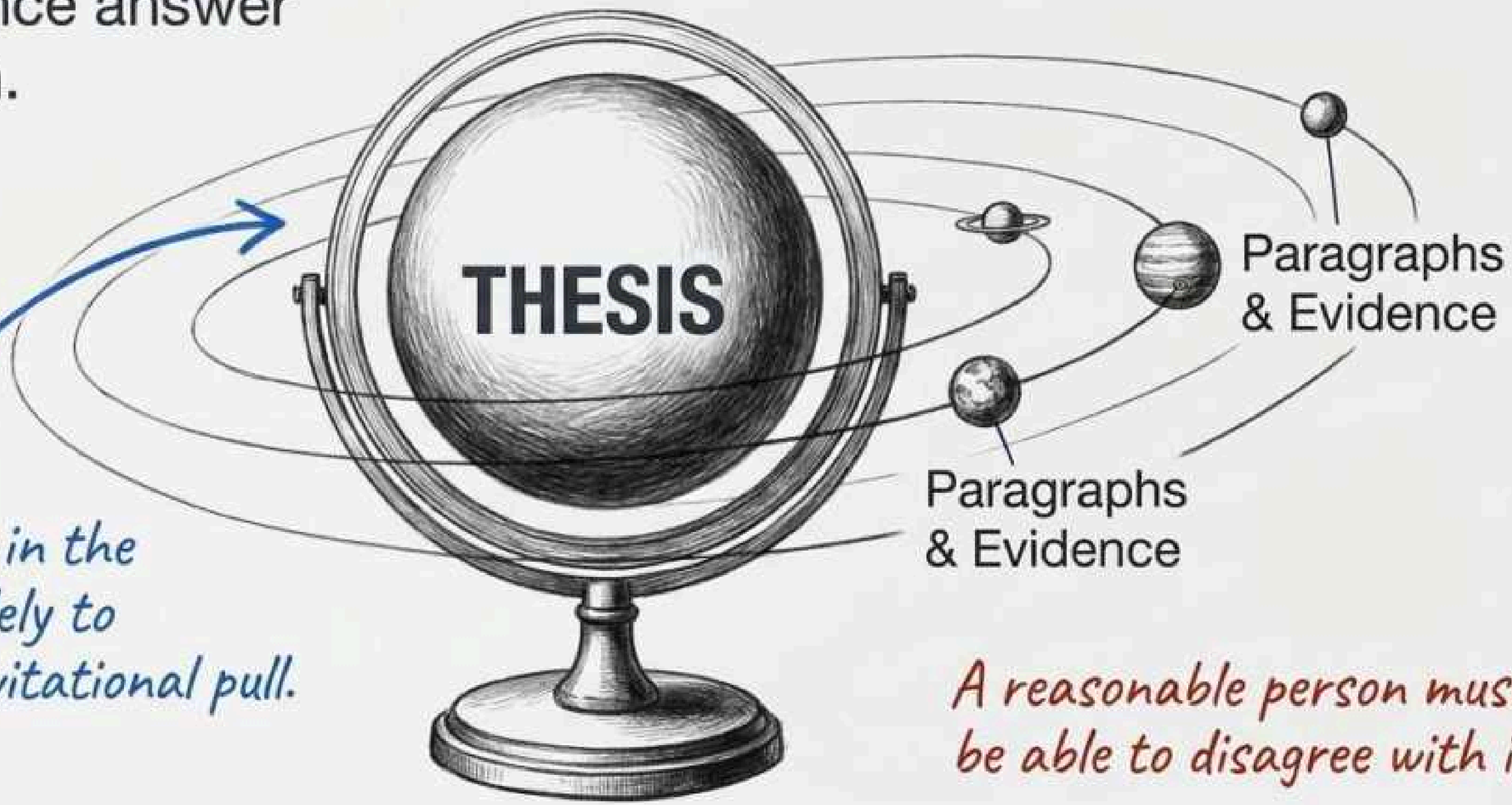
College Writing

- Takes a position
- Offers good grounds

The Center of Gravity

¶ 3.3

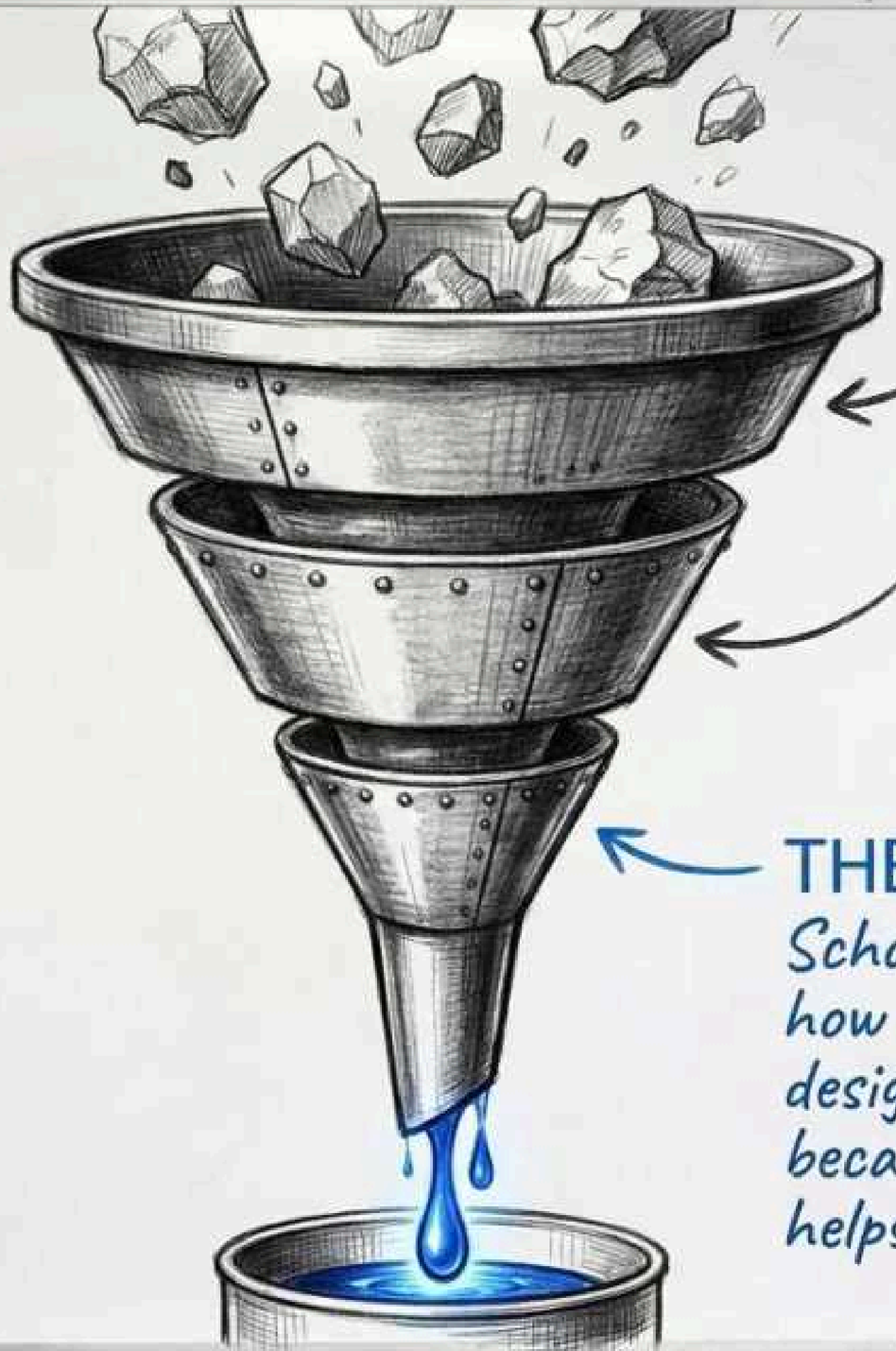
A 1–2 sentence answer
to a question.



Everything else in the essay exists solely to support its gravitational pull.

A reasonable person must be able to disagree with it.

¶ 3.4



TOPIC

Social media and teenagers.

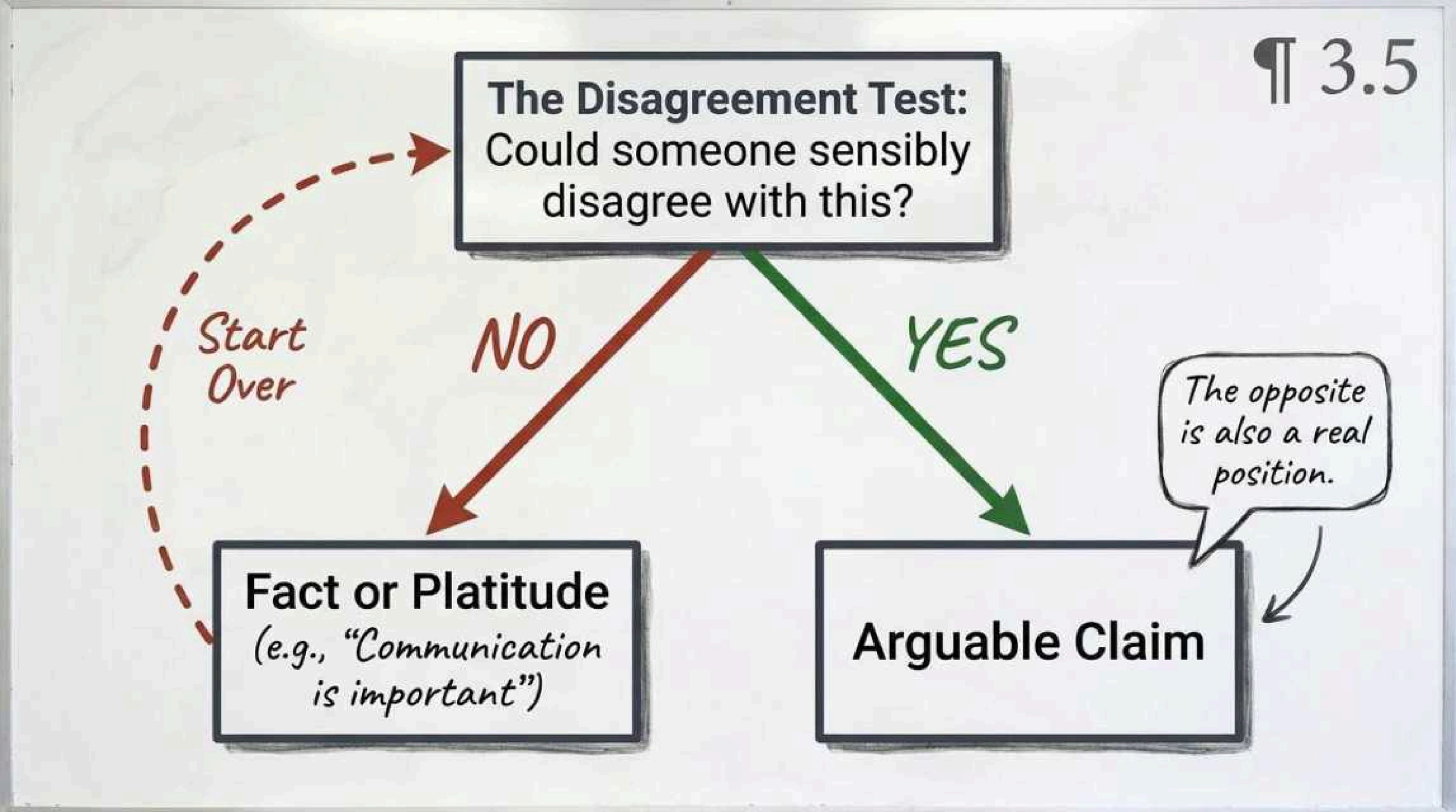
FACT

Many teenagers use social media every day.

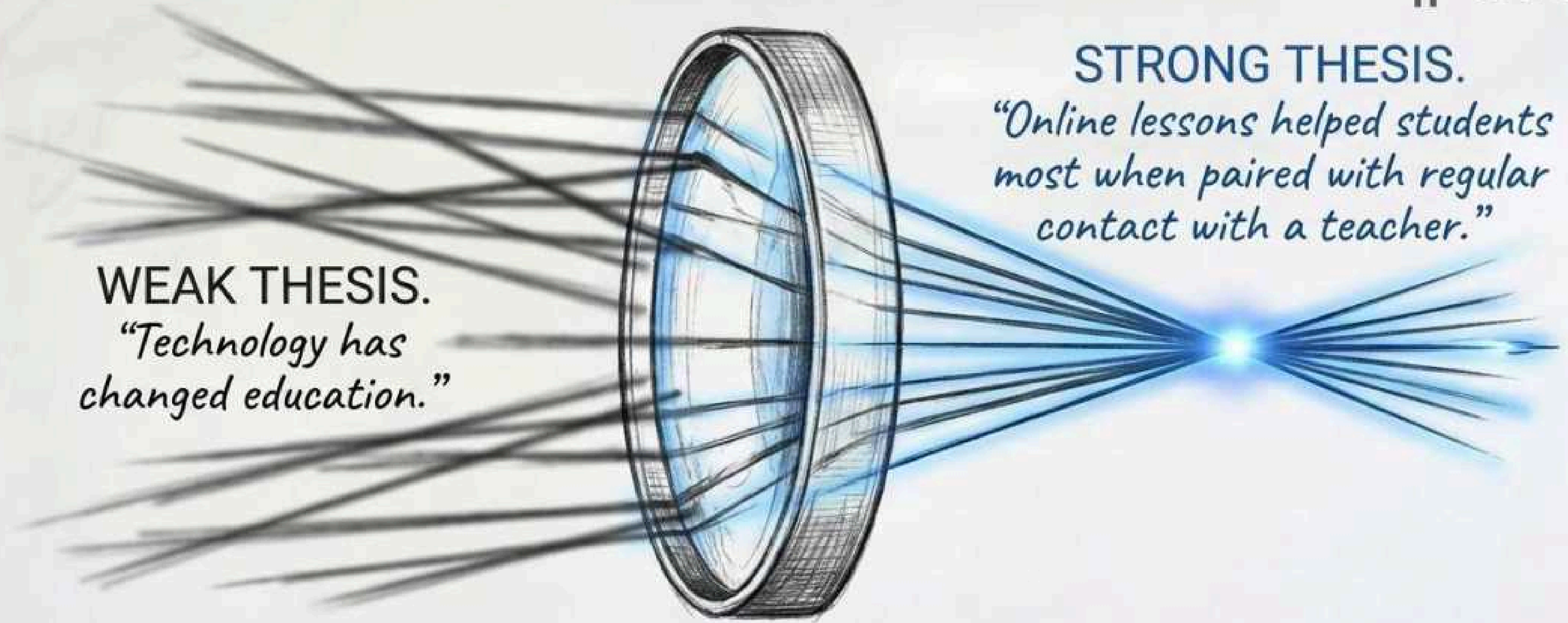
THESIS

Schools should teach students how social media platforms are designed to hold attention, because understanding the design helps them control their own use.

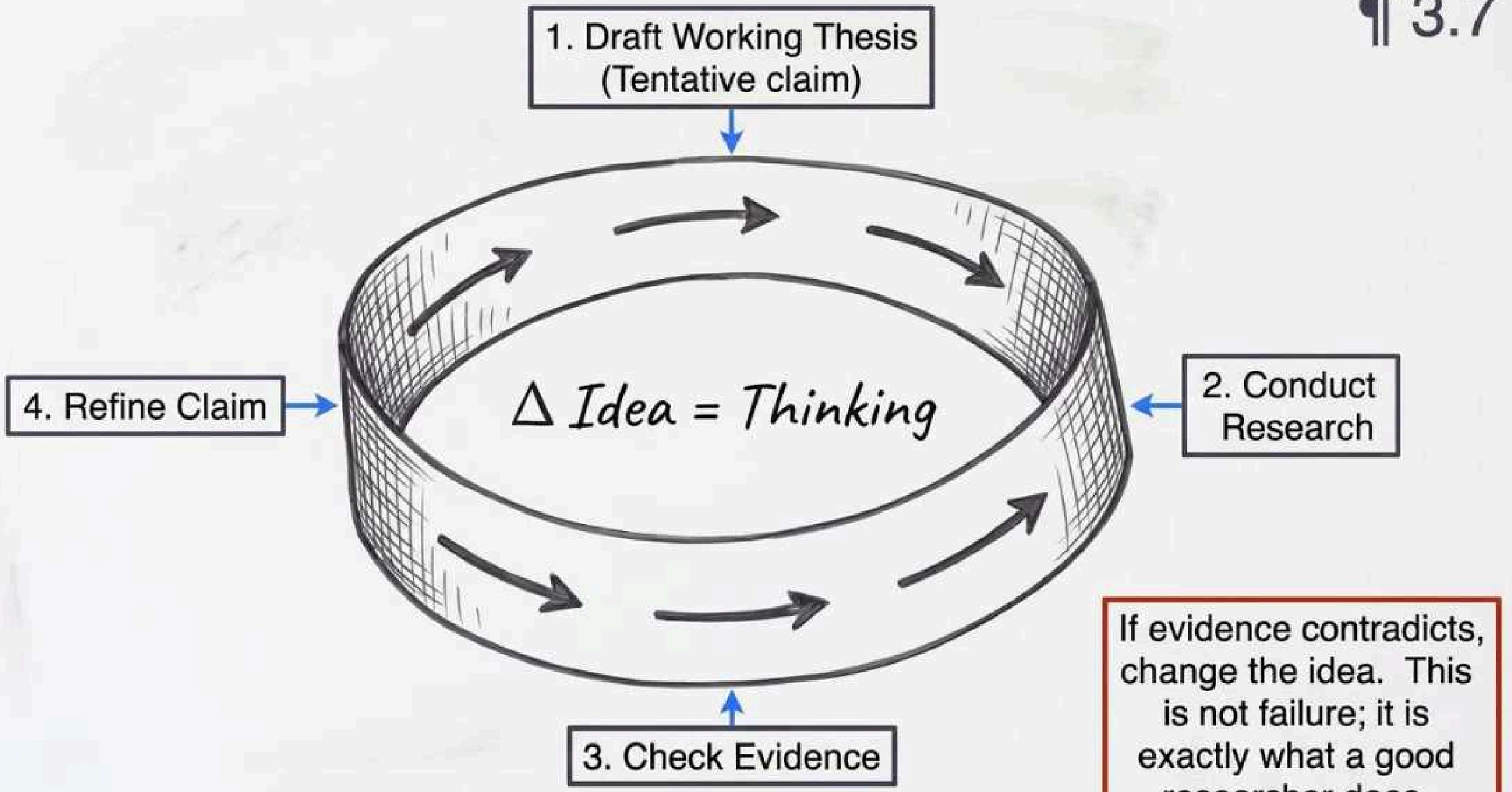
Takes a position. Can be argued.


The Disagreement Test:
Could someone sensibly disagree with this?
Start Over
NO
YES
Fact or Platitude
(e.g., "Communication is important")
Arguable Claim
The opposite is also a real position.

¶ 3.6



Specific theses tell the reader exactly what you will prove.
They are easier to support and more interesting to read.

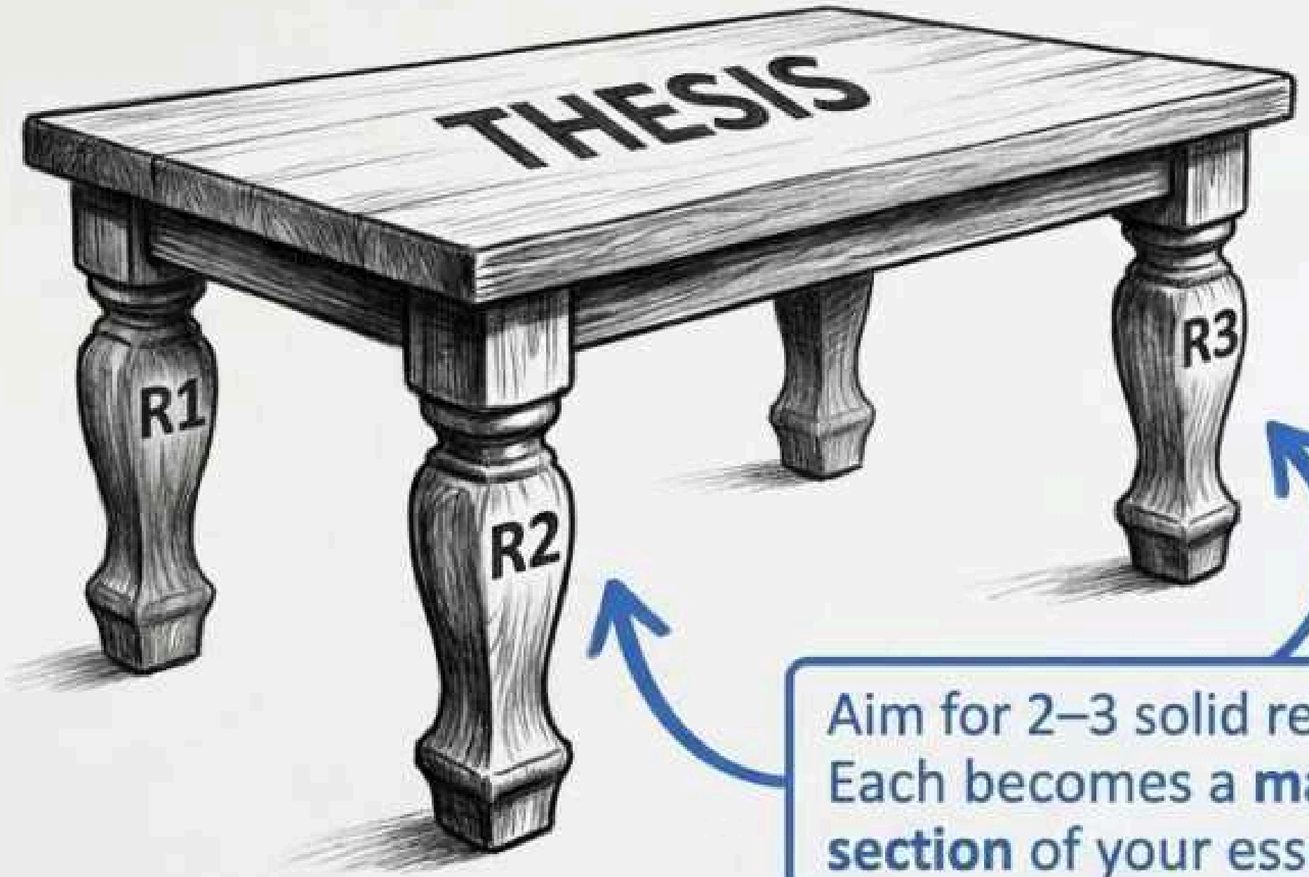


If evidence contradicts, change the idea. This is not failure; it is exactly what a good researcher does.

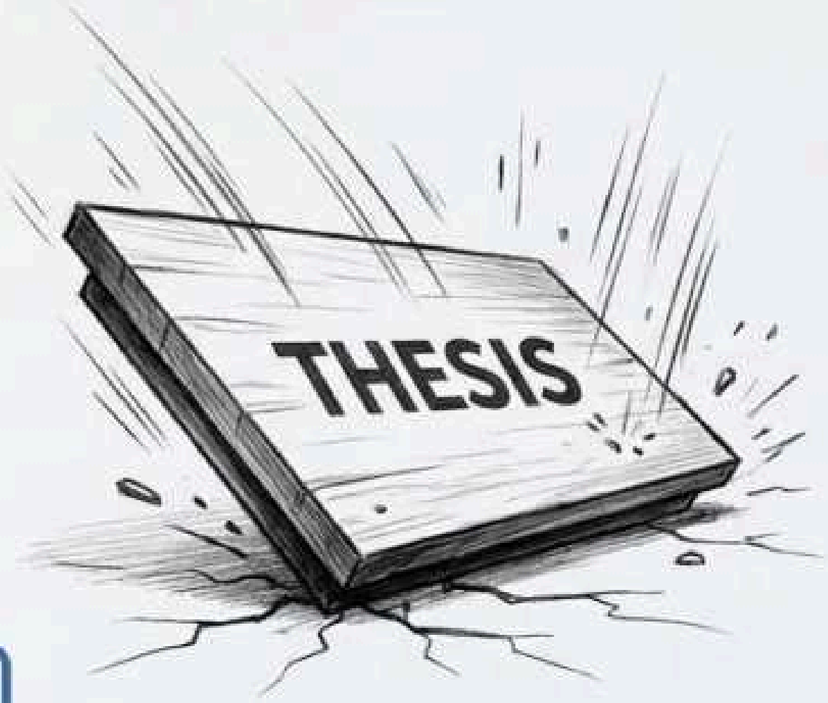
Structural Integrity

¶ 3.8

Reasons answer the question: Why should the reader believe this?

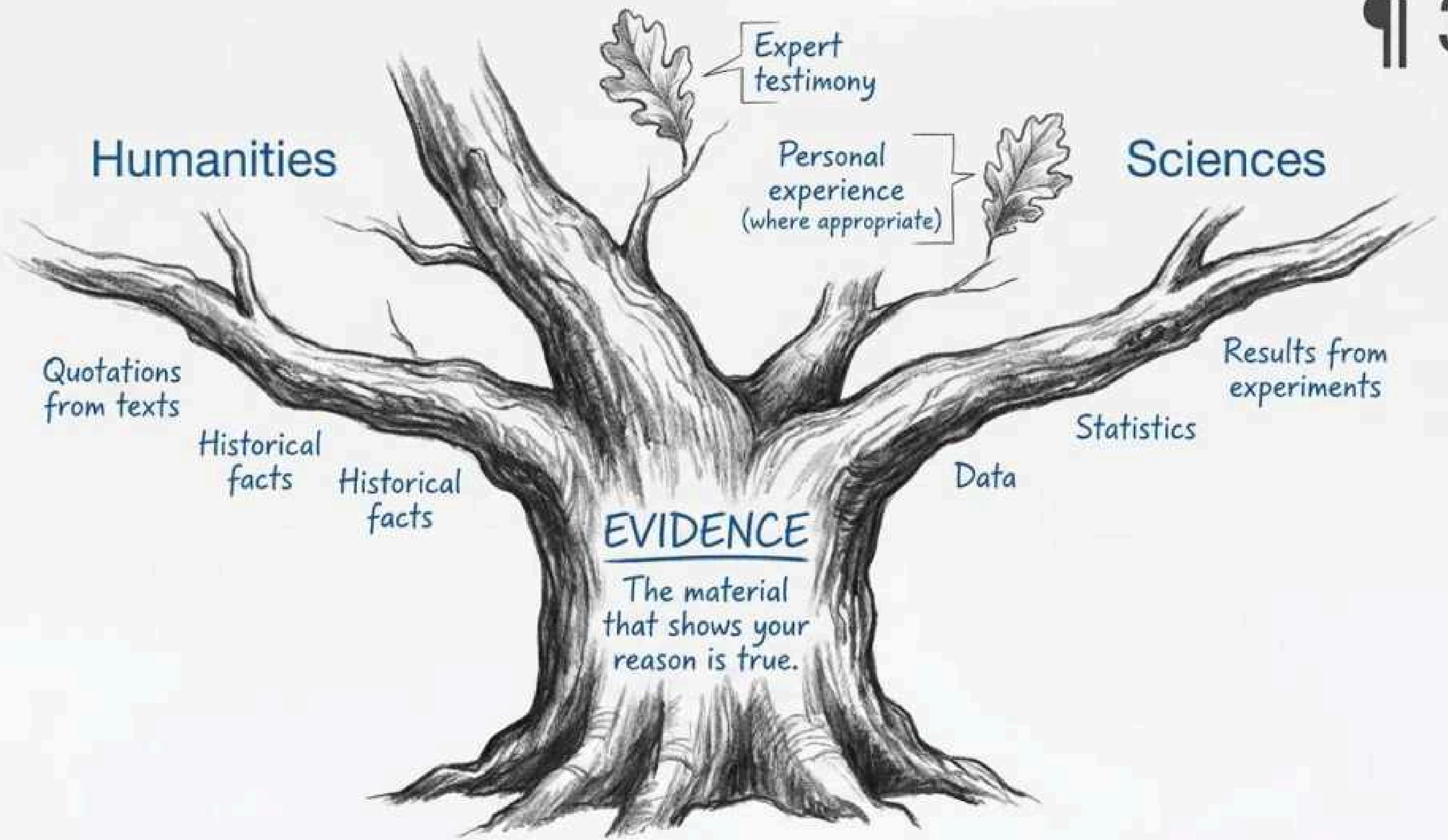


Aim for 2–3 solid reasons. Each becomes a **major section** of your essay.



Without the legs, the table falls over.

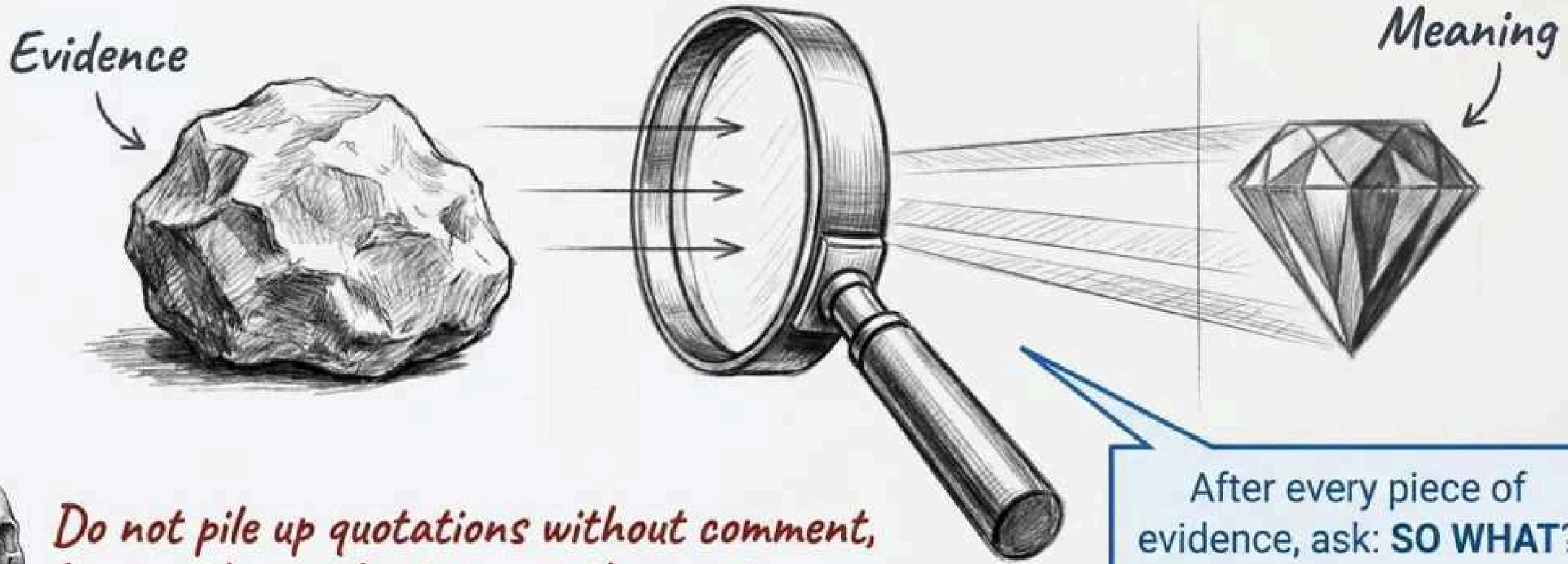
¶ 3.9



(More on using evidence honestly in Lecture 6).

Fact + Explanation = Proof

Evidence does not speak for itself.



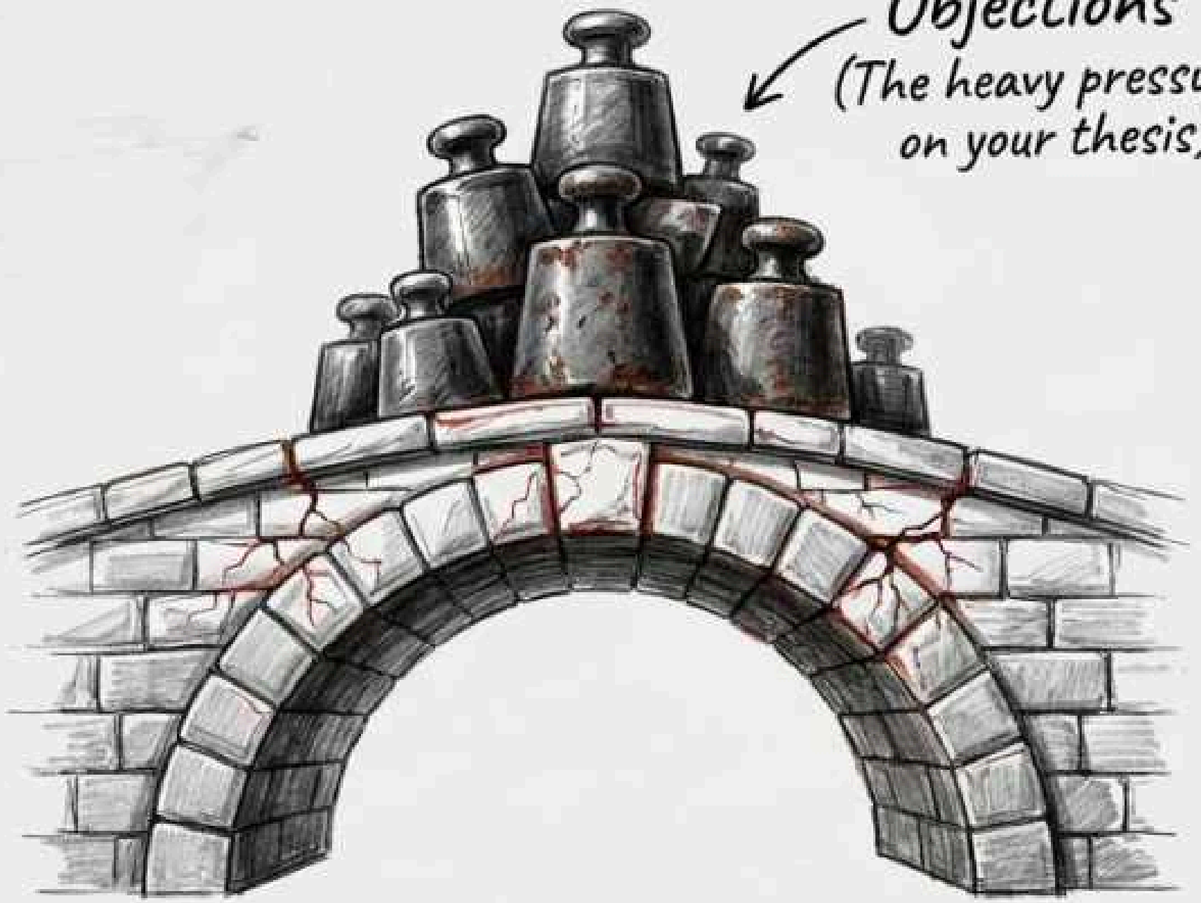


Do not pile up quotations without comment, leaving the reader to guess the point.

After every piece of evidence, ask: **SO WHAT?** Then write the answer.

Counterargument = A reasonable objection to your thesis.

(Shows you're considering all sides!)



Reader Trust Meter



Needle points to maximum (Highest Trust)

It proves you understand the whole question, not just your side.

✗ The Myth: Objections weaken your case.

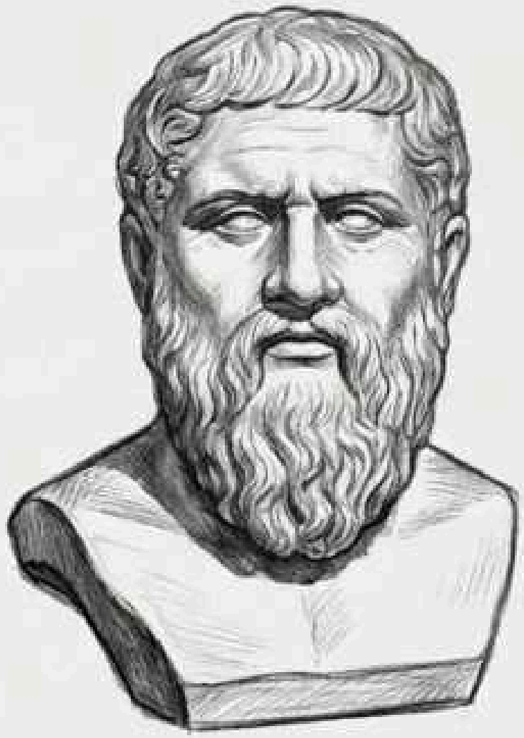
✓ The Reality: Stating an objection **fairly** and answering it increases reader trust.

The Straw Man Mistake



✗ Describing the other side in a weak, silly form just to knock it down. Readers will notice.

The Fair Objection



✓ Present the strongest version of the objection in words its supporters would accept.

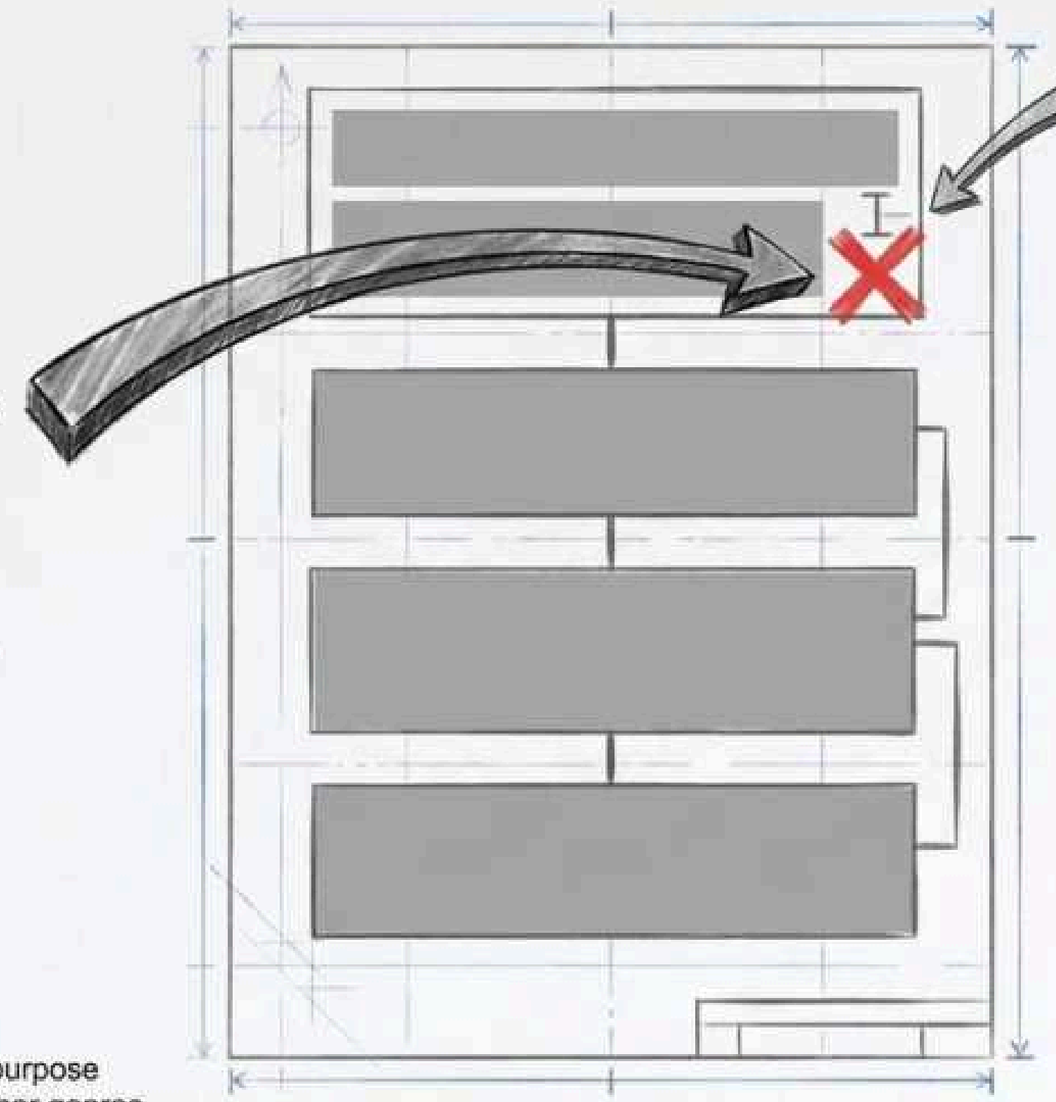
Then, explain why your position still holds, or how it should be adjusted.

The Slip	The Formula	The Fix
Overgeneralizing	*Few ≠ All*	Check your sample size.
False Cause	*A → B ≠ A caused B*	Prove the actual mechanism.
Ad Hominem	*Person ≠ Argument*	Attack the reasoning, not the person.

You do not need the Latin names. Just build the habit of asking:
Does the evidence really support the conclusion?

Cartography of an Essay

¶ 3.14



The Roadmap:
A sentence that previews the main reasons.

In a short college essay, the thesis usually appears at the end of the introduction.

Location may vary. Your audience and purpose (from Lecture 2) dictate placement in other genres.



You will not keep this exact wording. It is simply a scaffold for a first try.

A Thesis is a Promise

¶ 3.16

Thesis ⟺ Essay



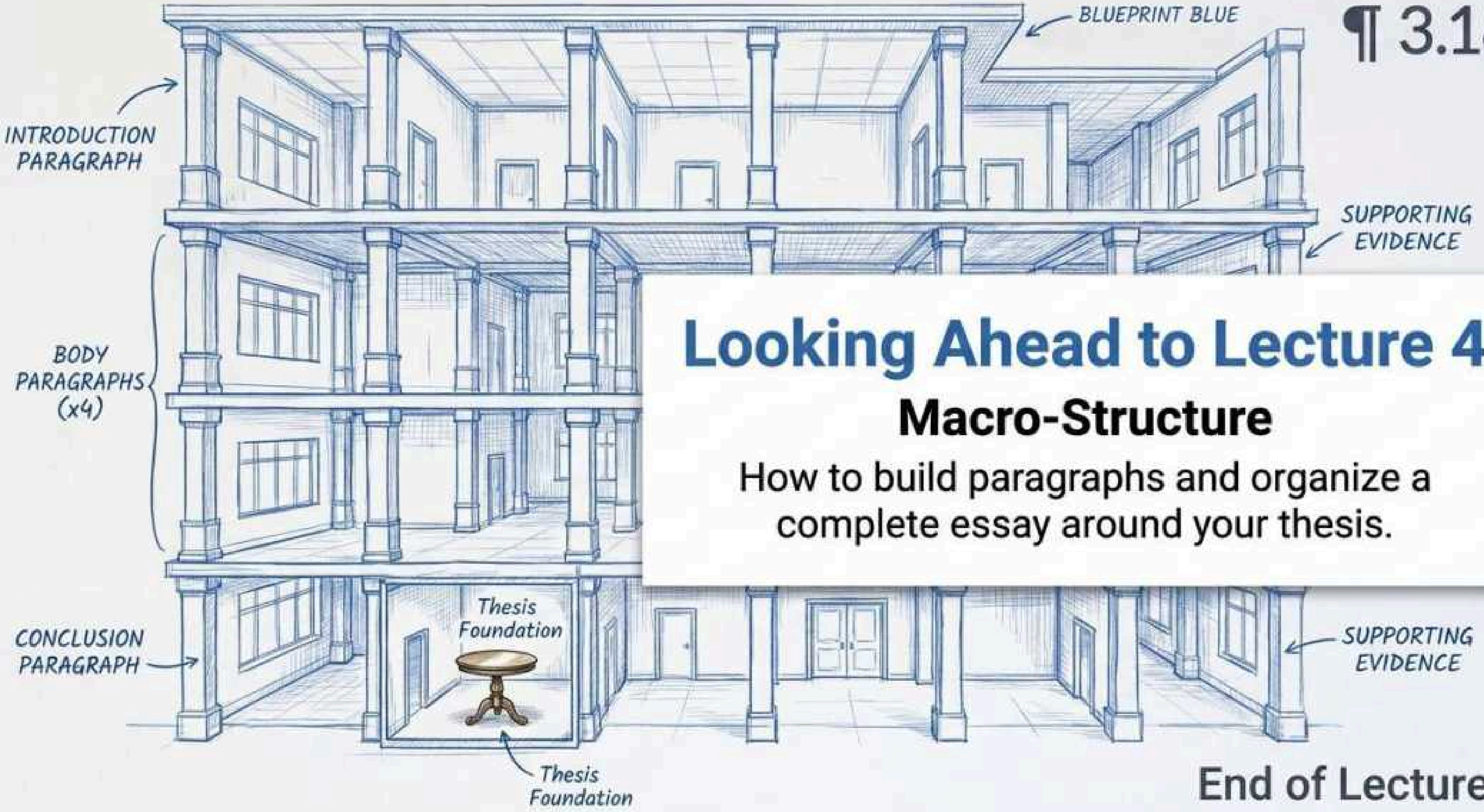
The reader expects the rest of the essay to deliver on your **claim**.
After drafting, check if they match.

If the essay has wandered somewhere more interesting, revise the thesis to match the essay. Or, revise the essay to match the thesis.

¶ 3.17


Your Turn
Choose a topic you care about:
[_____]
Write a thesis sentence:
[_____]
Is it specific?
Could a reasonable person disagree?
Write down ONE reason you would give:
[_____]
Write down ONE objection you must answer:
[_____]

¶ 3.18



Looking Ahead to Lecture 4

Macro-Structure

How to build paragraphs and organize a complete essay around your thesis.

End of Lecture 3