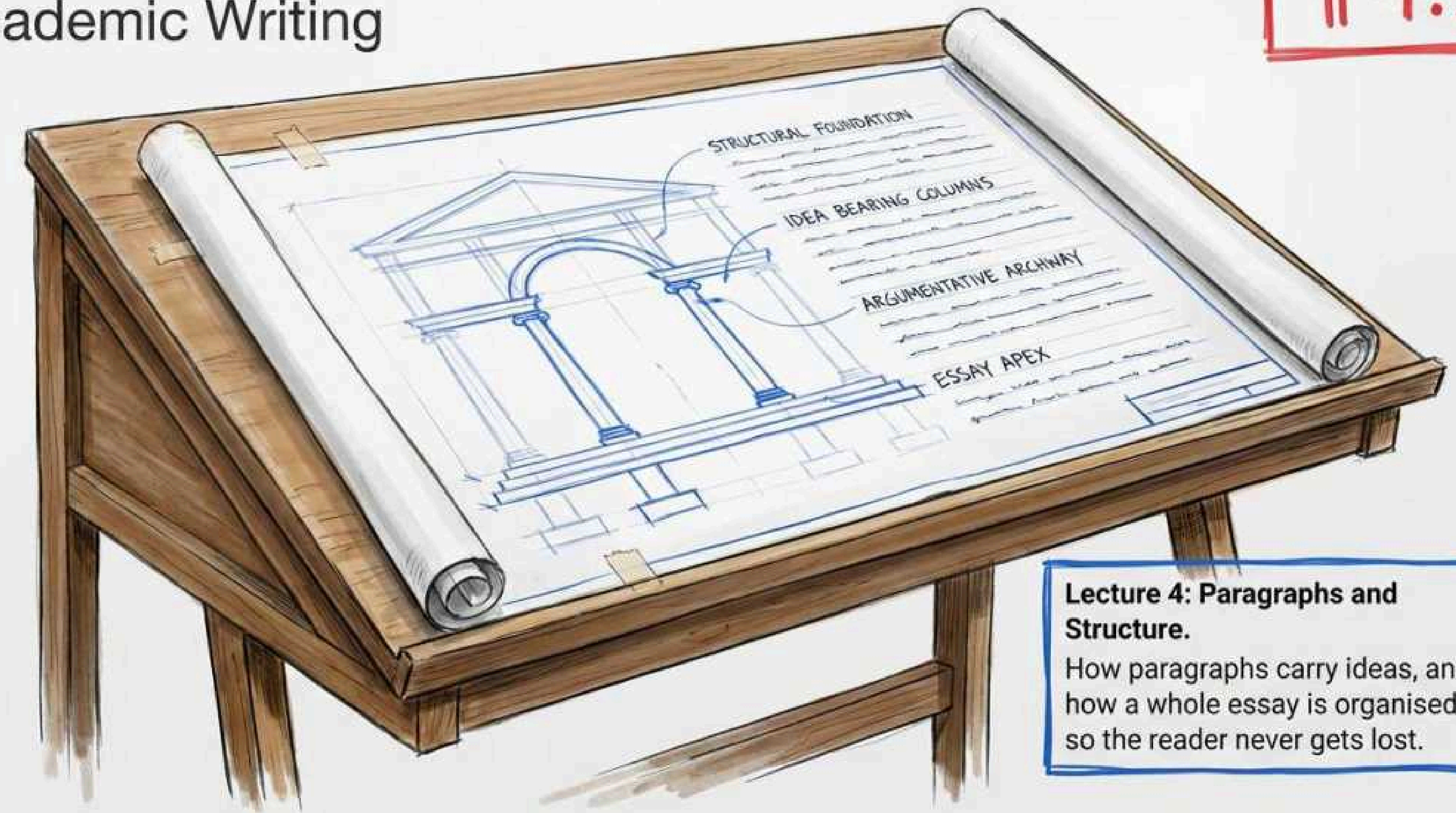
The Architecture of Academic Writing

¶4.1

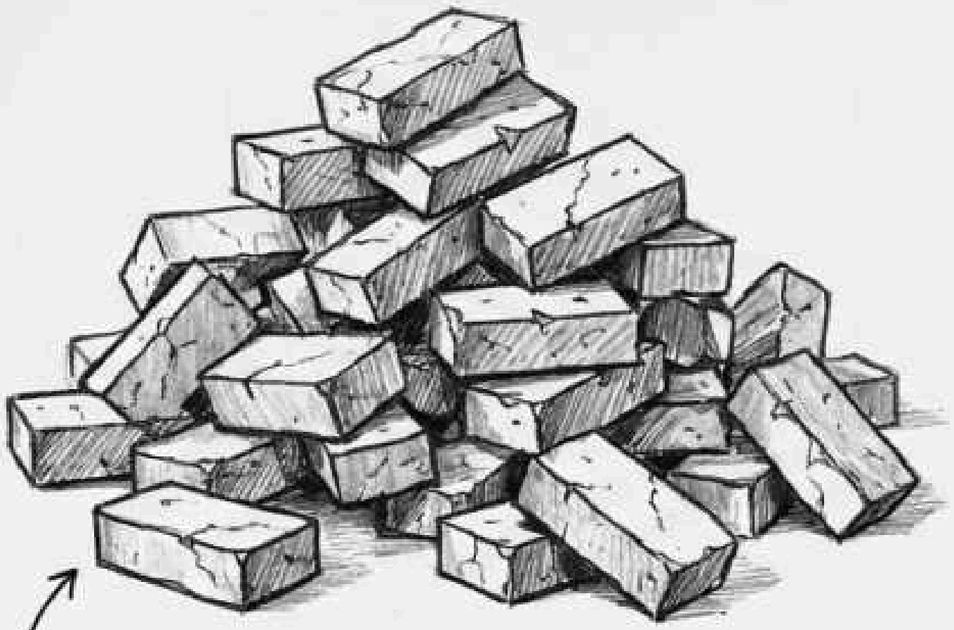


Lecture 4: Paragraphs and Structure.

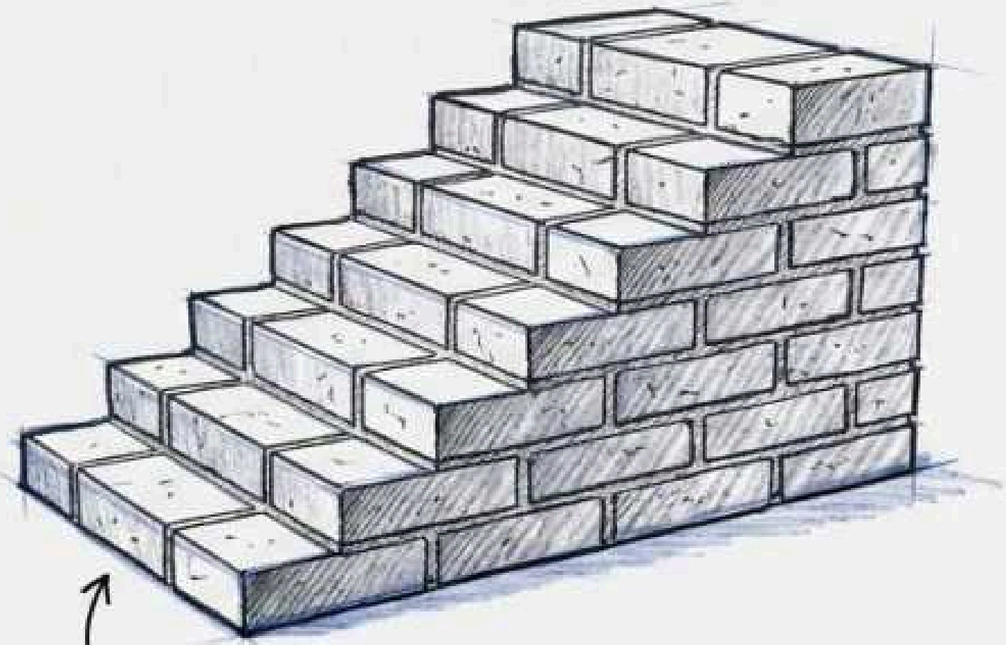
How paragraphs carry ideas, and how a whole essay is organised so the reader never gets lost.

Structure Transforms Ideas into Navigable Arguments

¶ 4.2



The Raw Material: A thesis and a pile of good reasons.



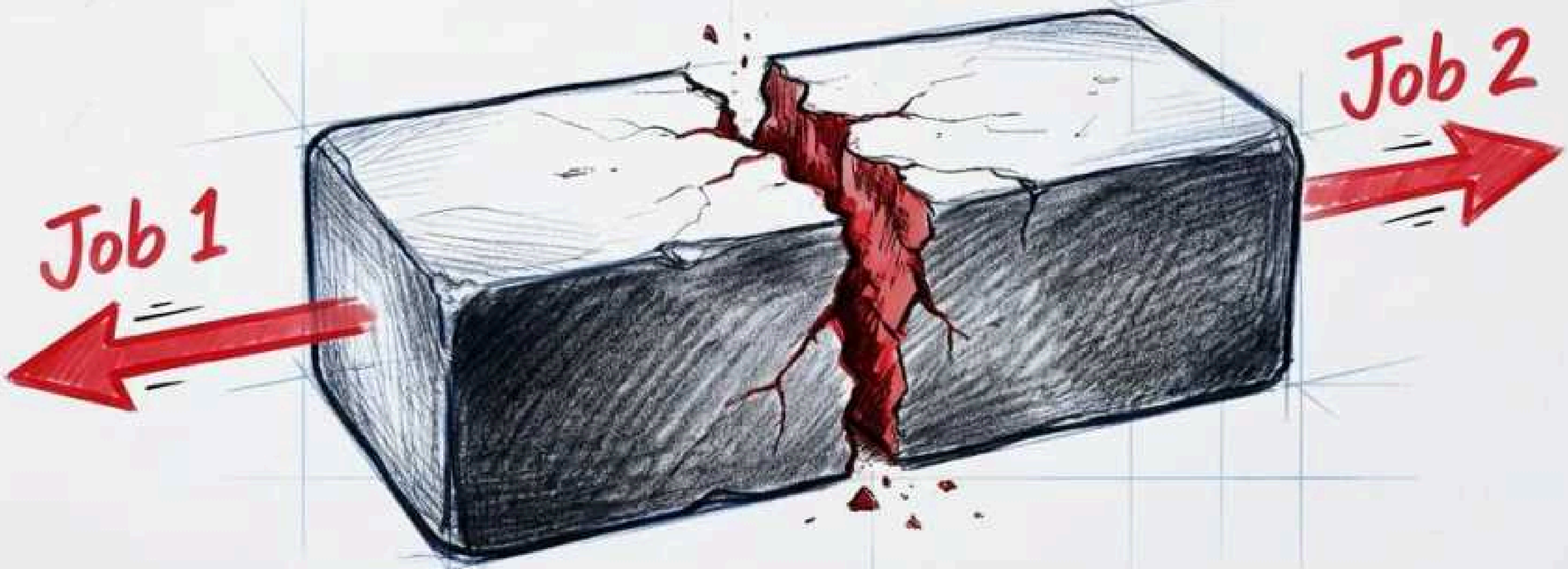
The Structure: A path the reader can follow.

The progression: We build from the atomic unit (the paragraph) to the complete structure (the whole essay).

The Core Structural Rule: One Paragraph, One Idea

¶ 4.3

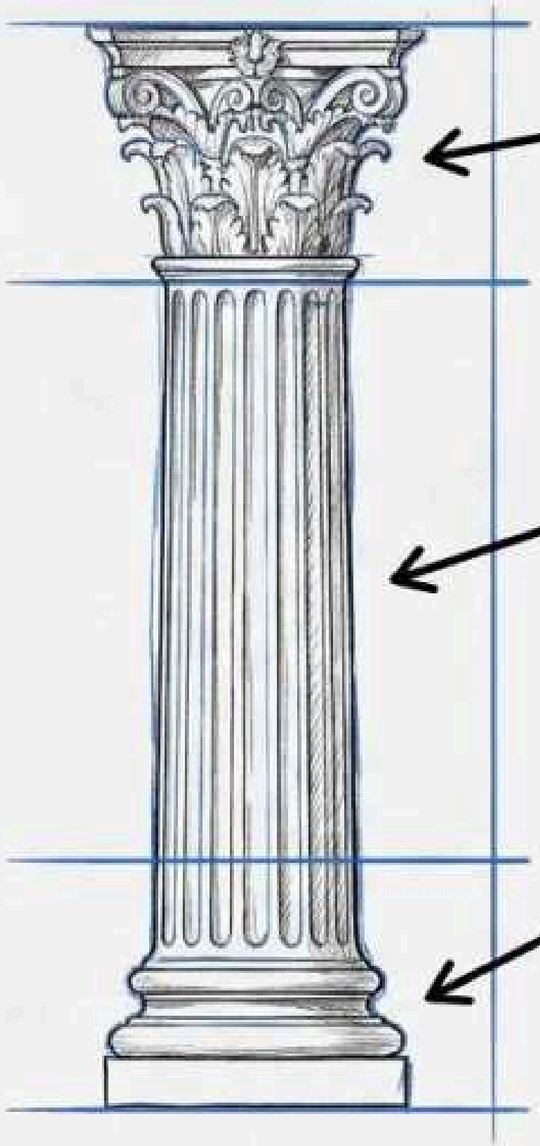
When a paragraph tries to do two jobs,
the reader loses the thread.



If the topic changes mid-paragraph, split it in two.

The Anatomy of an Academic Paragraph

¶ 4.4



Topic Sentence
States the main point of the paragraph.

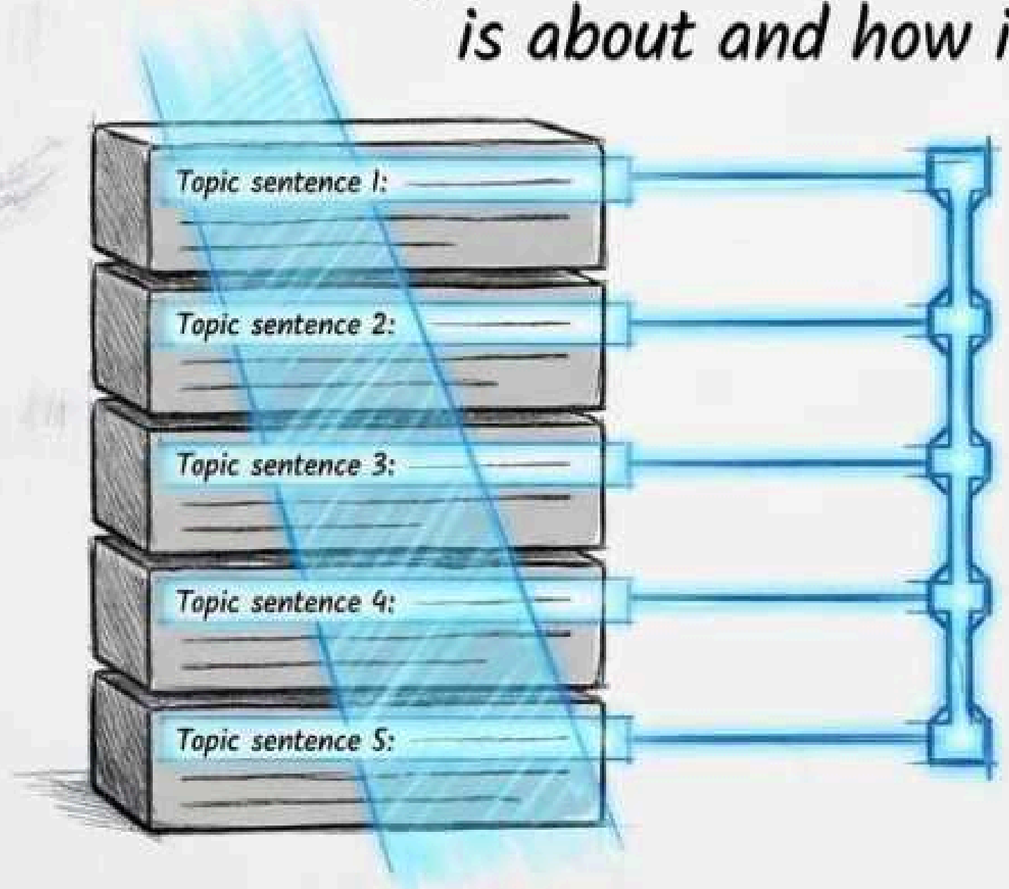
Support
Carries the weight: explanation, evidence, and examples.

Concluding/Linking Sentence
Ties the point back to the thesis or anchors it to the next idea.

The X-Ray Diagnostic: Testing the Topic Sentences

¶ 4.5

The topic sentence tells the reader what the paragraph is about and how it relates to the thesis.



Topic sentence 1: The thesis presents a clear central argument.

Topic sentence 2: Point A supports the thesis with evidence.

Topic sentence 3: Point B introduces a counterargument.

Topic sentence 4: Point C addresses the counterargument.

Topic sentence 5: The conclusion synthesizes the main points and restates the thesis in a new light.

The Test: Read only your topic sentences in order. They should form a rough outline of your whole argument. If they do not, the structure needs work.

The Mathematics of Support

¶ 4.6

$$\text{Support} = P + (I \times E)$$

P (Point): State the argument clearly.

I (Illustration): Present evidence, quote, or paraphrase your source.

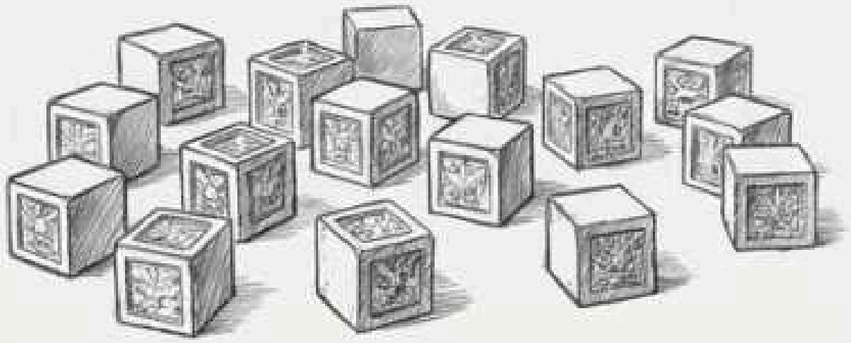
E (Explanation): Explain exactly how the illustration proves the point.

This is where most of the writing happens. Illustration alone is not enough; it must be multiplied by Explanation to provide structural Support.

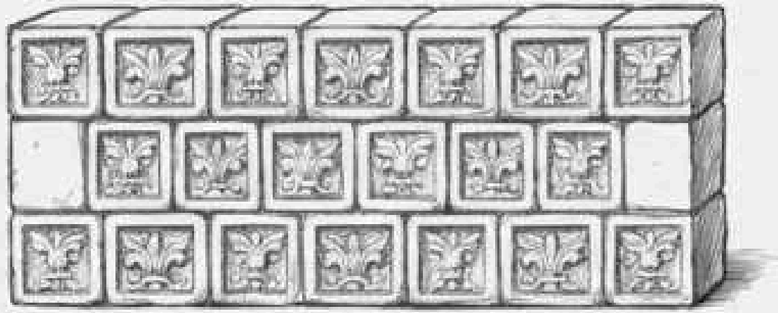
Distinguishing Unity from Coherence

¶ 4.7

Unity (Does every sentence belong to a single main idea?)



All sentences fit the topic, but jump around.



The ideal academic paragraph.

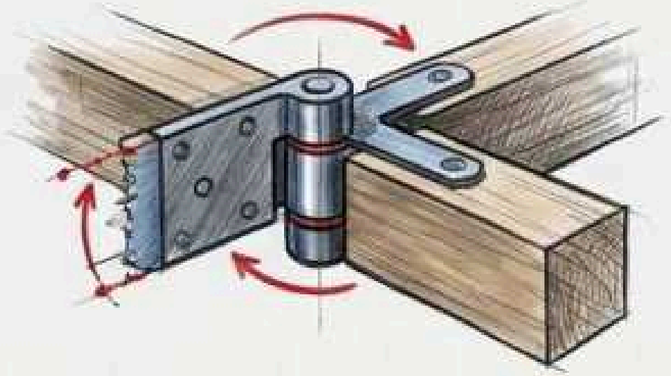
You can have unity without coherence. Both are required.

Coherence (Do sentences connect smoothly so each follows the last?)

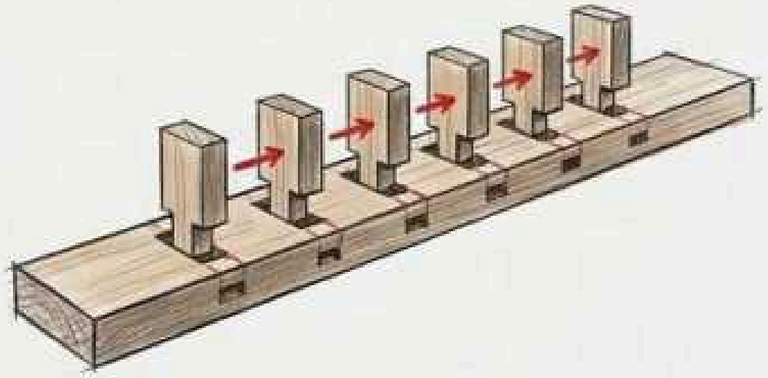
Transitions Function as Structural Joints

¶ 4.8

Transitions are words and phrases that explicitly show the relationship between ideas.



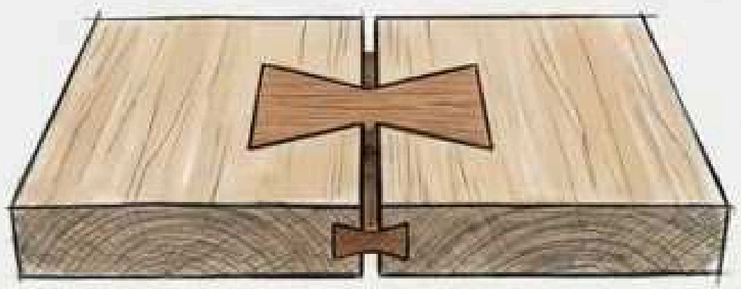
The Pivot (Contrast): However, but.



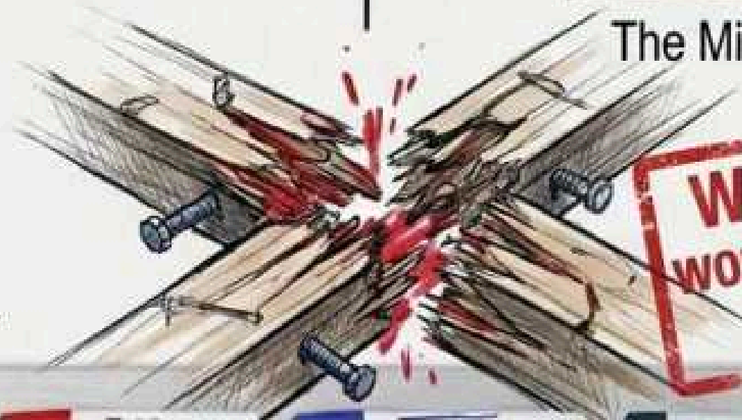
The Domino (Consequence): Therefore, as a result.



The Window (Example): For instance.



The Mirror (Likeness): Similarly

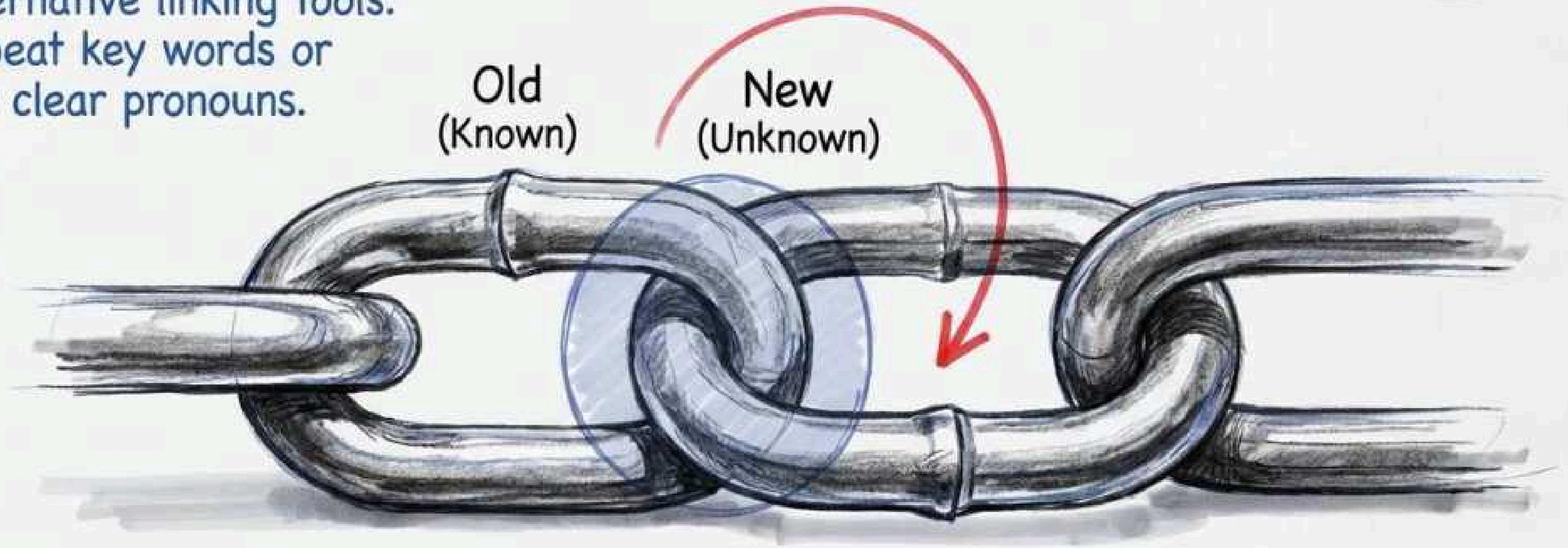


WARNING: A wrong transition is worse than none. Use them only where they are accurate and helpful.

The Old-to-New Syntax Chain

¶ 4.9

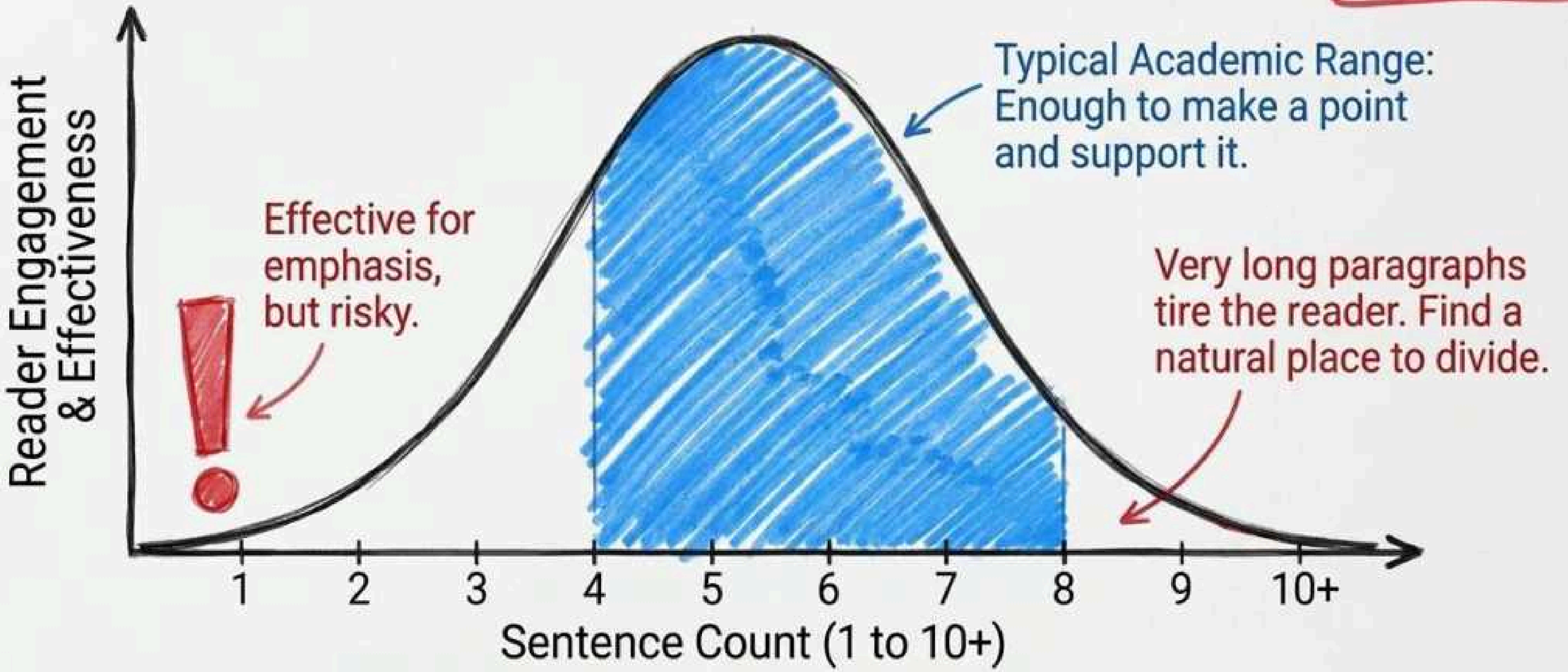
Alternative linking tools:
Repeat key words or
use clear pronouns.



The Quiet Secret: Begin a sentence with something the reader already knows, and end it with something new. The reader always has solid ground under their feet.

The Goldilocks Zone of Paragraph Length

¶ 4.10



There is no fixed rule, but reader stamina is a biological reality.

The Macro Architecture: The Classic Essay Shape

¶ 4.11

Introduction
Draws reader in, background, thesis

Body
Develops the argument in a series of paragraphs

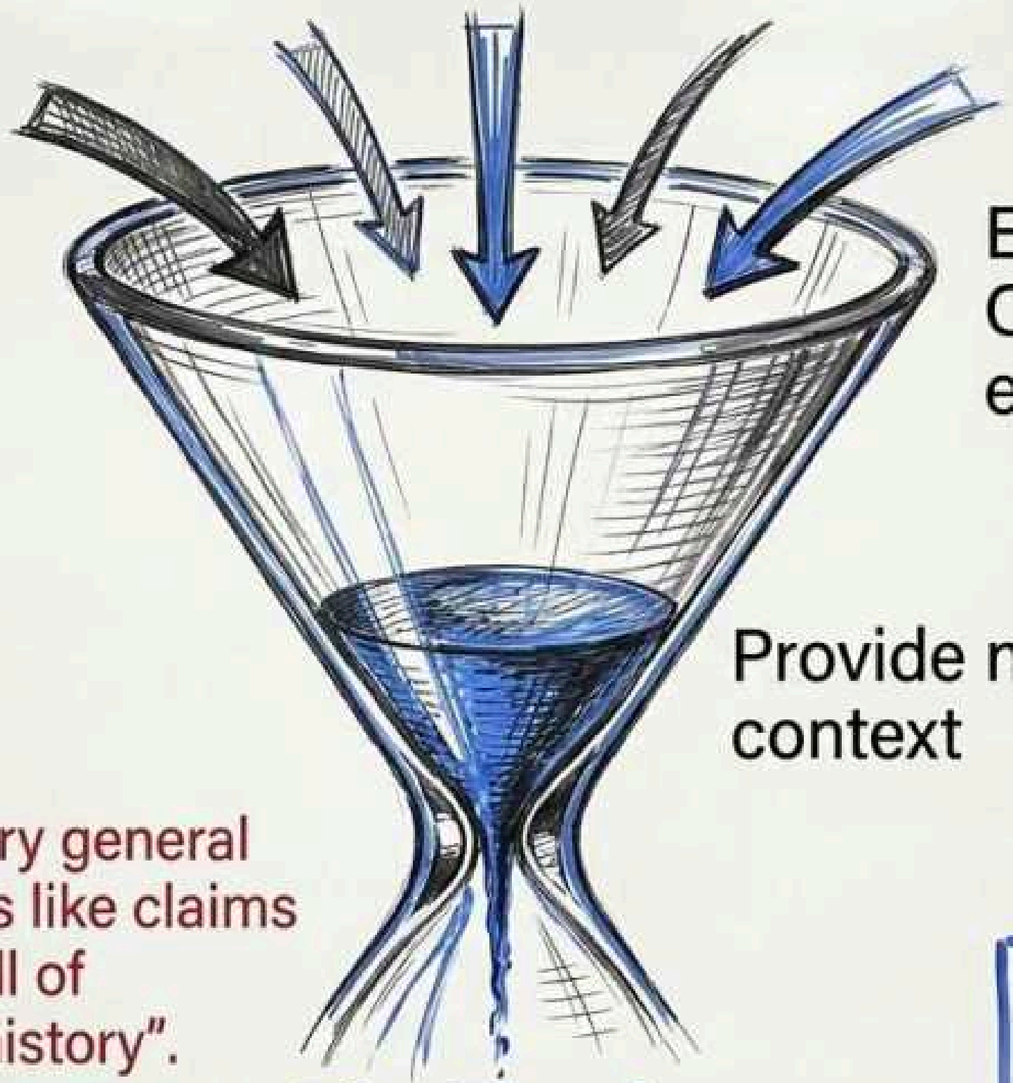
Conclusion
Brings it all together



Many essays follow this classic plan for one simple reason: it works.

The Introduction: Funneling Attention

¶ 4.12



Engage:
Question, short example, surprising fact

Provide necessary context



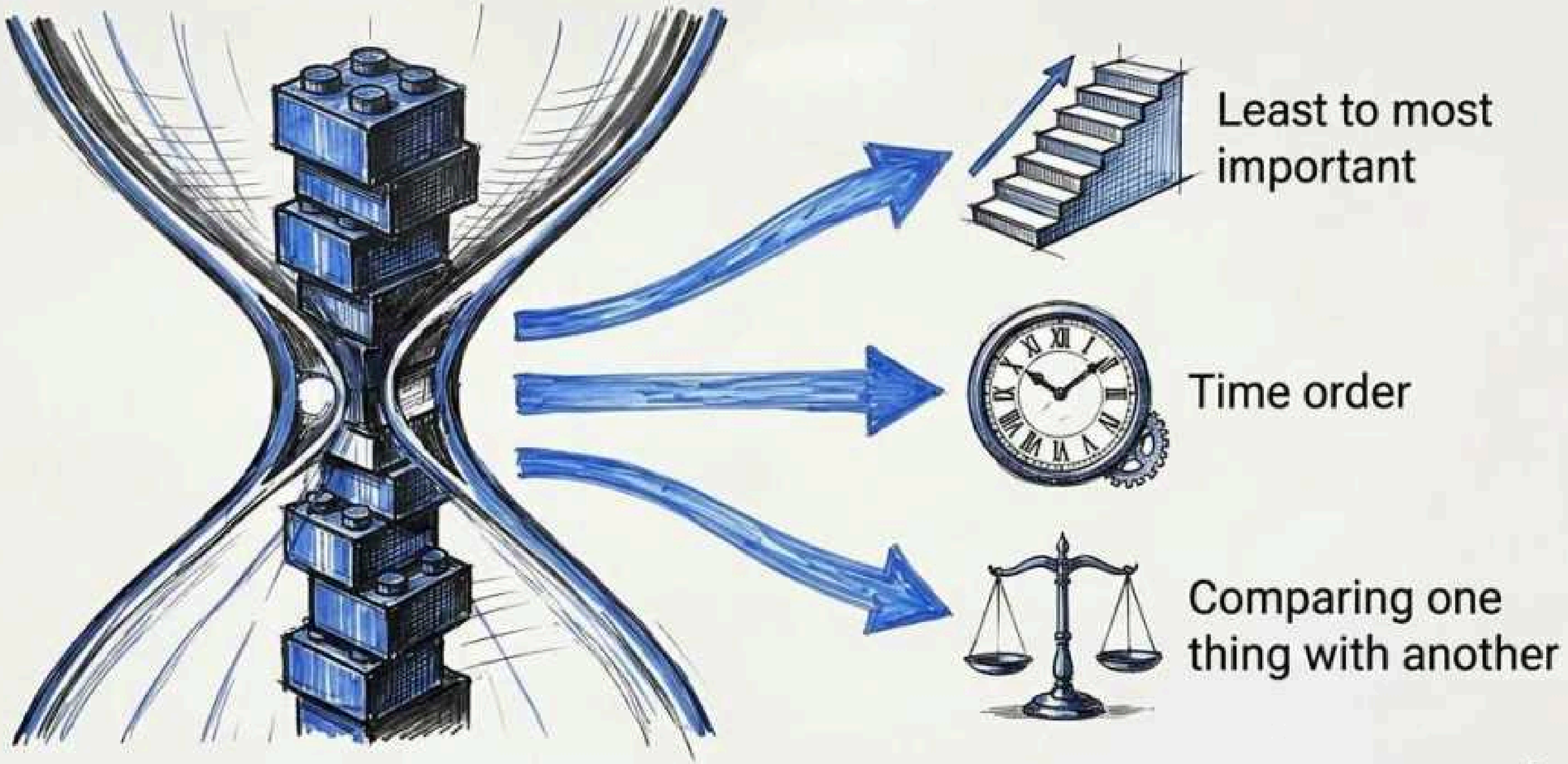
Avoid very general openings like claims about "all of human history".

The Thesis

Begin close to your actual subject.

The Body: Sequencing the Argument

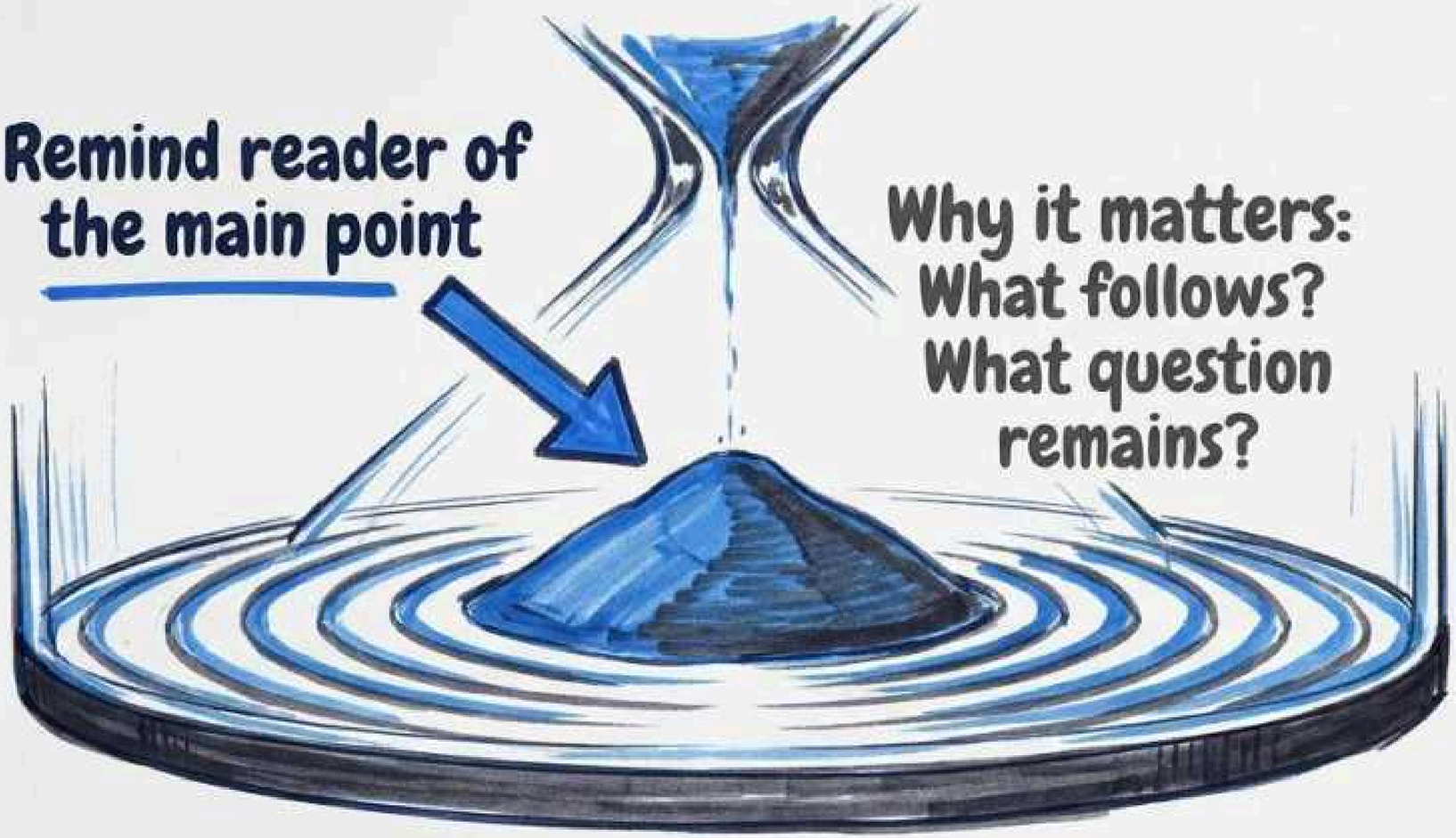
¶4.13



The body is organised by your reasons. Choose the order that makes the argument easiest to follow, and explicitly tell the reader what you are doing.

The Conclusion: Arriving with Confidence

¶ 4.14

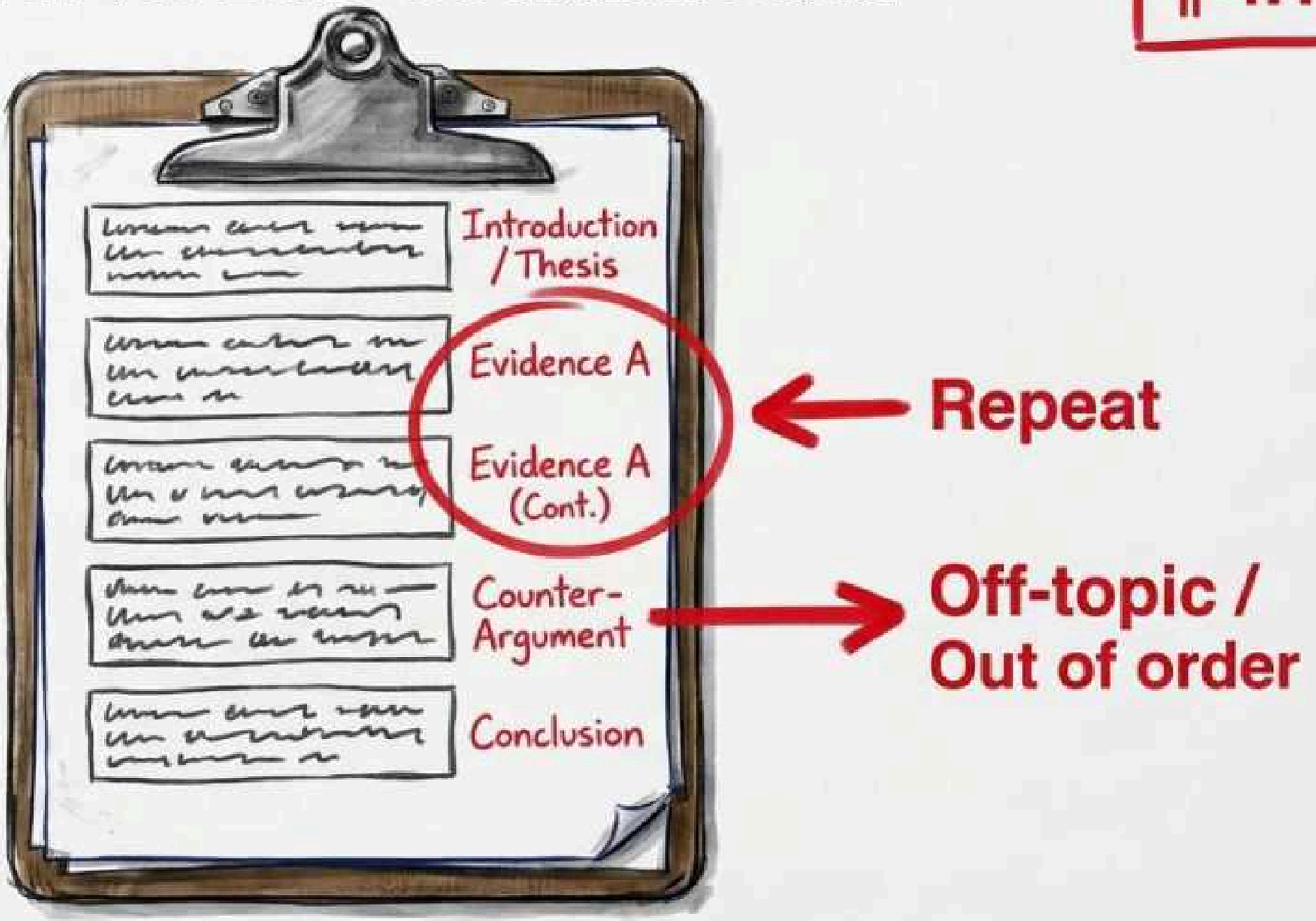


- ☒ No brand new arguments.
- ☒ No apologizing.
- ☒ No claiming "I am no expert."

The conclusion should do more than repeat the introduction.
End with a clear sense that the essay has arrived somewhere.

The Reverse Outline: An ‘As-Built’ Structural Audit

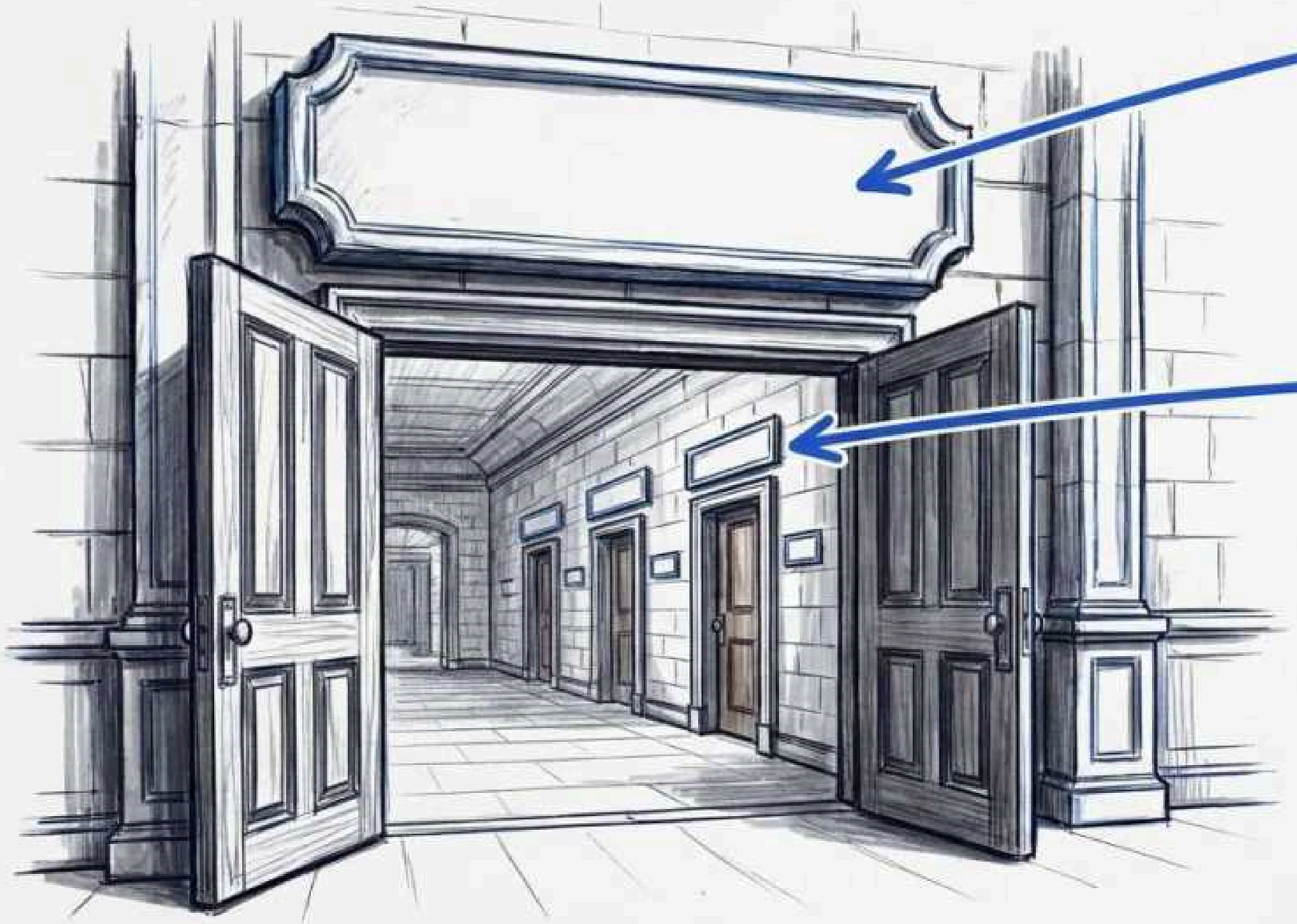
¶ 4.15



Outlining helps before you draft; reverse outlining helps after. Write one line beside each paragraph stating what it does to instantly reveal structural flaws.

Titles and Headings as Navigational Aids

¶ 4.16



Title

The Title is the reader's first impression; it must say something and tell them what to expect.

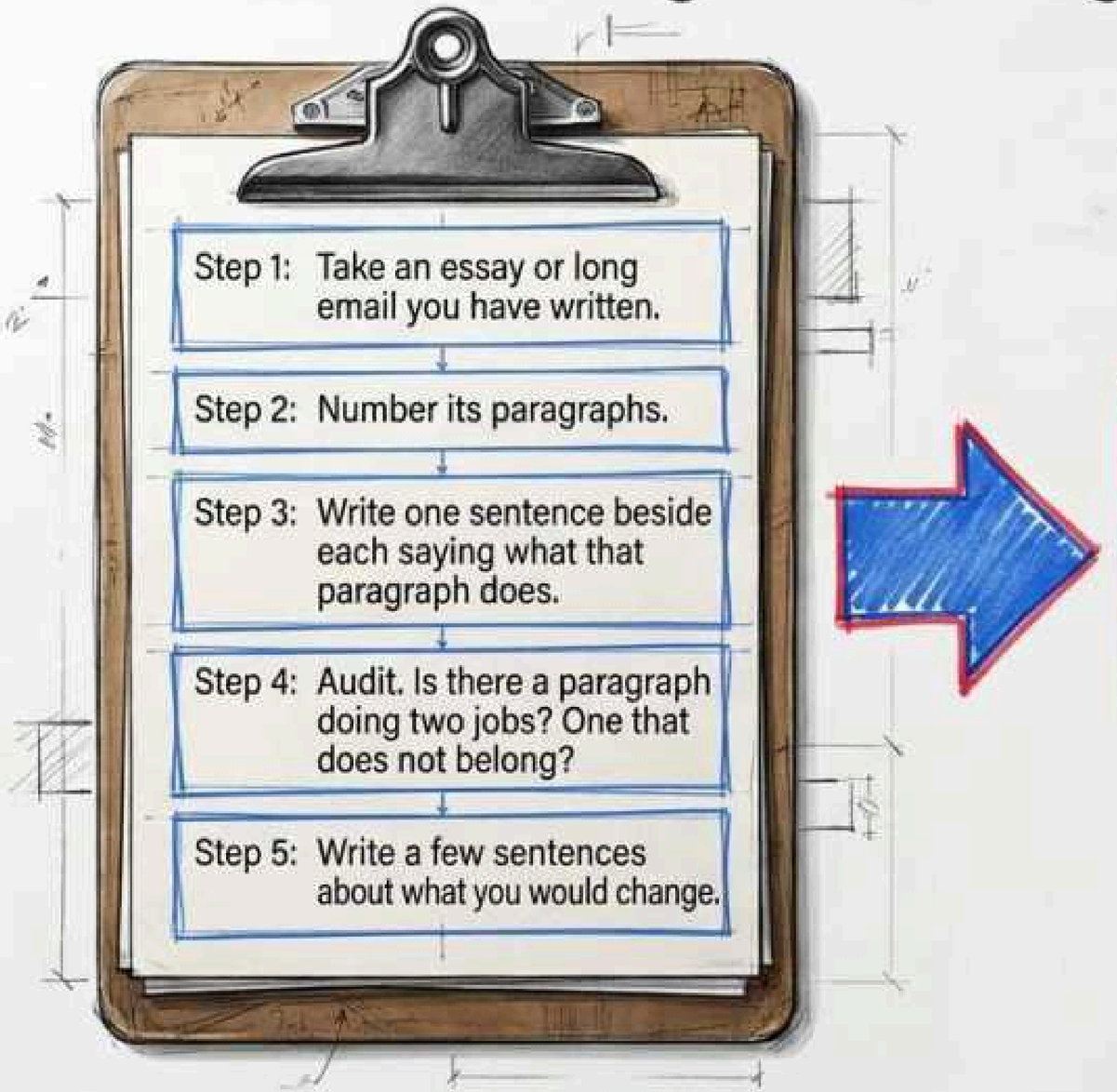
Heading

Headings help the reader navigate longer documents.

Headings do not replace transitions. The writing itself must still guide the reader from one part to the next.

¶ 4.17

The Lecture 4 Diagnostic Assignment



Put the reverse outline to work. Diagnose your own structure.

¶ 4.18

Looking Ahead: From Structure to Style



The structure is solid. In Lecture 5, we turn to revision, and to the style and grammar choices that make your sentences clear.