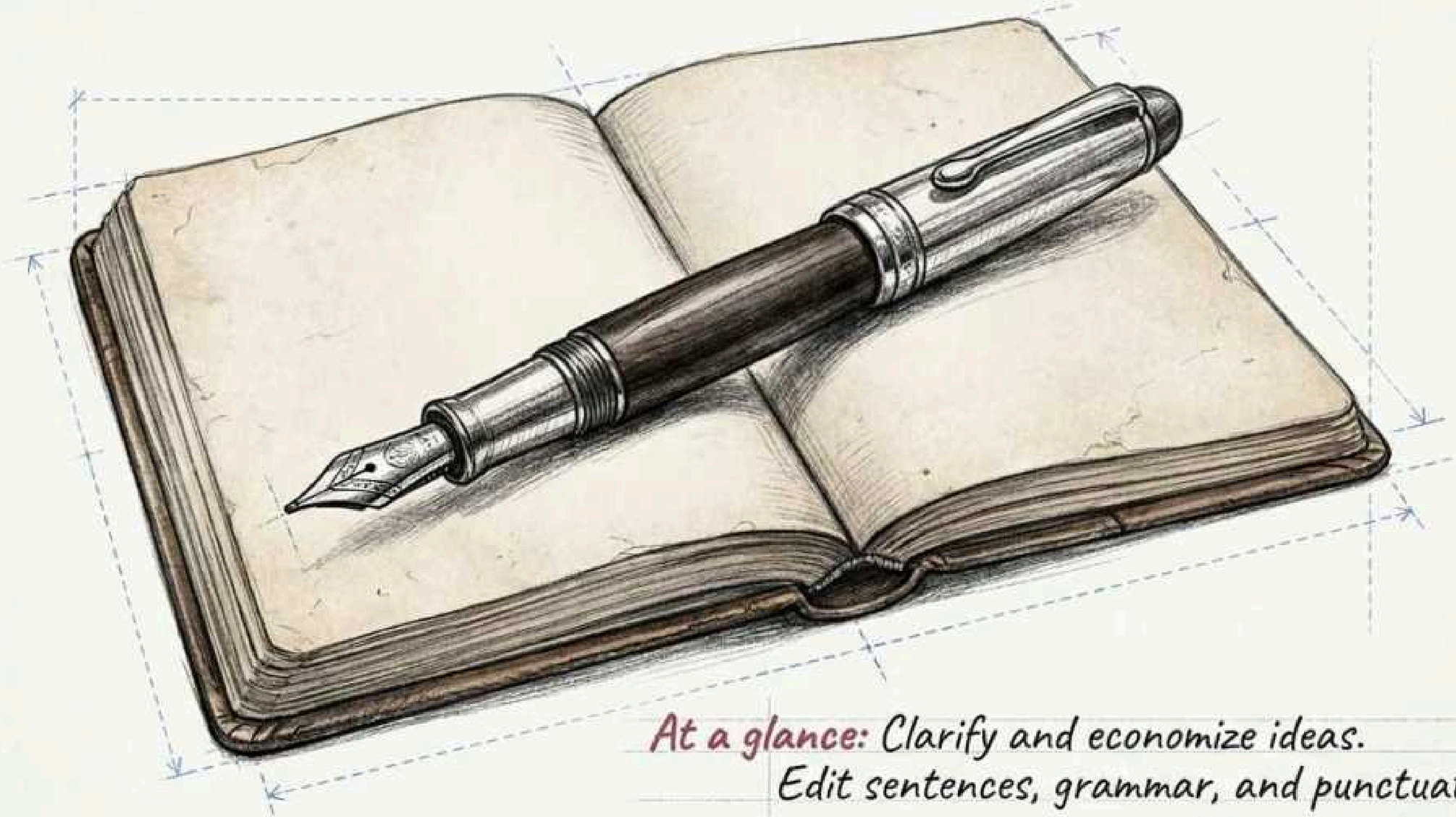
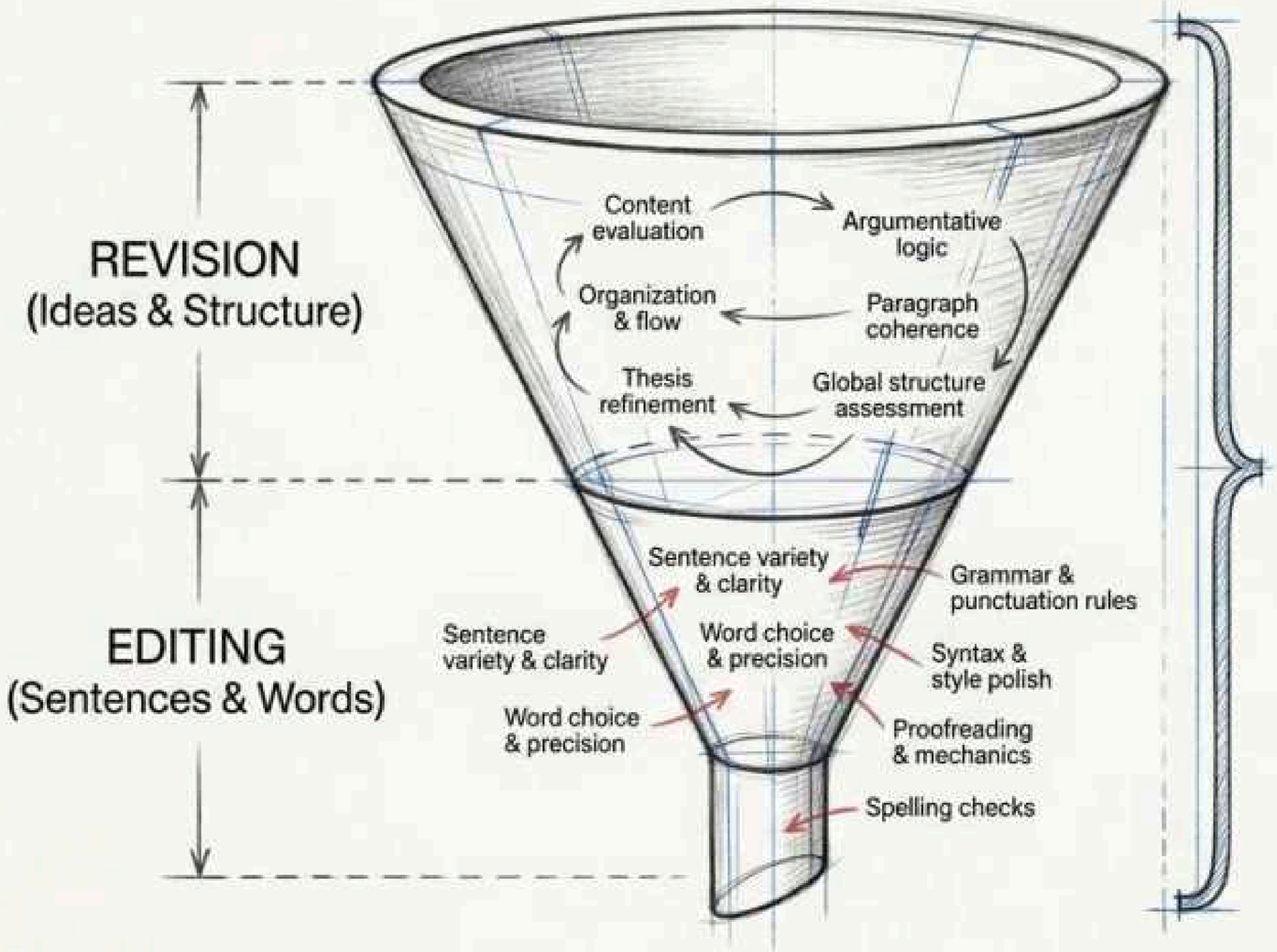
Revising and Editing: The Architecture of Style and Grammar

¶ 5.1



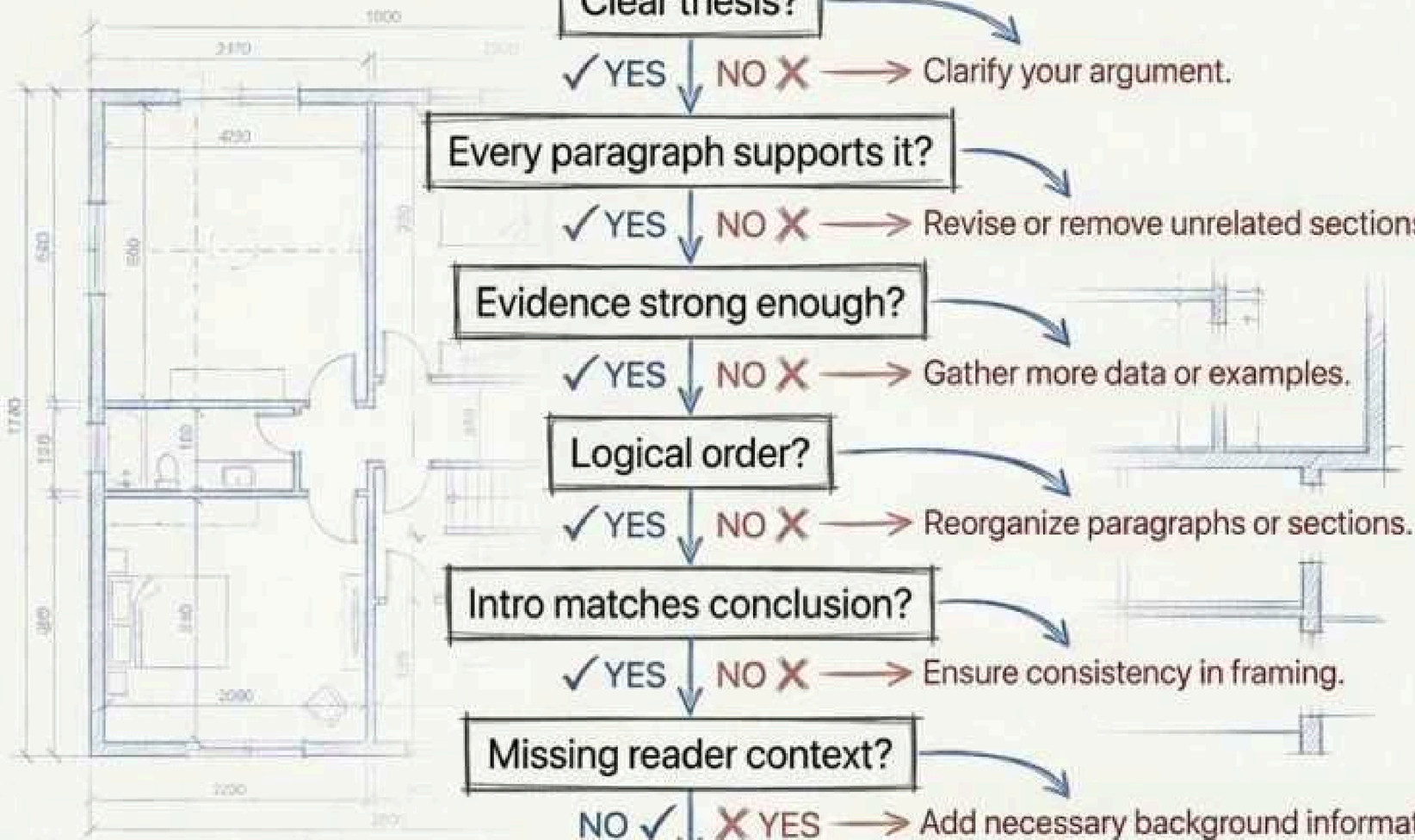
At a glance: Clarify and economize ideas.
Edit sentences, grammar, and punctuation.

The Funnel of Improvement:
Separate the Macro from the Micro



Keep them separate, and do them in that order. Good writing is rewriting—the real craft begins after the draft is on the page.

The Big Picture Diagnostic Tool



Clear thesis?
✓ YES | NO ✗ → Clarify your argument.

Every paragraph supports it?
✓ YES | NO ✗ → Revise or remove unrelated sections.

Evidence strong enough?
✓ YES | NO ✗ → Gather more data or examples.

Logical order?
✓ YES | NO ✗ → Reorganize paragraphs or sections.

Intro matches conclusion?
✓ YES | NO ✗ → Ensure consistency in framing.

Missing reader context?
NO ✓ | ✗ YES → Add necessary background information.

Write your answers down. Act on them.

The Art of the Cut



[Cut Text]

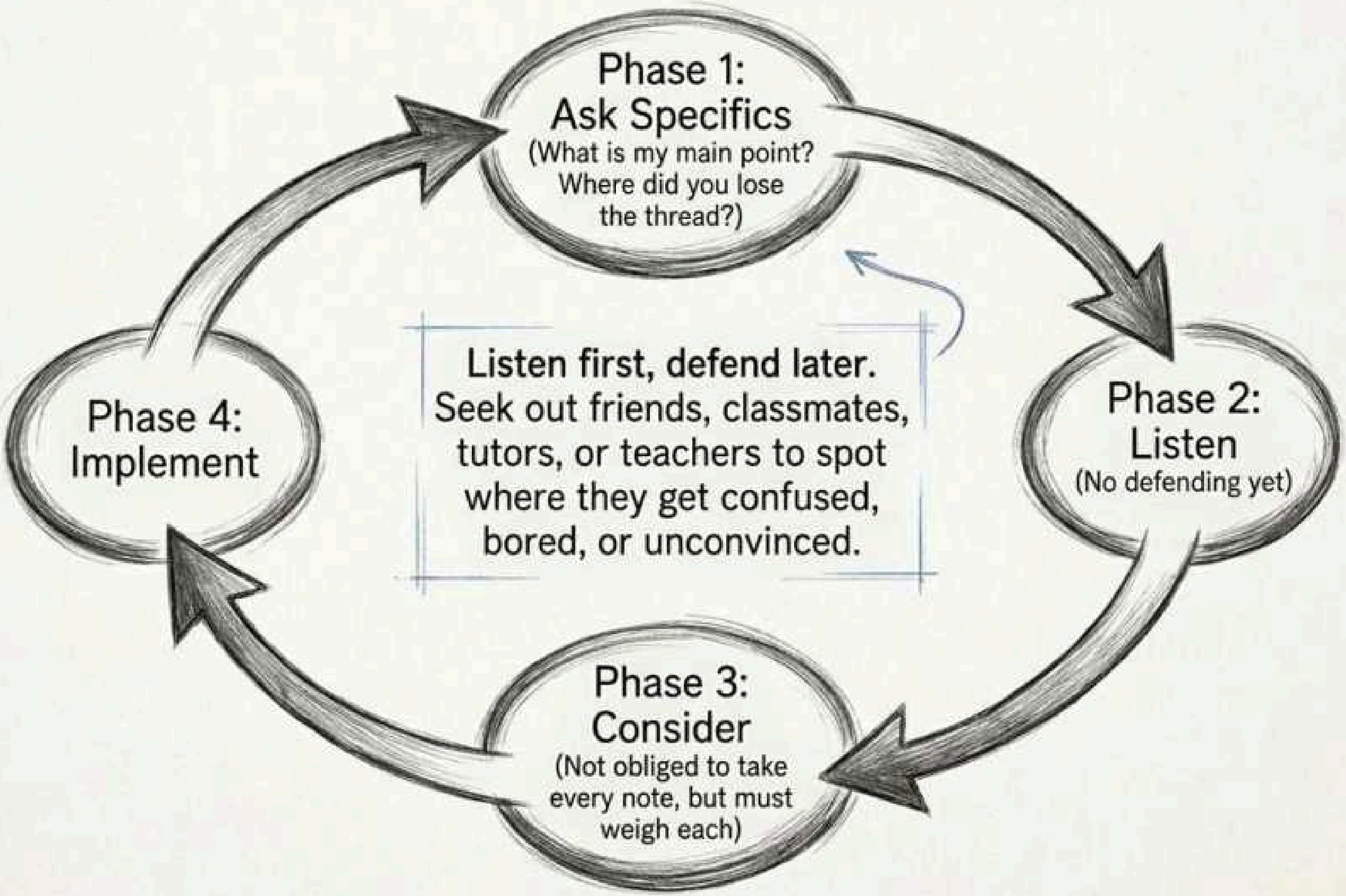
+

[Separate File]

= Zero Loss of Effort

Every sentence that does not serve the thesis weakens the whole. Save discarded text for another day to remove the resistance to deleting.

The Feedback Loop



Style Principle 1: The Active Voice

Active	Passive
[Active] = Doer (Subject) ⇒ Action (Verb) ⇒ Receiver (Object)	[Passive] = Receiver (Subject) ⇐ Action (Verb) ⇐ Doer (Object)
The committee approved the plan. ✓	The plan was approved by the committee. ✗

Prefer the active voice. It is shorter and clearer (though the passive has legitimate uses).

Style Principle 2: The Fraction of Meaning

$$\left[\text{Value} = \frac{(\text{Meaning})}{\text{Word Count}}\right]$$

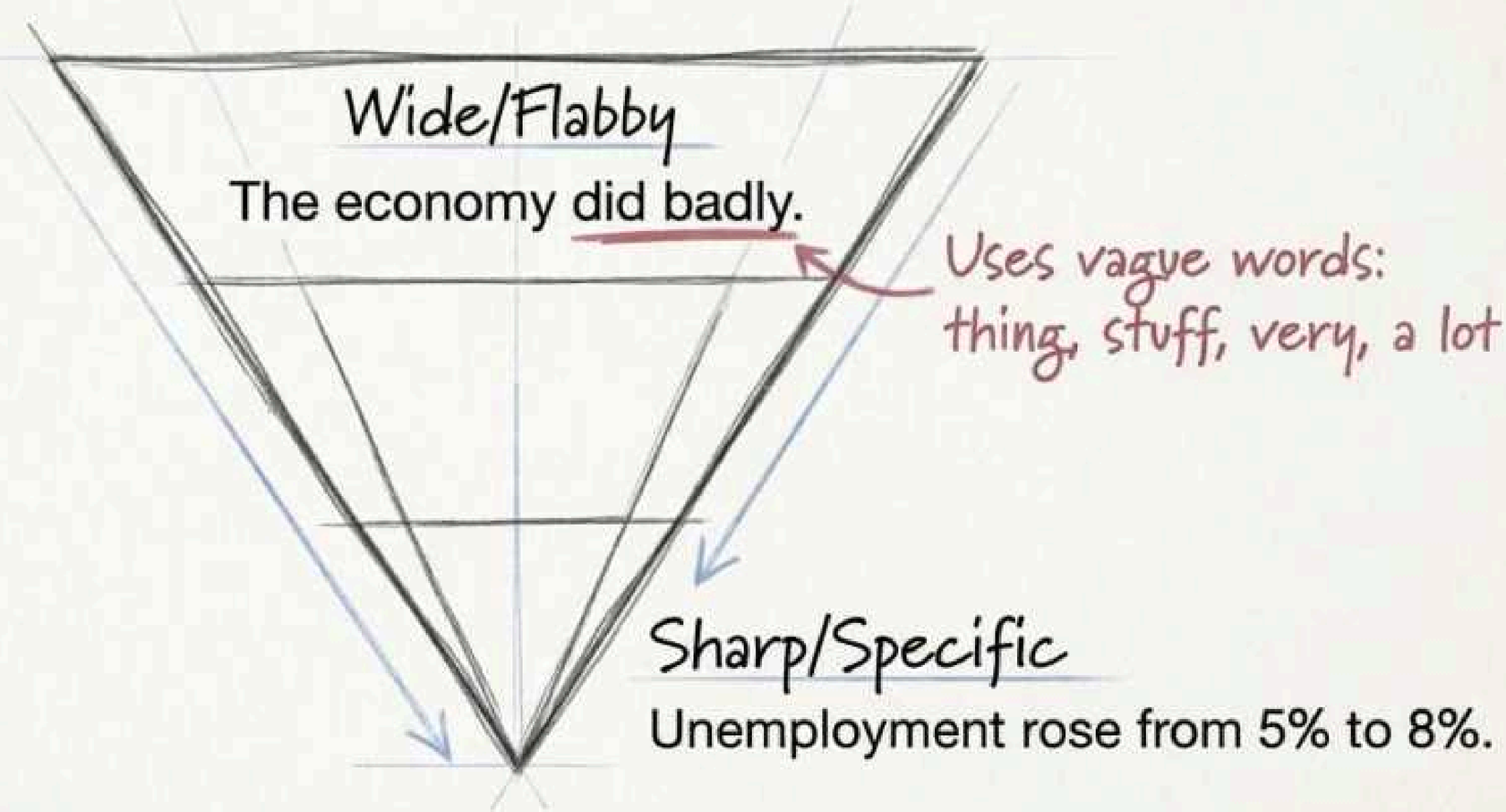
~~due to the fact that~~ → **because**

~~in order to~~ → **to**

~~it is important to note that~~ → **[DELETE]**

Concision means every word earns its place. Cut words that do no work and watch for needless repetition. Concise does not mean short at any cost.

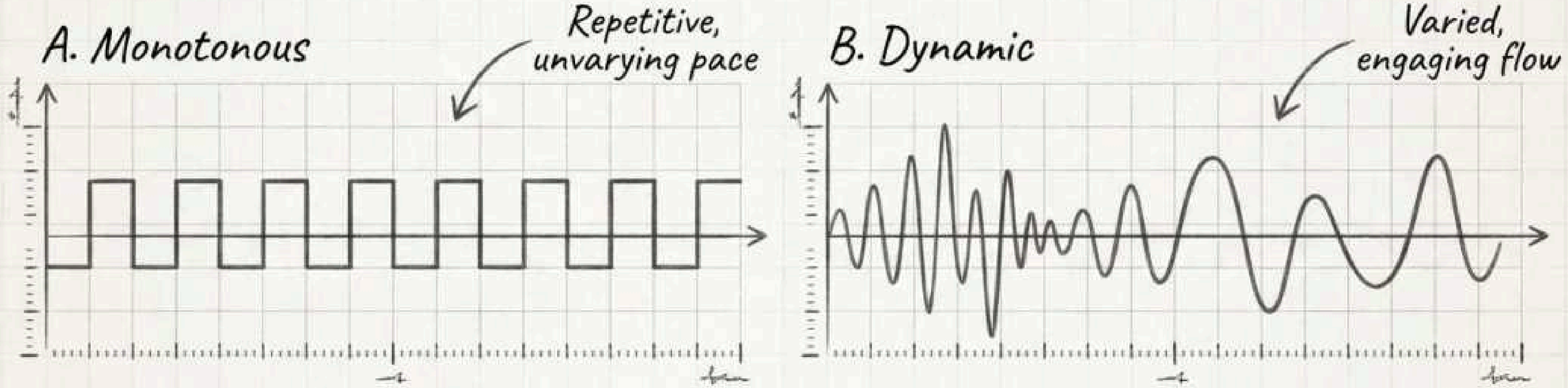
Style Principle 3: The Abstraction Pyramid



Specific nouns and strong verbs carry meaning.
Detail convinces readers and keeps them interested.

The Rhythm of Sentences

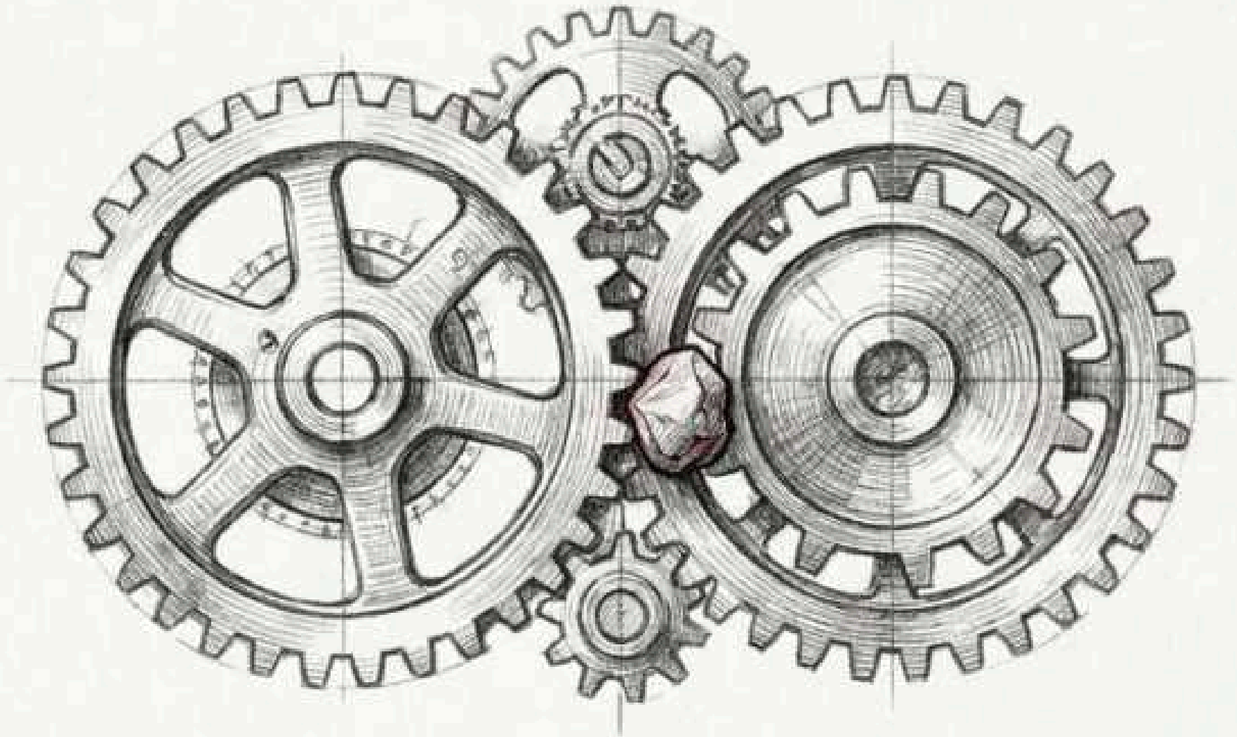
¶ 5.9



Vary your sentence length and shape. A short sentence after a long one lands with force. Your ear is a good editor—read aloud and notice where the rhythm drags or races.

Grammar: The Social Contract of Reading

¶ 5.10



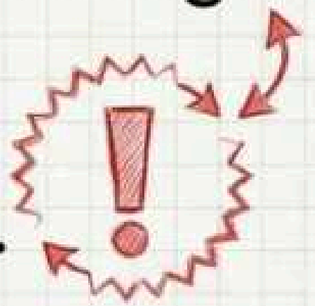
Grammar is the set of conventions readers expect. Breaking them is a pebble in the gears—it distracts people from your meaning. Master a handful of common errors to quickly improve.

Error 1: The Sentence Fragment

Complete Sentence = Subject + Verb + Complete Thought

Error Equation

[Fragment] = Because the evidence was clear.

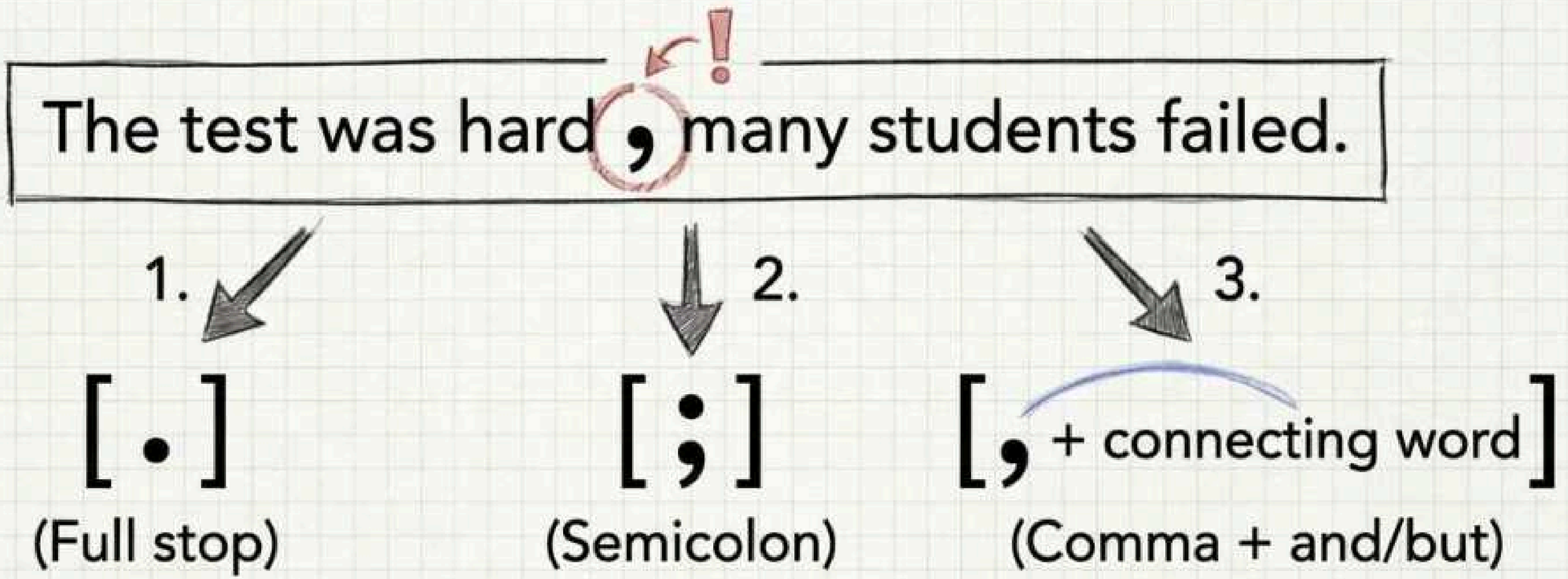


A fragment leaves us waiting. Attach it to a full sentence:

The committee changed its mind because the evidence was clear.

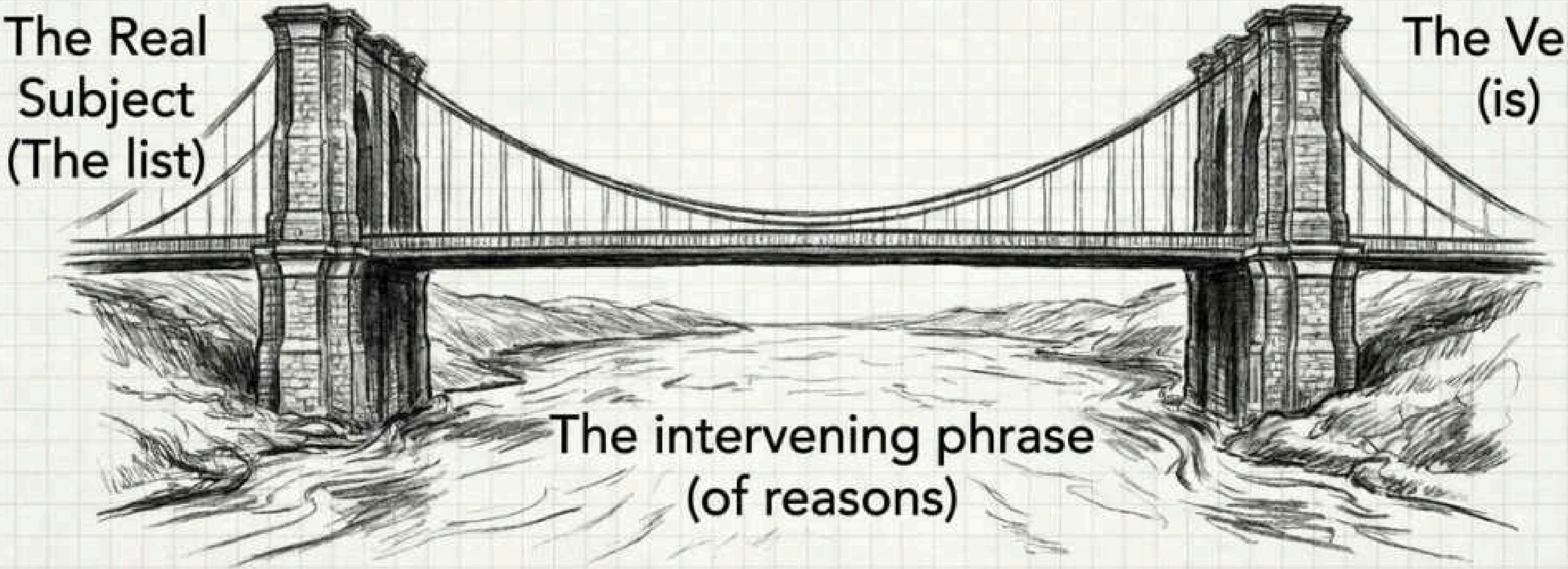
Fragments can be used on purpose, but never by accident.

Error 2: Run-ons & Comma Splices



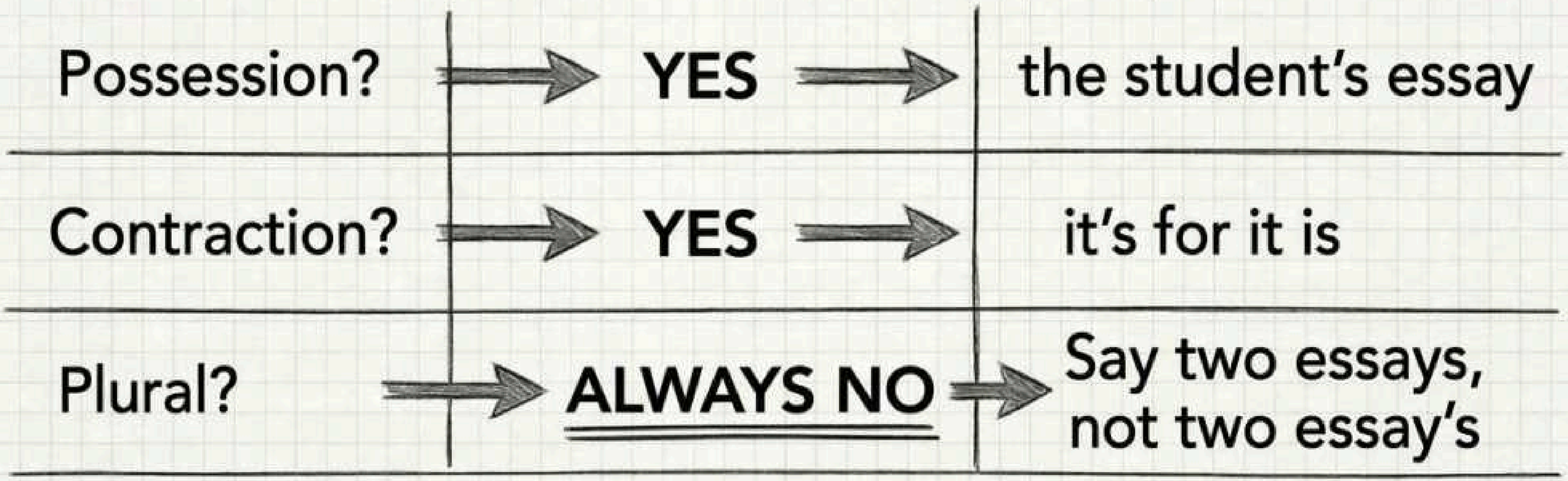
A comma splice joins two complete sentences with only a comma.
Read aloud; you will often hear where the pause should be a full stop.

Error 3: Subject-Verb Agreement



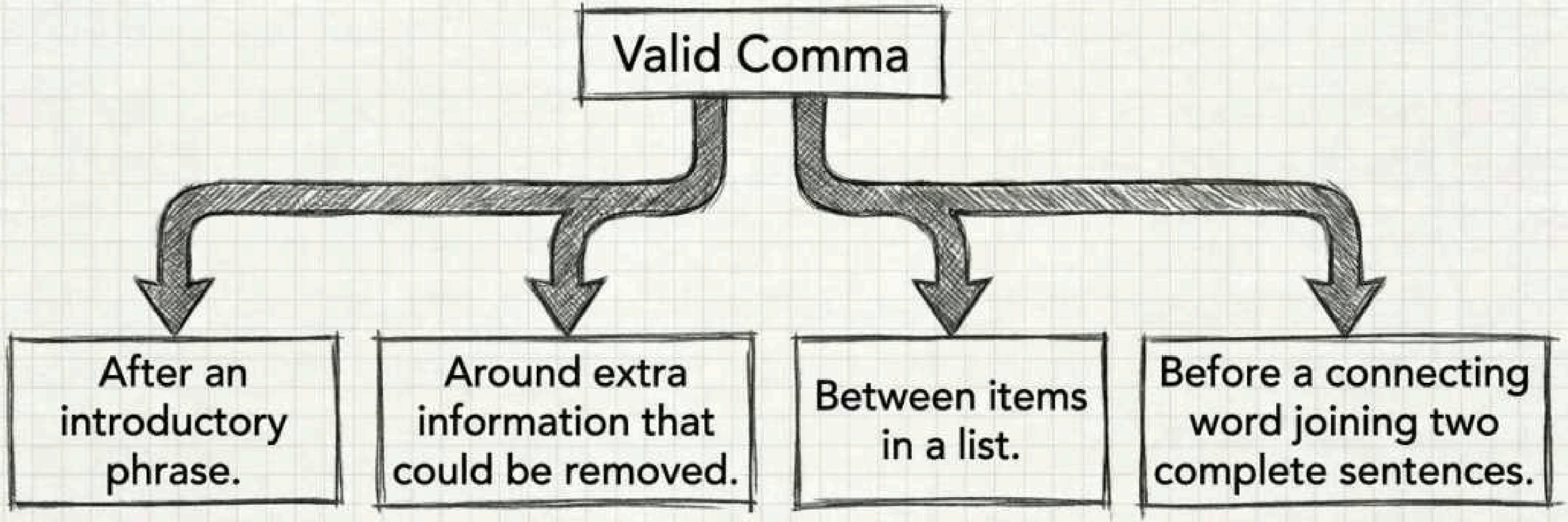
The trap is a phrase between the subject and the verb. Find the real subject, ignore the intervening phrase, and make the verb match it.

Error 4: The Apostrophe



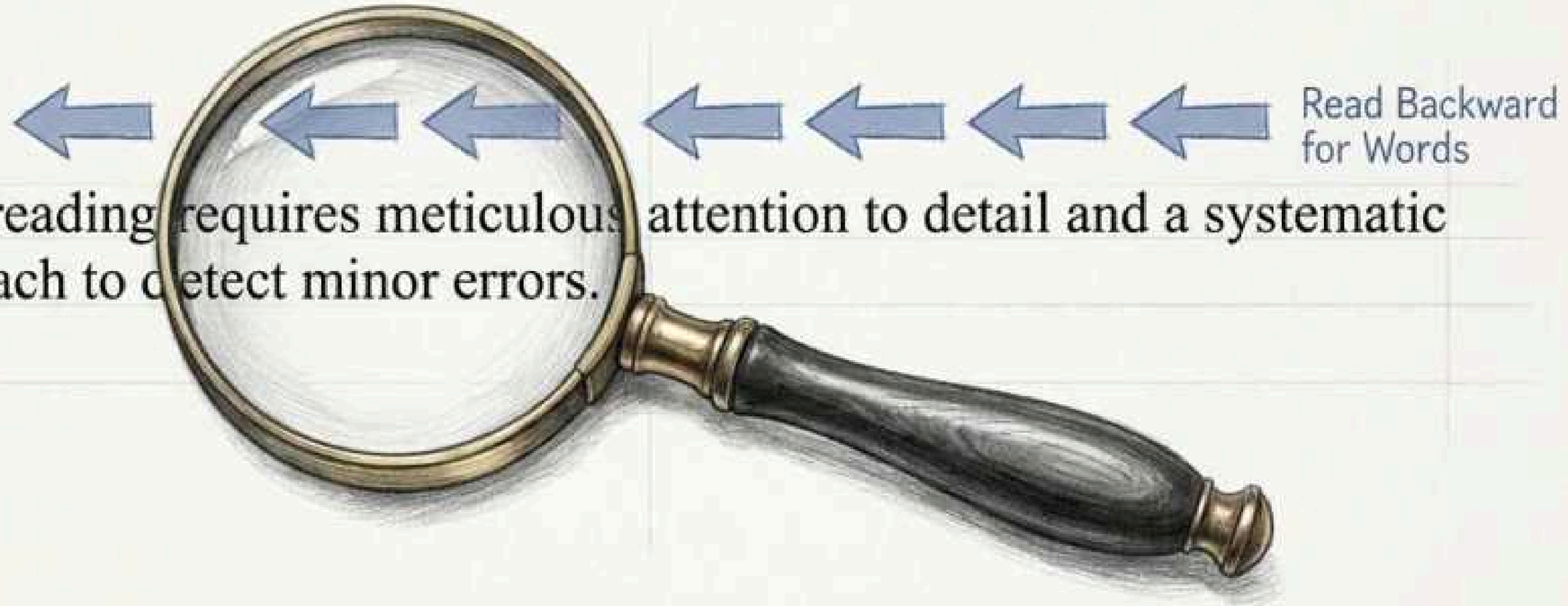
This one mistake is the most visible of all. Note the one major exception: *its* (without an apostrophe) is the possessive, as in *the cat licked its paw.*

Error 5: Commas



Do not scatter commas just because a sentence feels long. If unsure, consult a style guide. Clarity is the ultimate goal.

The Proofreading Process



- Proofreading is slow, careful reading for small errors.
- Read backward one sentence at a time to see words rather than meaning.
- Check names, numbers, and quotations.
- Do not trust the spelling checker (it cannot tell there from *their* or *its* from *it's*).

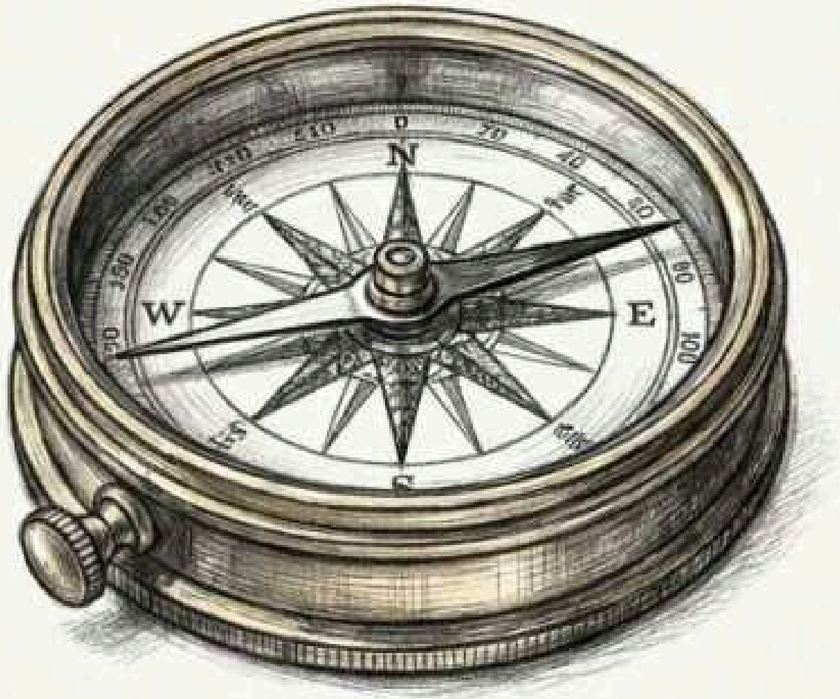
Application & Assignment

- ☐ Concision
- ☐ Concreteness
- ☐ Active Voice

Take a paragraph you have written and edit it for the three style principles.

1. How many words can you cut without losing meaning?
2. Write a few sentences about what you noticed.
3. Identify which habit you would most like to improve.

Next Steps



In Lecture 6, we turn to evidence and citation, and to the honest use of artificial intelligence tools in your writing.