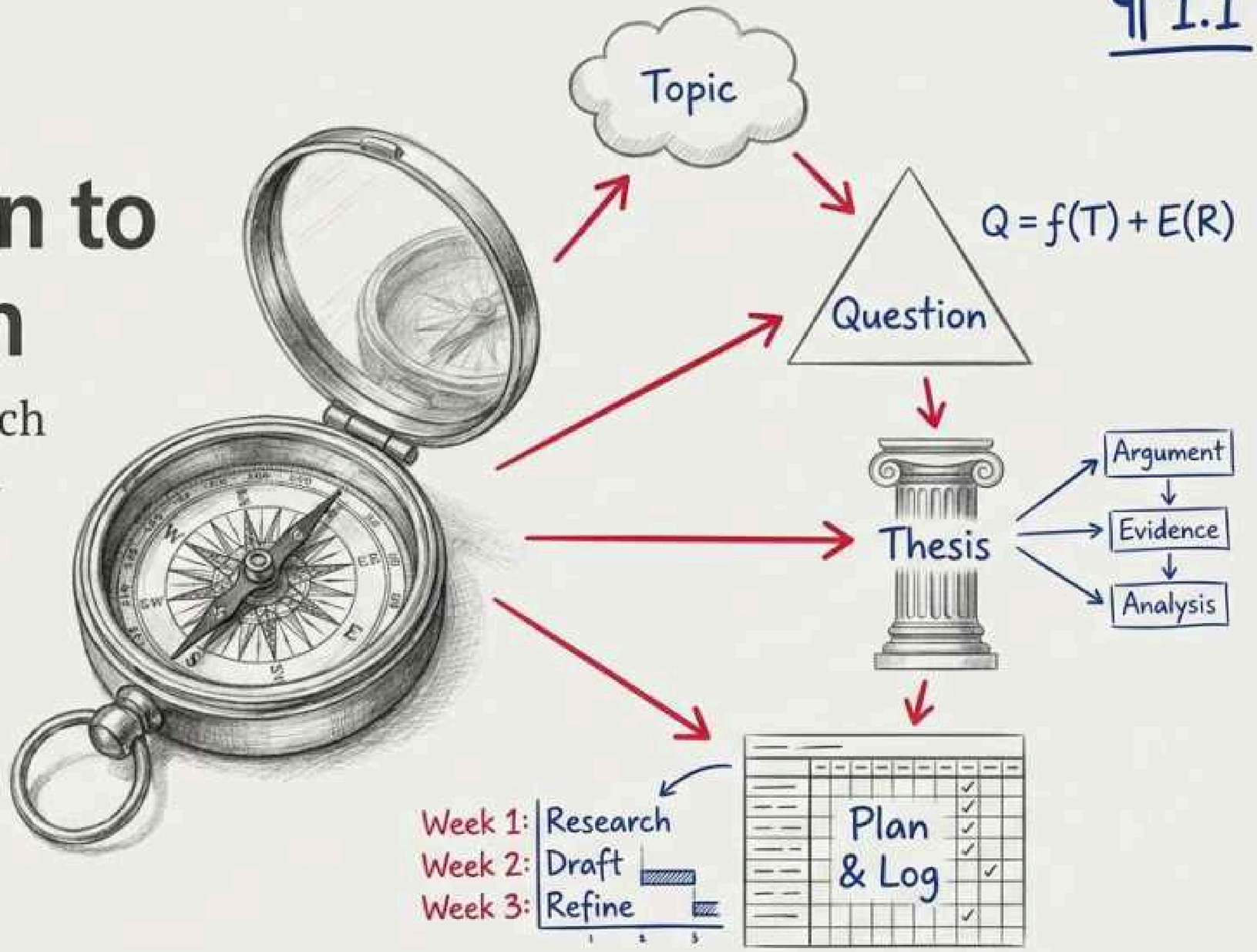
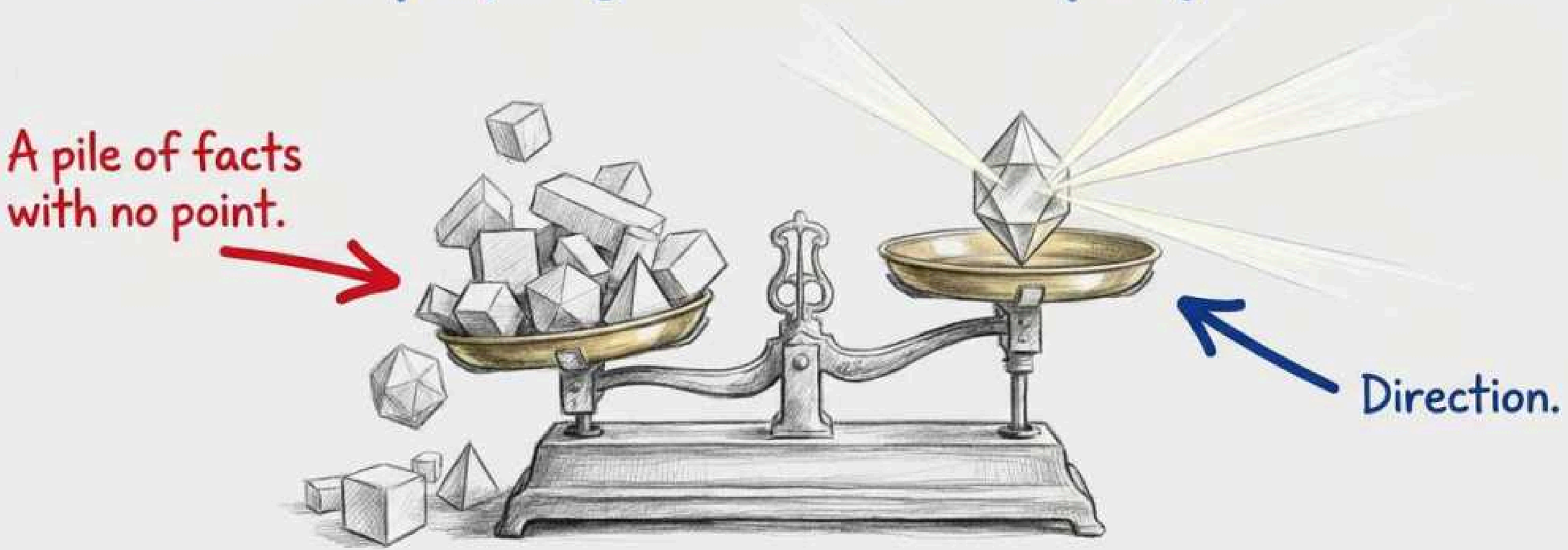
¶ 1.1

ENGL 102 B: From Question to Research Plan

Turning a topic into a research question, a working thesis, a plan, and a research log.



Quality_project = Quality_question



A strong question acts as your compass: it provides direction, dictates what to look for, and signals exactly when you have found enough.

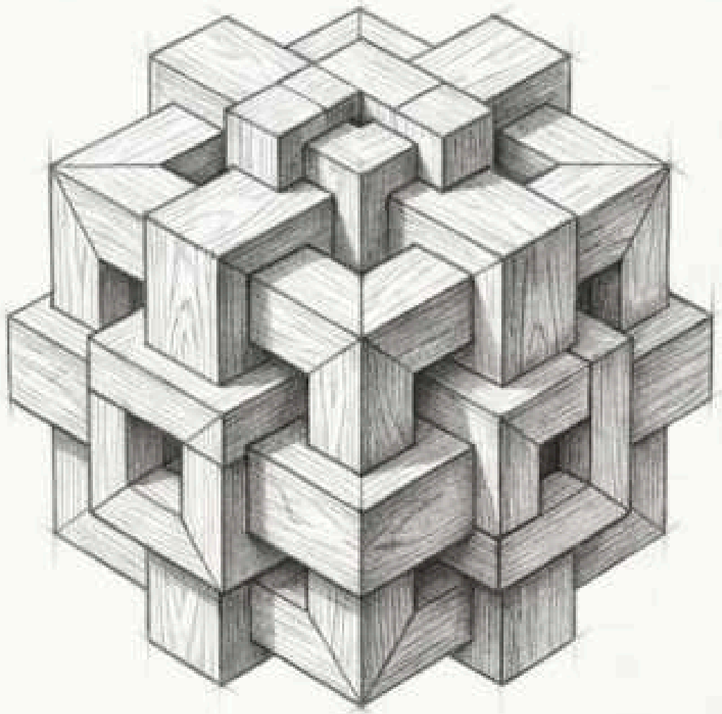
The Researcher's Whiteboard

¶ 1.3

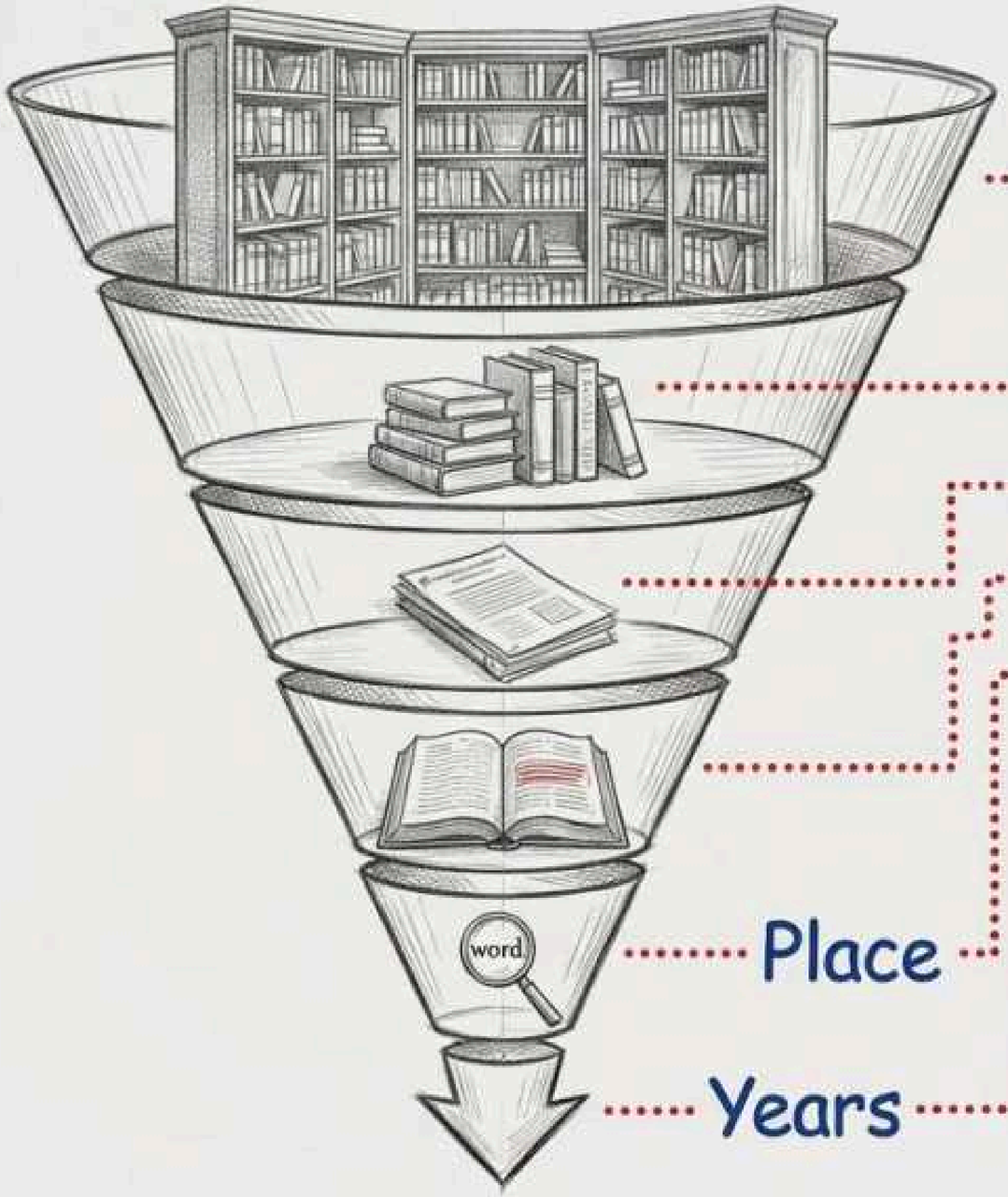
An Area (Infinite Reading)



A Puzzle (Solvable Argument)



You can read about a topic forever. A question narrows a topic into a solvable puzzle, giving you something precise to argue.



Topic

÷

(Platform

× Group

× Effect

× Place

× Years)

= Manageable Answer

Place

Years

A narrow question that you can finish is better than a grand one that you abandon. You can always widen it later.

The 4 Qualities Matrix

¶ 1.5

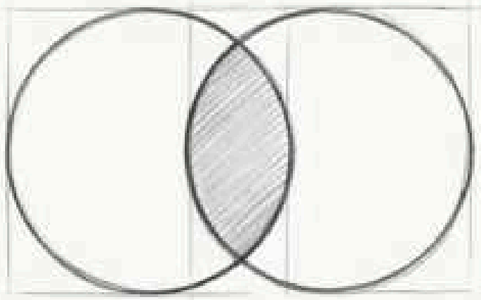
Test every draft question against these four constraints.

Open



Cannot be answered with a simple Yes or No.

Arguable



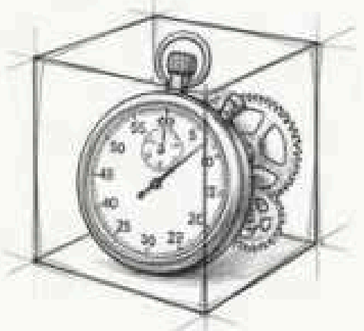
Thoughtful people could answer it differently.

Researchable

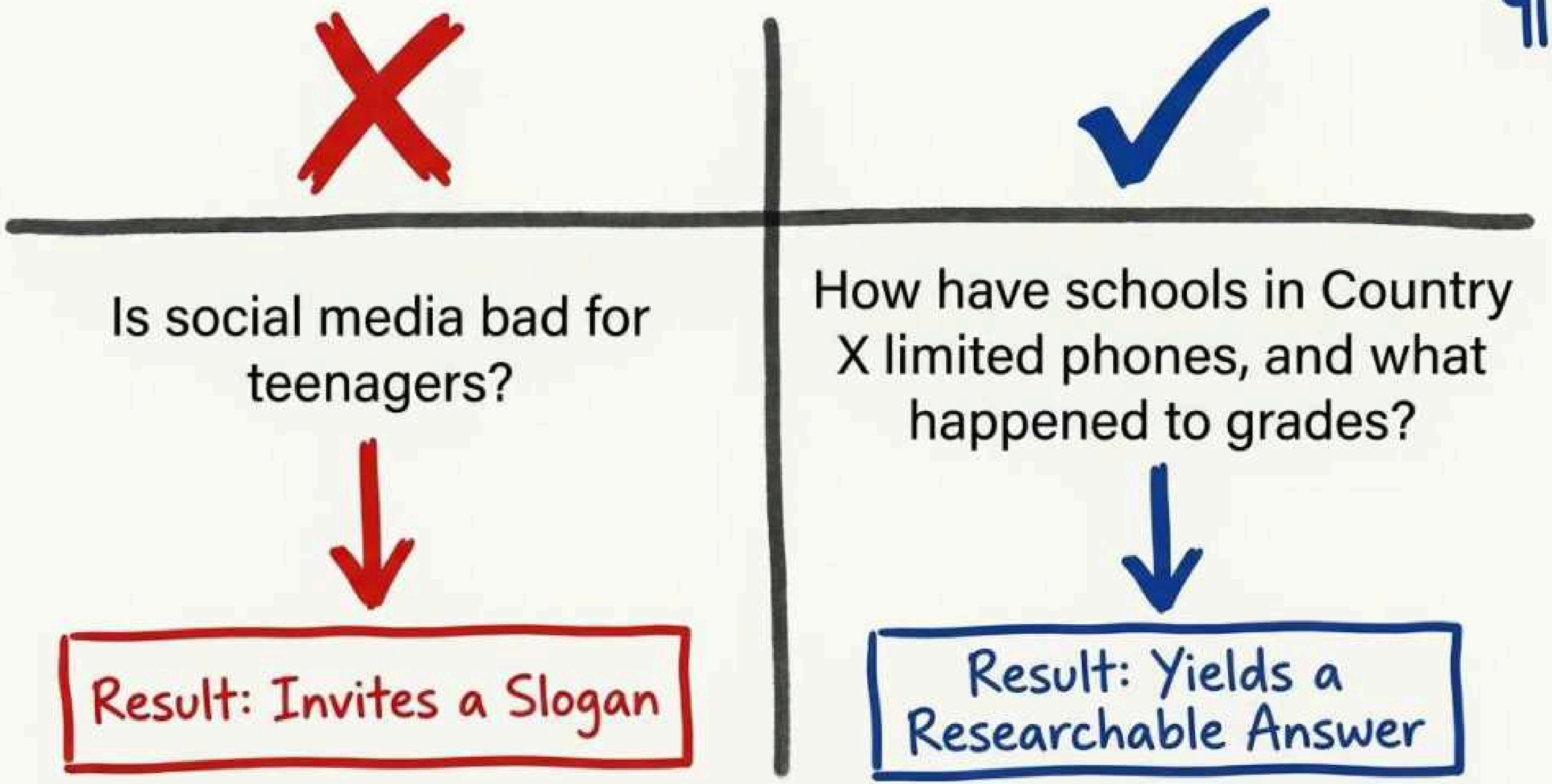


Evidence actually exists and is accessible to you.

Right Size



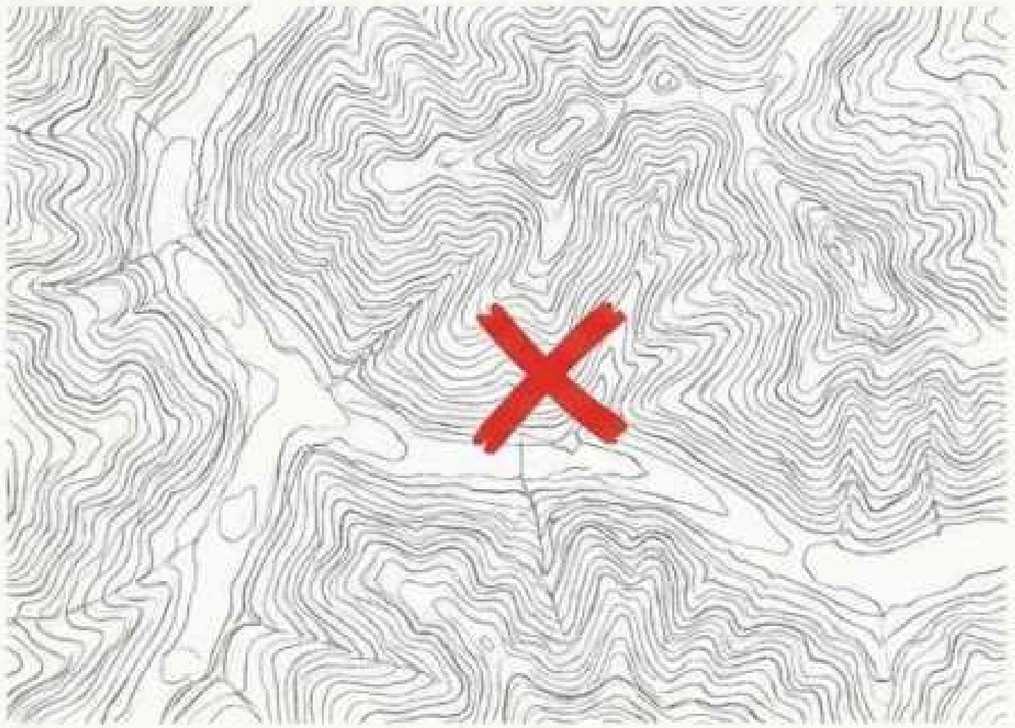
Fits your strict time and word limits.



The right column works because it is narrow, open, arguable, and finishable.

¶ 1.7

The Background Map





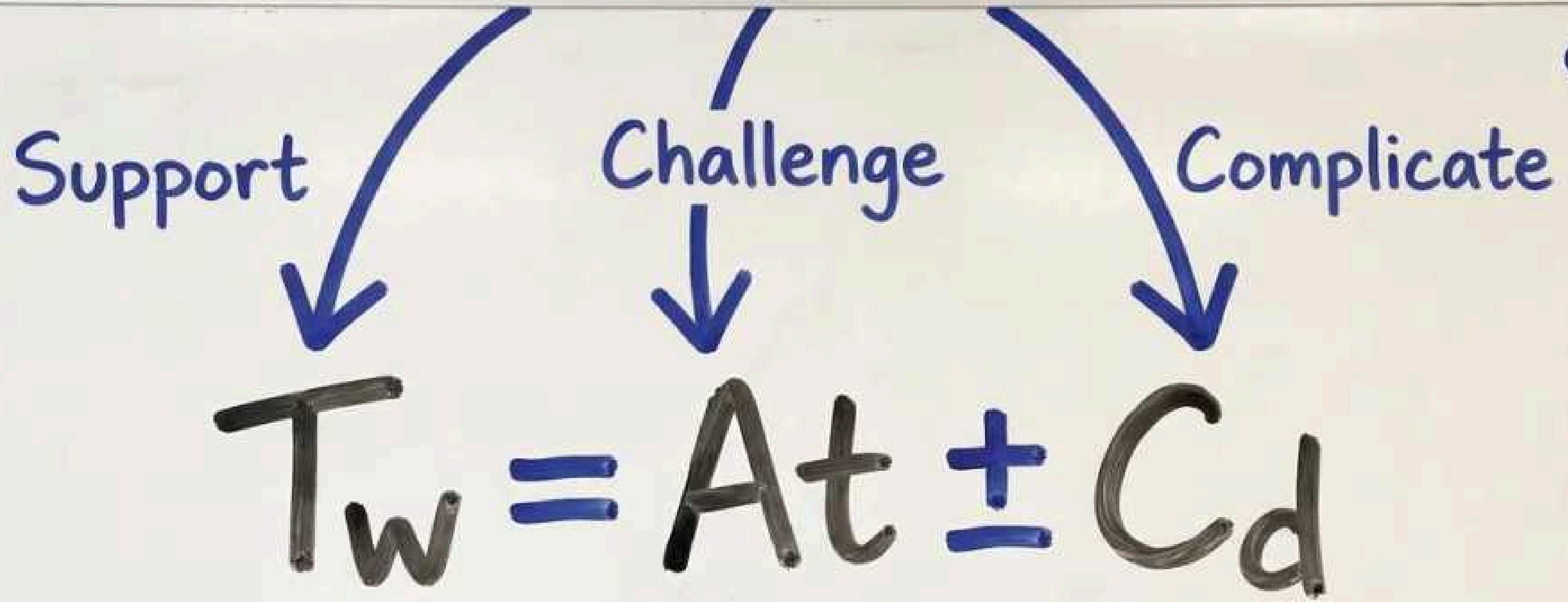
Background reading (encyclopedias, overviews) is not the research itself. It is the map that lets you learn the basic vocabulary, identify main debates, and choose exactly where to dig. You cannot write a good question about a subject you know nothing about.

¶ 1.8

Everyday Speech	Expert Vocabulary
~~Teenagers and screens~~	Adolescent media use Problematic smartphone use

Keep a running glossary in your log. Experts use specific words that differ from everyday speech. Record plain definitions and the source where you met the term. These become your database search terms.

¶ 1.9

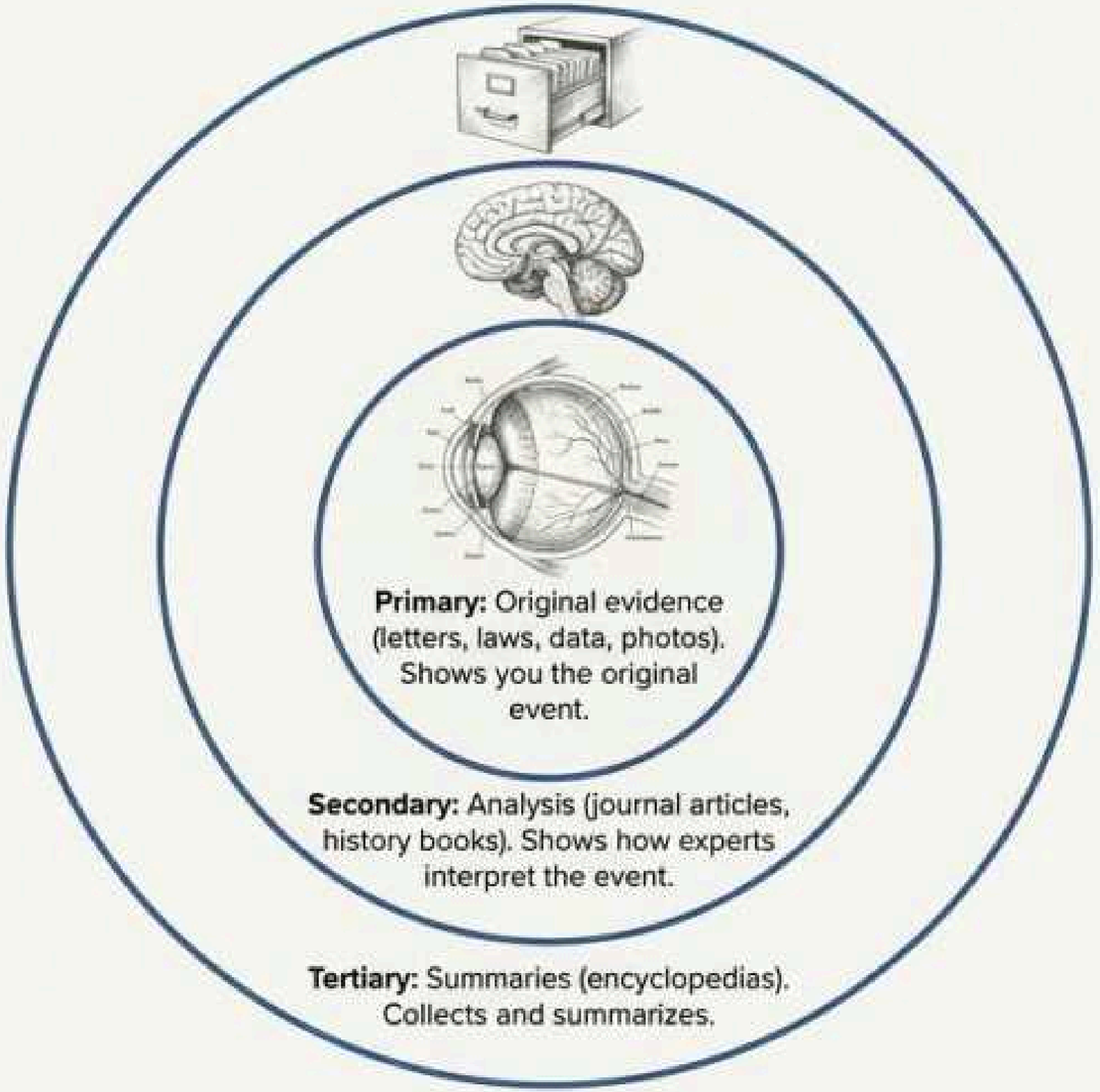


Tw = Working Thesis
At = Tentative Answer
Cd = Disputable Claim

Form a working thesis to give your reading purpose. It is a tentative answer that you should expect to change. Ask of every source whether it supports, challenges, or complicates your guess.

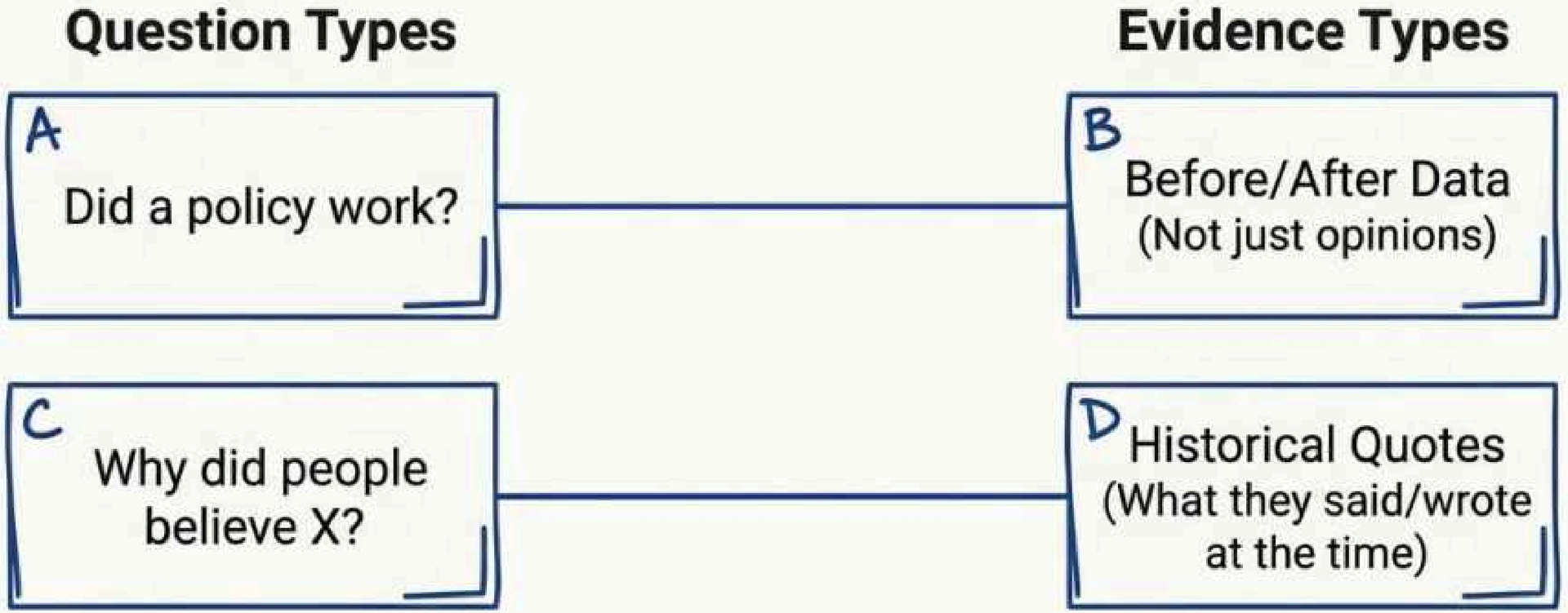
The Taxonomy of Sources

¶ 1.10



Ask of every source which kind it is; the answer dictates how much weight it can carry in your argument.

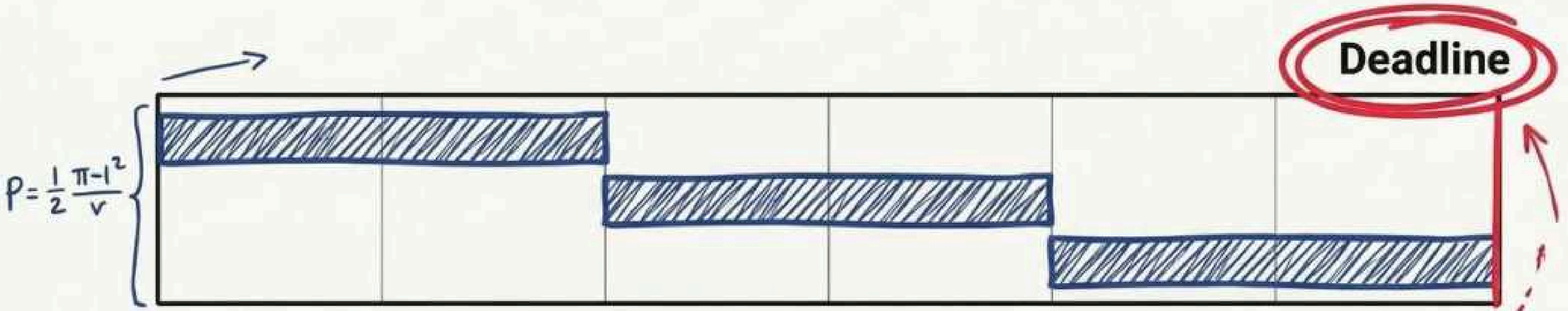
The Evidence Alignment Chart

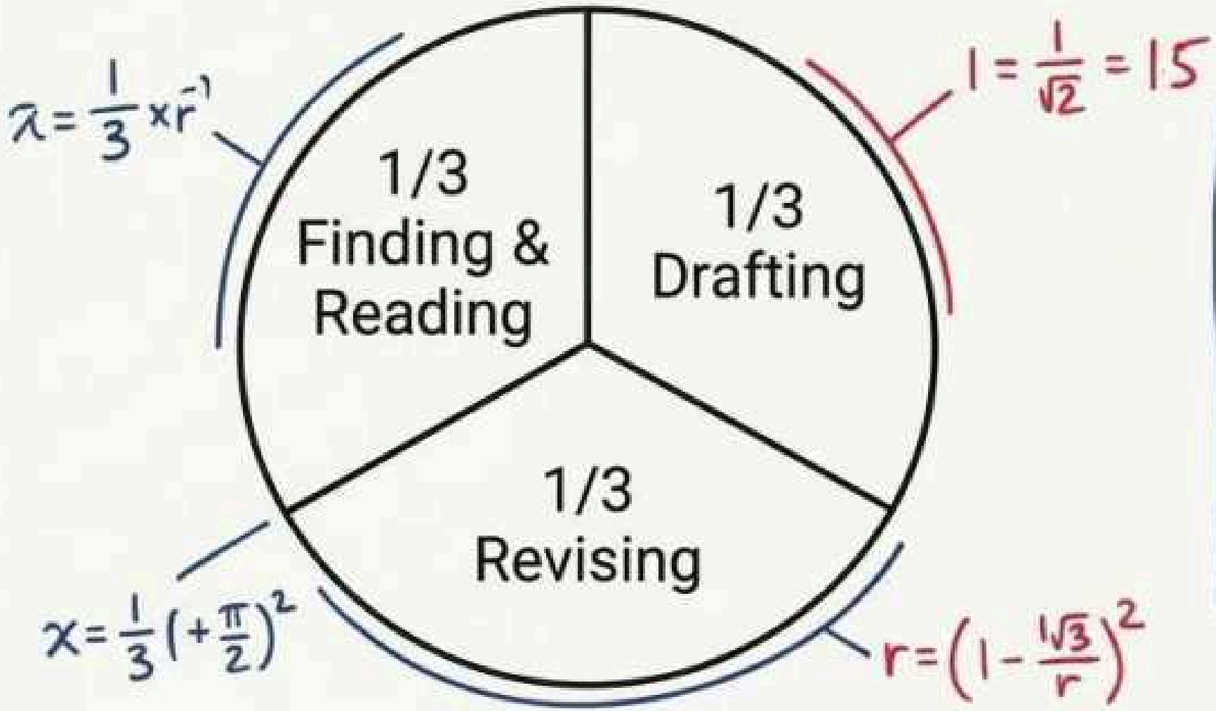


Matching the specific evidence to the question type saves you from collecting the wrong material.

The Backward Timeline & The Rule of Thirds

¶ 1.12





Research always takes longer than expected because sources multiply. **Give the search a firm end date.**

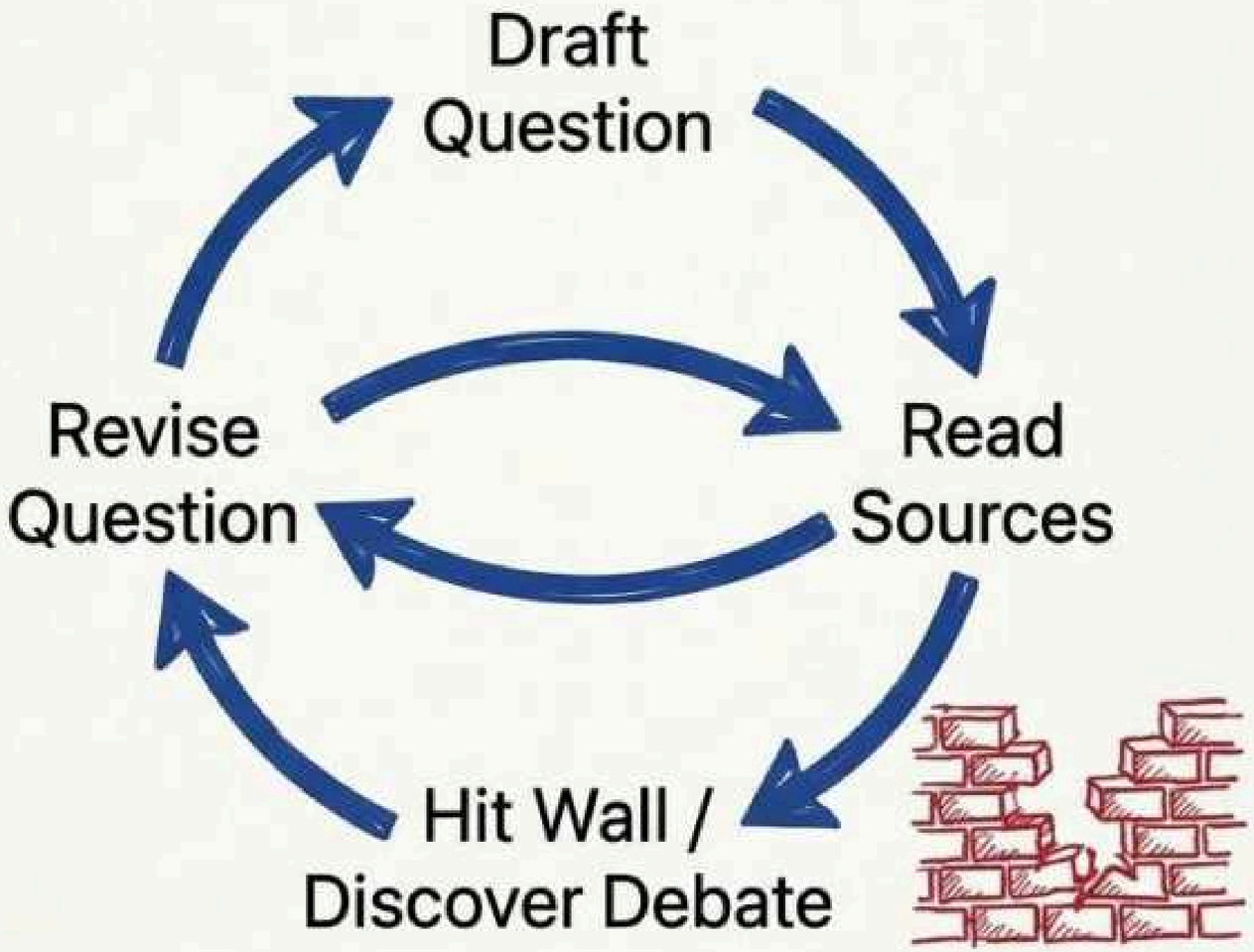
Most students spend all their time on the **first third**.

The Research Log

Date & Exact Search Words 	Location (Database/Archive)	Findings	Decision

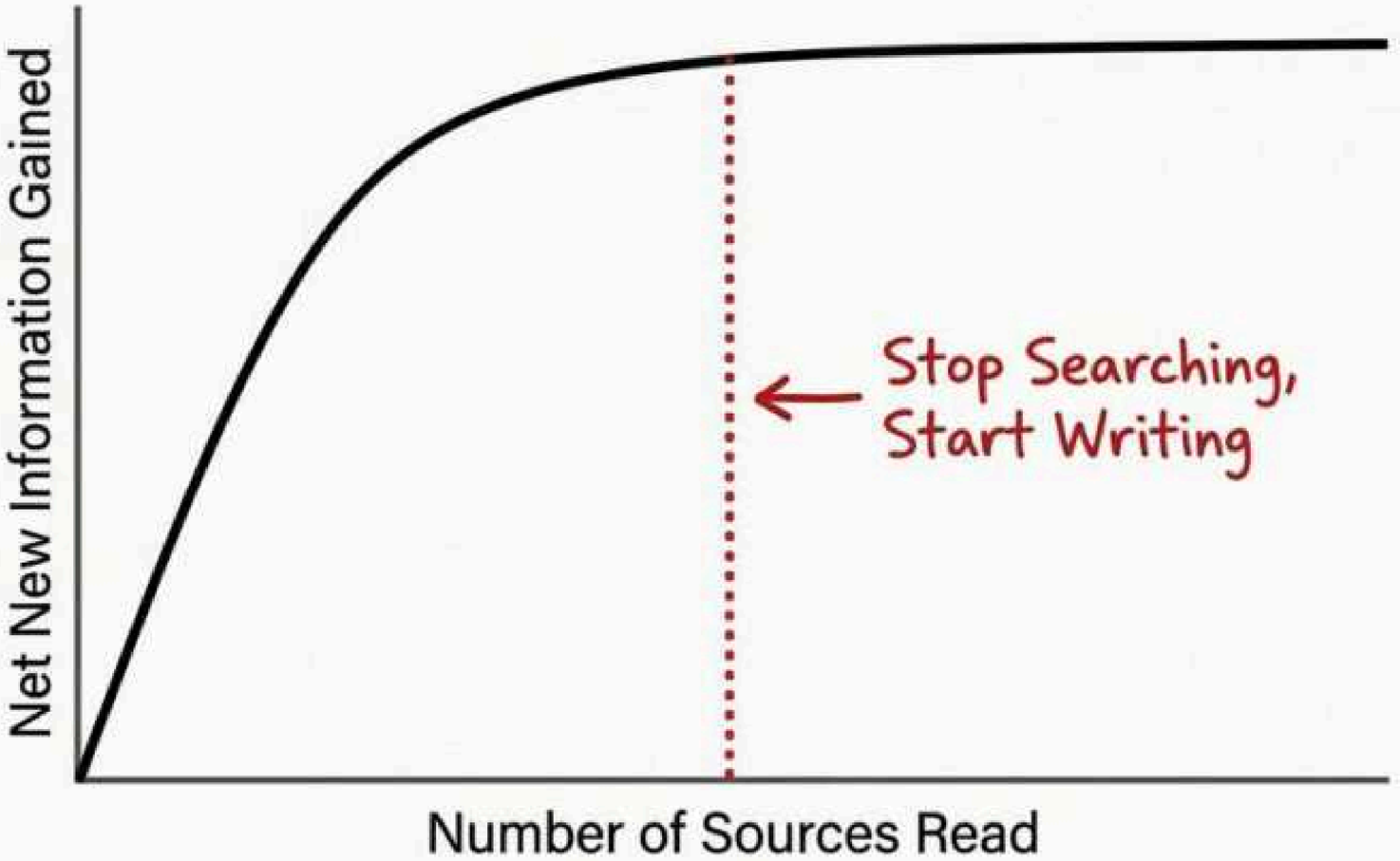
A log stops repeated searches, tracks why a source mattered, and makes writing less painful. Record exact search words—six weeks from now, your future self will be grateful you did.

¶ 1.14



Expect your question to change. You may find it is too wide, lacks evidence, or hides a better question inside. Revising the question is not failure; it is the research doing its job. Many good projects change direction twice.

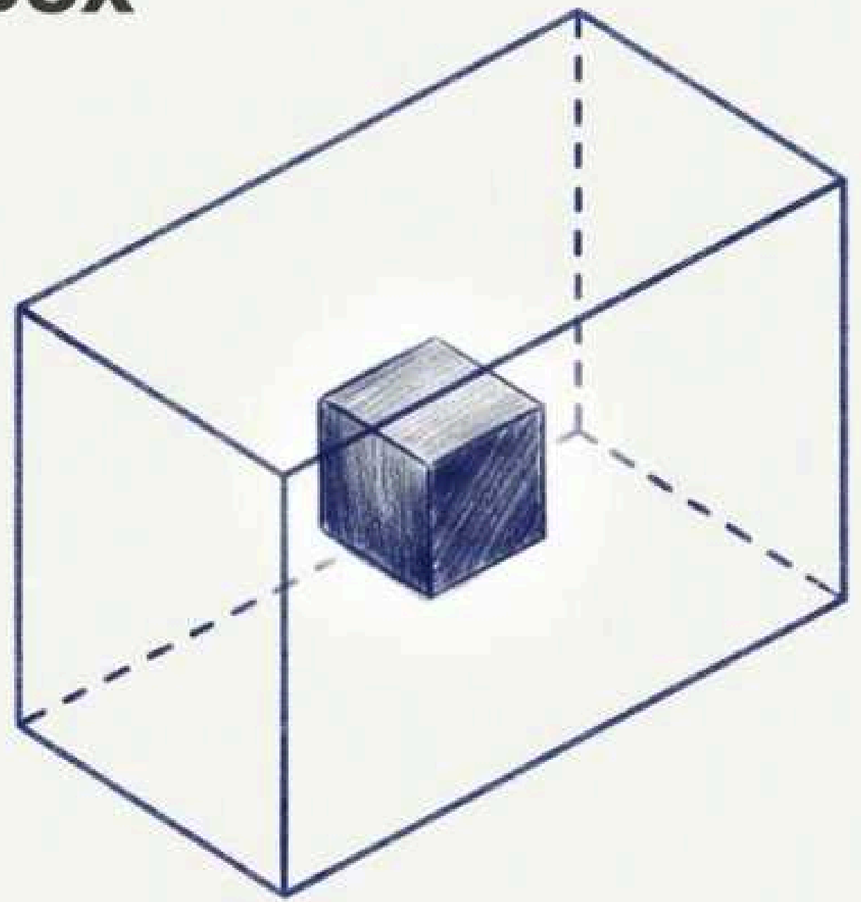
The Saturation Point



Quality matters more than count. You have enough when sources repeat what you already know, and when you can predict an article's conclusion before you finish reading it.

The Bounding Box

¶ 1.16



A short paper cannot settle a huge question; it contributes a careful, well-supported answer to a small one. State exactly what you did and did not cover. Readers trust a writer who establishes strict boundaries far more than one who promises to explain everything.

¶ 1.17

The Activation Worksheet

Think of a curiosity, write it as a topic, and narrow it three times.

Topic: _____



Narrow 1: _____



Narrow 2: _____



Narrow 3: _____



Final Question (Open/Arguable/Researchable/Right Size):

Target Source: _____ | Key Search Word: _____

¶ 1.18



Where to look, and how to look well.