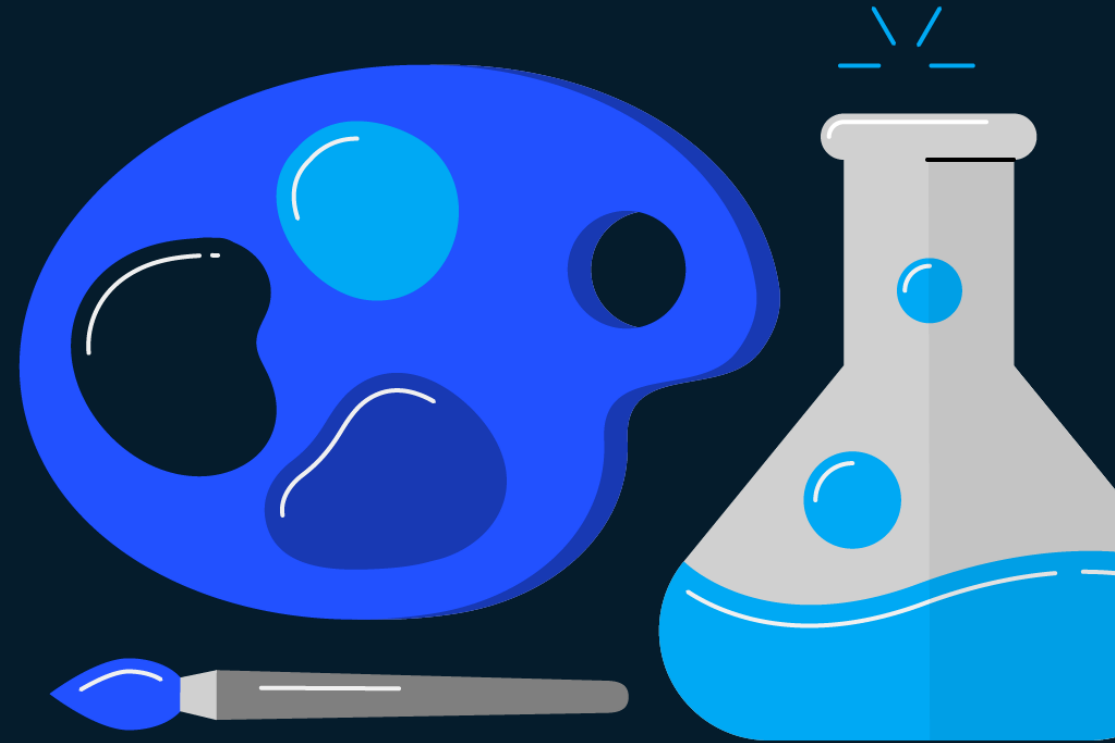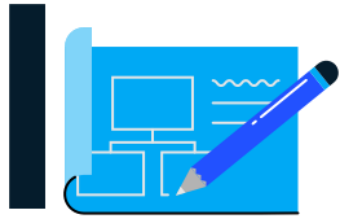# Structure your argument: Key Takeaways

Communicating for Impact
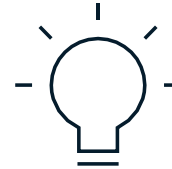
Key takeaways
Core content

What is insight?

- Insights are generated by analyzing information and drawing conclusions

- **Grouping and synthesizing like facts and insights** help to form the foundation of your argument or message

- The **Pyramid Principle and storylining** provide an approach to developing structured arguments

Why is structuring my argument important?

- It's not enough to have the facts; you need to **form them into a coherent message**

- In a business context, your ability to move an audience to action largely depends on your ability to **structure a logical argument** and **craft a compelling narrative**
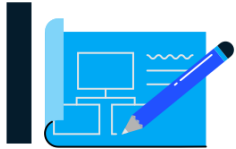
How do I apply structuring my argument?

- Leverage the following tools and/or techniques to master structuring your argument:

  — Pyramid Principle

  — MECE grouping

  — Summary vs. Synthesis

EPIC guiding questions
Worksheet

Insight
Articulate your ideas in a clear and compelling way

What questions do we ask ourselves?	**Write your answers here**
What insights are most relevant to helping you succeed in this purpose?	
What storyline will help you focus attention on those insights? What concise phrases capture your ideas best?	
What types of materials or interactions will help you share those insights most clearly?	

Pyramid Principle
Framework

What should the pyramid contain?

- A single governing thought which is the key takeaway the audience must hear during the first 2 minutes of your communication event

- 3-5 key line statements that act as the underlying arguments that support the governing thought

- 3-5 supporting facts per key line statement which build the foundation of your pyramid and support both the key line statements and the governing thought

**How to get started building your pyramid**

Step 1: Begin by reviewing the facts you have collected and create logical fact groupings

Step 2: Strive to create groupings that have no gaps or overlaps. That is, they are

- *Mutually exclusive*: The groups address unique issues with no overlap

- *Collectively exhaustive*: As a set, the groups represent the spectrum of issues at play, leaving no gaps

Step 3: Write a key line statement to synthesize each logical fact grouping

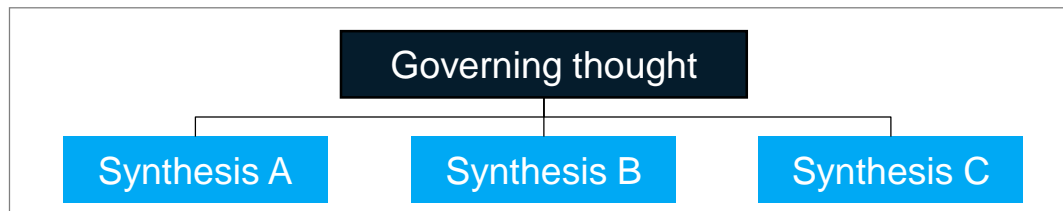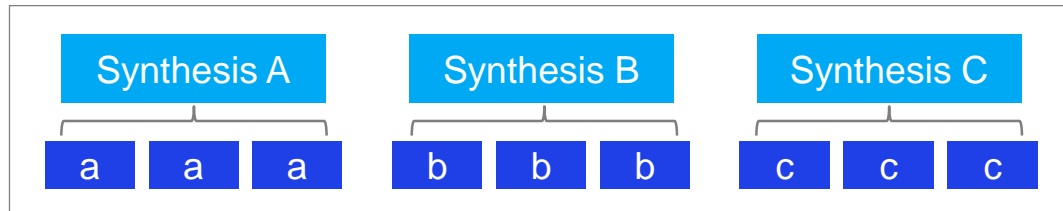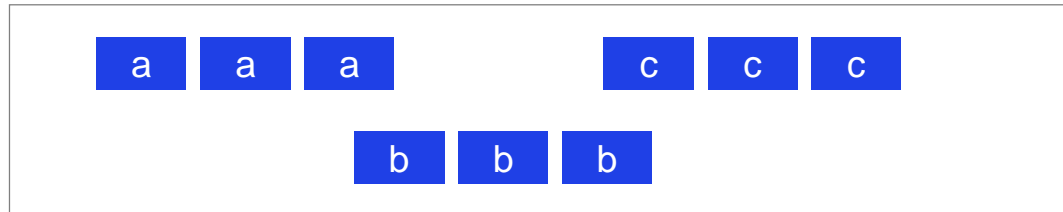**Step 4:** Write a governing thought to synthesize the key line statements
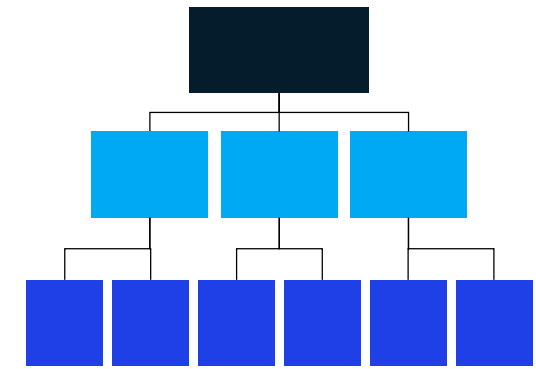
Governing thought: The one-sentence answer or solution to a problem

Key line statements: The why and how to implement the solution

Supporting data: The supporting evidence

Building a pyramid bottom up
Framework
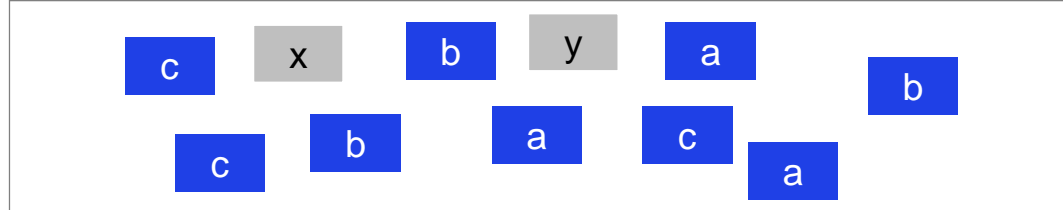
1. Lay out your findings on a table, floor, wall, or white board. Express your findings as dynamic assertions (e.g., complete ideas with verbs), not as static labels (such as topics)

2. Look for patterns that lead you to group ideas, such as effects of a situation, observed facts, examples, reasons, benefits

3. Write a statement that synthesizes each group of ideas. Express each synthesis as a dynamic assertion

4. Provide an overall synthesis. Ask: what does each synthesis imply for the question at hand, or for the next steps? This top synthesis becomes the governing thought of your storyline

Pyramid Principle diagram
Framework

Building a pyramid **top down** answers how or why

Building a pyramid **bottom up** answers, "so what?"

Groupings should follow a **logical order**, have no **gaps or overlaps**, and **synthesize** the level below
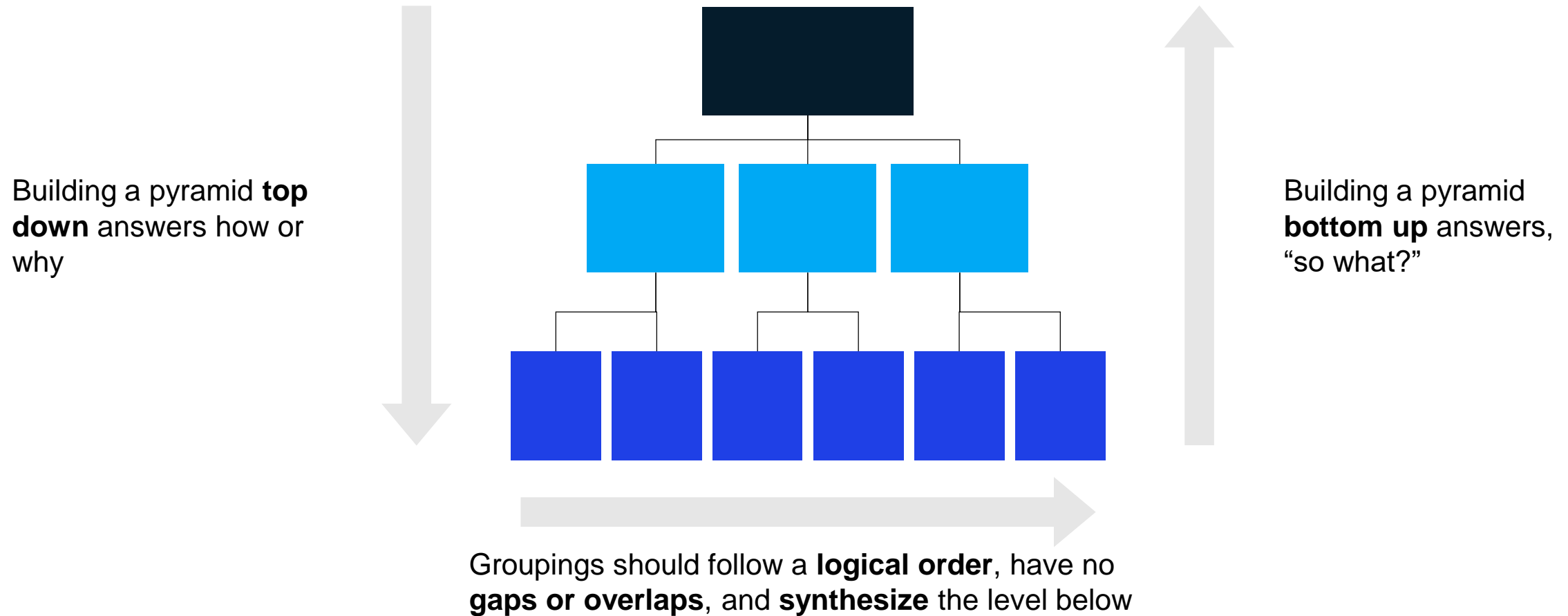
Pyramid Principle worksheet
Worksheet
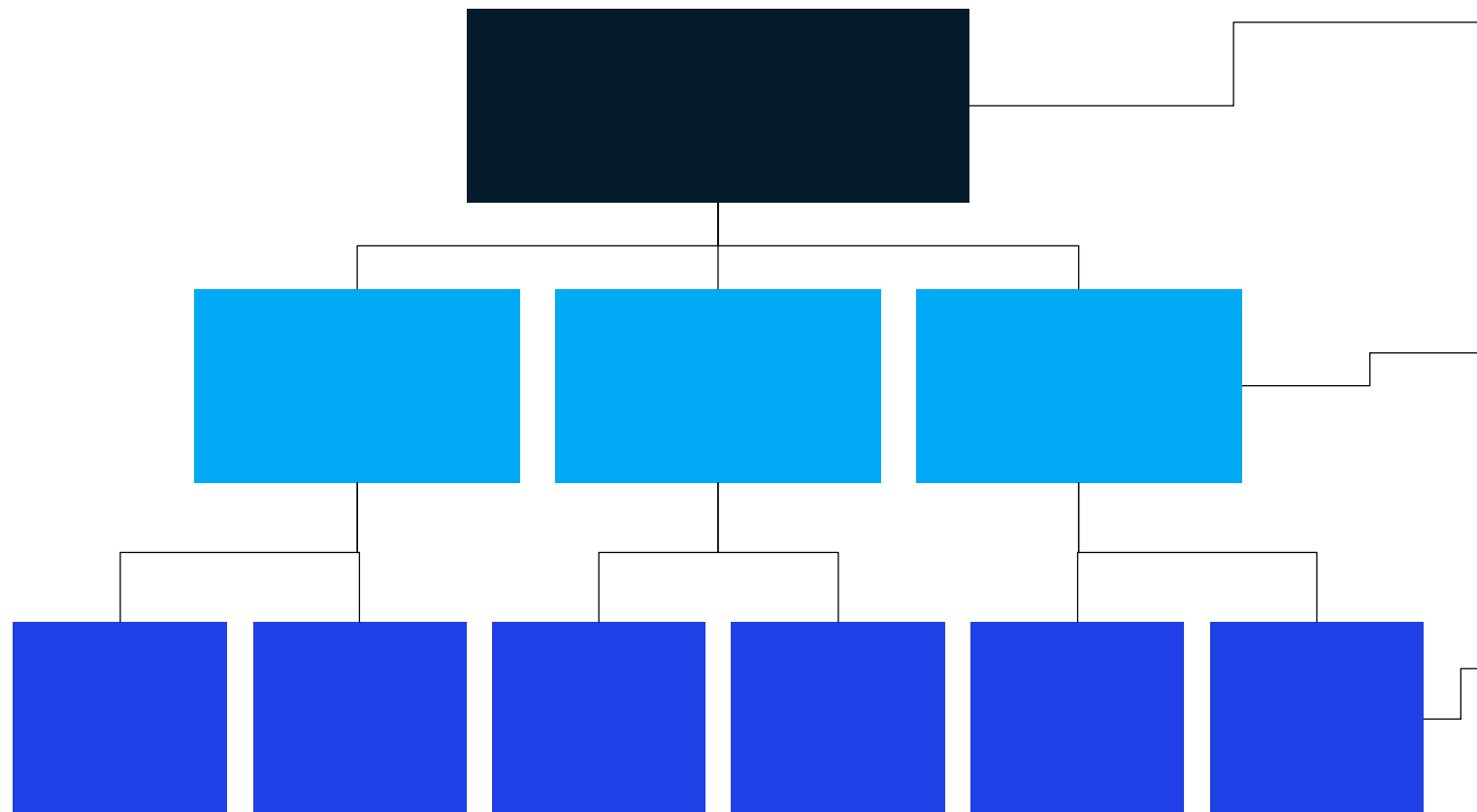
Governing thought
- Answers the central question, providing direction for a decision or action
- Makes an overarching point that is a synthesis, not a summary
- Is stated powerfully in short, sharp, plain language

Key line statements
- Underpins the governing thought with no gaps, no overlaps (MECE)
- Each point synthesizes the points beneath it
- Points are at the same level of abstraction and in a logical order
- In a grouping, ideas are of the same logical kind (e.g., reasons, causes, steps, parts)

Supporting data
- All data is relevant, sufficient, and fact-based
- Says enough about implications to enable decision making
- Items in each set are MECE

MECE Grouping
Tips/techniques

Most often, you deliver your message top down, but you build it bottom up:

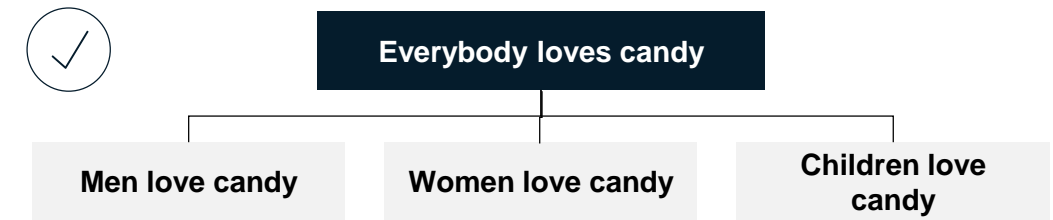- When you deliver your message, you lead with your governing thought and then share the analyses and facts that support it

- When you build your message, you do the opposite: you start by grouping the facts, and then you "boil them up" into a well-supported governing thought

A pyramid structure begins by **grouping like facts and ideas**. These groups form the foundation of your pyramid. When structuring arguments, there should be no gaps or overlaps in the groups of facts or arguments at each level. Another way to describe these groupings is that they should be **mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive (MECE)**

Mutually exclusive means that groupings are independent of each other, such that there is no overlap of ideas. Furthermore, mutually exclusive ideas are at the same level of abstraction

Collectively exhaustive means that the groupings represent a full spectrum of ideas or options. Taken together, a set of collectively exhaustive statements describe the issue completely

✓ **Everybody loves candy**

Men love candy | **Women love candy** | **Children love candy**

Can you see the difference?

✕ **Everybody loves candy**

Spanish speakers love candy | **Elders love candy** | **Young people love candy**
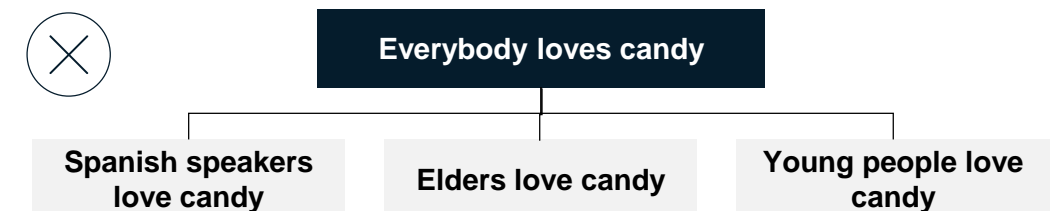
Summary vs. synthesis

Tips/techniques

Summary

A condensed version of all the facts

Synthesis

The "so what" of all the facts. Providing insight that all the facts together create

Example of summary vs. synthesis

There are several pain points that we heard from our customer interviews:

- In-store returns are a clunky experience and require customers to wait in line with paying customers

- Waiting time for inventory checks in-store is too long given customer demand and number of staff available

- Loyalty program sign-ups at the register require too much time to fill out

Overall, customers are looking for an enhanced in-store experience that reduces the time it takes from entry to exit and would opt for self-serve solutions to reduce the shopping-experience time

MODA Yoga Studio pyramid
Illustrative example

MODA should open a yoga studio inside of its headquarters

- Offering health-focused spaces like a yoga studio is consistent with MODA's health initiative
  - Classes offered in the yoga studio provide a more affordable option to nearby studios
  - Easy access to a yoga studio encourages exercise and improvement in health
- An onsite yoga studio will save time and make MODA's people more efficient
  - Waiting time will be minimal as the studio only serves MODA colleagues
  - Classes offered in house will eliminate travel time to external classes
- An onsite yoga studio will give employees a place to socialize and foster community building
  - A yoga studio promotes cross-functional interaction
  - An onsite yoga studio reinforces our commitment to the quality of life of our employees