Professional Writing

Becoming a writer

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In reality:

- Good communication takes time and effort.
- However there are clear rules and processes you can learn quickly and apply to everyone.

Professional ~~Writing~~ Communicating

Becoming someone people listen to

- We'll start with writing, but the principles are directly applicable to public speaking and data visualization.

Things we won’t talk about

- Grammar
- Spelling
- Proof reading

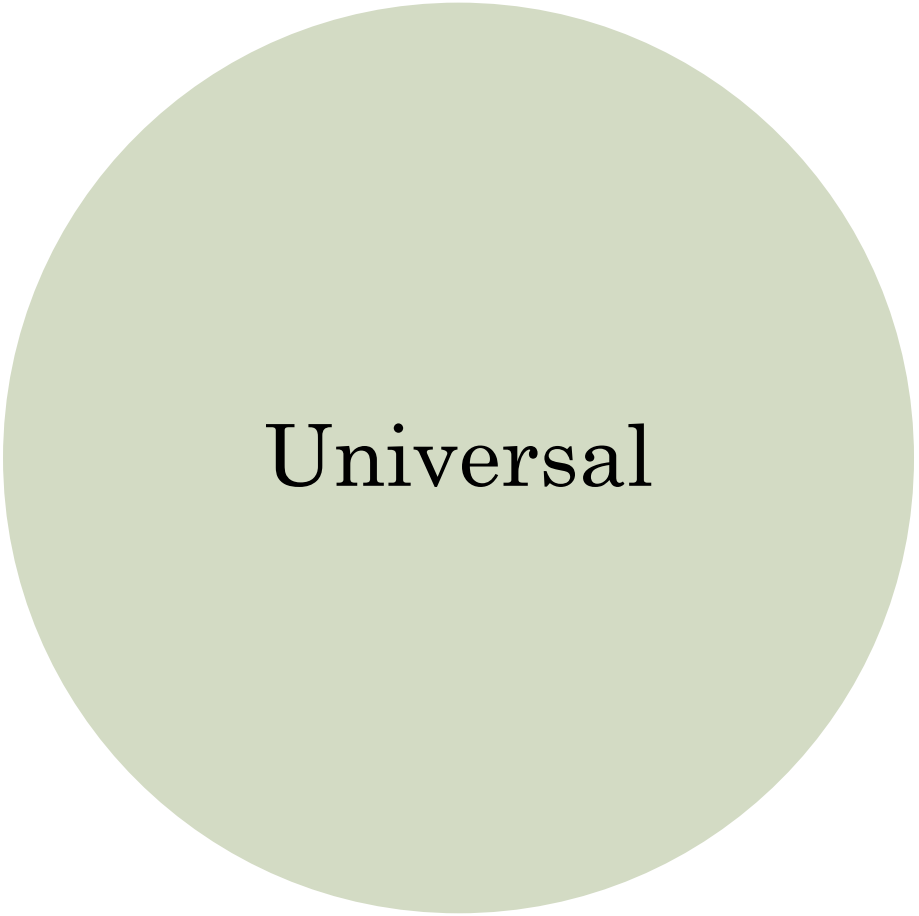
Things we will talk about a little

- Sentence structure
- Word choice

Things we will talk about a lot

- Organizing ideas in your mind
- Organizing those ideas for others
- Editing

Where bad opinions come from



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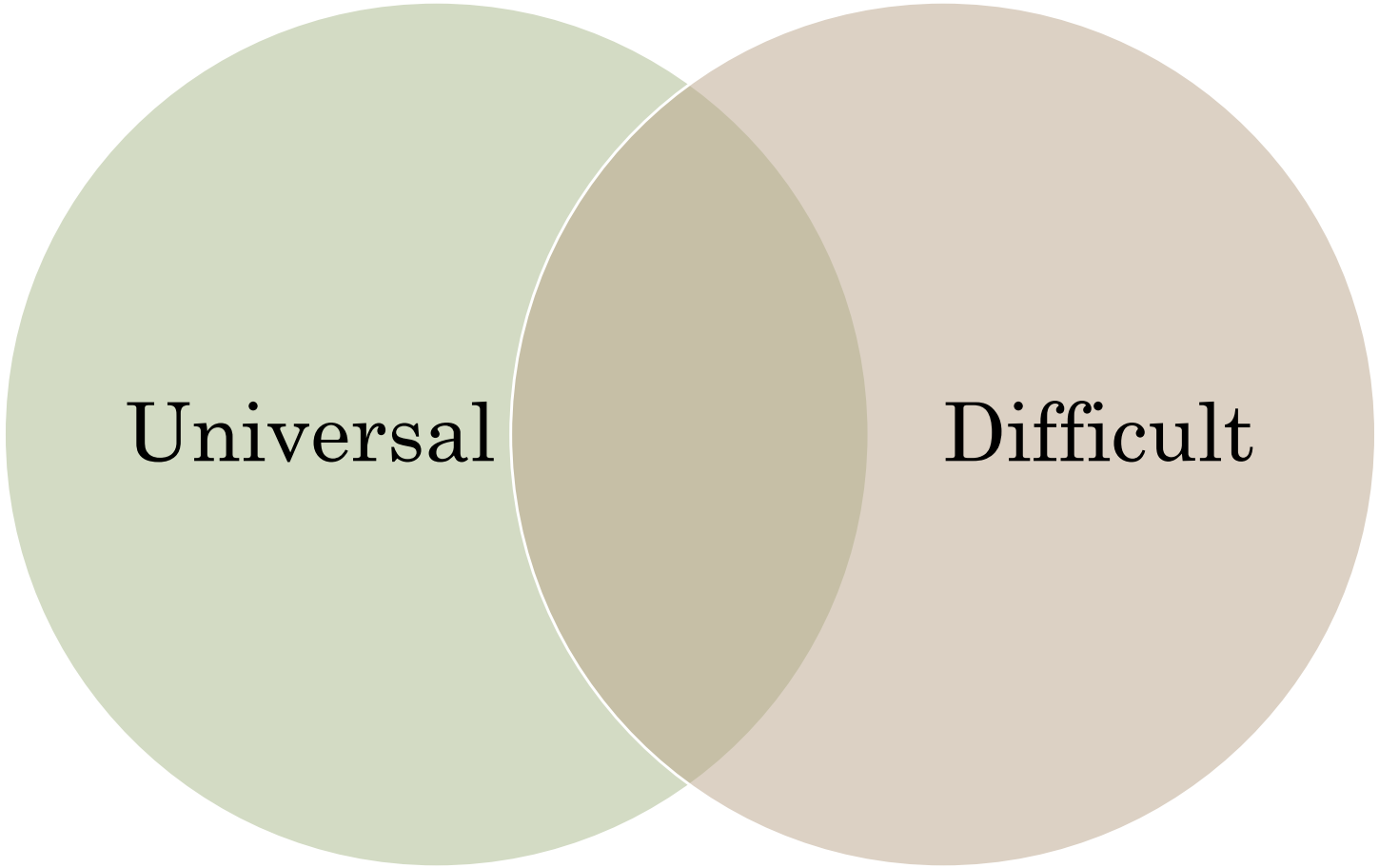

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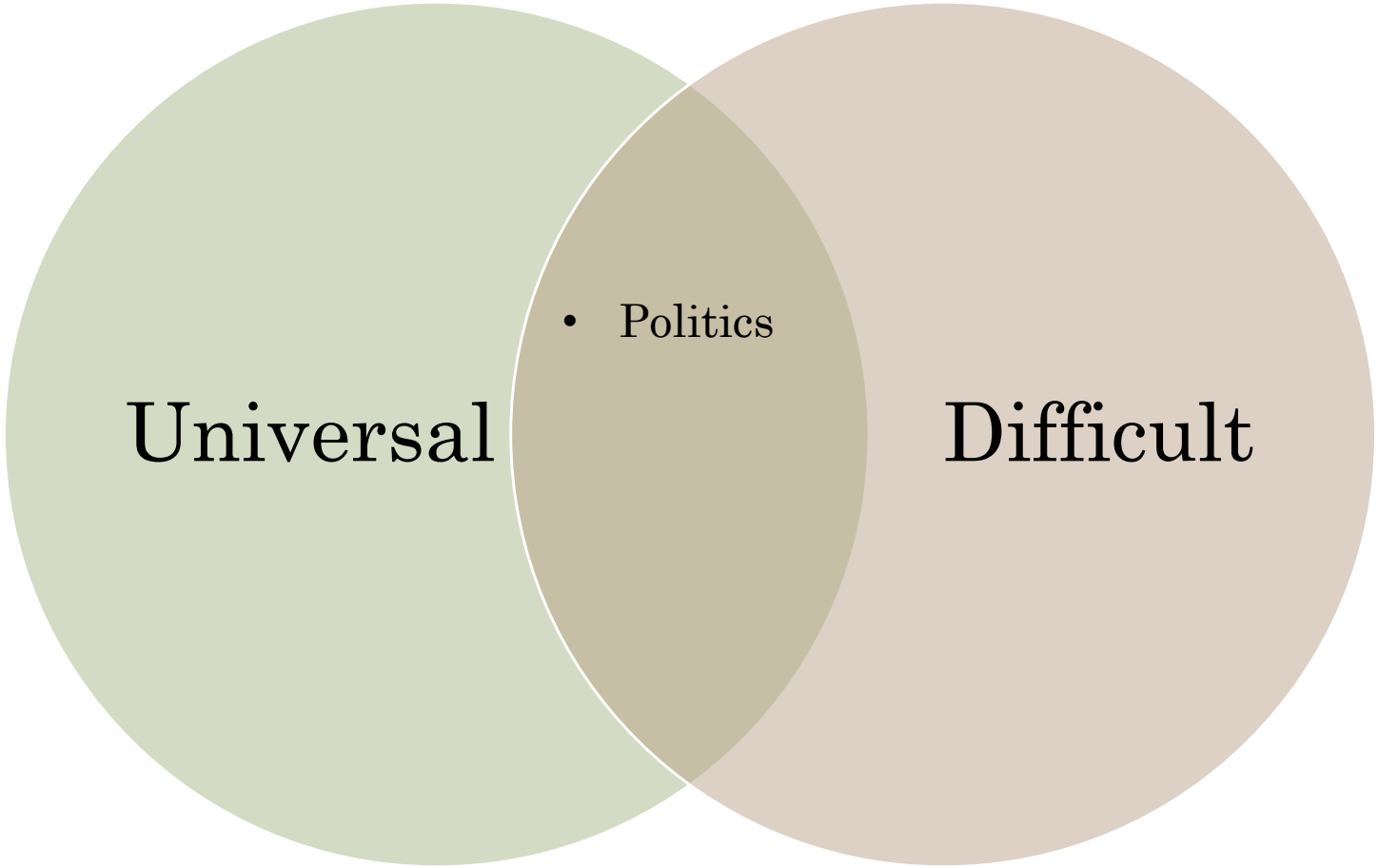

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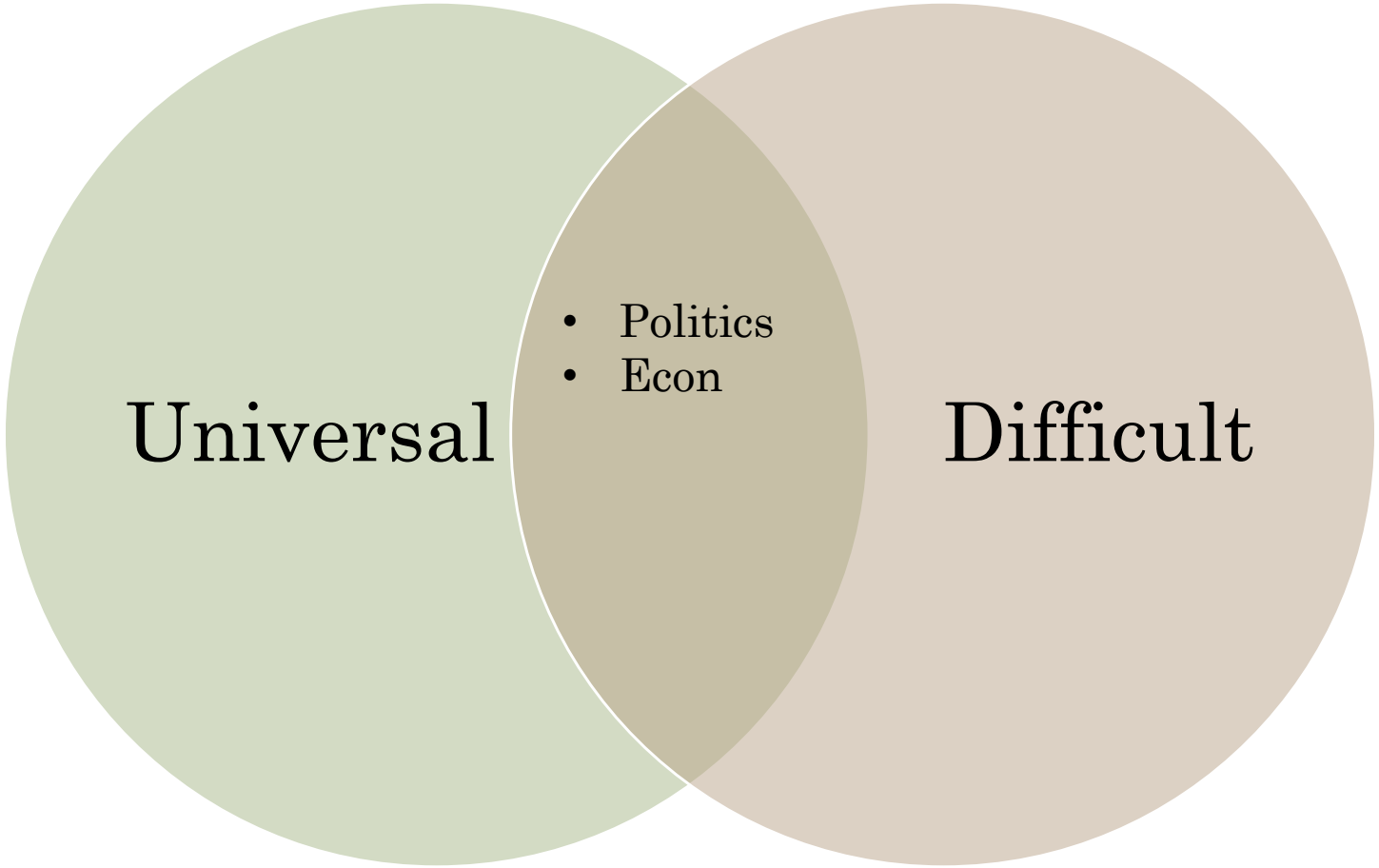

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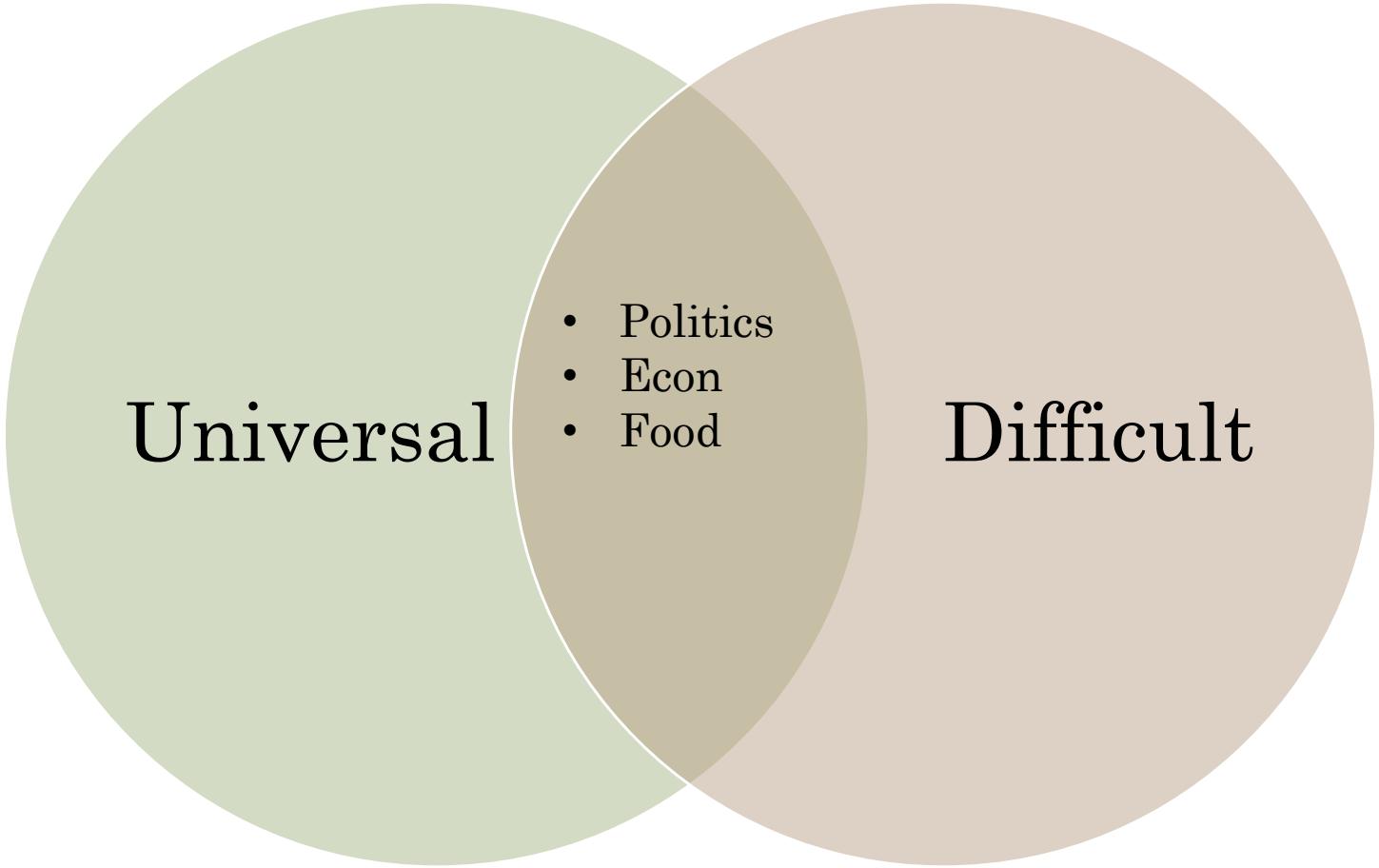

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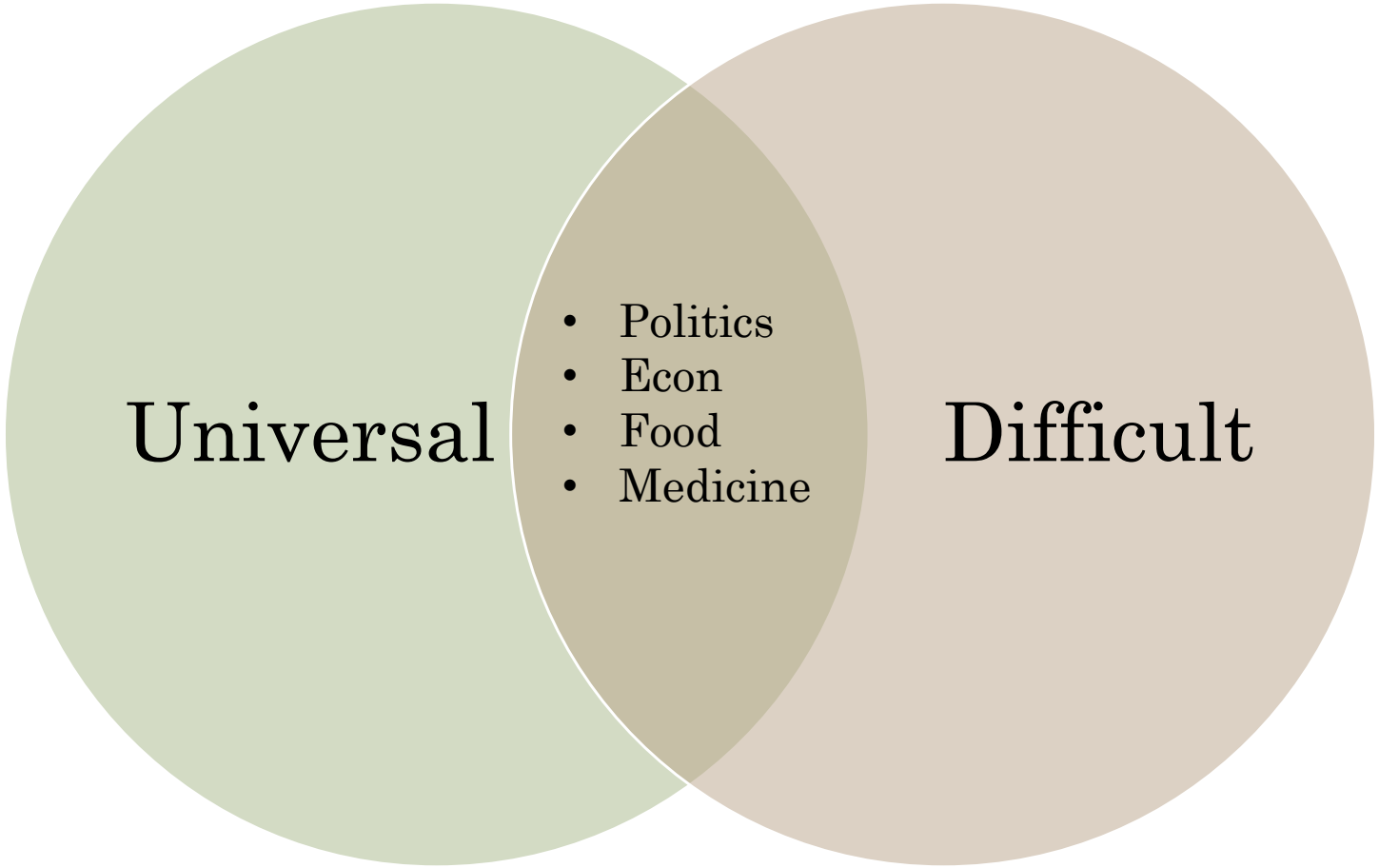

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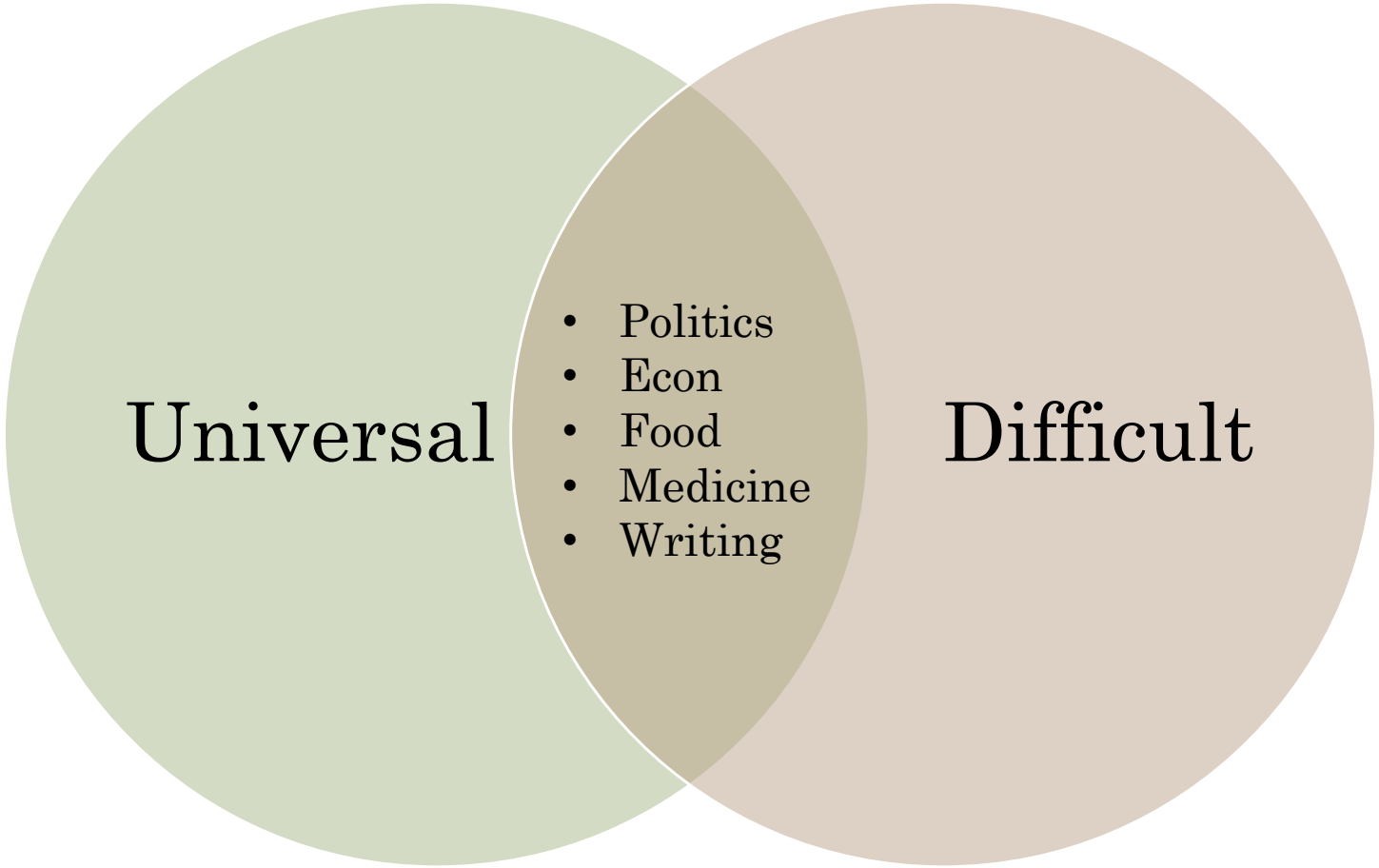

Setting expectations

- Suspend your prior notions about writing

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- Take feedback gracefully

Setting expectations

- Suspend your prior notions about writing
- Take feedback gracefully
- The goal isn’t mastery, but orientating you in the right direction

Process Overview

Planning
Drafting
Editing

What time allocation looks like for most writers

What it should look like

Planning/Outlining

Clear writing follows clear thinking.

Objectives

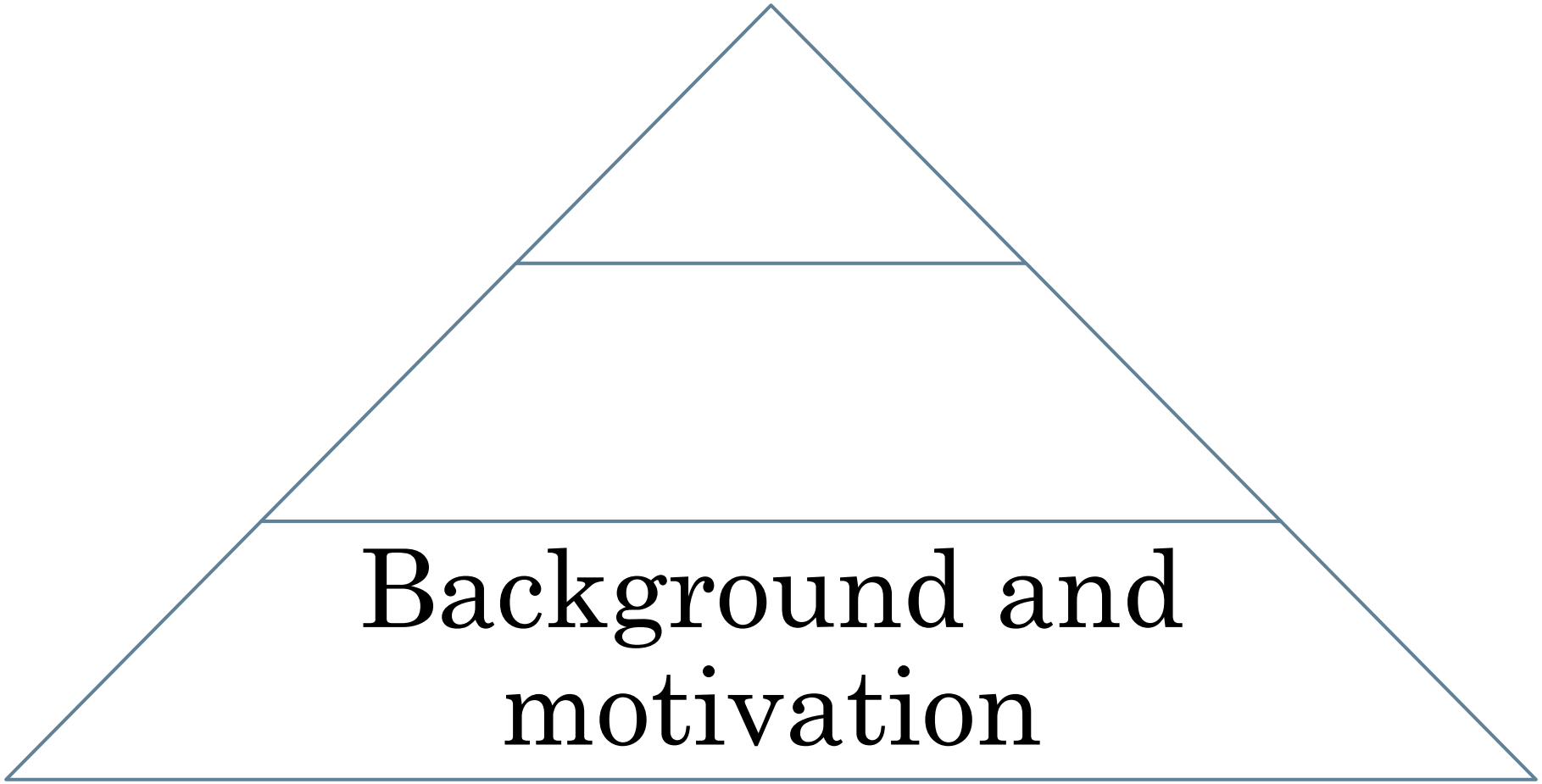
1. Do it.
2. Your goal in planning is to create a cohesive narrative for your paper.
3. Expose all of the shortcomings in your current thinking and attack those.
   - What's unorganized in my mind?
   - What do I struggle to explain?
   - Which claims am I more or less certain in?
   - What do I not have enough information about?

Process

- Start with your thesis/hypothesis/question. Build with:
  - Whatever structure the information follows in your head.
  - What you currently know (with citations/sources).
  - What you don't know.
  - Questions
- Find the organization that will most effectively lead the reader to your conclusion.
- You may have multiple outlines depending on how developed your thinking is
- You may find it helpful to think in paragraphs

Structure

A common structure



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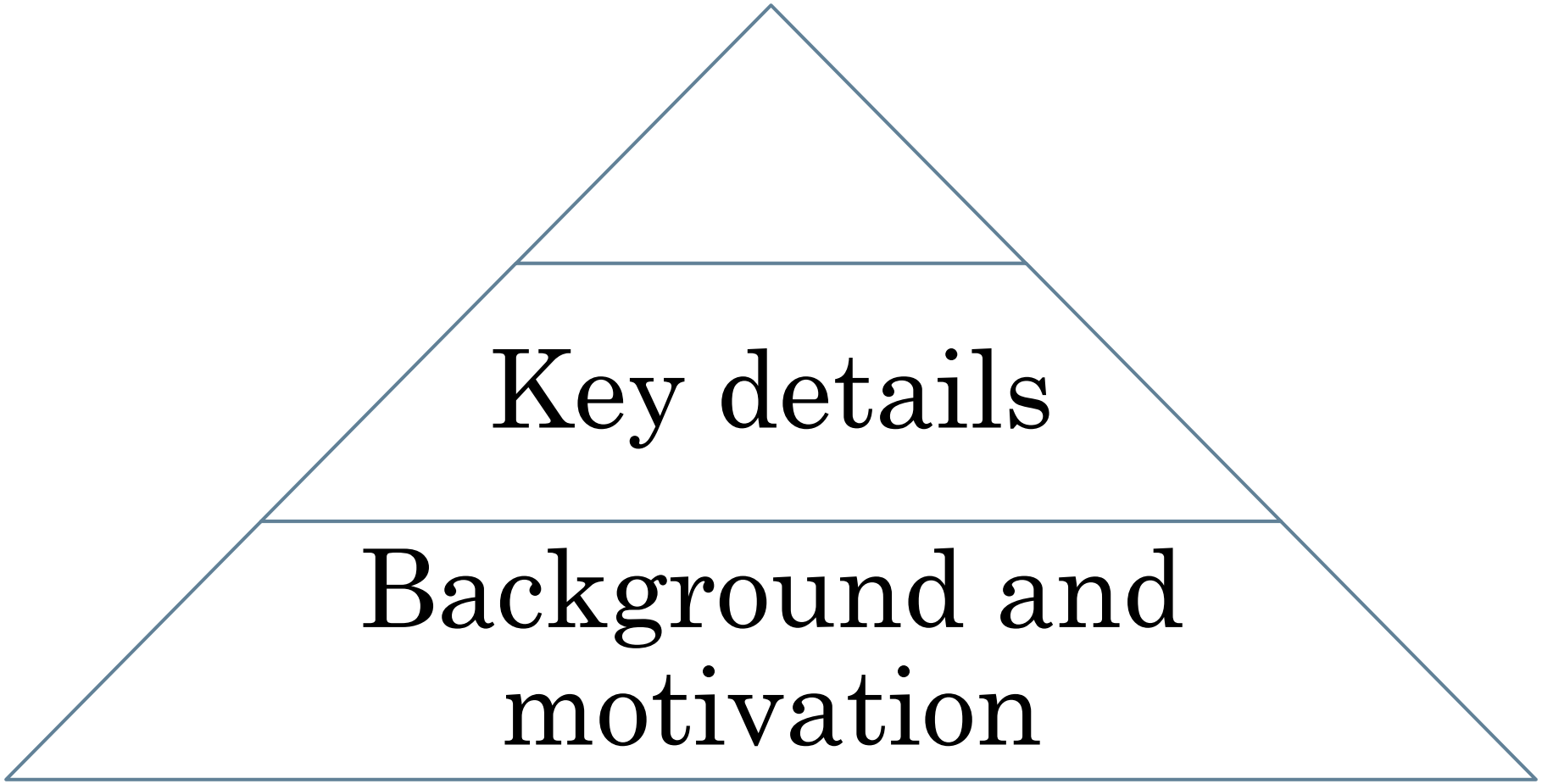

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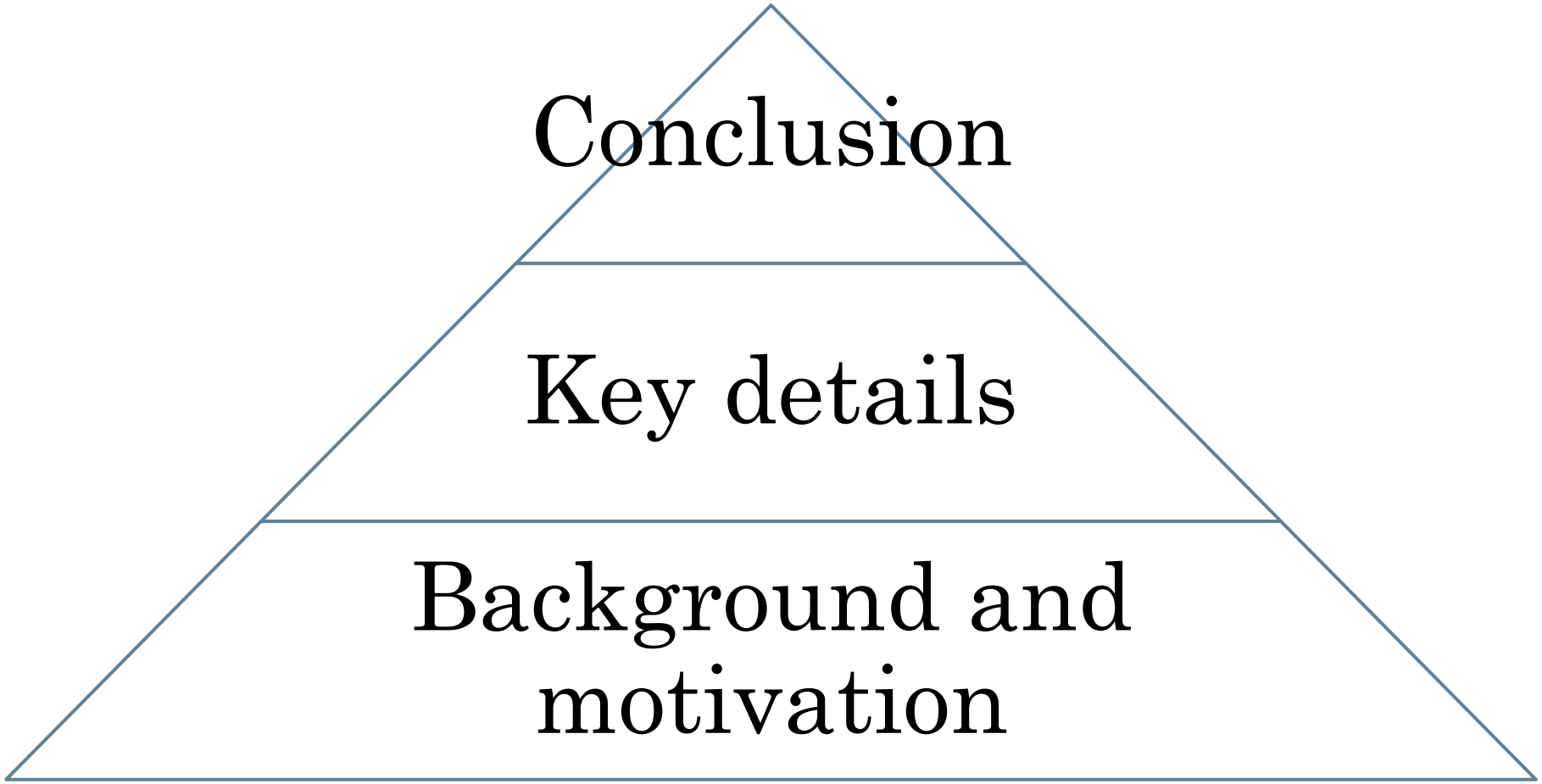
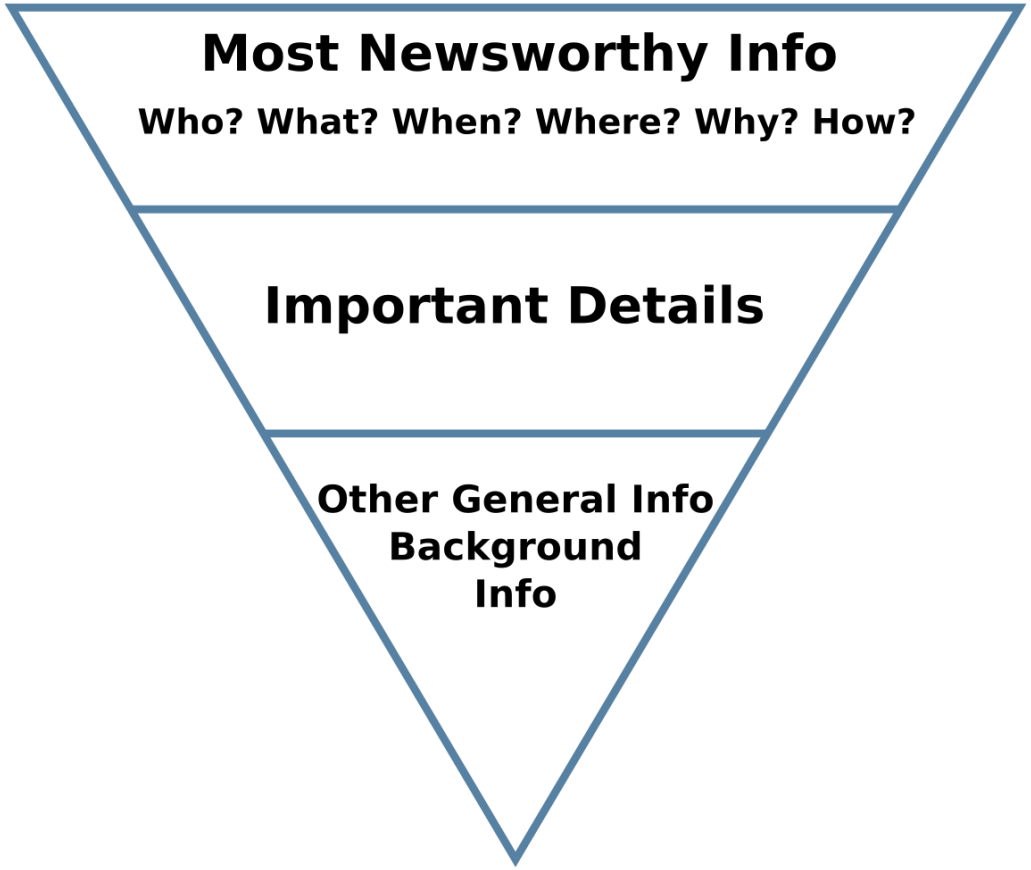


Belief systems have never surrendered easily to empirical study or quantification. Indeed, they have often served as primary exhibits for the doctrine that what is important to study cannot be measured and that what can be measured is not important to study. In an earlier period, the behaviorist decree that subjective states lie beyond the realm of proper measurement gave Mannheim a justification for turning his back on measurement, for he had an unqualified interest in discussing belief systems.[1] Even as Mannheim was writing, however, behaviorism was undergoing stiff challenges, and early studies of attitudes were attaining a degree of measurement reliability that had been deemed impossible. This fragment of history, along with many others, serves to remind us that no intellectual position is likely to become obsolete quite so rapidly as one that takes current empirical capability as the limit of the possible in a more absolute sense. Nevertheless, while rapid strides in the measurement of "subjective states" have been achieved in recent decades, few would claim that the millennium has arrived or that Mannheim could now find all of the tools that were lacking to him forty years ago.

BLUF and the Inverted Pyramid



Alternatively…

1. Tell me what you're going to tell me
2. Tell me
3. Tell me what you told me

BLUF all the way down

“In the BLUF format, the first sentence of each paragraph will sum up all of the information in the paragraph. A good BLUF should cover all of the information in a paragraph, like an umbrella. If the paragraph contains any information that doesn’t fall under the BLUF’s “umbrella,” that information should be moved to a more appropriate paragraph or the BLUF should be changed to include the additional information. Following the BLUF, the component sentences in the paragraph should be arranged from most to least important.”

Assignment #1

- Write a one page single-spaced executive summary on your research using the BLUF style.
- Imagine I'm your new boss and my job is to ensure you complete your project on time and that it is done well. You need to introduce me to all aspects of your work in a concise manner.
- Things you may want to address:
  - What is your research topic/question/hypotheses
  - Why it's important both substantively and scientifically. What are the implications of your research and how does it fit into existing literature?
  - Research design and methods
  - Data type, sources, etc.
  - Remaining tasks
  - Any preliminary findings
- 11pt Calibri with 1 inch margins
- Citations in endnotes on a second page, style is unimportant
- Include your outline

Advice on assignment #1

- Don’t spend any time trying to polish your outline for my sake
- Don’t try to create an outline retroactively
- Write until you feel like the assignment is complete, then edit down for length. Your initial draft should be significantly longer than one page.

Drafting and Style

Drafting

1. Execute your plan

Drafting

1. Execute your plan
2. Make mistakes

Style

- Place yourself in the background.
- Do not write ‘breezily’.
- Be concise.
- Write with nouns and verbs.
- Use the active voice.
- Draft first, edit later.

Voice

- Place yourself in the background.
- Do not write ‘breezily’.

Be Concise

“In recent years, computer science has made enormous strides in stance detection and developed tools such as transfer learning and zero-shot classification that significantly increase the accuracy and accessibility of stance detection for researchers.”

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“In recent years, computer science developed tools such as transfer learning and zero-shot classification that increase the accuracy and accessibility of stance detection.”

“Recent advancements in transfer learning and zero-shot classification increased the accuracy and accessibility of stance detection”

Nouns and Verbs

“He inserted vigorously a strong wooden post with a point at one end into the pale corpse that is supposed to leave its grave at night to drink the blood of the living by biting their necks with long pointed canine teeth.”

“He stabbed the vampire with a stake”

Angrily replied	→	Retorted
Ran quickly	→	Sprinted
Metal bottle	→	Flask
Large house	→	Mansion

Passive voice

- “The subject is acted upon by the verb”
- “The verb acts upon the subject”

Passive voice contains:

- A form of “to be” (e.g. is, are, am)
- A past participle of the verb (acted vs. act)

A simple way to remember:

X did Y, not Y was done by X

Editing

“Forgive the long letter; I didn’t have time to write a short one.”

“Forgive the long letter; I didn’t have time to write a short one.”

“I have made this longer than usual because I have not had time to make it shorter”

Editing

- Editing != proofreading
- Revision is an essential part of all writing and presentation.
- Expect to rewrite and delete significant portions of any documents

Editing Priorities

- Reorganize for clarity.
- Rewrite for clarity and voice.
- Remove unnecessary information and over explanation.
- Remove passive voice.
- Remove any unnecessary words (e.g. “that”, “in order to”, “due to the fact that”).