

# RCS

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RESEARCH  
COMMUNICATION  
SCOTLAND



## The writing process: getting started

Mimo Caenepeel

# Workshop overview

Are you going to write today or tomorrow?

What do you need to write today?



# Basic process

- reading
- note-taking
- ‘thinking’
- field work, data, experiments ...

Research

‘Writing’



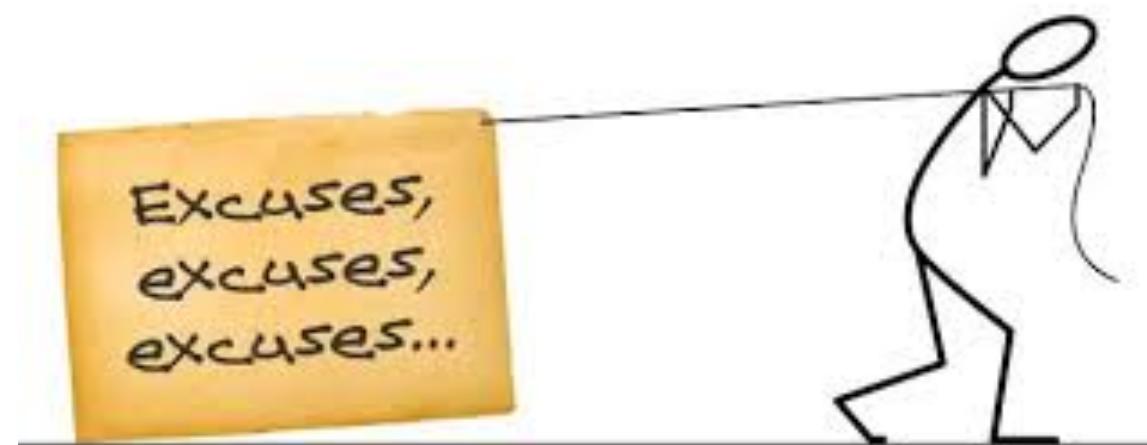
# Reasons and excuses

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What are your reasons (or excuses) for not writing?

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Put them on the chat



# Writing is hard

**‘... much like  
repairing a sewer or  
running a mortuary.’**

(Paul Silvia: *How to write a lot. A practical guide to productive academic writing*)



# Why is (academic) writing hard?

Text is complex.

A lot to think about!

Writing about research = engaging in  
different processes

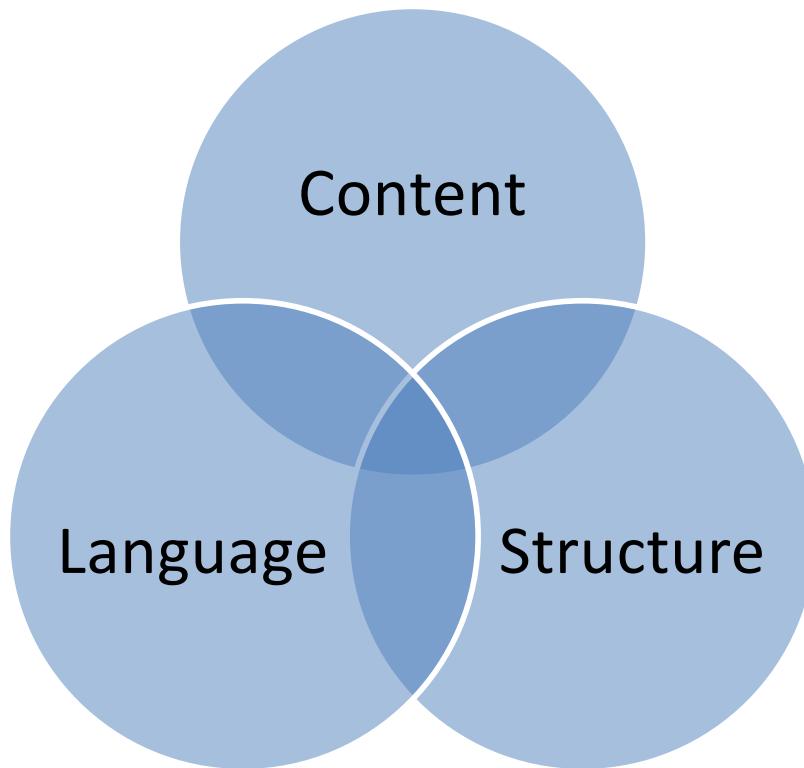
**research process**

**thinking process**

**writing process**

**communication process**

**+ pressure and  
expectations!**



# Overwhelm



**How can you write about your research without feeling overwhelmed?**

# Stop overwhelming your first draft

Pre-drafting

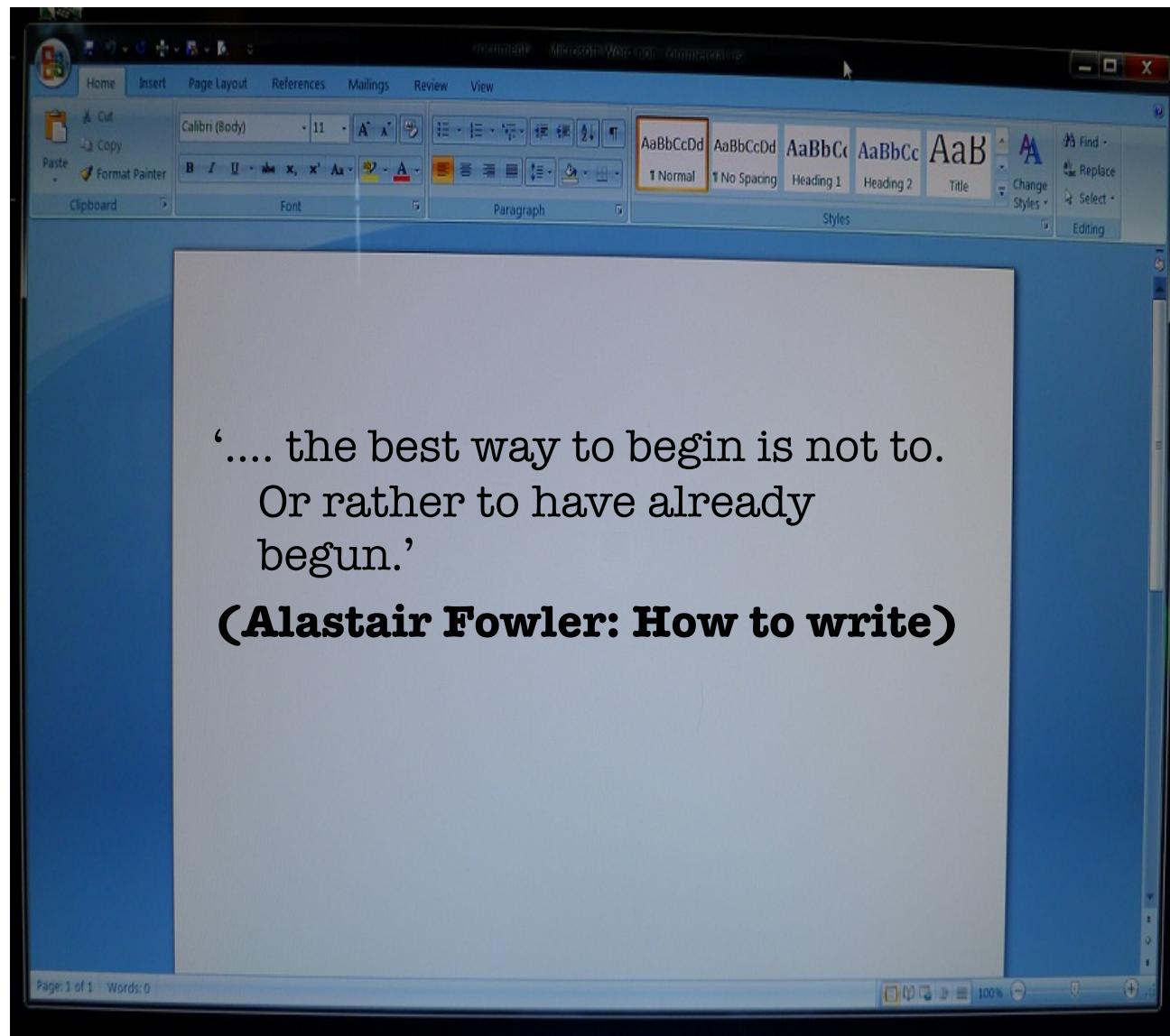
First draft

Post-drafting

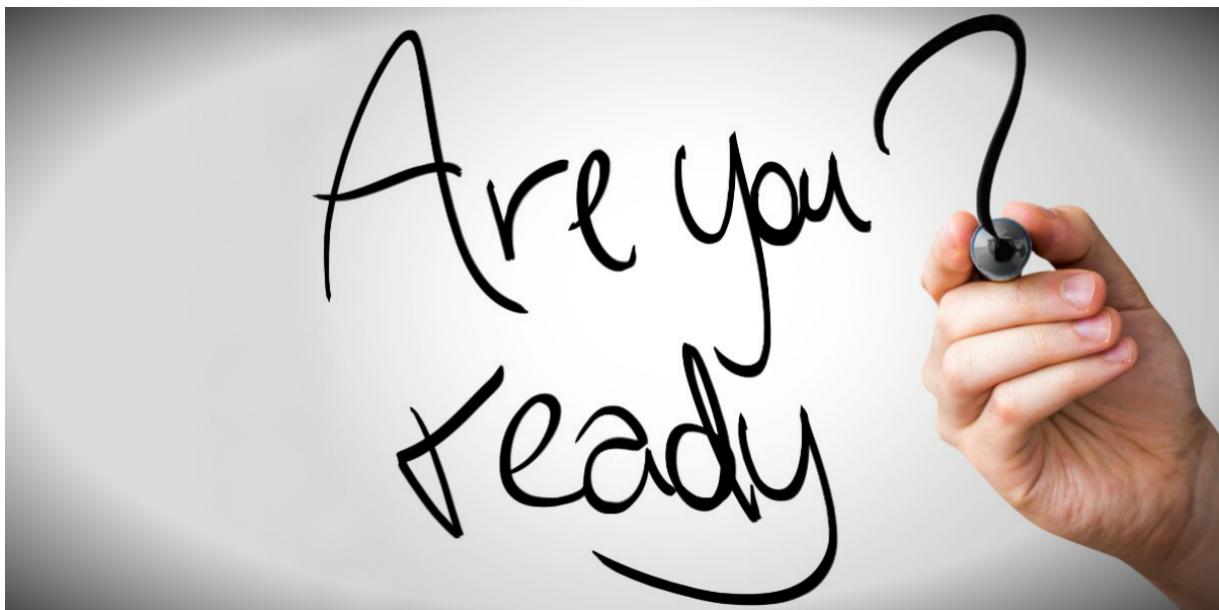


What do you need to know before you start drafting?  
How will you know that you know it?

# Begin before you begin



# Pre-drafting



1. Articulate questions
2. Shape
3. Map
4. Freewrite
5. Distil
6. Create movement
7. Gather
8. Start to write

# 1. Articulate questions

- ... are the engine of research
- ... arouse curiosity
- ... establish focus and scope
- ... are your first interface with your reader



**Questions are not the same as topics**

# From topic to questions

Your research topic

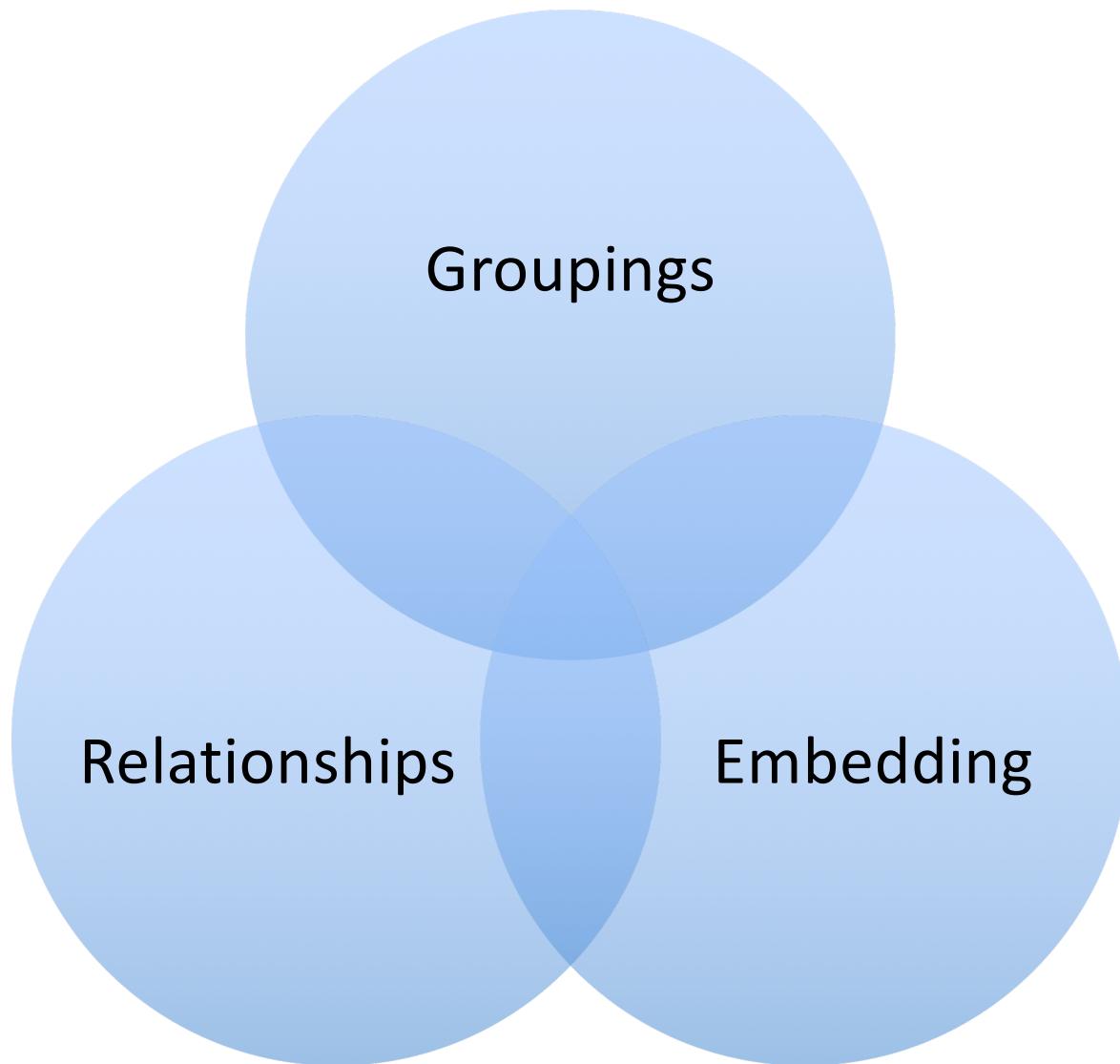
Your research focus

Your research question (a full sentence that ends with a ?). **Put your research question on the chat.**

List at least 10 questions that are related to your research question. Make some of them **detailed** and **specific**.

*write it down*

## 2. Shape



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### **Shape your list**

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which questions will you definitely address?

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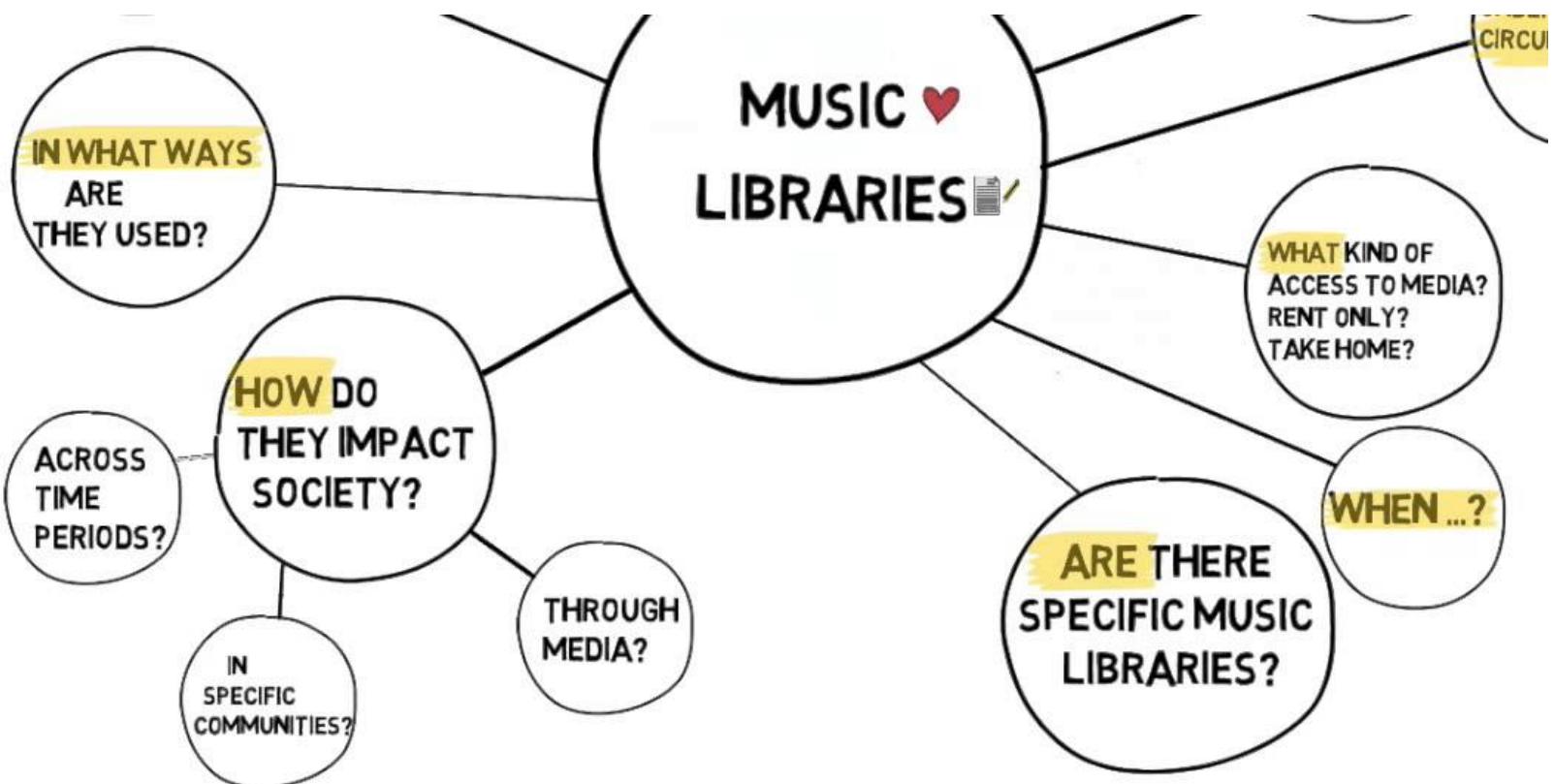
which questions are beyond the scope of your research?

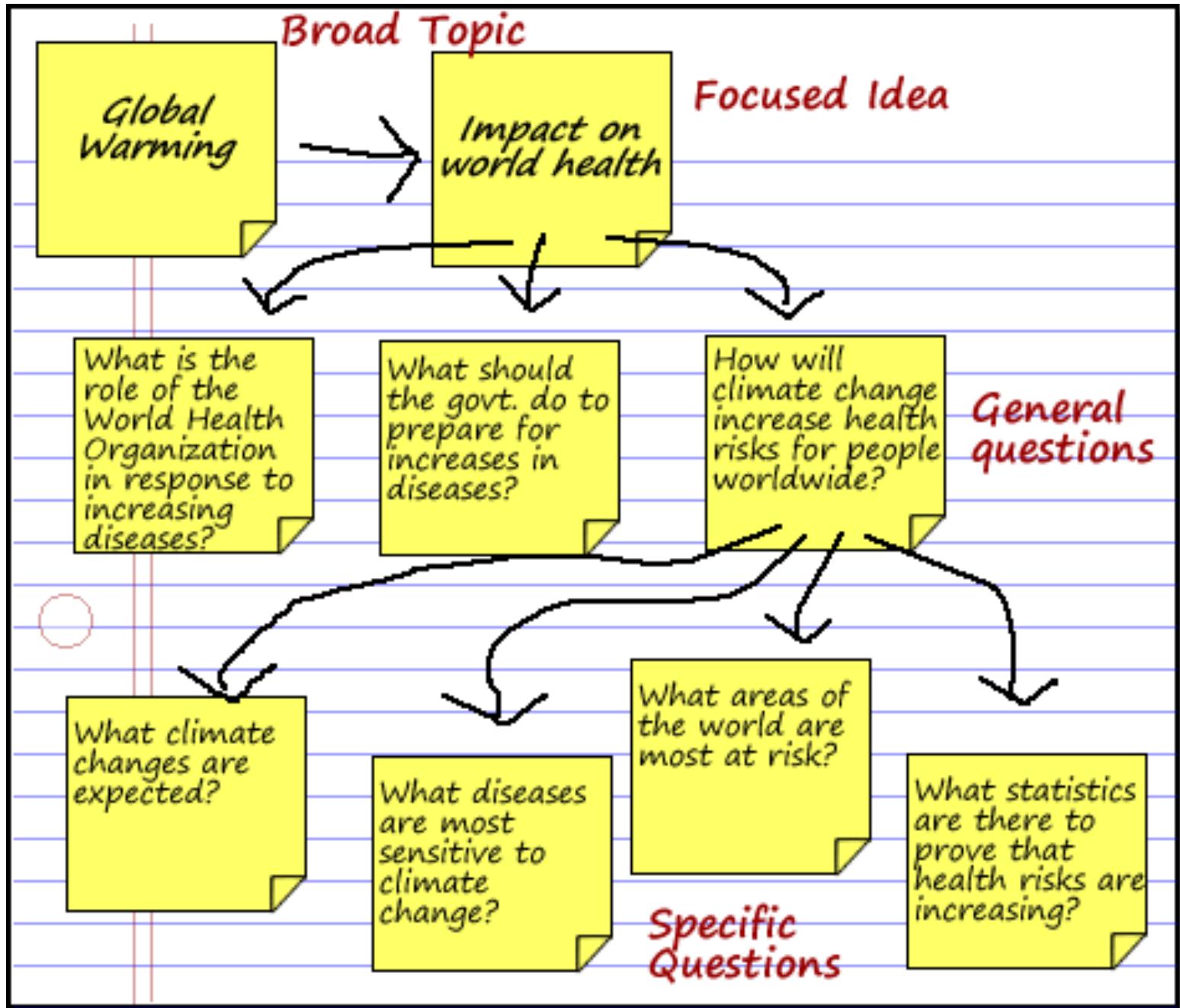
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which questions belong together? How are they related?

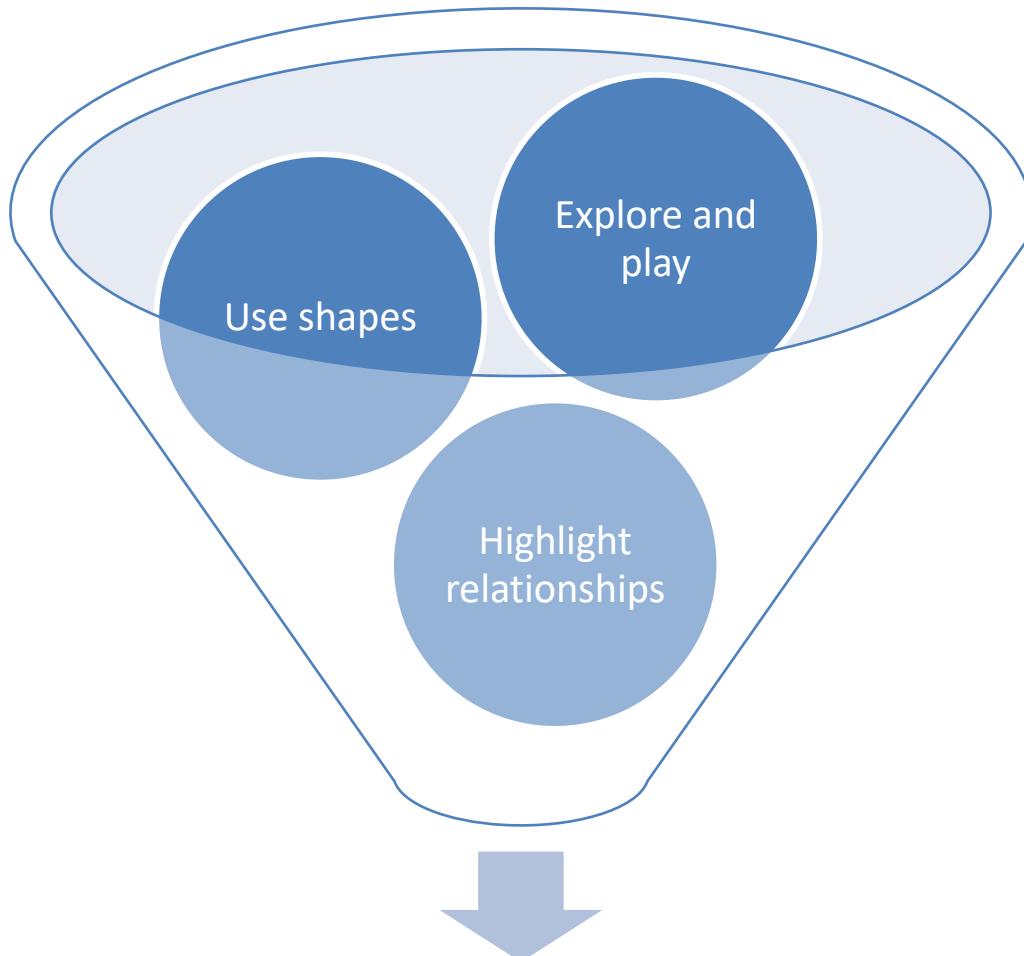
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which questions are part of other questions?





# 3. Map



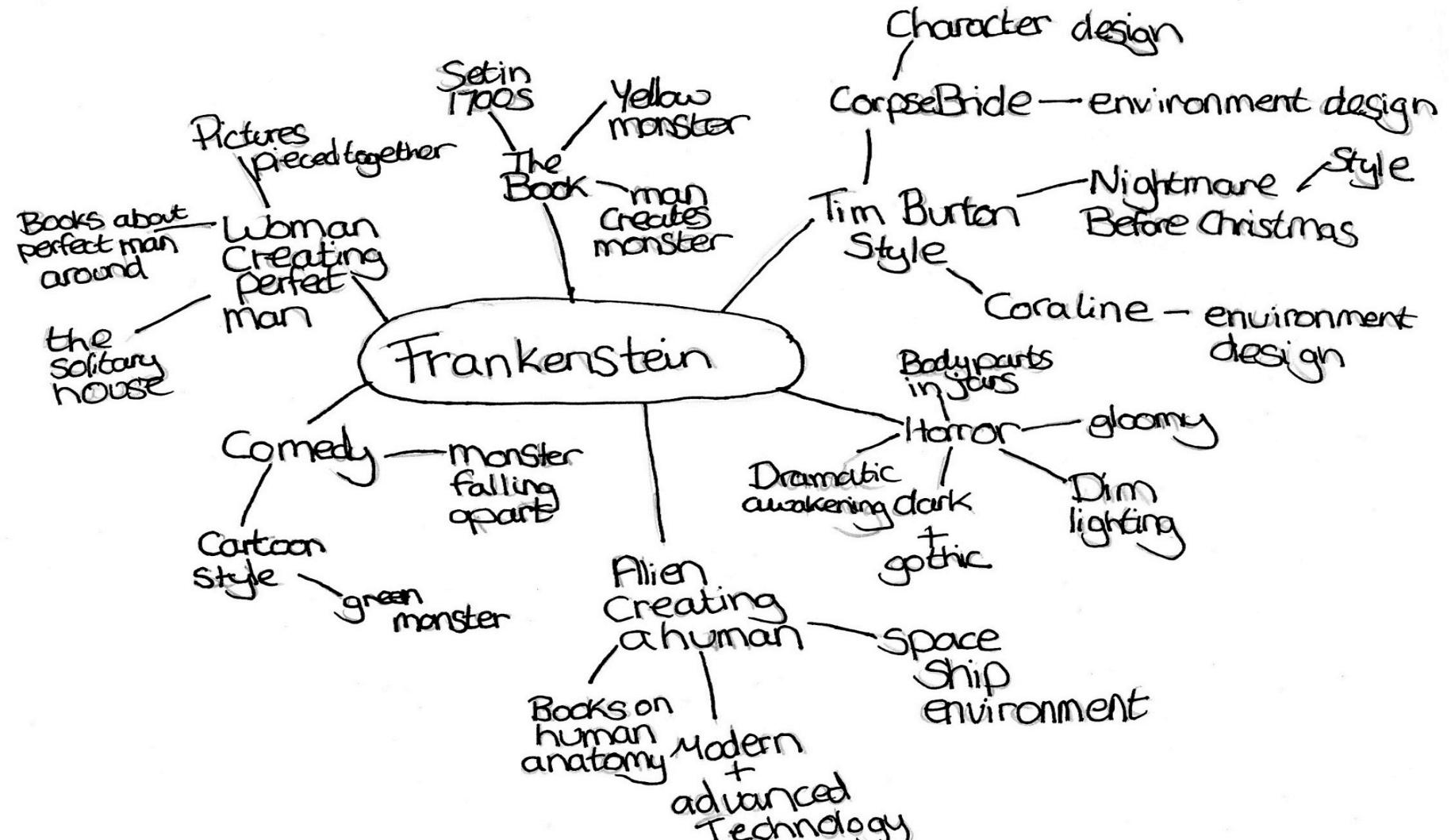
**10 minutes**

**Take a picture  
and post it on the  
chat**

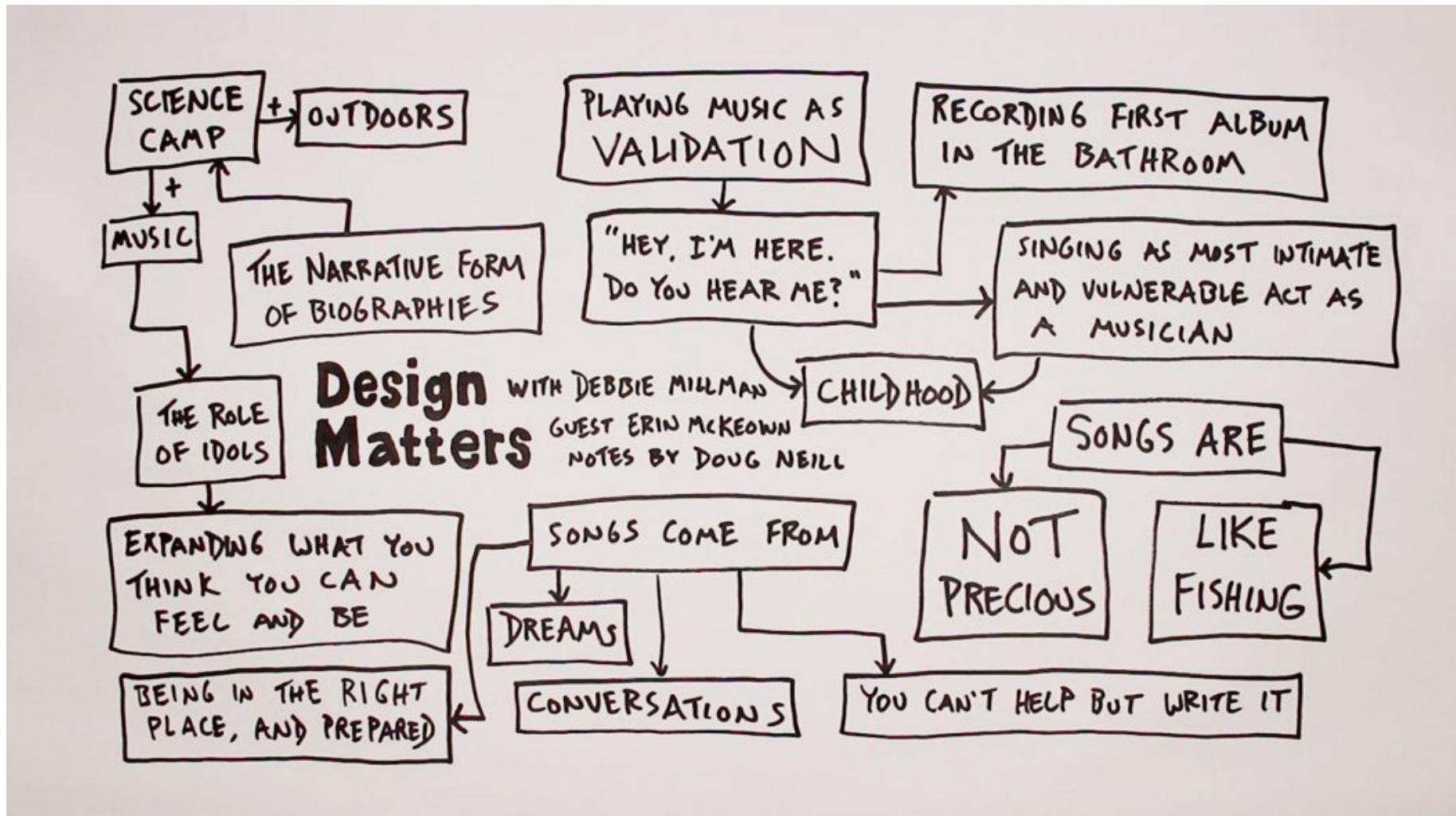
Keep words to a minimum

Use colour if you can

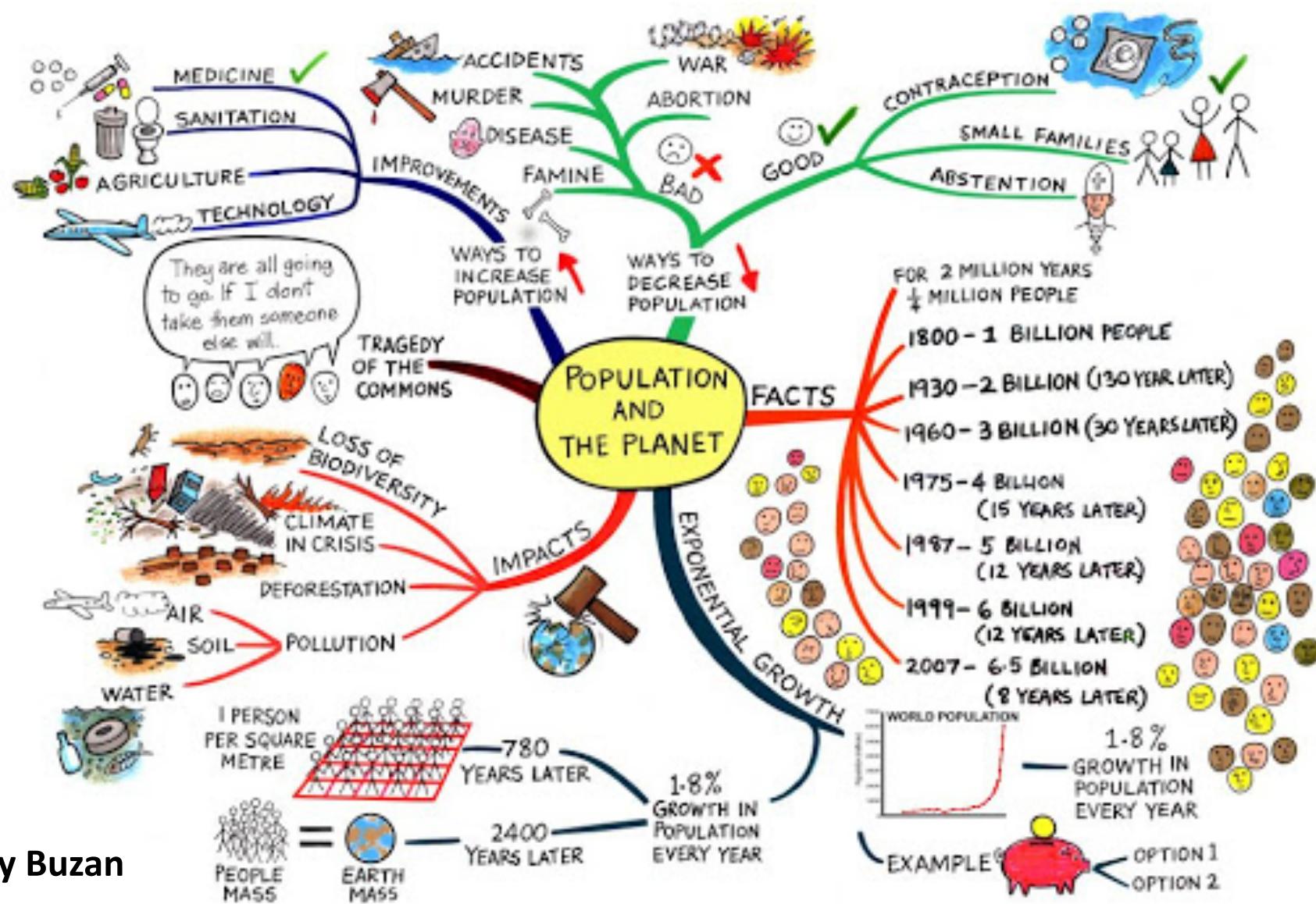
# Clustering



# Sketchnotes

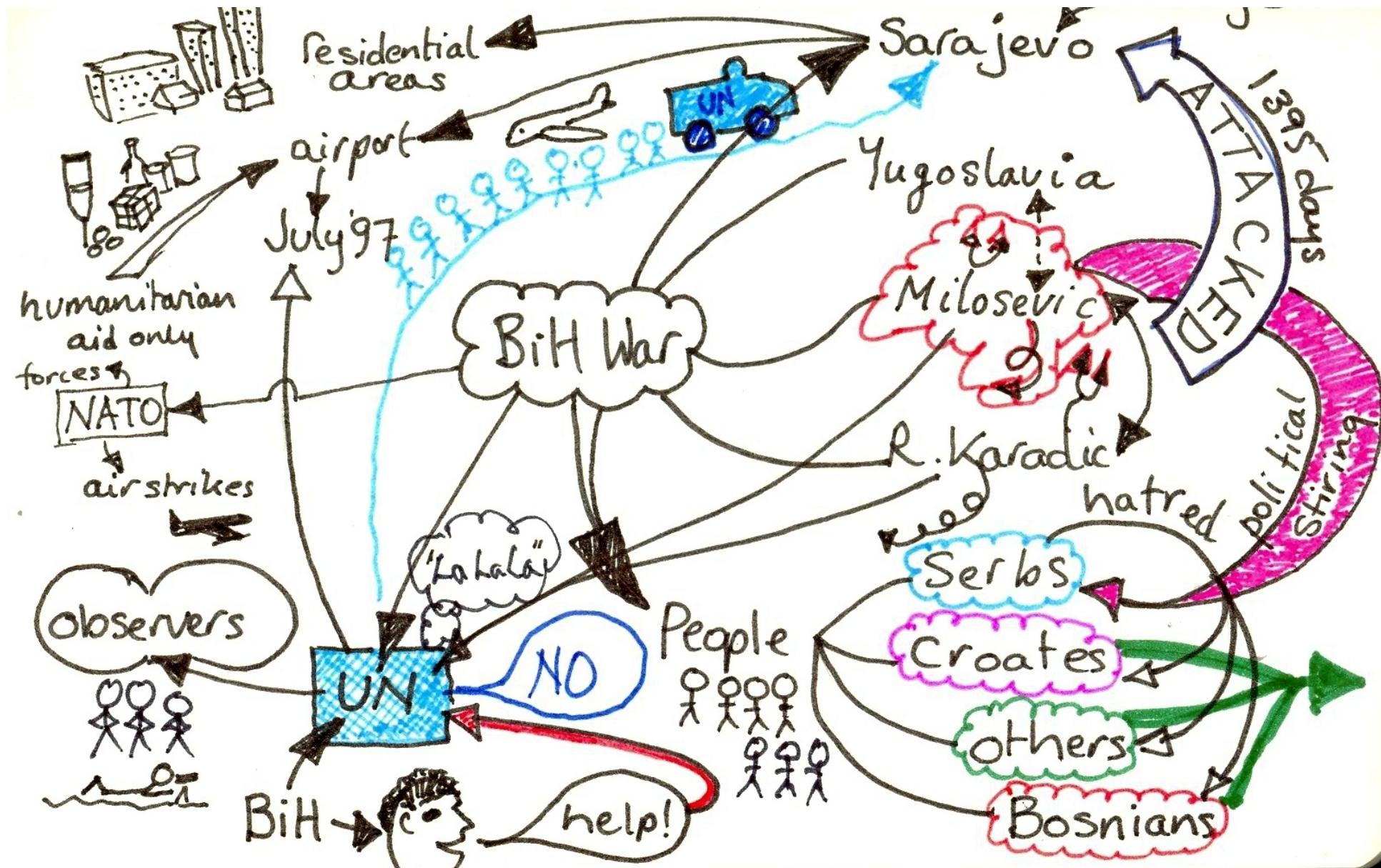


# Mindmapping

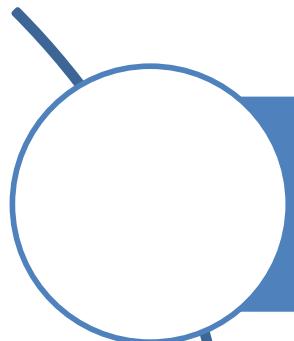


Tony Buzan

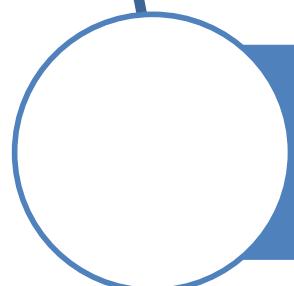
# Your way?



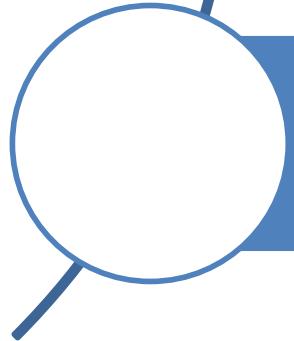
# Screen resources



Scapple ([literatureandlatte.com](http://literatureandlatte.com))



Coggle ([coggle.it](http://coggle.it))



Freemind ([freemind.sourceforge.net](http://freemind.sourceforge.net))

# 4. Freewrite



*'... the act of respecting and putting down the words that come to mind, and then continuing to respect and put down the next words that come to mind.'*

(Peter Elbow: Writing with Power)

# Write to a prompt

What drives my research is...

What interests me about this is...

I am trying to establish ...

This is a contribution in the sense  
that...

**Pick a prompt and write for five minutes. Keep your hand moving on the page.**

# How to build writing muscle

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Set a realistic time boundary

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Protect the time slot

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Turn up

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Make it routine

**Freewriting is preparation for drafting.**

Write, write, and write some more. Think of writing as a muscle that needs lots of exercise.

Jane Yolen

Writing Your  
Dissertation  
in Fifteen  
Minutes  
a Day

*A Guide to Starting, Revising, and  
Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis*

JOAN BOLKER, ED.D.

EDITOR OF THE WRITER'S HOME COMPANION



‘... we write to find out what we know and what we want to say.’  
*William Zinsser: Writing to Learn.*

**Write down three specific prompts that will help you think in ink about your research.  
Put them on the chat.**

# 5. Distil

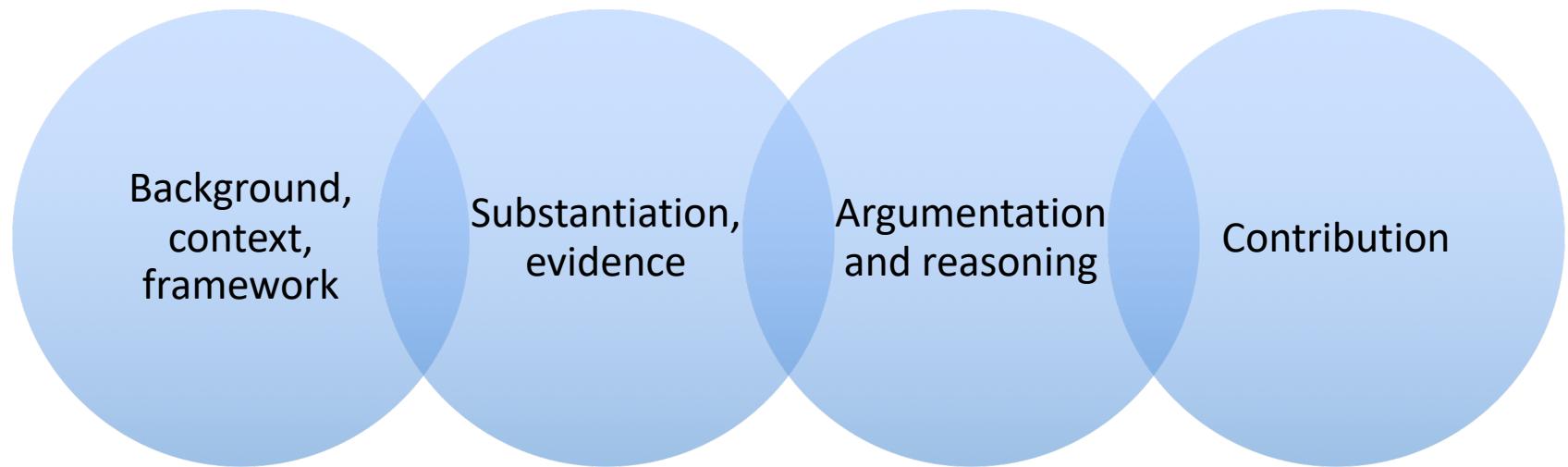


Distil the core content of your research into a sentence

Put it on the chat

Expand it into four sentences

# 6. Create movement



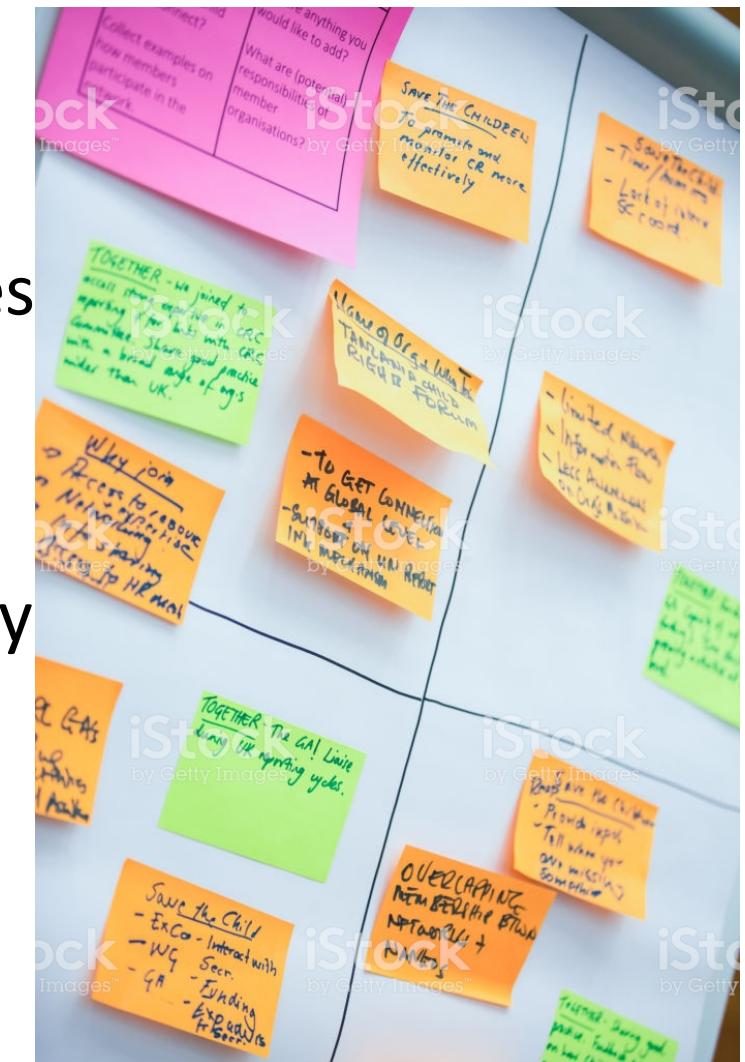
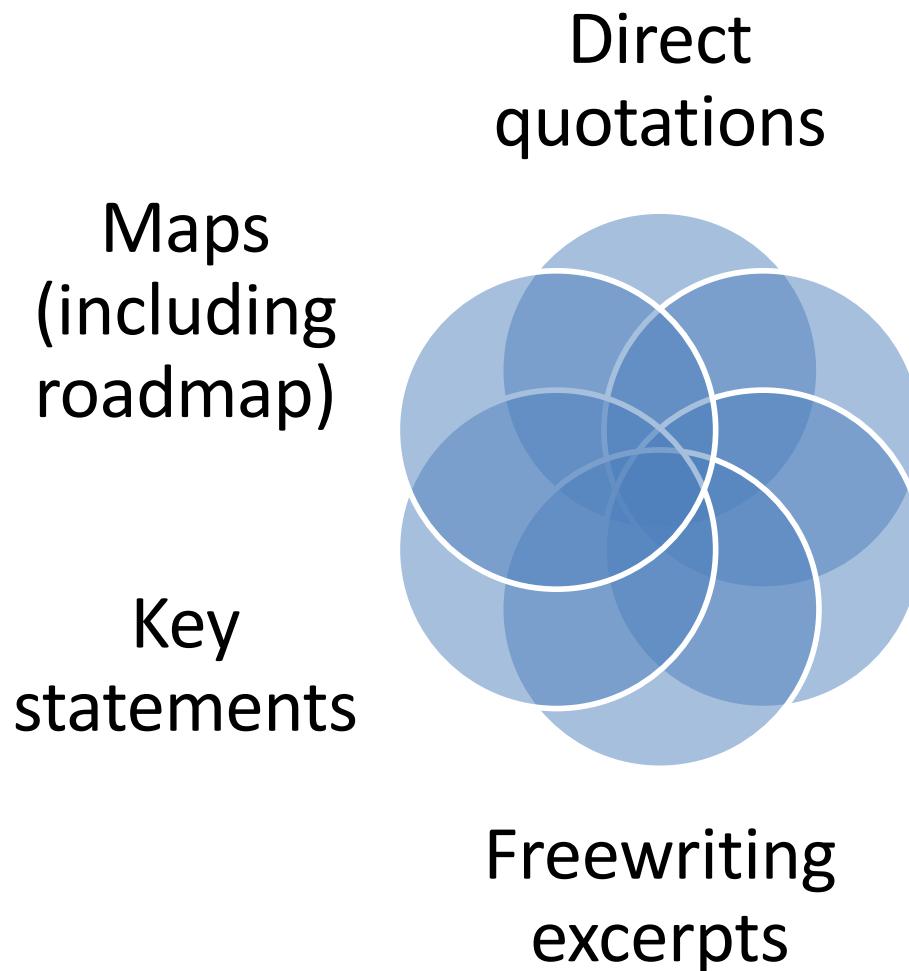
Outline a [roadmap](#) that reflects the dynamic, forward-moving quality of your text

[Annotate](#) with key statements, observations, relevant detail or references.

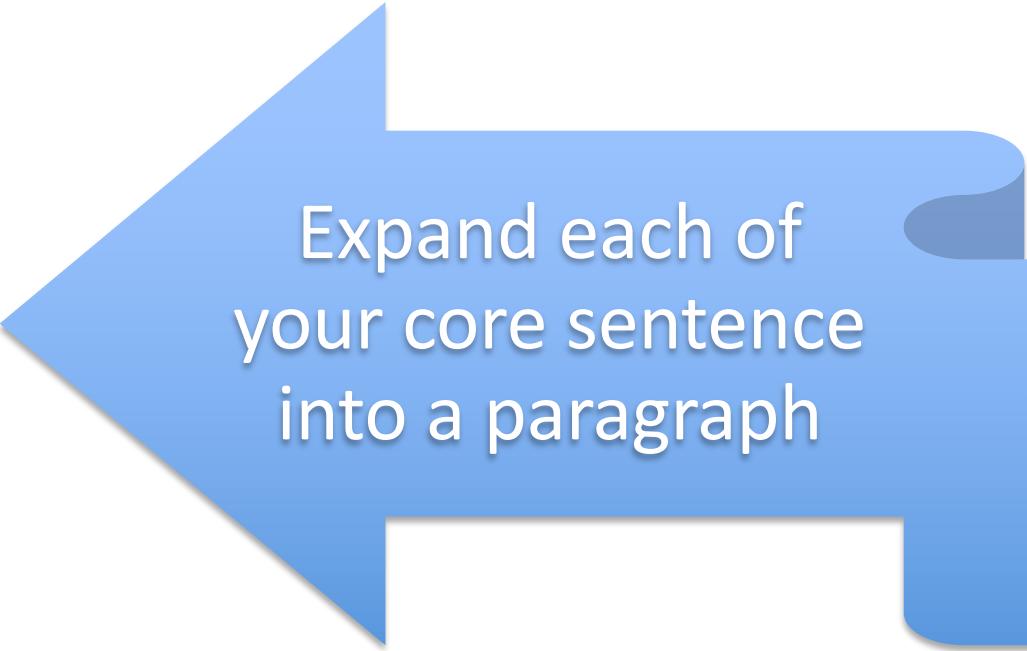
**10 minutes.**

Remember all research moves towards [something new](#)

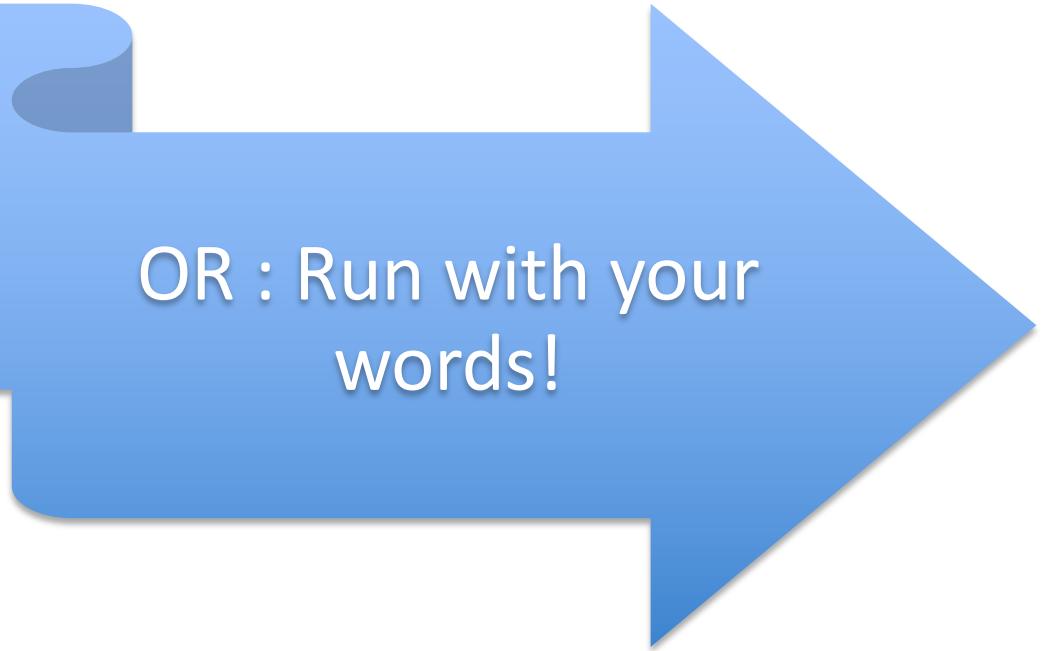
# 7. Gather



## 8. Draft



Expand each of  
your core sentence  
into a paragraph



OR : Run with your  
words!

Start with one page.  
Let your draft cool.  
Expand into three  
pages.  
Etc.

The image displays a collage of Microsoft Word document screenshots illustrating the process of writing and revising a first draft. It includes:

- A "Support Sheet" with a "Comments & Revisions" section containing numerous red and blue tracked changes.
- A "Methodology to Test Suite" section with a "P [RM] - P Run Test Script" heading and a list of items, some of which have been modified.
- A "Requirements Document" section with a "Requirements Overview" table and several rows of requirements, many of which have been changed.

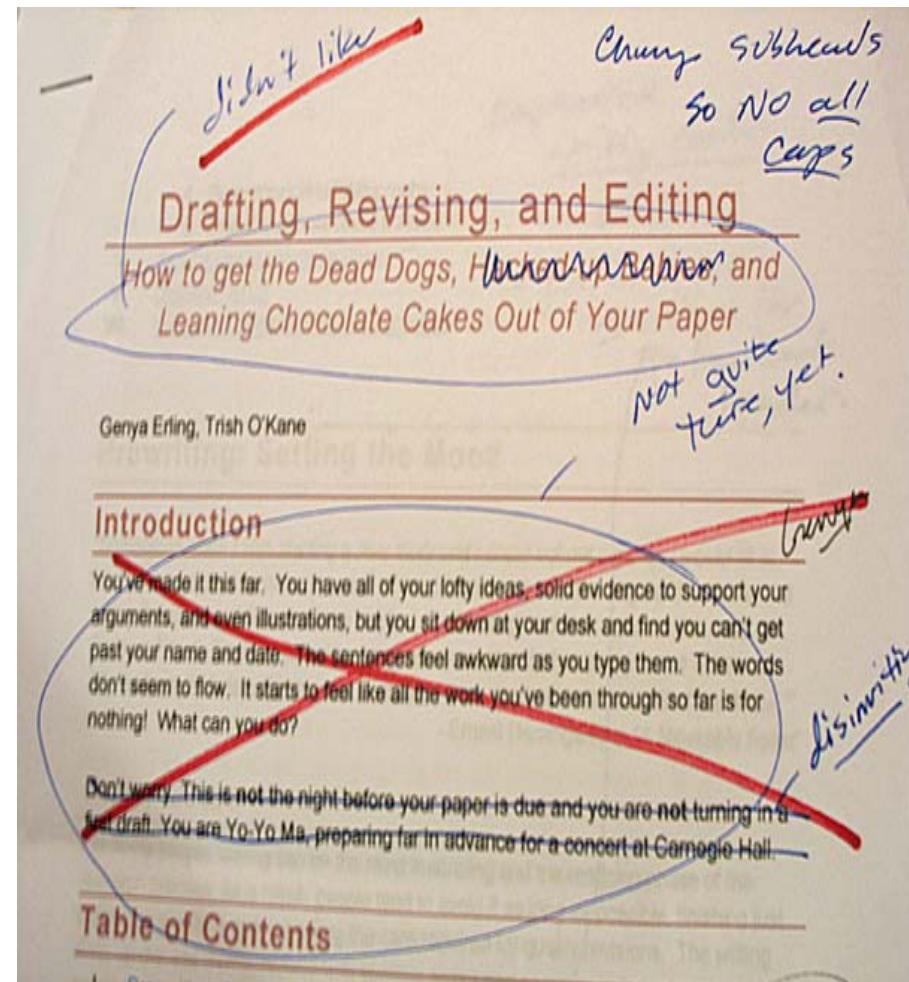
Large, bold text at the bottom reads "Your first draft sucks".

A bad first draft is a good place to start

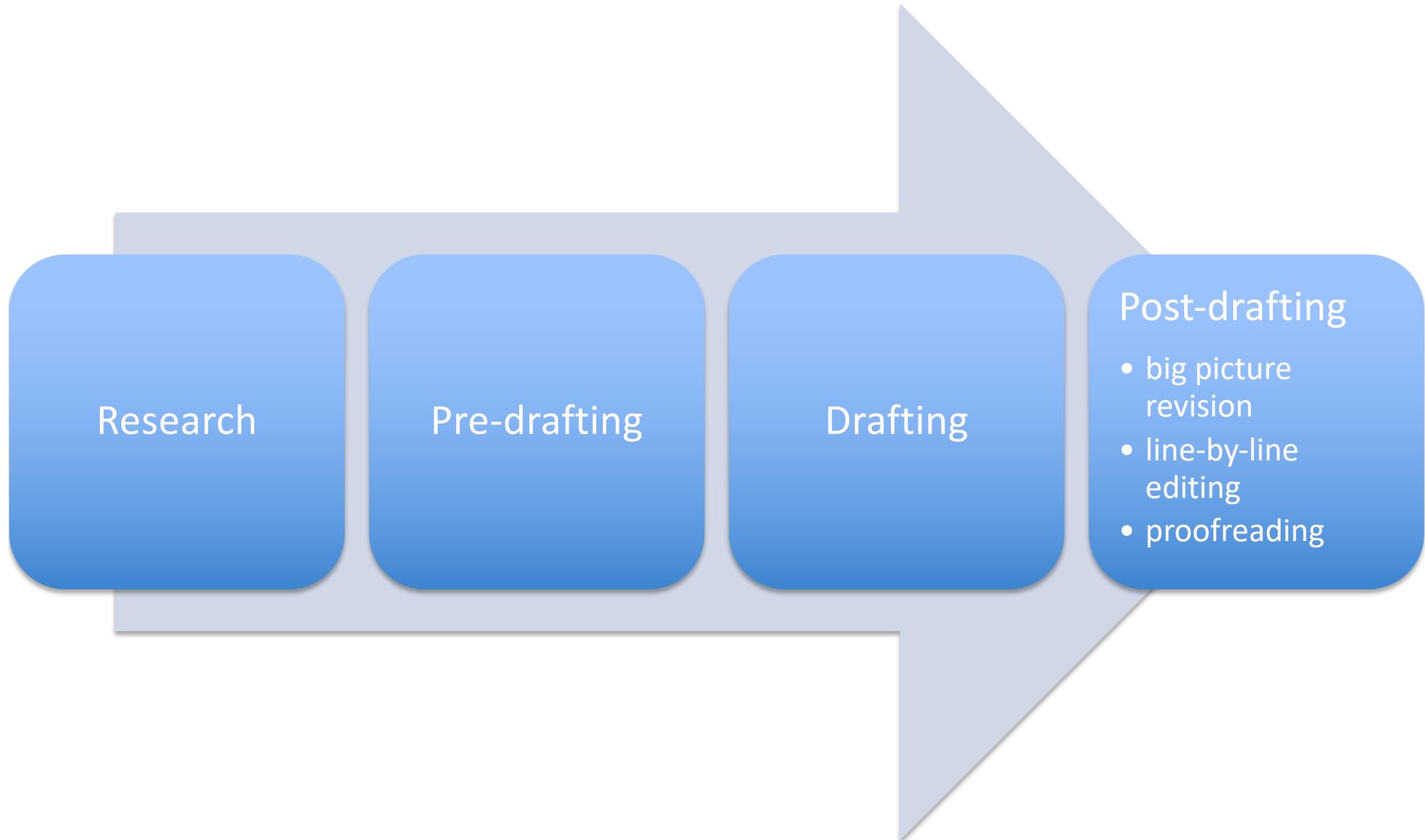
# Once you've got a first draft...

... you can start post-drafting (revising and editing)

- from your reader's perspective
- with a critical mindset
- at a slower pace



# Writing as process



# Writing is thinking.

To write well is to think clearly. That's why it's so hard.

*David McCullough*

