your words can scare them away…
or offer them shelter.

a wolf pursued a lamb, which fled for refuge to a certain temple. the wolf called out to him and said:

"the priest will slay you in sacrifice, if he should catch you."

on which the lamb replied:

"it would be better for me to be sacrificed in the temple than to be eaten by you."

3. *Defeat Their Demons*

Every marketing piece we create is entering in a beautiful battle of ideas. We are fighting for attention, dancing with distraction, and balancing the need for them to understand with the desire to be understood. In short, we are at war with the demons that plague our readers. Among these demons are the destructive rationalizations and poorly assembled assumptions that stand in the place of hard-earned beliefs. By learning how to defeat these demons we can instill in our reader something incredibly powerful, a solid foundation of truth and understanding. This will give you, the writer, a solid platform from which to sell and a long term brand from which to launch ever more impactful products & services, not to mention a message that will out convert any 'flash in the plan' competitive products that will inevitably launch.

Before we can attack, we must first better understand our enemy... ultimate victory depends on our ability to persuade our reader that we, *not their "demons",* are who they should listen to.

The word "Persuasion" stems from the Latin persuadere, which roughly translates to "*complete advice*" (from Latin, from per- 'through, to completion' + suadere 'advise'). Its opposite, being unpersuasive, logically brings us to the idea that an argument or point we are trying to prove is incomplete. Makes sense, if we present a fact to someone with little to no evidence to support it we're likely not to be seen as persuasive. But what makes 'complete advice', or a complete argument?

The 'A's of Influence' is my take on the elements needed to put together a 'complete' (and therefore persuasive) argument, it is a way for us to examine what it takes to write a convincing message. The foundation of all its parts, the essence of what makes it so powerful, is empathy. That term has found its way into many different sections of this book and is a flexible enough term to allow for different interpretations. At its core empathy is the ability to interpret and experience the feelings of others. Not simply a cold mechanical understanding, but a visceral connection with the person's emotions. A common mistake around empathy is only focusing on the negative emotions of others, only getting to know their pain. While this might be the primary use for empathy, we also can benefit from imagining the joys others experience. What good might we bring into their life with our influence? Only by connecting on both the positive and negative emotional level can we give 'complete advice', to be persuasive.

The last two sections ask us to empathize on both these levels. To dip into the aspirations (Fan their Flames), and trudge through their lesser qualities (Forgive Their Faults). **But empathy has its limits**. Even the most empathetic person can erode trust **by not giving actionable advice supported by well organized evidence**. You can win the heart, and still risk losing the mind. Let's win both.

Now we're going to hone in on that all-important element in building any argument: *evidence*.

Evidence is the light we shine on the darkest parts of our reader's path. Paving it with concrete truths while enforcing the goodwill we've earned through carefully practiced empathy.
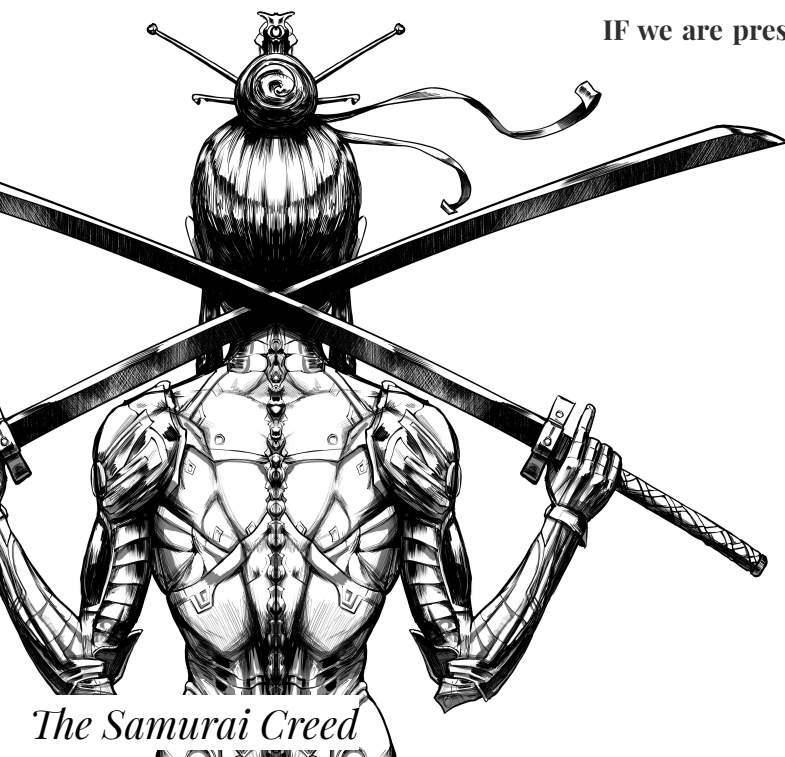
Defeat Their Demons

> "The truth will set you free...
> *but first* it will piss you off."
>
> — Joe Klaas, Twelve Steps to Happiness
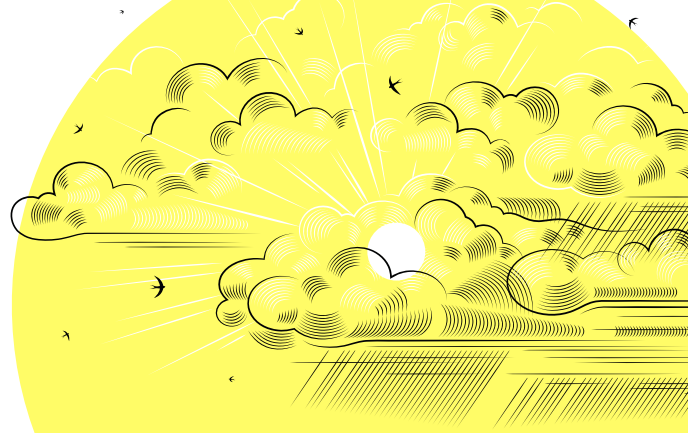
By default, we humans very much dislike being presented with information that conflicts with our current understanding of things. The intensity to which we resist new information seems to be correlated with how strongly we identify with the belief, that is, how much of our personal self we have wrapped up in with the belief. If it's connected with our 'core being' we will fight like a rabid dog to subdue the new information. Perhaps by swiftly listing off all the reasons it's wrong in our mind, or we may discount the source, or we may conclude that the conflict presented to us simply doesn't matter. All these reactions and those like them fall under the mental process of 'cognitive dissonance'. This process of rationalization can be harmless (eg. *I'll brush my teeth later, I need to drink my coffee first*) or it can lead to potentially life-threatening beliefs (eg. *smoking is bad, but it helps me keep weight off - so it's better for me to smoke*). How you react to new information can tell you a lot about yourself, and personally, I find it as one of the better gauges of progress in my life (eg. *am I willing to accept new information and change my behavior if that new information disagrees with my current understanding?*).

We will deep dive into cognitive dissonance later in this guide and look at how we can use it to our advantage in marketing, but for this section, we need to understand how information is processed by people.

IF we are presenting a reader with new information that is counter to their current understanding we should expect there to be some level push-back from them. Especially if the challenge we are present is affecting core beliefs they strongly believe. We should not assume they will take it at face value, as such we will want to do two important things...

1. **Present evidence to support our claims.**

2. **Address potential 'cognitive dissonance' reactions to those claims and our evidence.** *E.G. "Now I know what you're thinking..."* - to actively **manage objections.**

These rationalizations that hold our reader back from realizing the "truth" are the 'Demons' I'm referring to in this section title*. These are the insidious conclusions along the lines of 'I'm not smart enough for this', or seemingly harmless ones like 'I don't care about having white teeth' –– the latter seemingly harmless *unless you sell a tooth whitening solution*. They are objections to the evidence we present to support our claims, and without addressing them we will without a doubt lose our reader.

The Samurai Creed

I have no means; I make understanding my means.
I have no magic secrets; I make character my magic secret.

The Samurai Creed was written by an unknown author around 1300 A.D. and gives us some food for thought. In essence it invites its believer to abandon pride in oneself, one's own 'magic' and 'means', and instead rely on understanding and character. I find its implication powerful, and a hallmark of anyone with an open mind.

Defeat Their Demons

Why demons? Demons as a concept are only interested in preserving themselves at the expense of others, they actively feed you with things you desire, things you want to hear -- but have no interest in the truth or reality. Just like false beliefs they simply want to ensure their own survival, with the insidious twist that they know they're not good for you. Conceptually they sit on your shoulder whispering in your ear to ignore, to do the opposite of what's good for you. *They cloud judgement and rationalize lies.*

Yes, yes, IDEALLY you would just "*sell to the willing*". Go where your fans are, preach to your choirs. By all means, you should appeal to them as well, but if you want to sell to more than just the niche that already agrees with you (and good luck finding *just* them) you will want to know how to "convert people to your religion" - to convince the skeptical to 'taste and see that it is good'.

^ *see what I did there?...* this '**admission of an alternative path**' is one powerful way to actively sequester a likely conflicting opinion; an objection. If you read my claims above that "you should build an argument to counter cognitive dissonance" and reacted with "*well shouldn't I just try and sell to people who already agree with me?*" this short paragraph is designed to preemptively address that conflict. In marketing, this is often referred to as 'objective handling' and is a large part of what we're discussing here. We'll take a look at some more ways to handle objections shortly.

The formula as we've mapped so far in its simplistic form looks like this...

1. Empathize with the reader's positive & negative views on a given topic.

2. Present a claim about that topic.

3. Support the claim with evidence.

4. Support the evidence by actively managing potential objections.

5. Reach a reasonable and beneficial conclusion.

6. Repeat.

This simple yet powerful 'myth repellant' has been in use for literal thousands of years. A complementary approach that we can consider is '**The Socratic Method**,' named after the Greek Philosopher Socrates around 2500 years ago. Much of our modern western institutions are built upon this foundation, and dhat should give us some perspective on its power. As with our method, the goal of the Socratic Method isn't just to be <u>right</u> for the sake of being right, but to actively engage the critical thinking powers of the participants... **to change minds.**
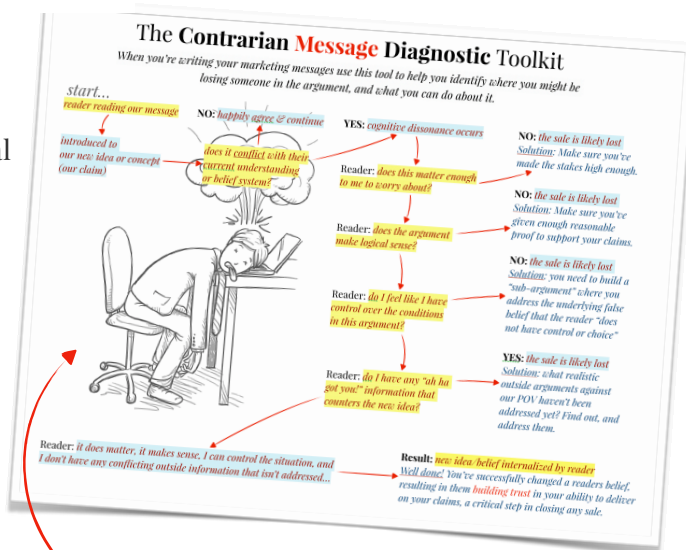
For a closer look at how to identify and overcome objections look at 'The Contrarian Message Toolkit' within the next framework in this guide.

on changing minds

The phrase "**change minds**" is so overused today that I want to be sure the impact of those words isn't lost – for a moment consider how difficult it can be to *successfully* change someone's mind.   When was the last time you had a political 'debate' online that ended with "*Oh, yup, I see your evidence there and clearly you're right! I'm going to change my beliefs related to that issue right away!*" –– essentially never right? Why not? Well, nuances of social media aside, the discussion itself wasn't started with the goal of finding the truth, *it was started to confirm a belief and to reinforce it.*

The Socratic Method's goal is the essence of what makes it powerful. A Socratic Circle is not a debate. The goal of this activity is to have participants work together to construct meaning and arrive at an answer, not for one to "win the argument" (Source: https://link.sean.co/socratic-circle).

In a real sense, this process goes beyond the 'prove it' mentality and invites the learner, our audience, to examine their core values and assumptions. To bring them to a conclusion, not to give them one.

We serve simply as a guide, not judging them, not accusing them, but bringing forth the right questions and evidence to unravel and realign core beliefs. Our message and the structure of our 'argument' is the tool we give them to bring forth these changes.

Are we still talking about copywriting and marketing here? Well, perhaps we've ventured into a more metaphysical depth, but ask yourself – *shouldn't I be willing to go to whatever depths?*   If what I'm presenting to the world is birthed of everything I know to be true; *shouldn't I?* Like it or not this is what you're doing. You're showing the world what you're made of, grabbing critics and devotees alike and bringing them into the circle. Evaporating falsehoods, fighting the self-defeating demons, crushing long-held damaging beliefs of your audience. You are a bringer of good news, and of vengeance against those who have been harming those you care about.

YES. You are just selling a thing or a service. But, you are also bearing your soul with your words, with your creations. If done well they will outlive you, your words and your deeds along with the lives you changed along the way. This is the realm of legacy, the thing millions fight and die for and few achieve.

The demons are the false assumptions & beliefs derived from non critical thinking.

You Won't Convince Everyone.

"Any fool can criticize, complain, and condemn—and most fools do.
But it takes character and self-control to be understanding and forgiving."

— Dale Carnegie, How to Win Friends and Influence People

Ideology: A set of normative beliefs and values that a person or other entity has for non-epistemic [*knowledge based*] reasons. These rely on basic assumptions about reality that may or may not have any factual basis.

As mentioned the amount of resistance you should expect to receive will depend on how deep your message cuts, how fundamental you're attempt is to change one's image of themselves. There are essentially three buckets of minds, those that are cautiously opened to new ideas (open-minded) those who are not (close-minded) and a third, fairly rare mind, that we should simply accept that we will not convince to our 'cause'. This 'third mind' is one enveloped in 'ideology'. It has latched onto a belief system that has no room for new ideas that question the core tenants of its belief system. In fact, anyone who questions them is branded an enemy and wrong <u>because of the act of questioning</u> itself.

It is a cult-like mentality, and not worth our effort to try and address (at least in the context of marketing). These are the trolls in the comments section who argue in bad faith, the individuals who will twist your ideas and words in ways that no logical person would agree with. If you're selling something profound you should expect these types of individuals to come out of the shadows. The very existence of your message is a threat to their ideology, and they will fight to silence it... they have no interest in your evidence or perspectives, and they should be seen for what they are. Fortunately, they are mostly on the edges of society, but they can indeed be loud - so being able to identify them, and actively avoiding letting them pressure you into silence, is important. If you want to take it a step further, forgive them for their plight; 'love your enemy' as the saying goes... they are, after all, in a far darker place than you - stuck in a world where even questioning a belief is seen as dangerous. Don't let their cynical critiques anger you, if anything, feel pity.

Now there are people who may seem "closed-minded" who can be reached, they are the ones who may have legitimate critiques or questions, even if they choose to present them in a harsh or demeaning way. <u>These are incredibly useful people because they will tell you where your message is breaking down.</u> It can be hard to distinguish the two, but usually they can be identified by how they react to your answers. If they're willing to keep discussing then they're not ideological, they just have concerns (*ones we should address*). If they start to attack you, or your industry, or other people like you, then they likely have no interest in actually learning anything.

Defeat Their Demons
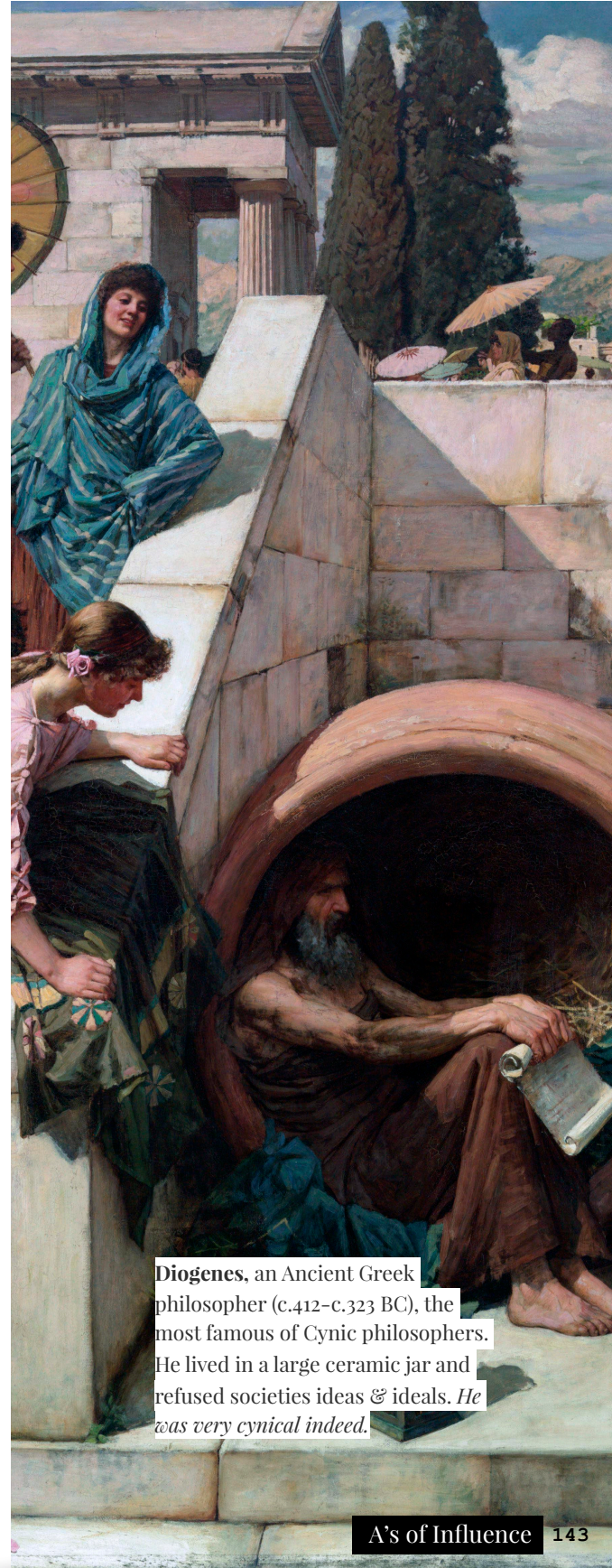
Diogenes, an Ancient Greek philosopher (c.412–c.323 BC), the most famous of Cynic philosophers. He lived in a large ceramic jar and refused societies ideas & ideals. *He was very cynical indeed.*

Defeat Their Demons *asking the right questions*

Now let's take a step back and focus in on the core elements in play here as they relate to the prior two 'A's of Influence' sections and this section...

Present a claim about a subject.

Ask: What impactful revelation (insight) do we think our audience would find provocative and impactful?

Support the claim with evidence.

Ask: What facts, figures, studies, rhetorical questions, and analogies could we present to support our claim?

Examine the evidence by actively managing potential objections.

Ask: For each piece of evidence we present what is a likely counter argument and how can we proactively address it?

The Goal: To change a mind we need to frame our evidence in a way that engages our reader's critical thinking.

Christopher Pappas' write up on "Socratic Questions in eLearning" (https://link.sean.co/s-questions) does a great job defining the different types of questions that the Socratic Method utilizes. I've added my own thoughts to his definitions as they relate to copywriting and our desire to not just win, but to persuade. We can use these to help us examine our important claims, our readers beliefs, and determine what sort of evidence we should supply to support them.

Christophers' article focused on how to use these questions in direct or group discussions, I've added in ways for us to use these in more rhetorical ways since we won't literally be having a discussion with our audience.

the 6 frames *that engage critical thinking* *& how to use them in our copy.*

1. **Clarification. – When we bring to light a thought provoking question so we can explore a topic...**
Encourages learners to examine why they are asking a question or the logic behind an opinion or idea. Clarification questions typically require an explanation as a response. Example: Why do you believe that...? *In copy rhetorically ask your reader to consider why we presented a claim or a piece of evidence.*

Copy Example: Question We Ask: "What is the number 1 entrepreneurship skill?" Claim: "Copywriting is the number 1 most important skill to learn first." Clarification: Why is it important to prioritize the skills we learn? We are using this question to both raise the stakes and give us a jumping point to better inform our audience.

2. **Probing assumptions. – When we want to call into question a false belief.**
This type of inquiry prompts learners to think about the beliefs or assumptions that are the basis of their argument. It gives them the opportunity to delve into their thought processes and figure out why they think the way they think. Example: Can you tell me why...? *In copy, ask them to consider the path that brought them to a specific false conclusion. – "everyone else does it", "the teacher said", "just the way it is".*

Copy Example: "You may think that rasing investment money, networking, or managing people are the skills you must first learn to become an entrepreneur... but ask yourself, why do I think that's the case? *...continued ...*

3.

Probing reasons and evidence.

This type of question is often used as a follow-up question. When a learner provides an explanation, you can use this form of inquiry to probe deeper into the reasoning and logic behind their presuppositions. Example: Can you provide an example of...? *In copy, follow up a rhetorical question & answer with your interpretation of how someone might reach that false belief, and why that's understandable.*

Copy Example (Continued): ... "Perhaps you've been told that by someone you respect, or perhaps it's just an assumption... whatever the case I think you'll admit that it is an important question for anyone who wants to become an entrepreneur. Below I'll explain why copywriting is so important and how it can help you avoid the mistakes that so commonly doom an entrepreneurial venture before it even gets off the ground..."

4.

Analyzing perspectives.

Encourages a learner to look at the situation or problem from an opposing angle, so that they are able to *see the other side of the argument*. This is one of the trickiest forms of Socratic questioning, as it can make a learner feel as though they are being attacked or alienated from their peers. As such, it should be used with caution. Example: **Why is your solution better than...?** *In copy, invite the reader to consider how other people may have jumped to a different conclusion than them. Again exploring why one idea might be stronger than another, and why both may have their own merits.*

5.

Probing consequences.

Prompts learners to explore the consequences or repercussions of their assumptions and theories. Example: If you take that approach, what do you think might happen? *In copy, explore the consequences or repercussions of their assumptions in a storyline form, list out the steps a false belief can lead to; along with the steps the right path can lead to.*

Copy Example (Continued): ... "Let's say you prioritize Networking as the first entrepreneurial skill you focus on learning. Of course it is a very important skill, but if you do not have a handle on how to communicate your message, your mission, and the benefits of your product (or even yourself) you'll come to find that 'networking', even with amazing people, will turn into an exercise in making friends instead of building business deals. Not that there's anything wrong with that, and indeed some of the best deals you will make will end up being with friends... however, better to come into the networking situation with a sound understanding of how to persuade someone to work with you, oh and it will very much help to have an offer that converts."

6.

Questioning the question.

Asks the learner to think about the reason for asking the question, itself. This can encourage them to examine why you are calling their assumption into question. Example: Why do you believe I asked this follow-up question? *E.g.- why do you think it's important to explore this perspective? In copy, again we're going to explore this rhetorically. Invite them to think about why you asked the question to begin with, or why you called into-question their belief. Be honest and admit you have some self-interest involved, but share with them the deeper reasons... the higher-level reasons, explore why you actually do care about the subject.*

Copy Example (Continued): ... "Now, you may rightfully question my motives here, after all you'll find on this page an offer for a guide on Copywriting... so admittedly it works in my favor that 'copy' would be the skill I'd recommend. And I'm willing to admit that these other skills discussed <u>are important,</u> but fundamentally (and as we've discussed) if you don't have a handle on your message and the tools of persuasion these skills other skills will be wasted! I'm going to share with you more concrete reasons why copy is indeed the number #1 skill you should start with, but I will also share with you how it can and does enhance the other necessary skills along the way.

Source: Concepts: "Socratic Questions in eLearning" (https://link.sean.co/s-questions)
by Christopher Pappas - Commentary, my own.

Defeat Their Demons
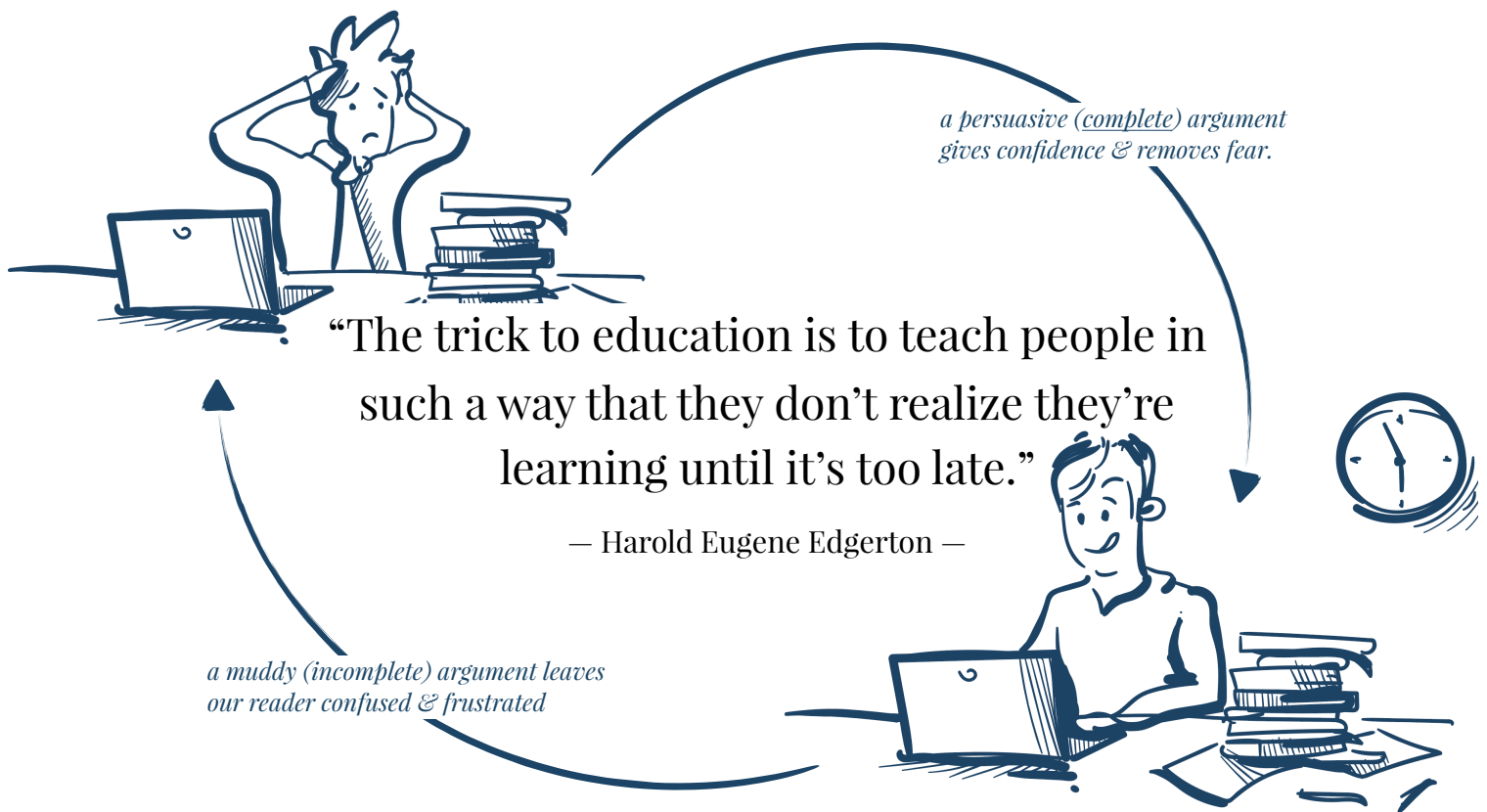
systematic persuasion

Whether it's the Socratic Method, A's of Influence, or any other method of logical exploration of an idea the point is, that, in our marketing, we need to leverage the power of **systematic persuasion**. Consider this your invitation to the life long study of the subject; *it is much more vast of a topic than could ever be covered in one book*. Knowing that there are well documented systems of persuasion out there is very much the first step on that journey.

Put simply, the power of an argument fundamentally lies in how strong its supporting evidence is and how well we can position that evidence as trustworthy. If you aren't sure how to handle certain objections, keep digging and keep searching for interesting ways to support your claims. If you find that you are WRONG about something, do not fall victim to the desire to ignore this new information; *revise your beliefs and adjust your argument*.

This refining of your beliefs is what will drive you to search for ever more potent ways to spread your message, unlocking ever more concrete evidence to support your claims, and more eloquent ways to dispel the objections, *those demons*, that inevitably rear their ugly heads. ▸

a persuasive (complete) argument gives confidence & removes fear.

> "The trick to education is to teach people in such a way that they don't realize they're learning until it's too late."
>
> — Harold Eugene Edgerton —

a muddy (incomplete) argument leaves our reader confused & frustrated

added benefits

This approach will not only give your reader more confidence in you and your message, but it will also give your reader more confidence in themselves. *How so?* Ideas refined in the fires of critical thinking are much more empowering than those simply handed to us by others, and especially more so than ideas that are reality just assumptions.

This may seem obvious, but in our world of constant interruptions and distractions, critical thinking is becoming ever rarer. This is why it's critical that we always revisit the core benefits to our readers to maintain their attention; as soon as they start to think that this 'doesn't apply to me' we will lose them. One way to do this is to simply make sure we weave in and out of a narrative that speaks to "you" (the reader), and what benefits specific claims will bring to them. To make sure you've started out on the right foot is, once you've finished a marketing piece, always revisit the introduction and be sure it includes a 'claim of benefit' clearly spelling out what's in it for the reader (main benefit) if they consume the piece. **(See the underlined sentence in the first paragraph of this section for example).**

What's the alternative? *Must it be so (seemingly) complex*?

First a reminder that all of the elements of the 'A's of Influence' do not have to live in every single piece of copy. *They should live as a culmination of all of your pieces of work.* They are birthed from a single idea or mission, and the rest of your pieces of marketing are built to support that central theme. In fact, when people talk about rebranding they should be talking about revisiting that 'central idea' or 'big idea', not just a new logo or website. *So no,* every piece will not need to be overly complex with excessive break outs of evidence and rhetorical discussions.

You can focus-in on one core 'demon' to battle or one core element of 'forgiveness' that they need to hear. Or, you can hone in on one positive aspect of your reader in relation to your topic and 'fan that flame', then swing into an internal fault that may be holding them back from reaching their end goal. **Mixing and matching these elements is the name of the game.**

Here's another hypothetical way to look at it with the parts of the "A's of Influence" we've discussed so far in relation to a few marketing pieces...
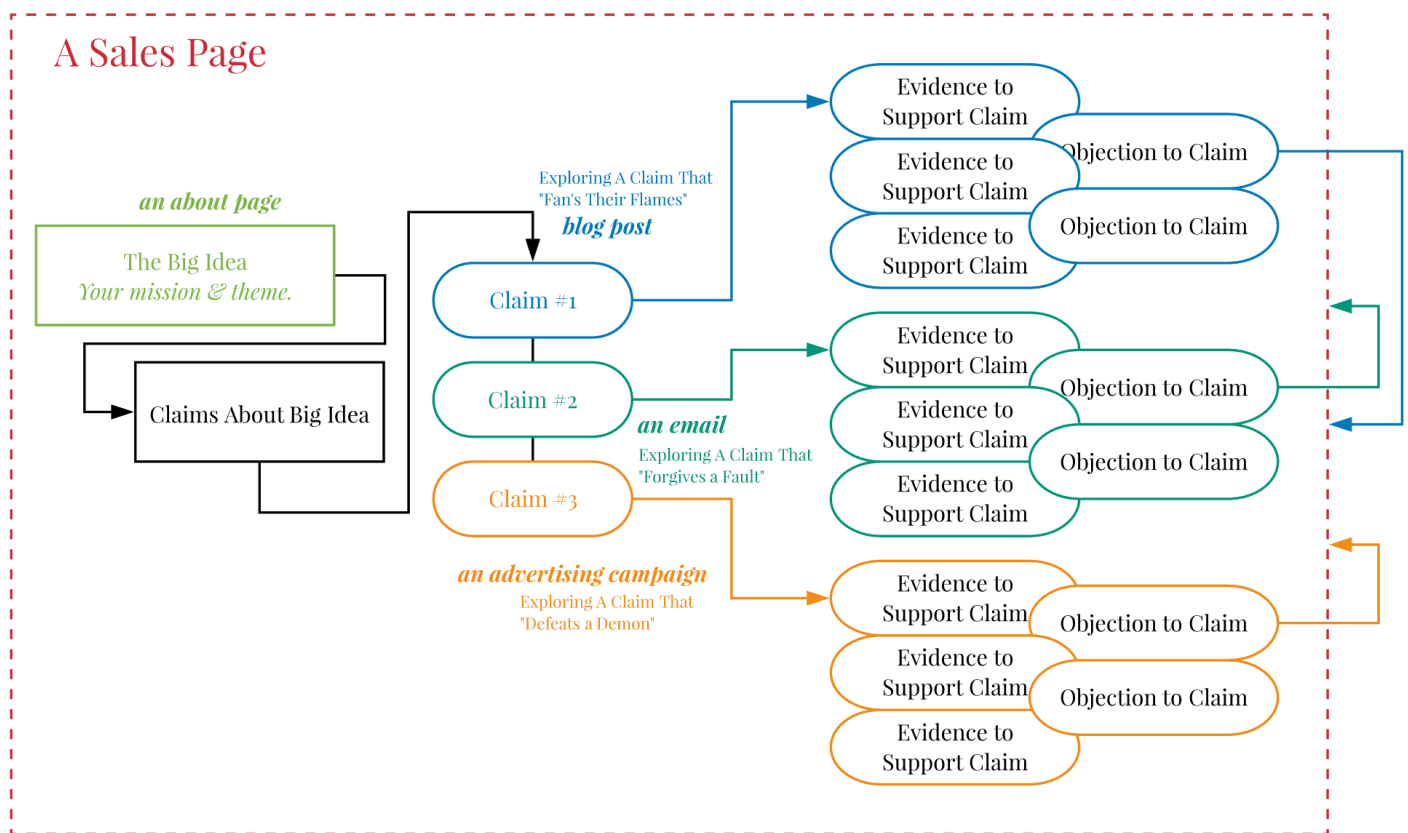
Now, of course you can sell by using what you might call 'flash in the pan' copy, and perhaps it has its place. These more direct pieces of marketing focus less on informing our reader and more on brute-force fear-based persuasion. Elements of which can be very powerful on their own (urgency, scarcity, authority, social proof, etc) but without a larger picture, a larger message or theme they are simply manipulations instead of strategy and will only have short term benefits. *Once you've been 'found out' you will lose their trust for good.* The better way is to leverage these elements, **but make sure they come second to your message.**

If we build up a strong foundational core in our marketing that is woven in with our products then persuasion will slowly become second nature... *we will actively anticipate objections*, *instinctively know how our offer will influence someone's aspirations*, and *be quick to come to the aid and forgive the shortcomings of the ignorant*.

Presenting Proper Evidence to Support Your Claims

We've discussed some of the more abstract ways to dispel our readers demons. Indeed the way we present our argument is important, but the facts we highlight matter too. For the most part we can share facts, figures, antidotes, and the like without getting too bogged down in them. We're not writing a research paper, and the facts we share should be exposed only to the depth that is needed; otherwise we risk losing our readers interest.

We can (and should) link to the sources of facts we bring to the table, and anyone interested in learning more can certainly dig into those sources, but elaboration just for the sake of 'sounding smart' is arrogant and unnecessary. For example, sharing a statistic that supports our argument is great, but diving into the methodology used to formulate the statistic is overkill; *unless that methodology used is important to our argument in some way.*

This can be tough to balance, especially when we find ourselves interested in the nitty gritty aspects of our argument. If we find something that is indeed interesting to us that we want to share, just make sure and prioritize how it benefits our reader in our explanation.

This, as all rules, has room for interpretation and experimentation. The advent of 'edutainment' content (*content that teaches and is entertaining*) is a good sign that this rule is leaning more towards allowing quite a bit more factual information come to life; especially in video. Some of the post popular content on YouTube, for example, is easy to digest educational content with millions upon millions of subscribers and billions of views. (Eg. Kurzgesagt – In a Nutshell: 10.5mil subs, Ted-Ed 10.3 mil subs, SmarterEveryDay 7.49mil, Vsauce 15mil subs). I'll admit to probably spending the majority of my personal entertainment content time on these types of YouTube channels, so maybe I'm bias, but I do think it's clear to see that if you can present facts in both a logical and entertaining way you'll be much better off.

So how should you conduct research and find properly supporting evidence for your claims? Later in this guide we'll take a deep dive into research & development of content and arguments, but for now let this be your guiding principle: ***if you make a claim, you'll need at least one convincing piece of logic or factual information to support it**.*

* The irony of not supplying direct evidence to support this claim is not lost on me... however the 'logical conclusion' of needing "at least one" makes sense for 99% of people, if you're the 1% who questions it – good! Go research how much evidence is actually needed to support a claim! The real answer is usually "it depends", which is why I say you'll need "at least one", the principle simplified might be better stated as "the bigger the claim, the more evidence you'll need to support it."

An important note on the 'edutainment' approach, just because it's interesting doesn't mean it must be fun/lighthearted/comical as many might conclude. You can be serious and entertaining as well. As with most things, balance will serve you well here. Keep it interesting, entertaining, but also on point.

Don't be a fool...

Dale Carnegie observed that "Any fool can criticize, complain, and condemn—and most fools do. But it takes character and self-control to be understanding and forgiving." In a conversation between two people this can be easier to observe and practice, but how about in copy? Well, I believe it demonstrates well the principle that should guide how we systematically undo the objections that pop into the mind of our audience. We must approach the task with character, self control, understanding and forgiveness. Otherwise we risk alienating them, perhaps even inflating their Demons.

I knew it! They'll say when they sense we don't understand them, or the issues they face... and as we've seen *even if we do understand them;* the way in which we present our perspective to them is just as important as the information itself.

Often they're coming into our message with presumptions that we're "*out to get them*", and who can blame them? Unless they know us they have no reason to not have their guard up, it's only natural. We've taken a look at how we can lower that guard, but let's now look at how we can *leverage their presumptions* about us (and more importantly, others) to our message's benefit.