

Mind Your Words

A Self-Editing Guide for Writers





**“Half my life is
an act of revision.”**

~John Irving



Hours Per Week

Submission reviews	20.0
Full MS reviews	17.0
Breaks	<u>2.5</u>
	39.5



APPROVED
Editing Begins

Editing Hours

Ten Minutes per Page

Developmental Edit 41.0

Line Edit 41.0

Copy Edit 41.0

123.0

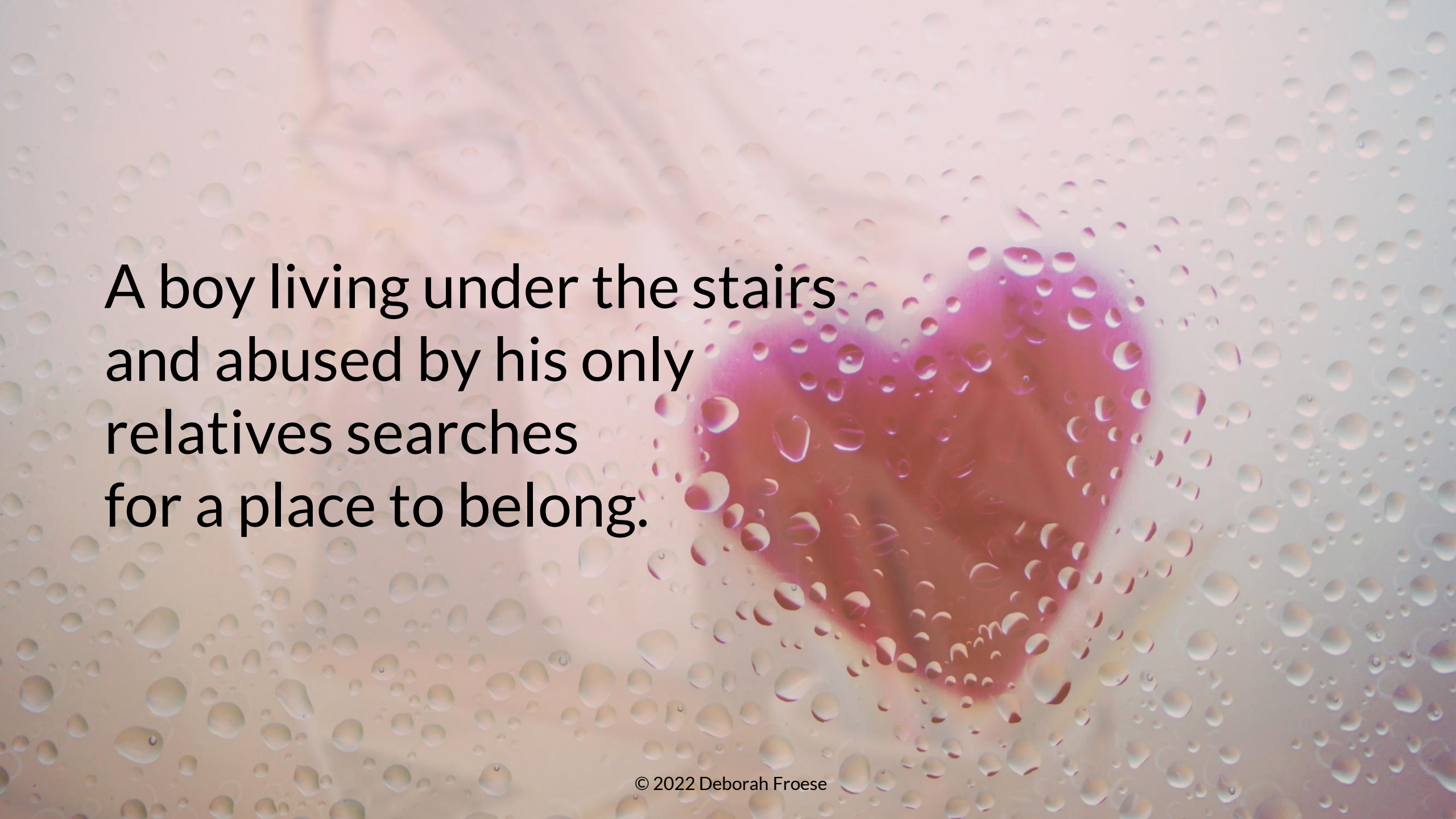
Most manuscripts take more than one round each for developmental and line editing.

Only a small
number of
manuscripts
submitted
have what it
takes.




A close-up photograph of a hand holding a pink heart-shaped object, possibly a piece of candy or a small toy. The background is a light, textured surface covered in numerous water droplets of various sizes, creating a soft, bokeh effect. The lighting is warm and diffused, highlighting the texture of the hand and the heart.


**What is your
emotional draw?**




A boy living under the stairs
and abused by his only
relatives searches
for a place to belong.




After witnessing an
unspeakable assault on his
good friend and being
too afraid to intervene,
a young man endures
decades of guilt.



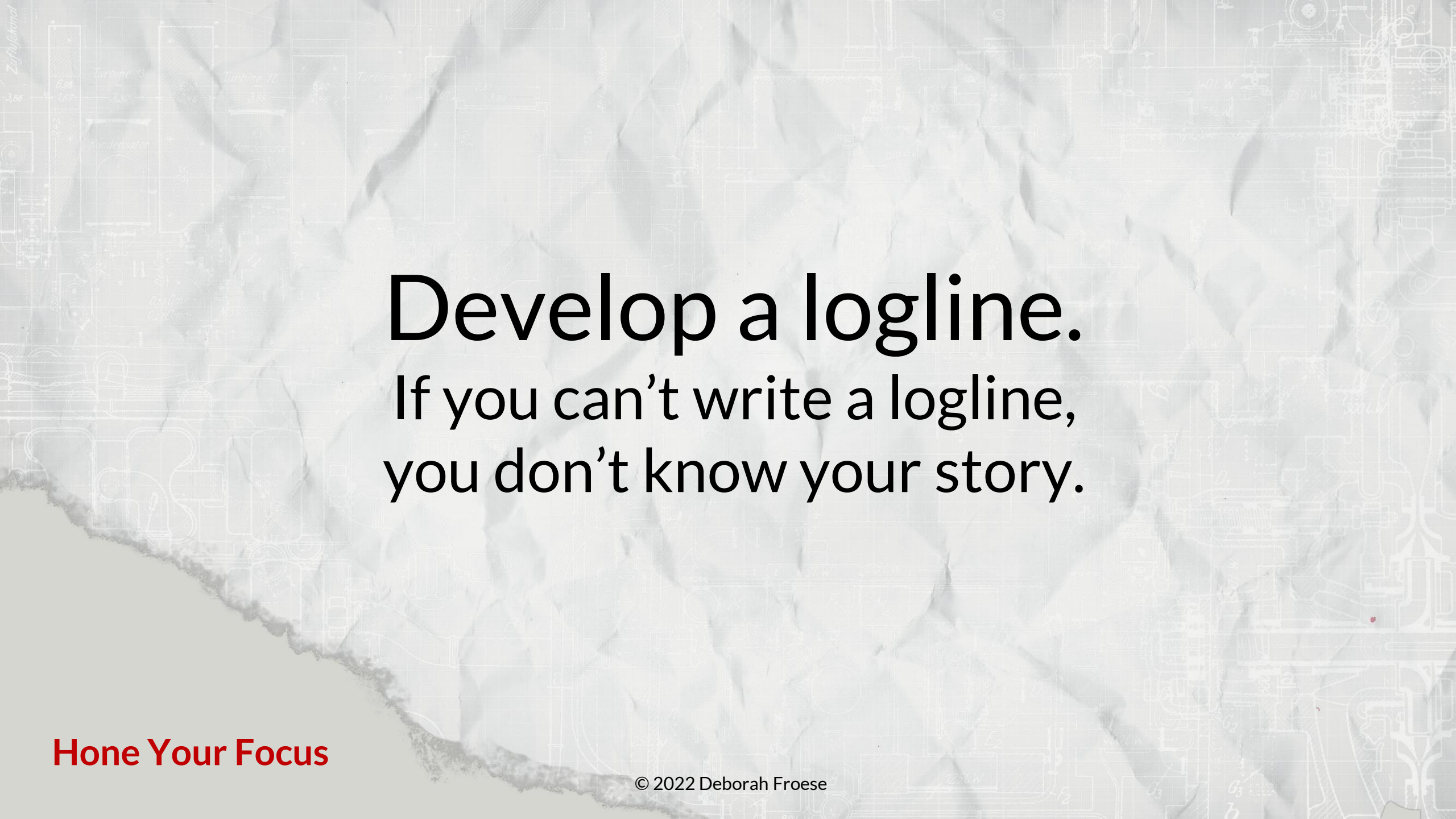
Straight-forward advice about relationship building pushes individuals beyond their current limitations to find personal and business success.



After decades of suppressing
her true self just to
please others, a woman
finally sets herself free.



In the quest to survive, humans succumb to societal and corporate structures that rob them of their ability to focus and deprive them of well-being.



Develop a logline.
If you can't write a logline,
you don't know your story.

Hone Your Focus

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Loglines

Fiction or Memoir

1. What external conflict challenges your main character?
2. What internal conflict challenges your main character?
3. What is your theme?

Nonfiction

1. What is the problem you want to address?
2. How does that problem impact your readers?
3. What is your theme?

Hone Your Focus

Loglines

Harry Potter

An **orphaned boy** enrolls in a school of wizardry, where he encounters the terrible evil that haunts the magical world, and he learns the truth about himself and his family.

Loglines

Ann Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl

Through vivid impressions of her experience during the **Nazi occupation of Holland in World War II**, Ann Frank offers a fascinating commentary on human courage and frailty and a compelling self-portrait as a **sensitive and spirited** young woman whose **promise was tragically cut short**.

Hone Your Focus

Loglines

Untamed

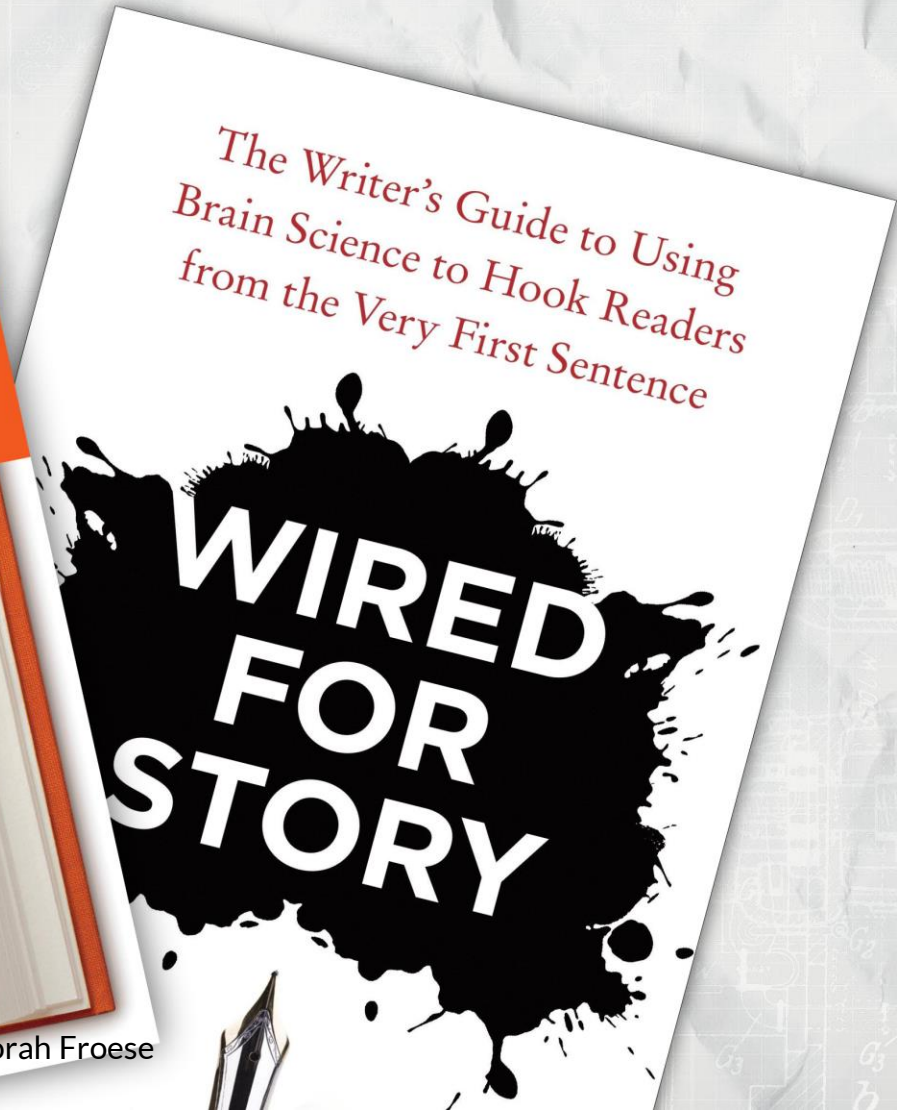
After conforming to the **pressure of societal expectations** and **denying her discontent** for many years, Glennon Doyle learns that **a responsible woman is not one who slowly dies for others, but one who shows them how to fully live.**

Hone Your Focus



**Analysis requires
disciplined focus.
Ignore the urge to start rewriting.**

Stories: Turning Points



Examine Structure

Stories: Turning Points

Use the turning point percentages to calculate the turning point page number in your manuscript.

10%	25%	50%	75%	90%
Page 25	Page 62.5	Page 125	Page 187.5	Page 225

Do you have these turning points in your manuscript? If not, choose an element to become a turning point or create one.

Do your turning points fall in approximately the right place? If not, consider how you might adapt the text around them.

Nonfiction: Chapter Outlines

Chapter title

Chapter theme

Main points

Support material

Do the chapters progress in a logical order?

Are they focused?

Is each chapter roughly the same length to imply balance?

Are any chapters so closely related that you could combine them or so long that you could divide them?

Do each chapter's main points unfold in a logical order?

Do you address everything you would want to know if you were new to the subject matter?

Do you have sufficient support material for each point?

Examine Structure

Nonfiction: Chapter Outlines

Chapter title

Chapter theme

Main points

Support material

What's at stake?

Who has the most to lose?

Who or what has control over another individual or group and why?

How is the dominated group or individual responding to the situation?

Have you utilized the emotional draw to create a tension arc?

Examine Structure

Nonfiction: Citations

The
Chicago
Manual
of Style
Online

HOME CMOS 17 CONTENTS **CITATION QUICK GUIDE** HELP & TOOLS

STYLE Q&A BLOG FORUM ABOUT CMOS STORE CMOS 16 **GIVE**

Log In

[Go to Index](#)

Go to

Search

Notes and Bibliography: Sample Citations

[Go to Author-Date: Sample Citations](#)

The following examples illustrate the notes and bibliography system. Sample notes show full citations followed by shortened citations for the same sources. Sample bibliography entries follow the notes. For more details and many more examples, see [chapter 14](#) of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. For examples of the same citations using the author-date system, follow the [Author-Date link](#) above.

Book

Notes

1. Zadie Smith, *Swing Time* (New York: Penguin Press, 2016), 315–16.
2. Brian Grazer and Charles Fishman, *A Curious Mind: The Secret to a Bigger Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 12.

Shortened notes

Book

Chapter or other part of an edited book

Translated book

E-book

Journal article

News or magazine article

Book review

Interview

Thesis or dissertation

Website content

Social media content

Personal communication

Examine Structure

https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html

Engage Your Readers

1. Add hooks to chapter beginnings and endings.
2. Incorporate *show, don't tell* details for emphasis and drama.
3. Turn “information dumps” into scenes.
4. Foreshadow or “set up” important scenes, people, and objects long before they become important.



Mind
Your Words
Word by Word

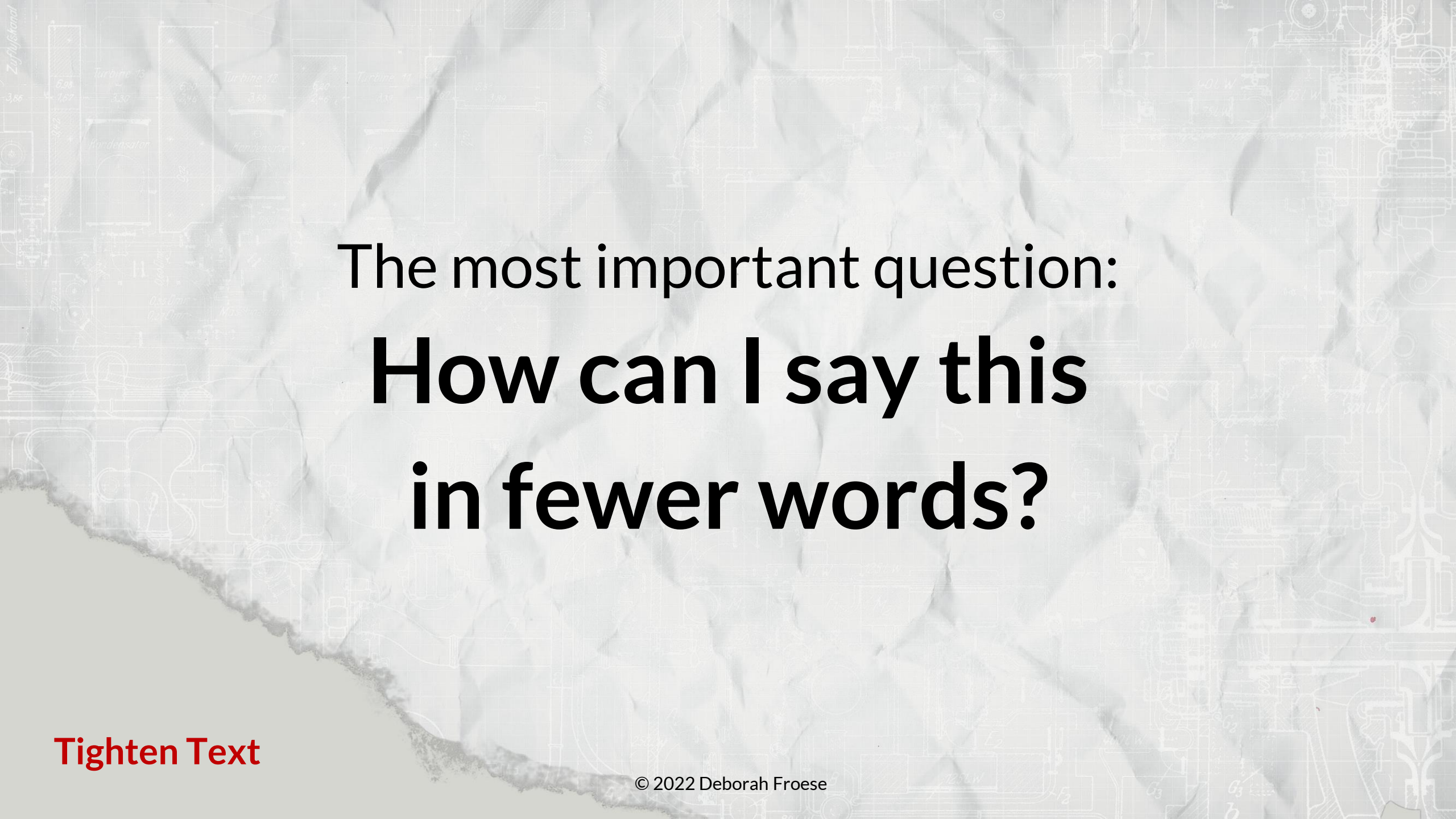


Tighten Text

“Let the reader find that he cannot afford to omit any line of your writing because you have omitted every word that he can spare.”

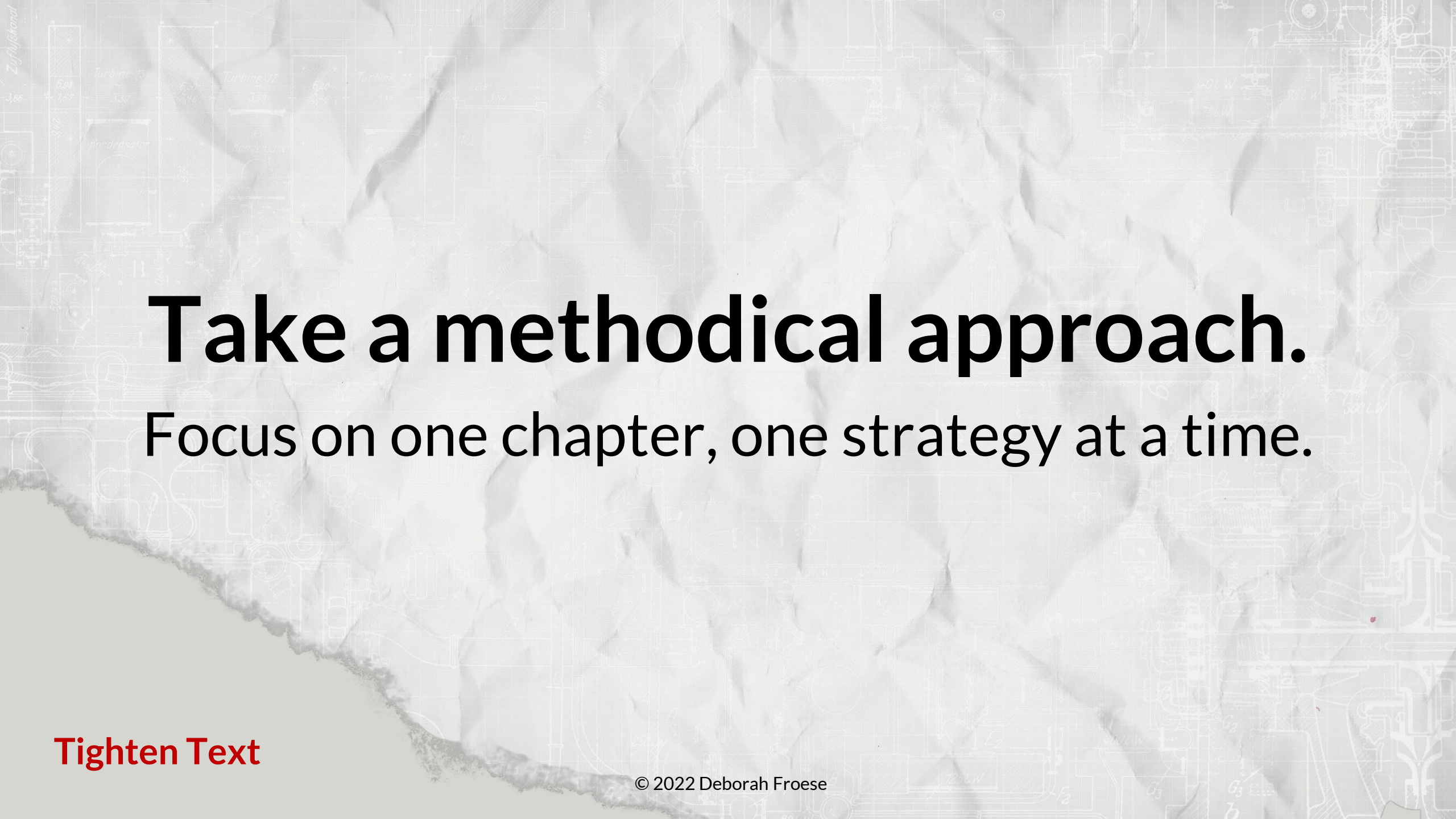
~Ralph Waldo Emerson

Tighten Text



The most important question:
**How can I say this
in fewer words?**

Tighten Text



Take a methodical approach.
Focus on one chapter, one strategy at a time.

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

1. Lose passive verbs. (am, is, are, was, were, have, etc.)

a. Change the form of associated verbs.

The wind **was hammering** the glass.

The wind **hammered** the glass.

I **am standing** in the doorway.

I **stand** in the doorway.

Refinement Strategies

1. Lose passive verbs. (am, is, are, was, were, have, etc.)

b. Restructure the sentence.

It **was** somewhere during her first year at college that she decided to become an actress.

She decided to become an actress during her first year at college.

Refinement Strategies

1. Lose passive verbs. (am, is, are, was, were, have, etc.)

c. Replace the passive verb.

The food at the restaurant **is** excellent.

The restaurant **serves** excellent food.

I **have** sixteen letters of confirmation.

I **received/acquired/obtained** sixteen letters of confirmation.

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

2. Use *had* guardedly.

When I was growing up, I'd **had** nothing but contempt for the old man. He **had** done nothing but belittle me and use me as a target for his rage. He **had** given me no reason to trust him.

When I was growing up, I **held** nothing but contempt for the old man. He continuously belittled me and used me as a target for his rage.

I didn't trust him then, and I don't trust him now.

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

3. Avoid passive words in general.

Too many **things** bothered me.

Too many **of his behaviors and attitudes** bothered me.

I want **some** eggs.

I want **a dozen** eggs.

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

4. Skip double verbs.

I **decided** to run.

I **ran**.

She **picked up** her cup and **drank**.

She **drank**.

I **started planning** my route.

I **planned** my route.

I **sat** on the shore and **ate** my sandwich alone.

I **ate** my sandwich alone on the shore.

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

5. Use adverbs and adjectives judiciously.

She was **very** happy.

Her eyes sparkled.

The **little** girl stood next to her **tall** brother.

The boy towered over his younger sister.

Refinement Strategies

6. Avoid repetition.

a. *Direct* repetition is fairly straightforward.

- a. Don't repeat words in close proximity. Even using *it* or *to* twice in one sentence dilutes authority and impact.
- b. Avoid starting two or more sentences or paragraphs in a row with the same words.
- c. Don't combine synonyms. Think of common phrases like *any and all*, *one and only*, *end result*, *basic fundamentals*, *initial starting points*, and so on.
- d. Watch out for your favorite words—the ones that pour onto your pages like salt from a saltshaker.

Refinement Strategies

6. Avoid repetition.

b. *Indirect* repetition is more subtle.

- a. Watch for similar ideas expressed with different words across sentences or paragraphs.

The weekend progressed **as if nothing had happened.**
Nothing remarkable occurred.

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

7. Don't say what *isn't*.

“That’s just the way it is.” He **paused**.

“That’s just the way it is.” He **sighed and turned toward the window.** (or: He **folded his arms across his chest.**)

“That’s enough.” Mike didn’t say another word.

“That’s enough.” **Mike’s shoulders slumped** (or: **Mike held up his fist.**)

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

8. Flag multiple commas.

After work, Glenn would roar his truck, a company-issued vehicle, onto the lawn so Colin could practice basketball on the driveway.

After work Glenn roared his company-issued truck onto the lawn so Colin could practice basketball on the driveway.

The five of us arriving around seven one at a time brought everything we needed for supper.

The five of us arrived one at a time around seven. We brought supper.

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

9. Don't announce character senses.

*I don't need Mama's lecture today, Miriam **thought**.*

*I don't need Mama's lecture today. Miriam **bit her lip**.*

Miriam **saw** the pot start boiling.

The pot boiled.

Miriam watched her son with the blanket, and she knew he liked it.

Her son drew the blanket to his cheek and smiled.

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

10. Eliminate unnecessary detail.

I wanted to go to the movies with Ann, but Jermaine wouldn't be home for hours. My neighbors were away, holidaying in Florida, and my parents were going to the opera that night. Even my babysitter was busy. I couldn't leave because I had no one to watch my kids.

I wanted to go the movies with Ann, but no one was available to watch my kids.

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

11. Delete implied text.

He nodded **his head**.

He nodded.

He blinked **his eyes**.

He blinked.

He purchased a blanket **at the store**.

He purchased a blanket.

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

12. Check prepositions. (Such as: at, by, for, from, in, of, on, to, with.)

She rapped loudly **on the door to the office**.

She loudly rapped the office door.

That's **one of the reasons** why I hate television.

That's one reason I hate television.

The **side doors of** the car were painted red.

The car's side doors were red.

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

12. Check prepositions. (Such as: at, by, for, from, in, of, on, to, with.)

She grabbed her son **by his collar**.

She grabbed her son's collar.

He wore a **jacket with fringes**.

He wore a fringed jacket.

Refinement Strategies

13. Use dull dialogue attributives.

“You will NOT take that shovel,” Quinton ~~ordered~~ said.

“Perhaps you can try again tomorrow,” Nelson ~~suggested~~ said.

“Hmm. Is it possible to break the lock?” Frieda ~~wondered~~ asked.

“Hmm.” Frieda tilted her head. “There might be a way to break the lock.”

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

14. Use realistic dialogue.

“I can no longer see the end of the road.”

“I can’t see the end of the road.”

“There is no way I will give you fifty dollars if you refuse to tell me what you are going to spend it on.”

“No way. I’m not giving you fifty bucks if you won’t tell me what you’re doing with it.”

Refinement Strategies

15. Use authentic dialogue.

Cowboy: “You gotta get me that steak quick.”

Engineer: “Put a rush on my order.”

Young child: “I want it NOW!”

Tighten Text

Refinement Strategies

16. Minimize dialogue.

“I’m going to pack up and go on vacation,” Mark said.

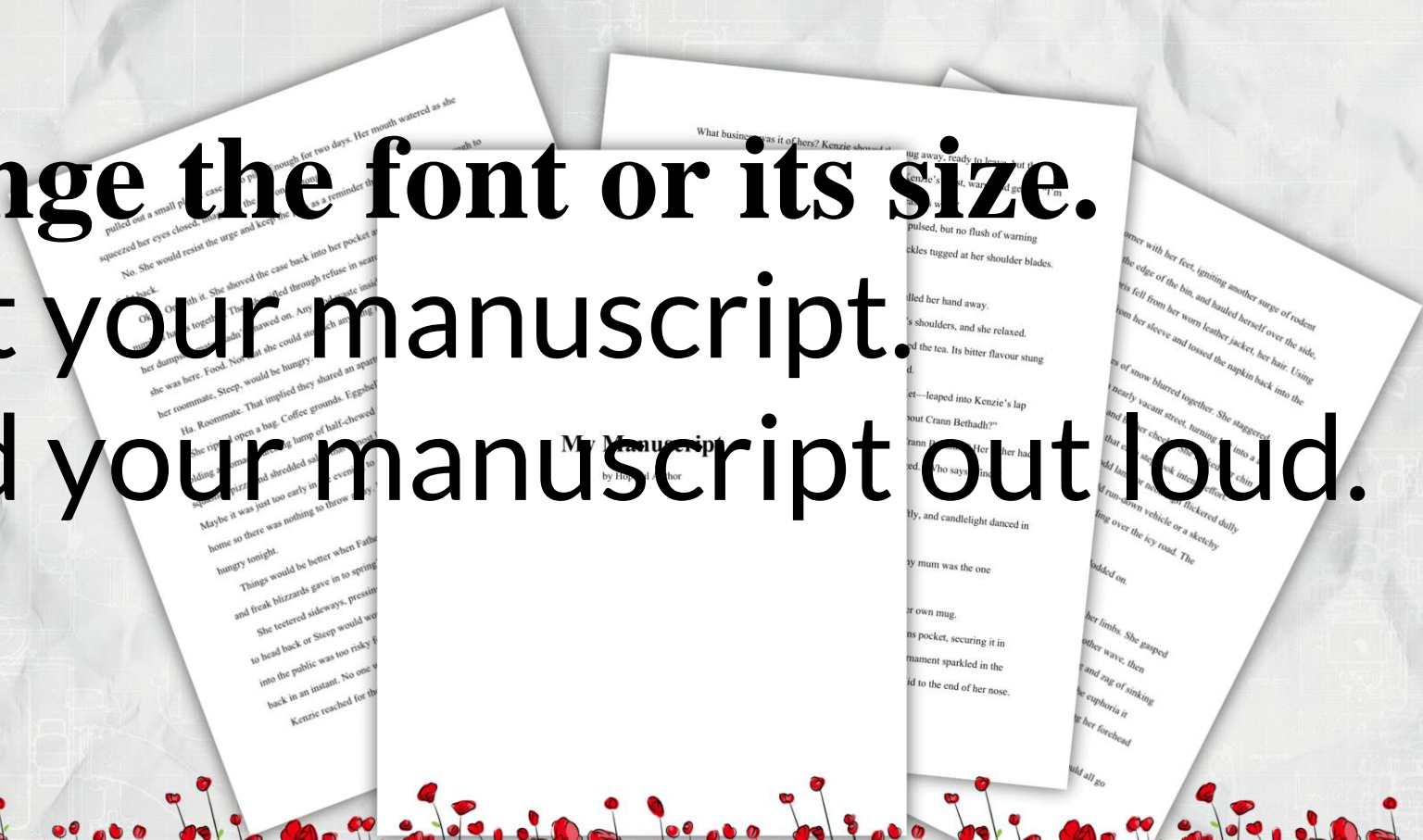
“I’m going on vacation,” Mark said.

“You can’t just tell me I have to make dinner and have it ready on time when I’m dealing with four sick kids,” Theresa said.

“I can’t make dinner on time with four sick kids,” Theresa said.

Refresh Your View

Change the font or its size.
Print your manuscript.
Read your manuscript out loud.



Assess Your View

Do you like what you're reading?

Do you feel emotionally connected to the main character or subject matter?

Do any questions arise?

Do any areas feel slow or boring?

Does each chapter begin and end with a hook?

Are all loose ends tied up by the time the story concludes?

How do you feel when you're finished reading?



Trust your intuition.
That little “niggle” is usually right.

Lose the Excess

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