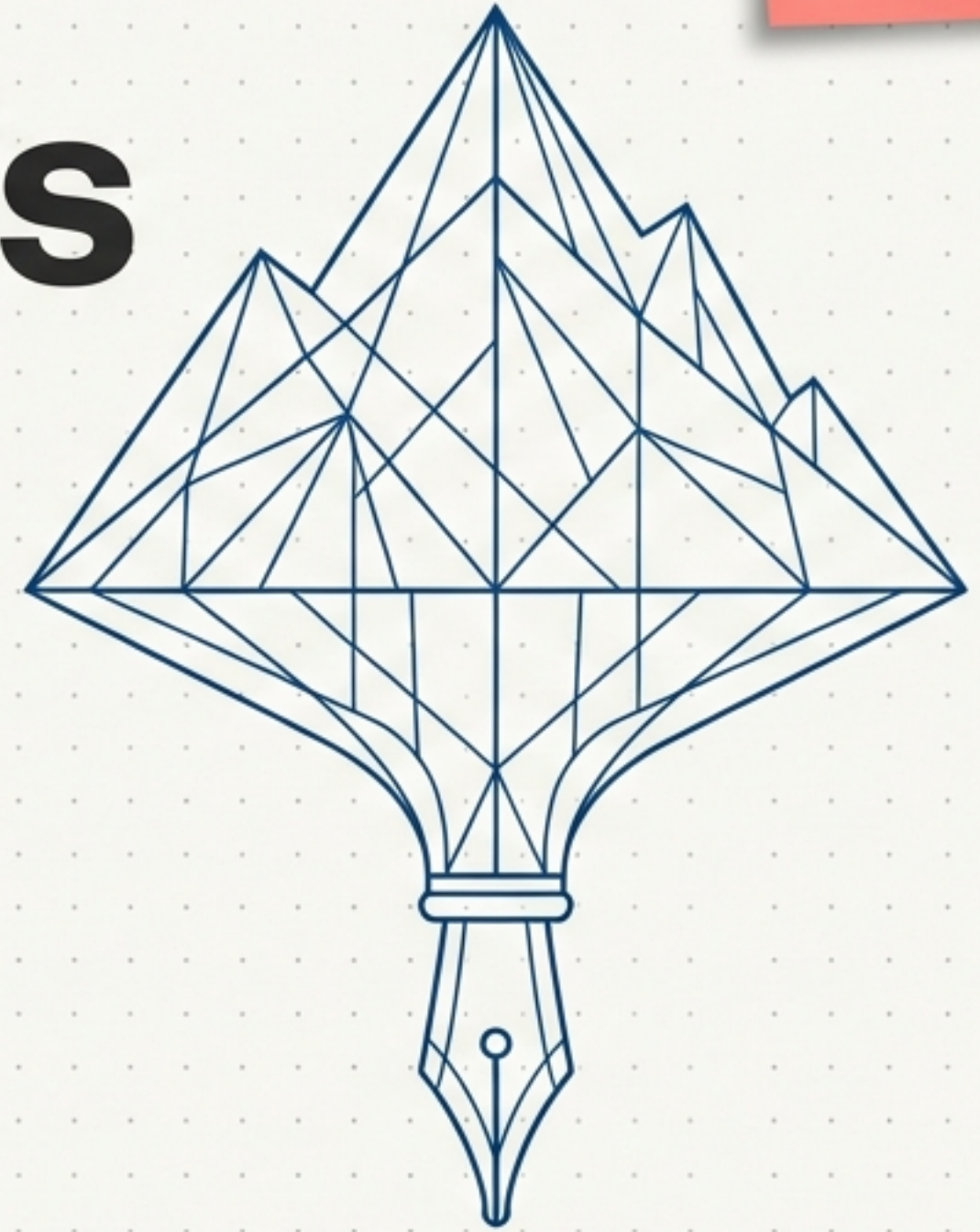


*Paper 1.
Composition.
100 Marks.*

The Architect's Playbook

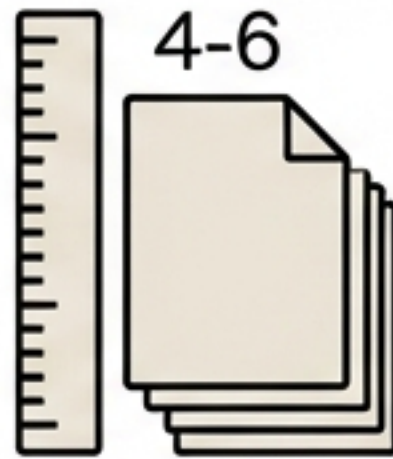
Engineering a 100-Mark
Short Story



The Exam Brief: Design Specifications

The Canvas

4 to 6 pages. No more, no less.
This is the exact space you have to build a world and resolve a conflict.



The Pre-Prepared Fallacy

Short story titles on the exam tend to be very specific. Trying to shoehorn a memorized, pre-prepared story into the prompt is the fastest way to lose marks.



The Core Metric

To score high, you must master two levels of architecture: the Micro (sentence-level sensory details) and the Macro (the structural pacing of your plot).



The Reader Engagement Engine: Show vs. Tell

The Tell Approach



Writer states a plain fact.

Reader takes information in passively.

Result: Flat mental picture, low engagement.

The Show Approach



Writer provides sensory evidence.

Reader is forced to become involved by deducing fact for themselves.

Result: Highly interactive, participatory, and enjoyable reading experience.

Micro-Skill Diagnostic: Creating a Mental Picture

*Margaret
was an old
woman.*

**Passive Telling
(0 Marks for Style)**

Margaret moved slowly down the hall, her stooped form supported by a curved wooden cane gripped in a gnarled hand covered with translucent, liver-spotted skin.

Action implies physical state.

Object implies reliance.

Sensory detail forces the reader to deduce Margaret's advanced age.


Micro-Skill Diagnostic: Providing Evidence

The Tell (Vague & Unconvincing)

Jennifer was talented.

The Show (Active Evidence)

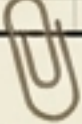
Jennifer competes in show-jumping competitions, plays cello in the school orchestra and gets As in every subject.



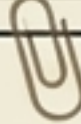
Rule: Don't assign an adjective. Assign an action. Let the reader award the adjective themselves.

The Show Me Conversion Matrix

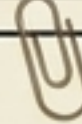
How would you transform these passive statements into active, deduction-forcing scenes?



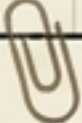
David was a young boy.



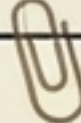
Sandra was in love.



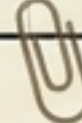
Spot was a young puppy.




The building was old.



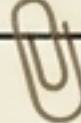
Carol was shy.



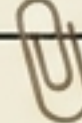
It was a sunny morning in Spring.



Mary hated P.E.



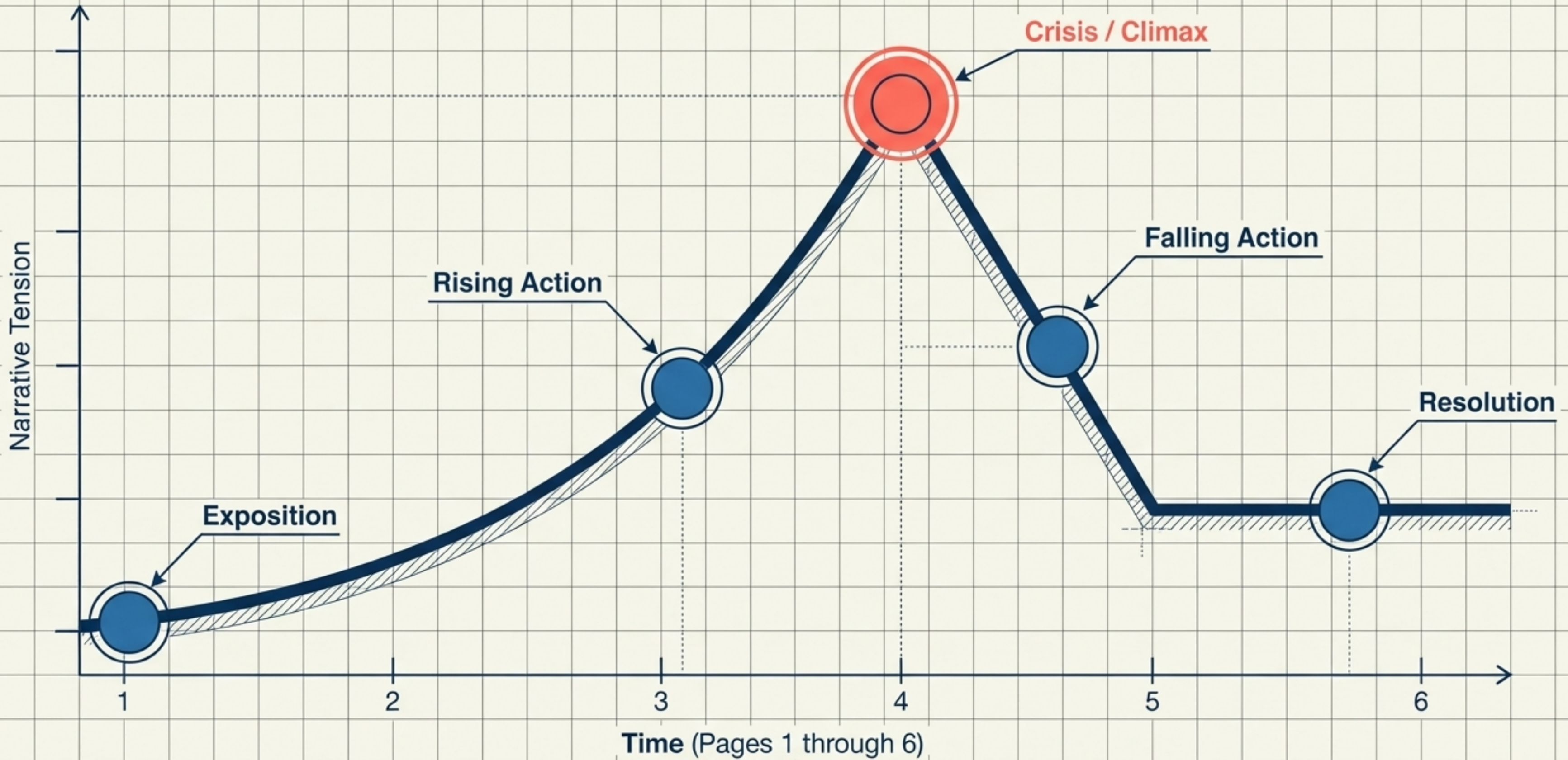
She was my best friend.



Mark was shy.

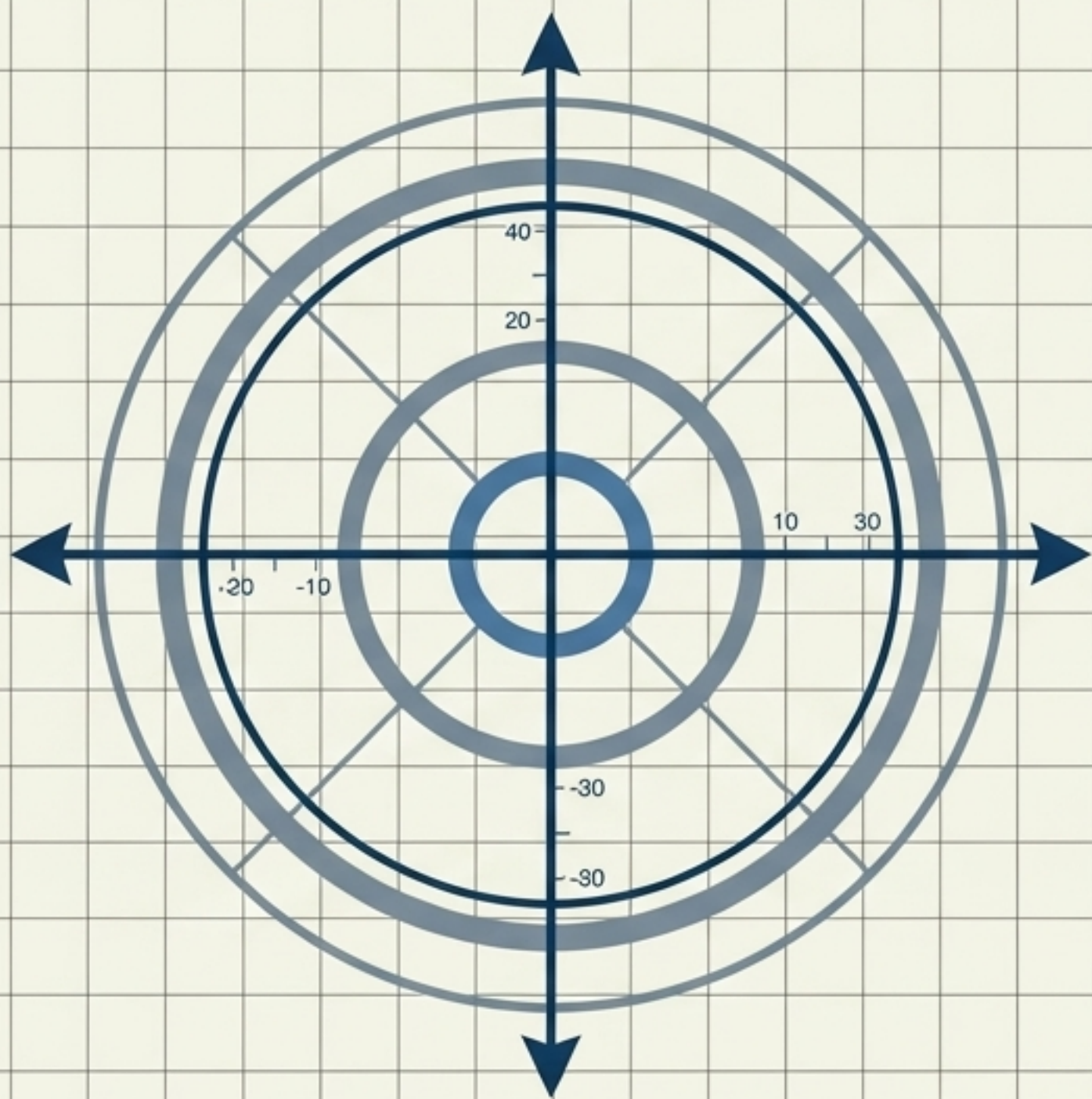


The Macro-Structure: The Tension Mountain



Stage 1: Exposition

Establish Setting & Characters



Create a specific space & time: Give the year, month, season, or time of day/night.



Describe the starting place: What is life like for people there?



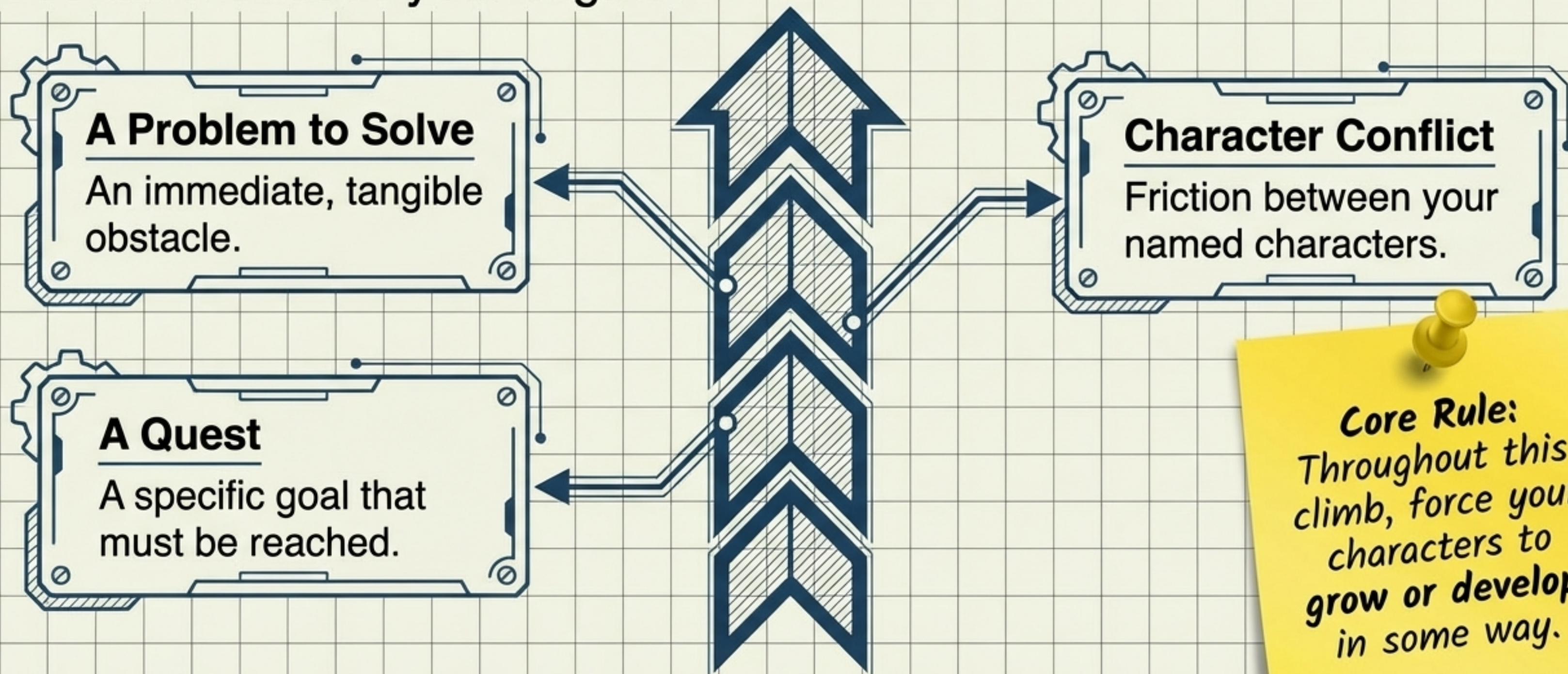
Identify main characters: Give them names immediately.



The Hook: Raise questions for your reader to pull them up the mountain.

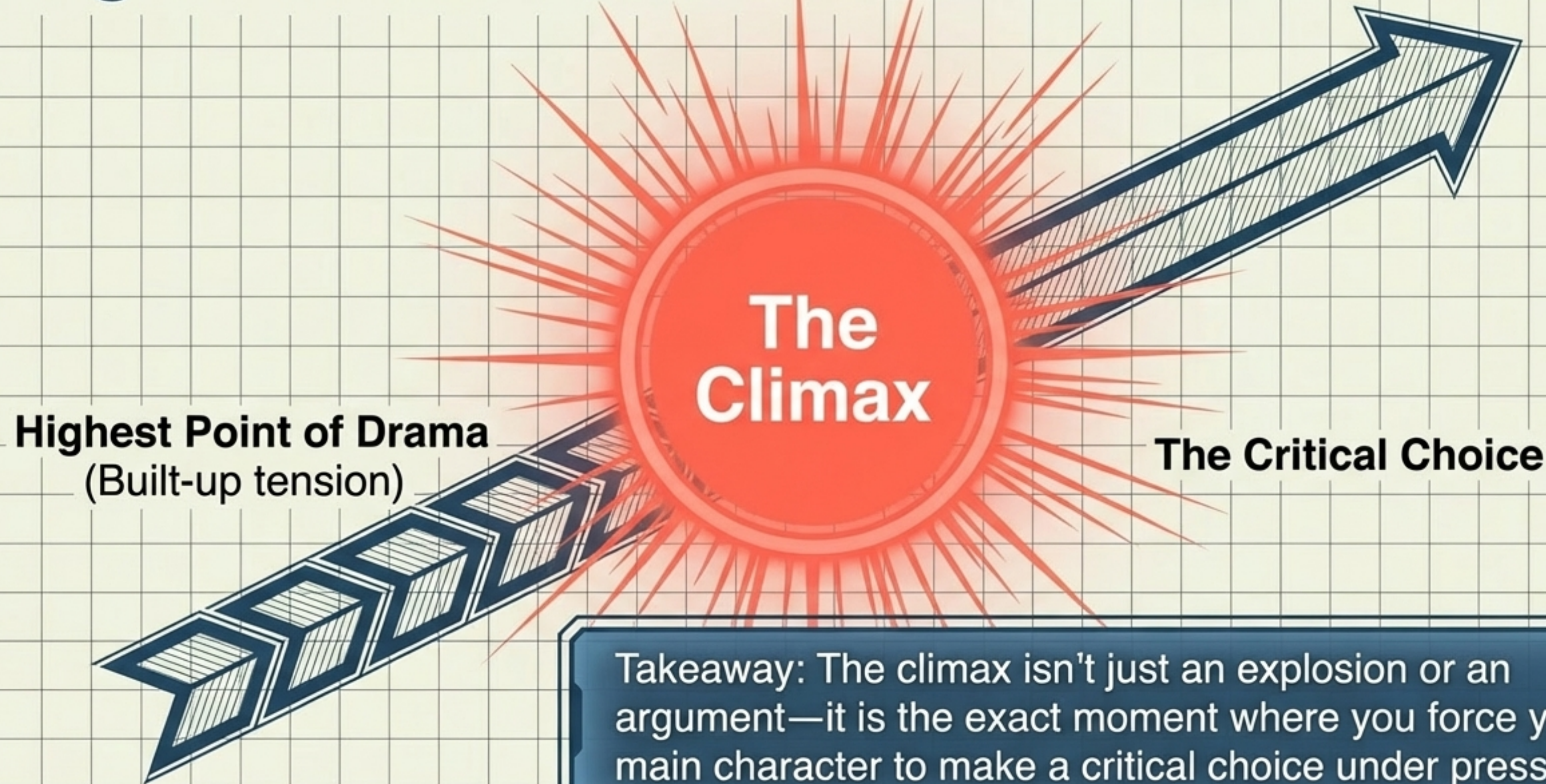
Stage 2: Rising Action (Development)

To develop the plot and build tension, you must introduce an engine of conflict. Choose your engine:



Core Rule:
Throughout this climb, force your characters to grow or develop in some way.

Stage 3: Crisis / Climax



Takeaway: The climax isn't just an explosion or an argument—it is the exact moment where you force your main character to make a critical choice under pressure.

Stage 4: Falling Action



The Unravelling

The immediate aftermath of the climax where the central conflict begins to unravel.

Easing the Pressure

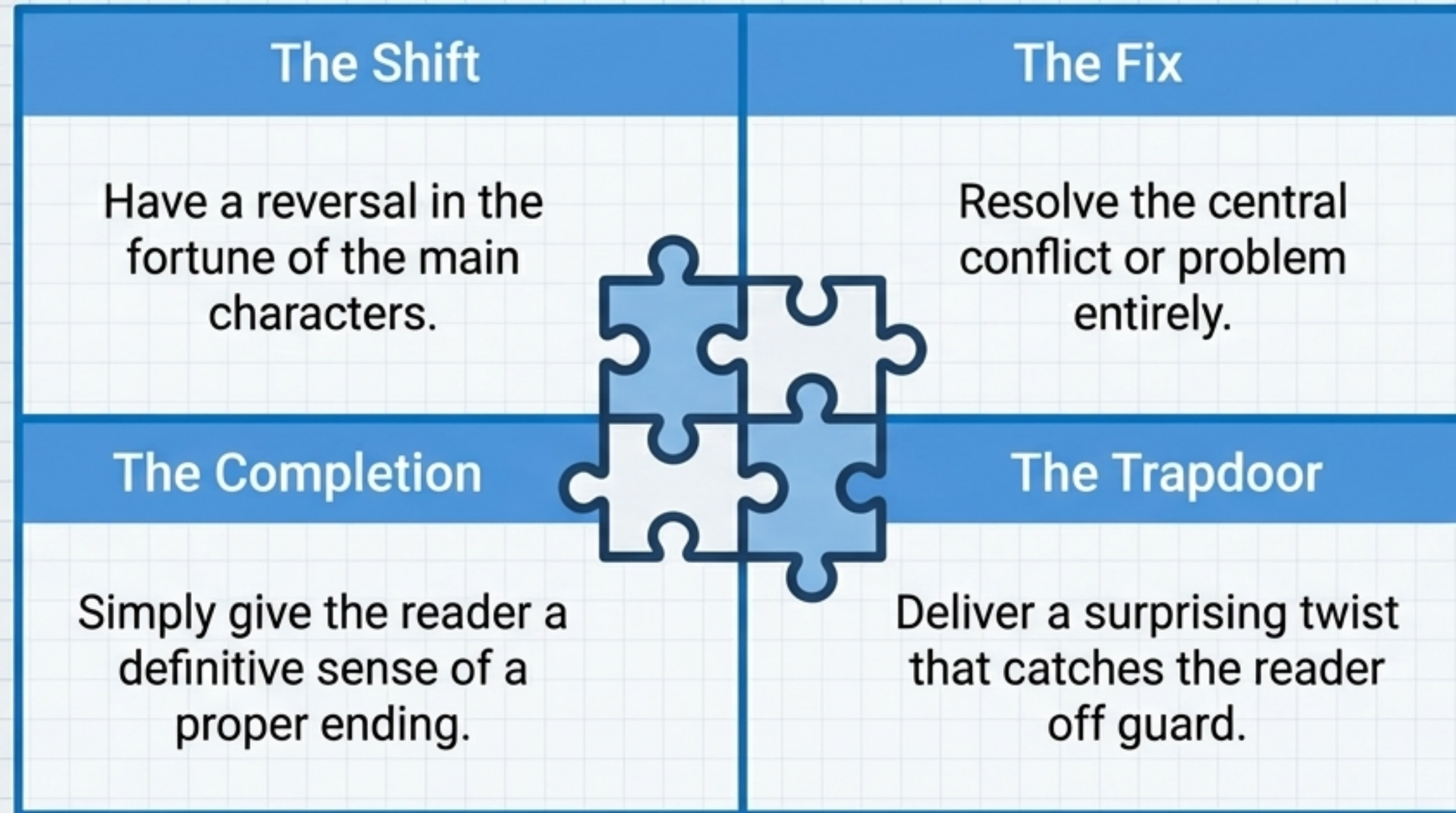
Narrative tension actively drops as the consequences of the critical choice play out.

The Final Hook

May contain one final moment of suspense if the ultimate outcome is still not fully clear.

Stage 5: Resolution / Denouement

Bring the story to a satisfactory end.



Quality Control: Masterpiece vs. Melodrama

	Amateur Trap	H1 Strategy
The Scope	Trying to fit the plot of a three-hour movie into the exam booklet.	Providing a contained, detailed “slice of life”.
The Conflict	Melodrama. Having characters get shot, go on speedboat chases, or get diagnosed with cancer all in three pages.	Grounded, believable tension based on the specific setting and characters you established.
The Prompt	Forcing a pre-prepared, memorized story to fit.	Adapting your pacing and sensory details directly to the specific title given on the paper.

The Anatomy of a Top-Tier Story



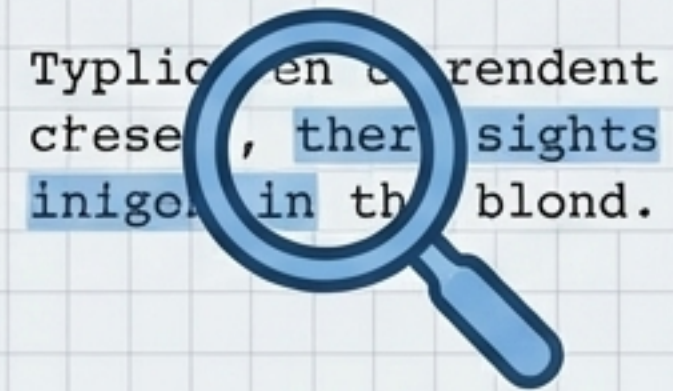
The Blueprint (Structure)

You have precisely 4 to 6 pages. Map your pacing strictly from Exposition to Resolution. Don't rush the climb; don't skip the fall.



The Engine (Tension)

Drive the plot with grounded conflict and force a critical choice at the peak. Avoid three-hour movie melodrama.



The Paint (Style)

Never tell the examiner a fact when you can show them the evidence. Force the reader to deduce the reality of your world.

MASTER THE ARCHITECTURE, CONTROL THE TENSION, AND LET THE READER SEE THE PICTURE.