



# The Mindset of an Effective Policy Analyst

## The Building Blocks

**Week Five**  
**Summer 2026**  
**SOWK 588**

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**Heritage University**

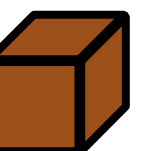
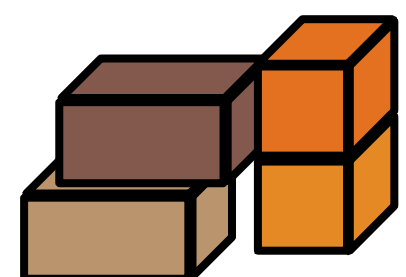
# Plan for Week Five

## Agenda

- The characteristics of an effective policy analyst
- Understanding numbers and inequality
- Developing a sound, well-reasoned, evidence-informed, policy-relevant claim
- PLAIN vs APA writing style

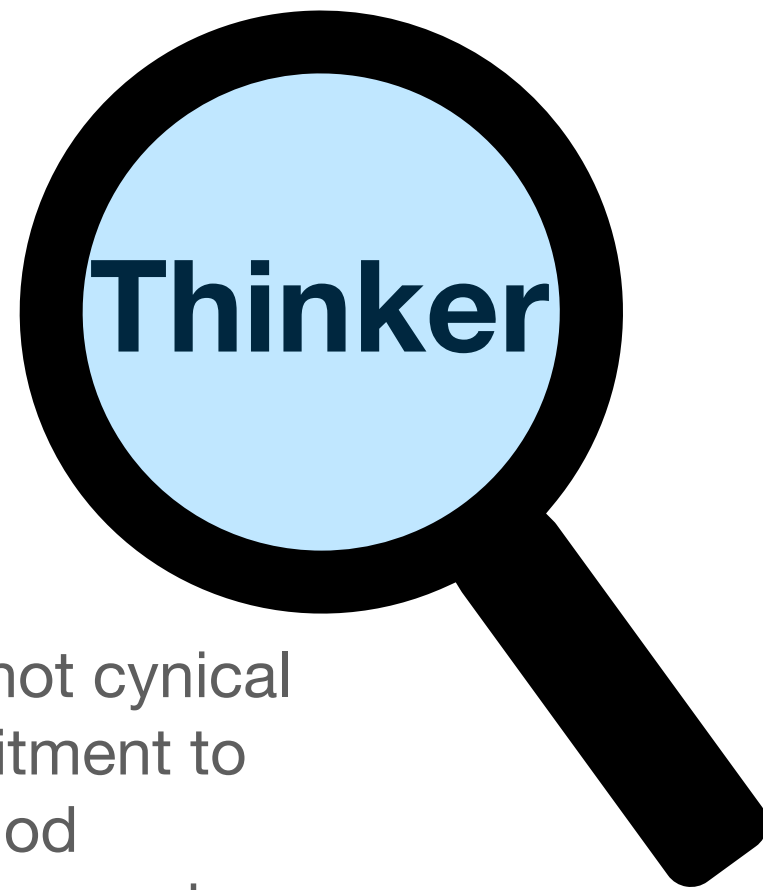
## Learning Objectives

- Identify and reflect on the six core mindsets of effective policy analysts
- Apply a framework to develop and critique policy claims using real-world topics collaboratively
- Compare APA and PLAIN writing styles

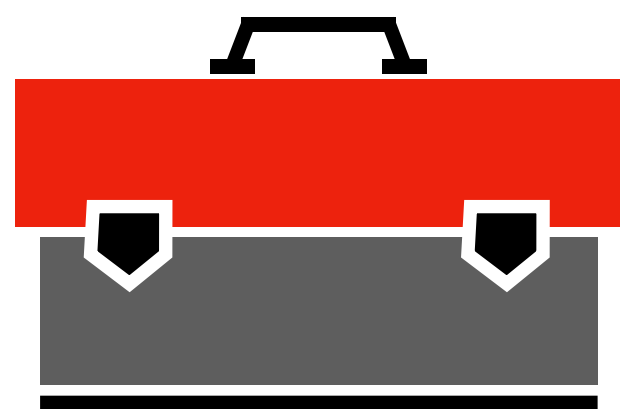


# The Mindsets of a Policy Analyst

## Critical Thinker



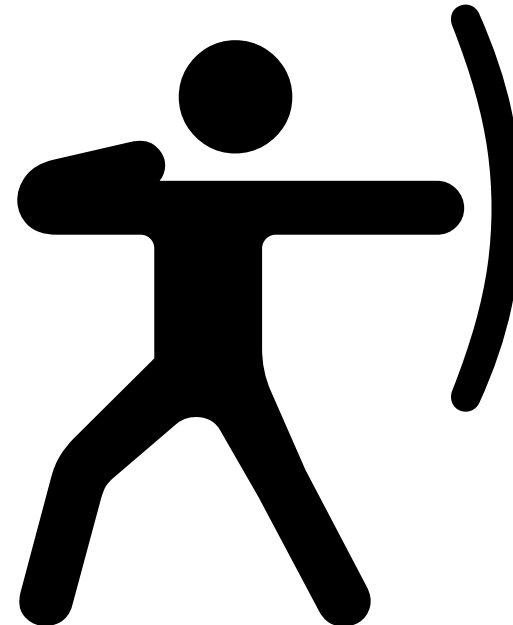
- Skeptical but not cynical
- Neutral commitment to scientific method
- Humble, curious, and open-minded



## Pragmatic

- Embraces real-world context of policy analysis
- Adept at satisficing
- Knows value of analysis is lost if not effectively communicated

## Competent



- Appropriate domain, procedural, political, and analytic expertise
- Committed to lifelong learning
- Team player

## Tough Minded



- Maintains equanimity in policy maelstrom
- Self-confident, but not arrogant
- Tenacious in the face of setbacks

## Service Oriented



- Embraces role: analytic specialist, public servant, campaigner, or client advisor
- Displays personal integrity
- Develops and maintains deserved reputation for credibility

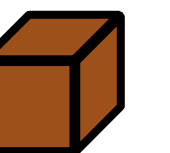
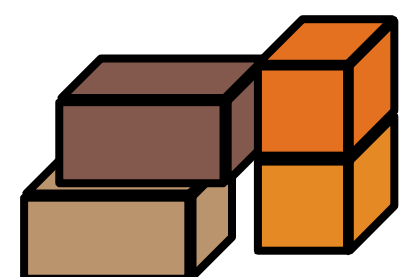
## Self-Aware



- Adopts an attitude of reflexivity
- Embraces multiple small theories, rather than one big theory
- Intellectually and personally modest, rather than enthusiastic know-it-all

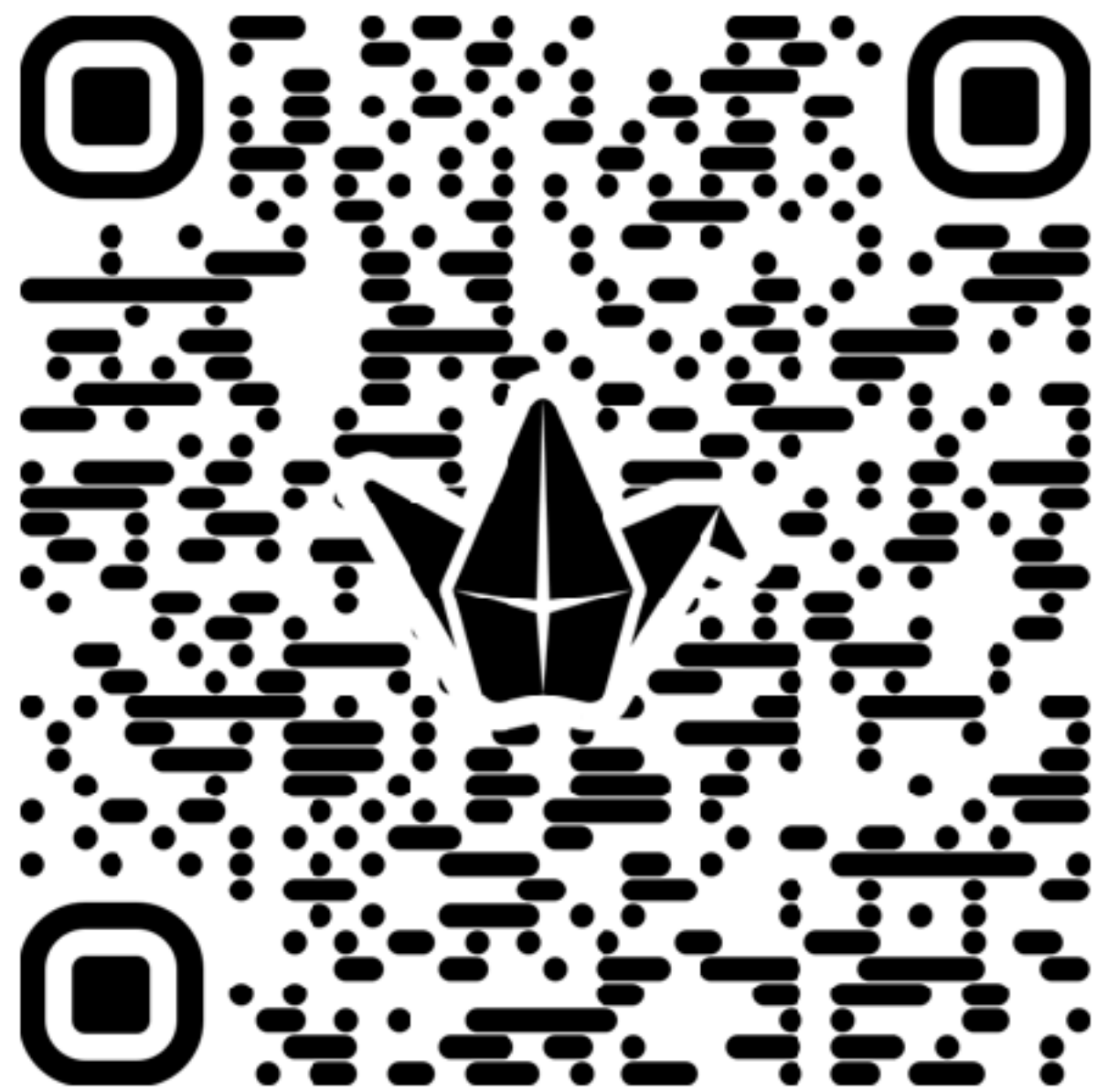
## Discuss

- 💪 Personal strengths?
- ⚠️ Challenges or pitfalls?
- 🌱 Growth opportunities?



# Mapping The Classes' Mindsets

## How Do We Connect as Analysts



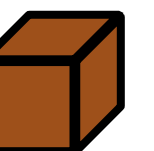
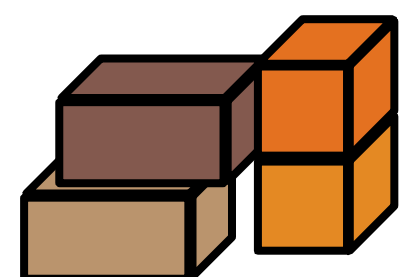
- Critical Thinker
- Pragmatic
- Competent
- Tough Minded
- Service Aware
- Self-Aware

# Mindset

A personal example or strength related to this mindset

A challenge or situation where this mindset is difficult to apply

A way you'd like to grow in this mindset or apply it in your future policy practice



325 Million People in America

1.5 Cups per day

\$4.4 Billion Federal Budget

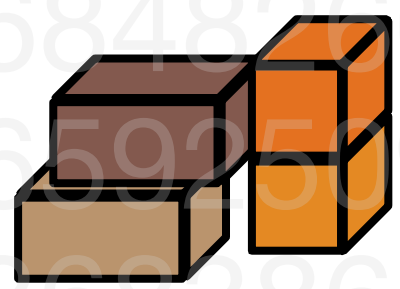
# Numbers

250 Working days

25% make coffee at home

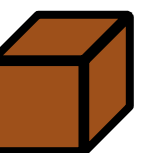
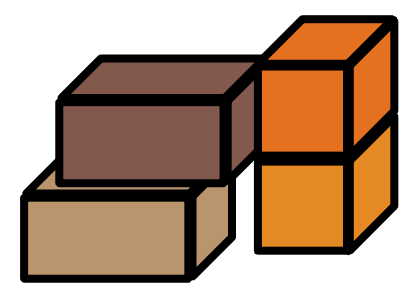
35 Billion Sleeves

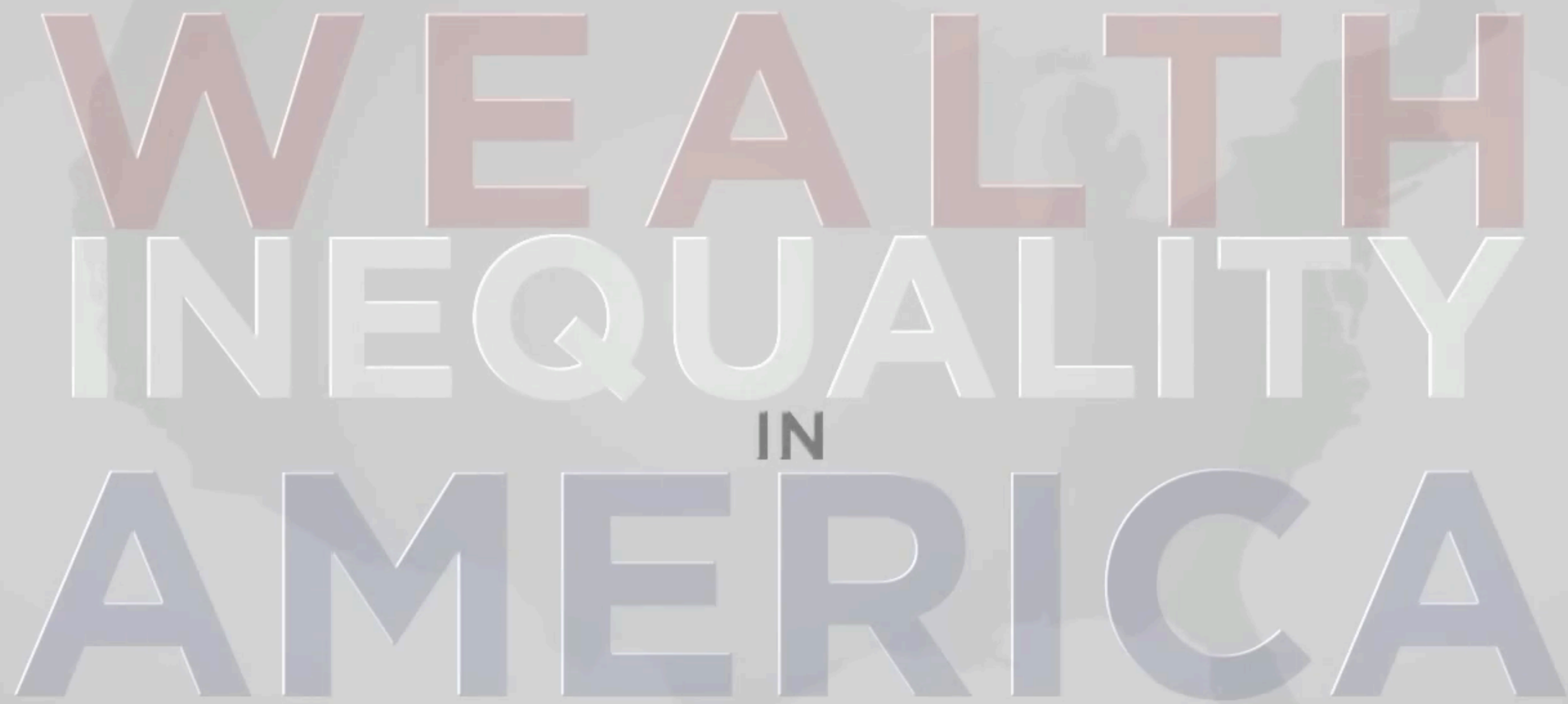
.01¢ vs .10¢



# Money Pit

(Campbell, 2009)



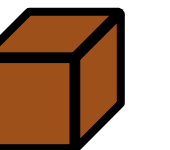
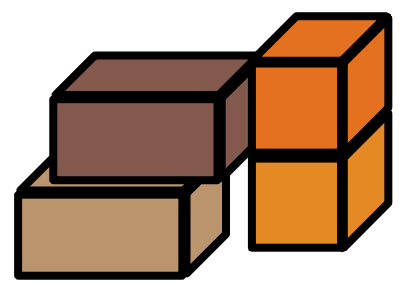


**WEALTH**  
**INEQUALITY**  
**IN**  
**AMERICA**

## American Wealth Inequality



\$ 1 MILLION



# Developing a Policy-Relevant Claim

## Reason #1

Evidence & Logic

Evidence & Logic

Evidence & Logic

## Reason #2...

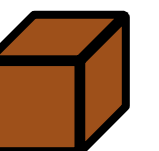
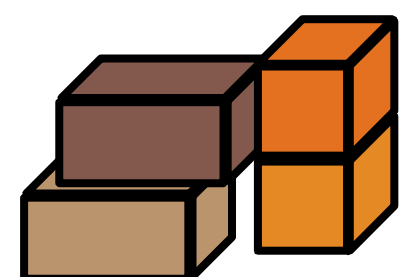
Evidence & Logic

Evidence & Logic

Evidence & Logic

Potential Counter Arguments and Rebuttles

can be prescriptive or descriptive



# Developing a Sound, Well-Reasoned, Evidence-Informed, Policy-Relevant Claim

Get in groups of 3 or 4 and pick a topic below or your own

## Social & Economic Policy

- Expanding housing access for low-income or unhoused populations
- Implementing universal basic income (UBI)
- Increasing access to affordable childcare

## Education & Youth

- Implementing free community college in Washington State
- Banning suspensions/expulsions in elementary schools
- Increasing funding for school social workers or counselors

## Criminal Justice & Policing

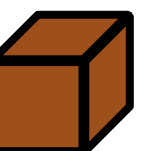
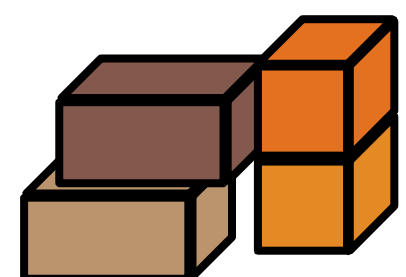
- Decriminalizing drug possession
- Expanding diversion programs for youth
- Mandating mental health co-responders for police calls

## Health & Environment

- Expanding Medicaid to cover all undocumented residents
- Providing safe drug consumption sites
- Banning single-use plastics in Washington

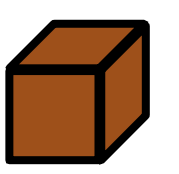
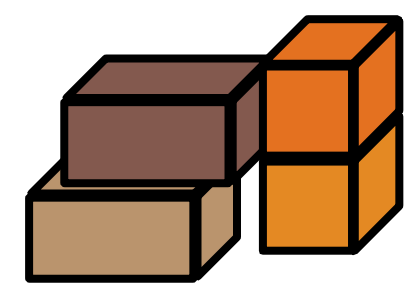
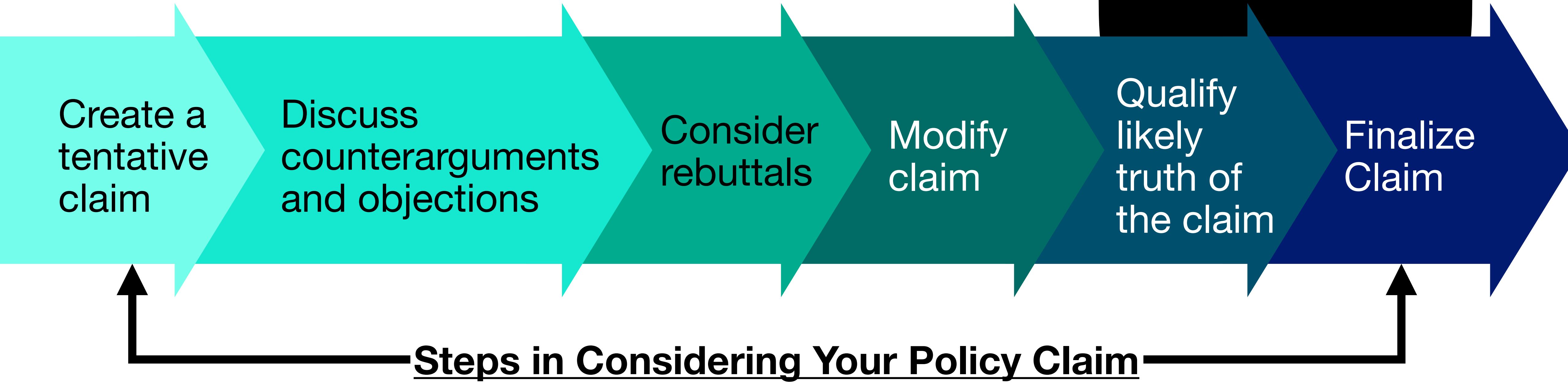
## Equity & Inclusion

- Requiring anti-racism training in state-funded organizations
- Creating guaranteed income pilots for marginalized groups
- Recognizing tribal sovereignty in child welfare cases



# Developing a

Sound, Well-Reasoned, Evidence-Informed, Policy-Relevant Claim

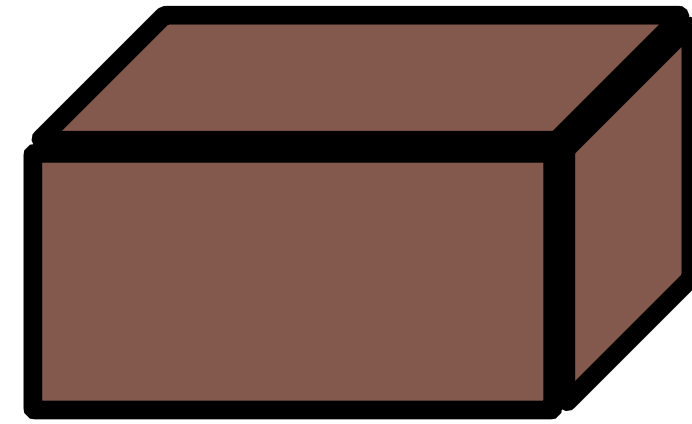


# Developing a Sound, Well-Reasoned, Evidence-Informed, Policy-Relevant Claim

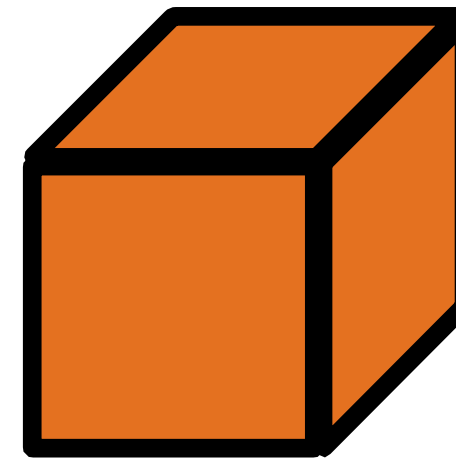
Cognitive Errors



Unsound Reasoning



Weak Evidence



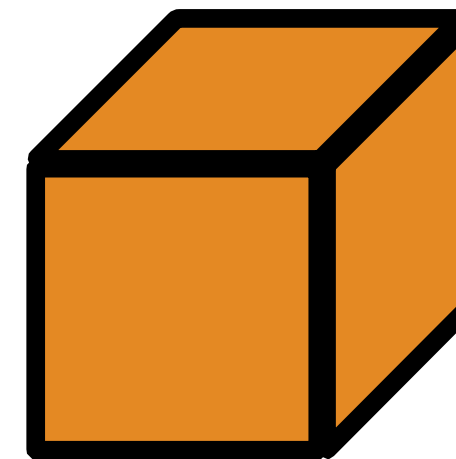
be cautious of *heroic assumptions and consider*

- Institutions
- Complexity
- Unintended consequences
- Winners and losers

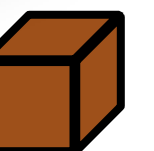
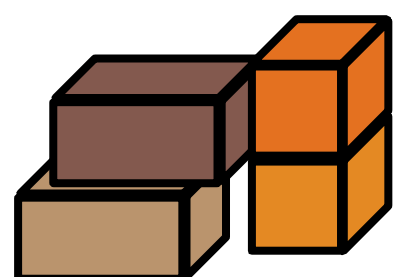
## Deconstruct Policy Claim

break it apart  
and look for  
problems

Obvious Flaws



After each group presents, take a minute to consider and provide feedback

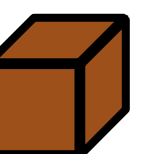
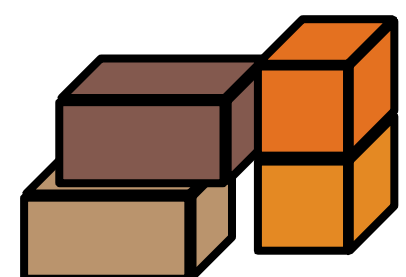
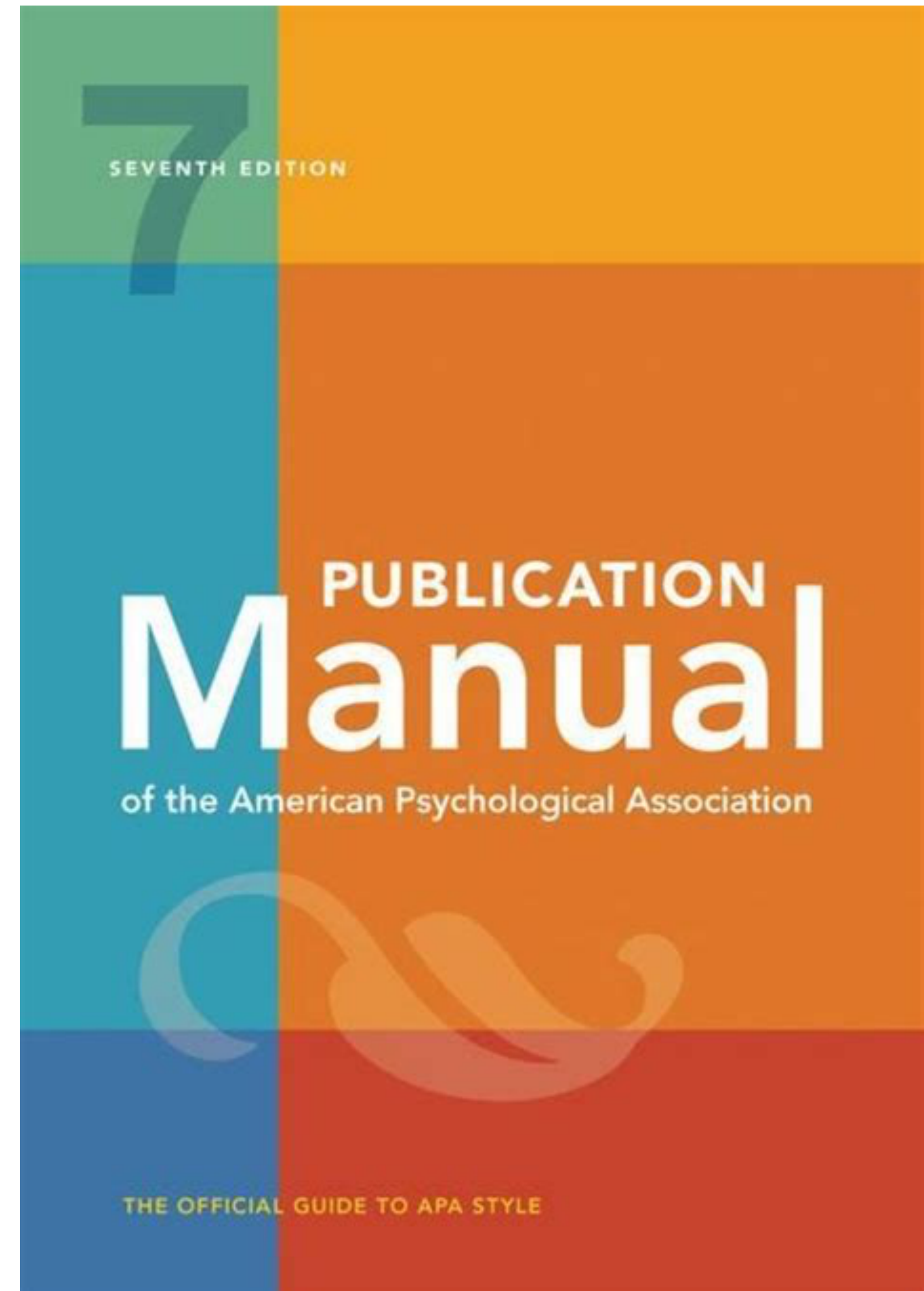


# Federal Plain Language Guidelines

March 2011  
Revision 1, May 2011



# VS



# APA Style Tone

## Clear, Straightforward, and Professional

### Informal

After reading Boman (2022), apparently, poor kids don't get as good of grades in school compared to rich kids. This result hits different when you remember all that poor communities already have to deal with. I guess more studies like this are needed to provide evidence for policy changes so poverty doesn't continue.

### Overly Jargon-laden

Boman (2022) revealed that low socioeconomic status (SES) evinced a significant correlation with suboptimal academic achievement in juveniles—an unsurprising consequence, given that these communities grapple with resource paucity and ancillary inequities. Subsequent empirical forays are necessary to illuminate the adjustments to public policy needed to dismantle the pernicious cycle of poverty.

### Appropriate Tone

Boman (2022) found that low socioeconomic status (SES) predicted lower academic achievement in youth. This highlights the injustices that communities with lower SES encounter. More studies like this are needed to provide evidence for policy changes that can disrupt the cycle of poverty.

