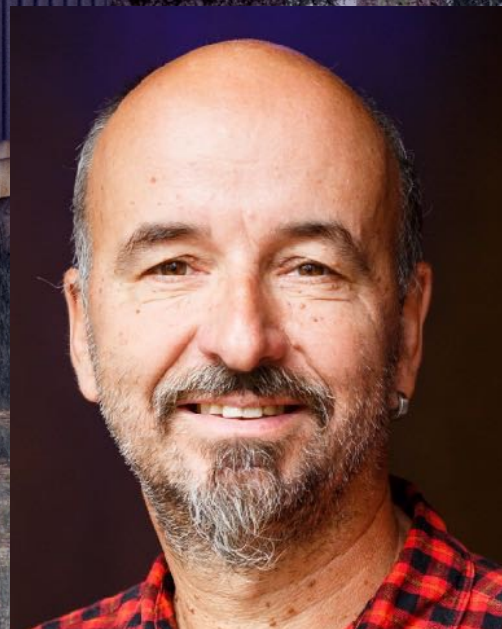# Surviving large online communities with conciseness and clarity

FOSS Backstage, March 2022 - **Bertrand Delacrétaz** - Principal Scientist, Adobe, Basel, Switzerland
& Board Member, Apache Software Foundation - @bdelacretaz - grep.codeconsult.ch

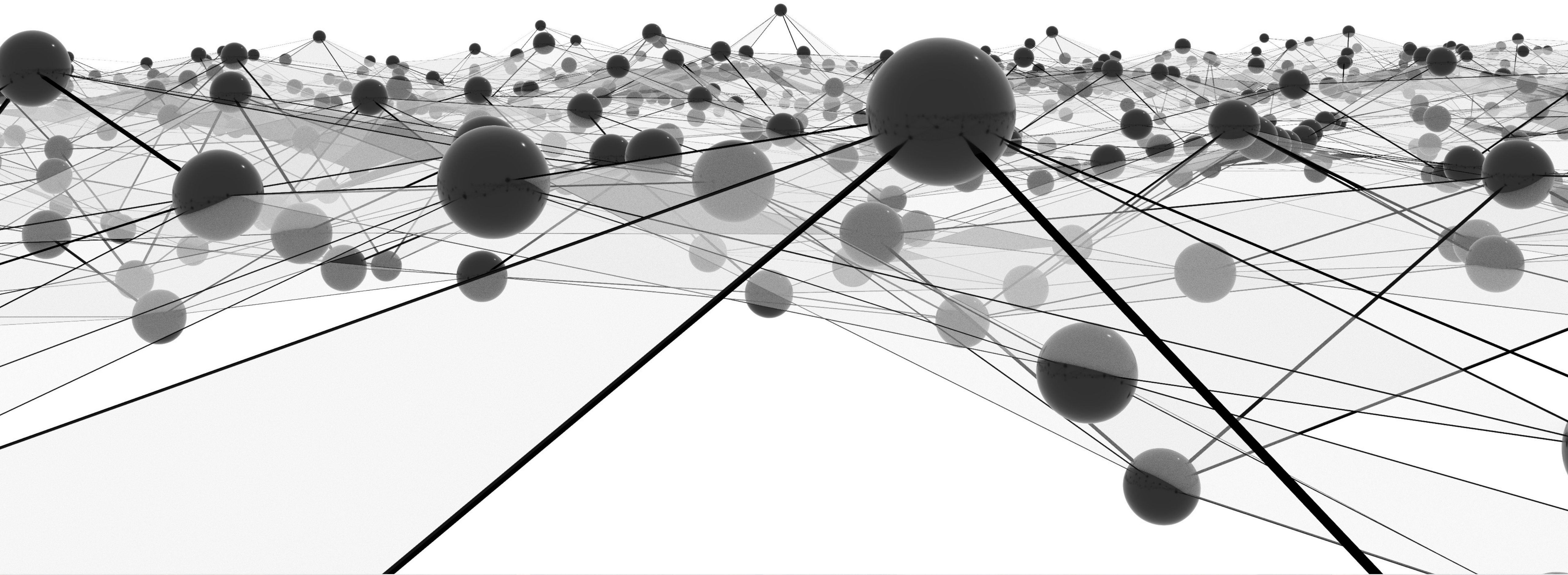Illustrations: Adobe Stock, unless specified - slides revision 2022-03-17

Clear writing is easy to understand, with no ambiguities.

Concise writing is as short as possible.

Context: written communications in online communities
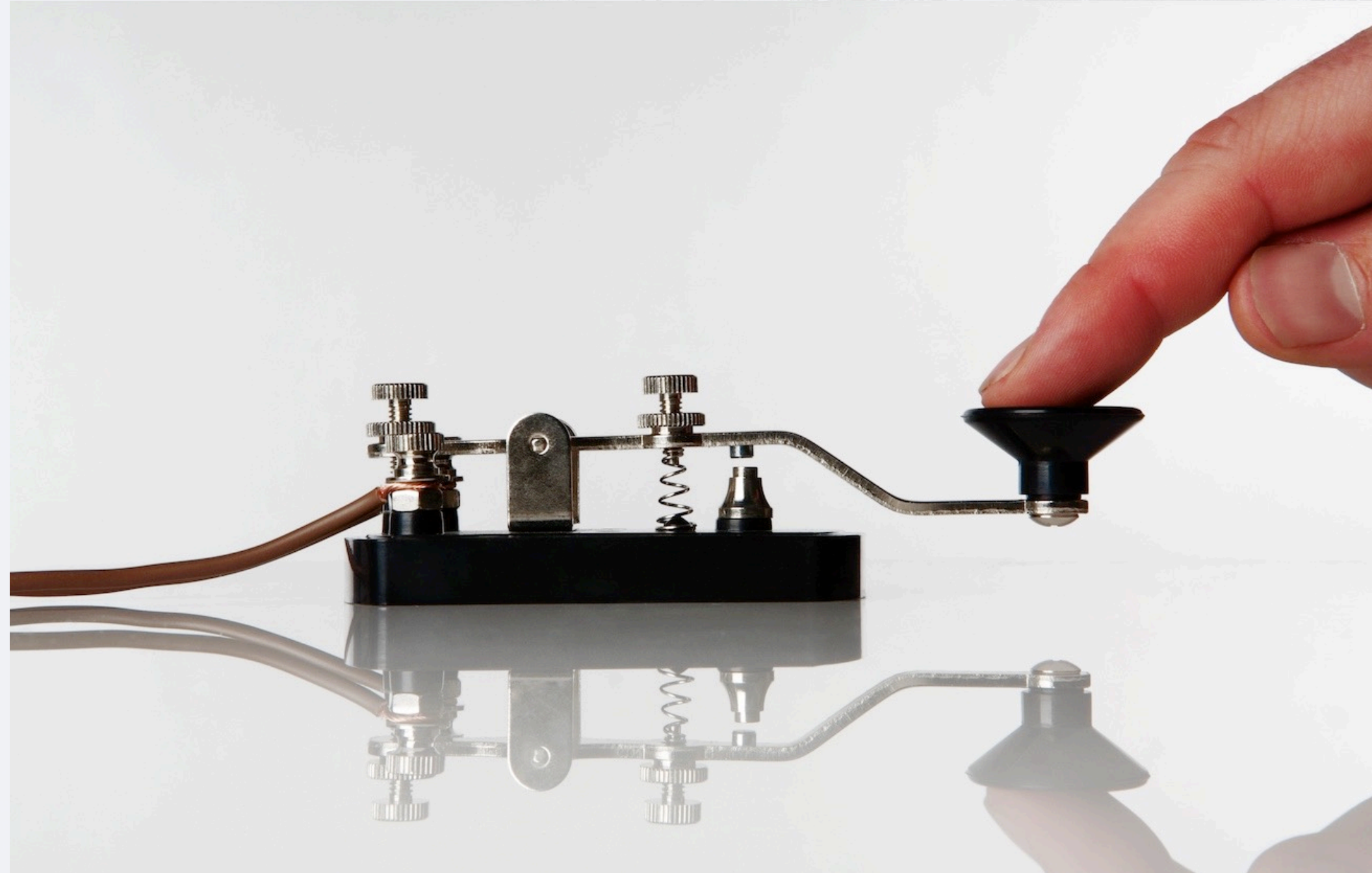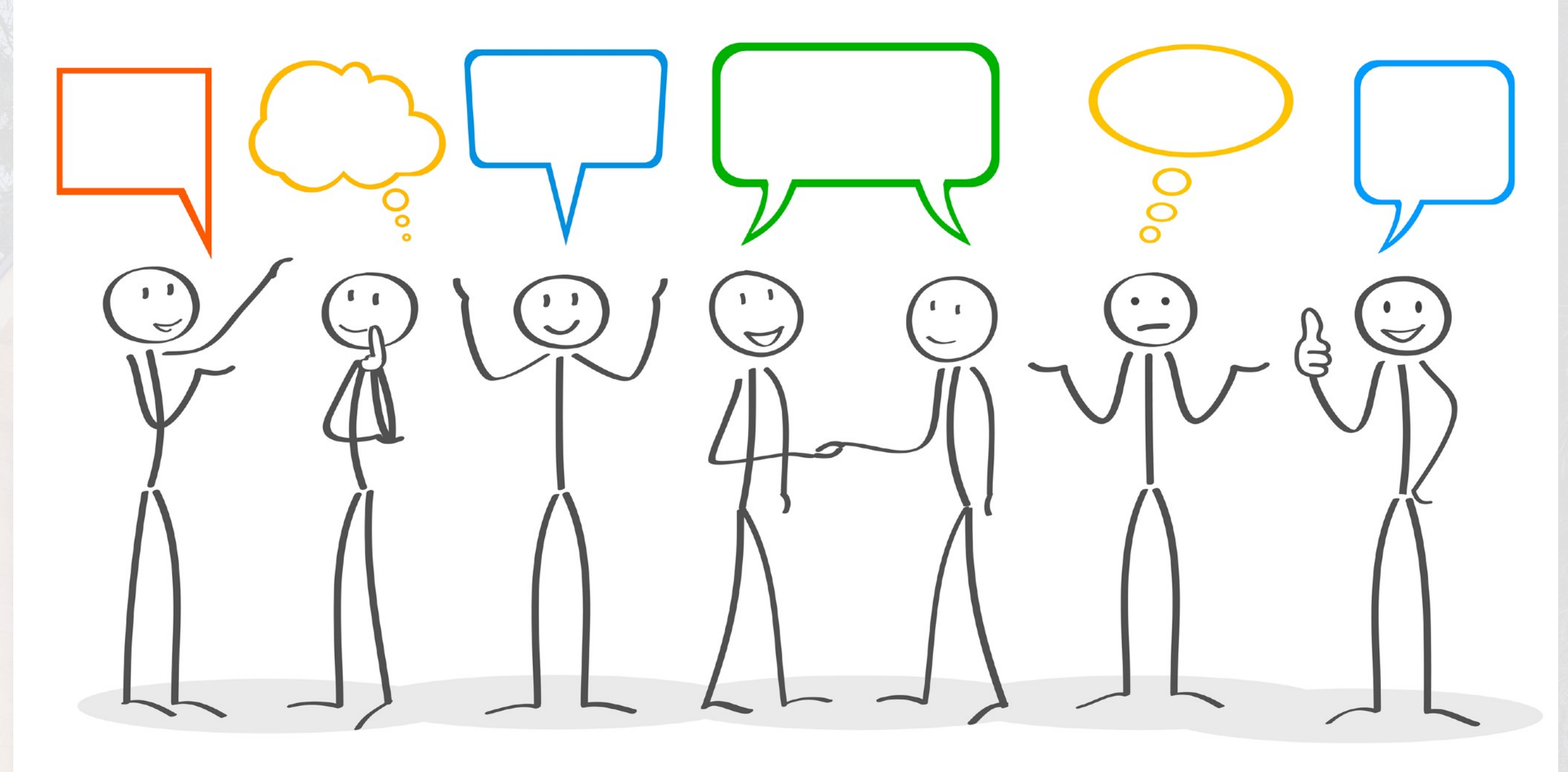
You *are* writing for an audience !

Think you're just
writing a message?

You are
Architecting a conversation!

A quick question, or a debate that lasts weeks?

Quick questions are **easy** in any medium

Debates are **hard** in written form, but that's what we need for **Deep Collective Thinking!** (aka "Shared Neurons")

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

"I have only made this letter longer because I have not had the time to make it shorter"

Clear & Concise: more work for you!

"Architecting a conversation"

"Write drunk, edit sober"
(writer -> editor)

Tools & Techniques

Enable multi-level reading?

excerpt from imdb.com

Title,
Abstract,
Trailer
help you decide
to watch the
movie or not.
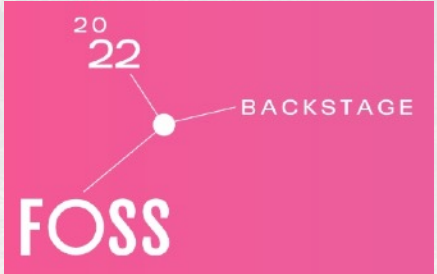
Enable multi-level reading!

[WEBSITE] please review the staged /board content

Subject line

Bertrand Delacretaz <bdelacretaz@apache.org>

Hi

That section of the website is currently built from its own svn
repository, for historical reasons, and it makes sense today to move
it under the main www-site repository.

Introduction

For now I have moved the content to a preview branch, see
https://issues.apache.org/jira/browse/INFRA-22772 for details.

Please review that staged content at
https://www-board-site-migration.staged.apache.org/board/ and comment,
or feel free to fix things directly in the
https://github.com/apache/www-site/tree/preview/board-site-migration/content/board
branch . Updates to that branch go live within a few minutes,

Body & References

I'll wait for the discussion (if any) to settle down before letting
infra activate this new setup to serve https://www.apache.org/board/

What's next?

-Bertrand

Provide readers with
multiple decision points
to stop reading
if not interested
in the next level of detail.

Work on your Concise Writing!

Last slide's text:

Provide readers with **multiple decision points** to stop reading if not interested in the next level of detail.

Could have been:

It is often a good idea to make sure people who are reading your message have multiple options (shall we say "decision points"?) where they can opt to stop reading the rest of your message. If they are not interested in more than the current level of detail, they can then stop reading to avoid using more energy and time than strictly needed. I hope I'm being clear.

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Use a simple vocabulary

ASD-STE100

ASD SIMPLIFIED TECHNICAL ENGLISH
SPECIFICATION ASD-STE100
EUROPEAN COMMUNITY TRADE MARK NO.
004901195
INTERNATIONAL SPECIFICATION FOR THE
PREPARATION OF TECHNICAL DOCUMENTATION
IN A CONTROLLED LANGUAGE

ISSUE 7 - JANUARY 2017
http://www.asd-

Example from https://robertobertuol.com/simplified-technical-english/
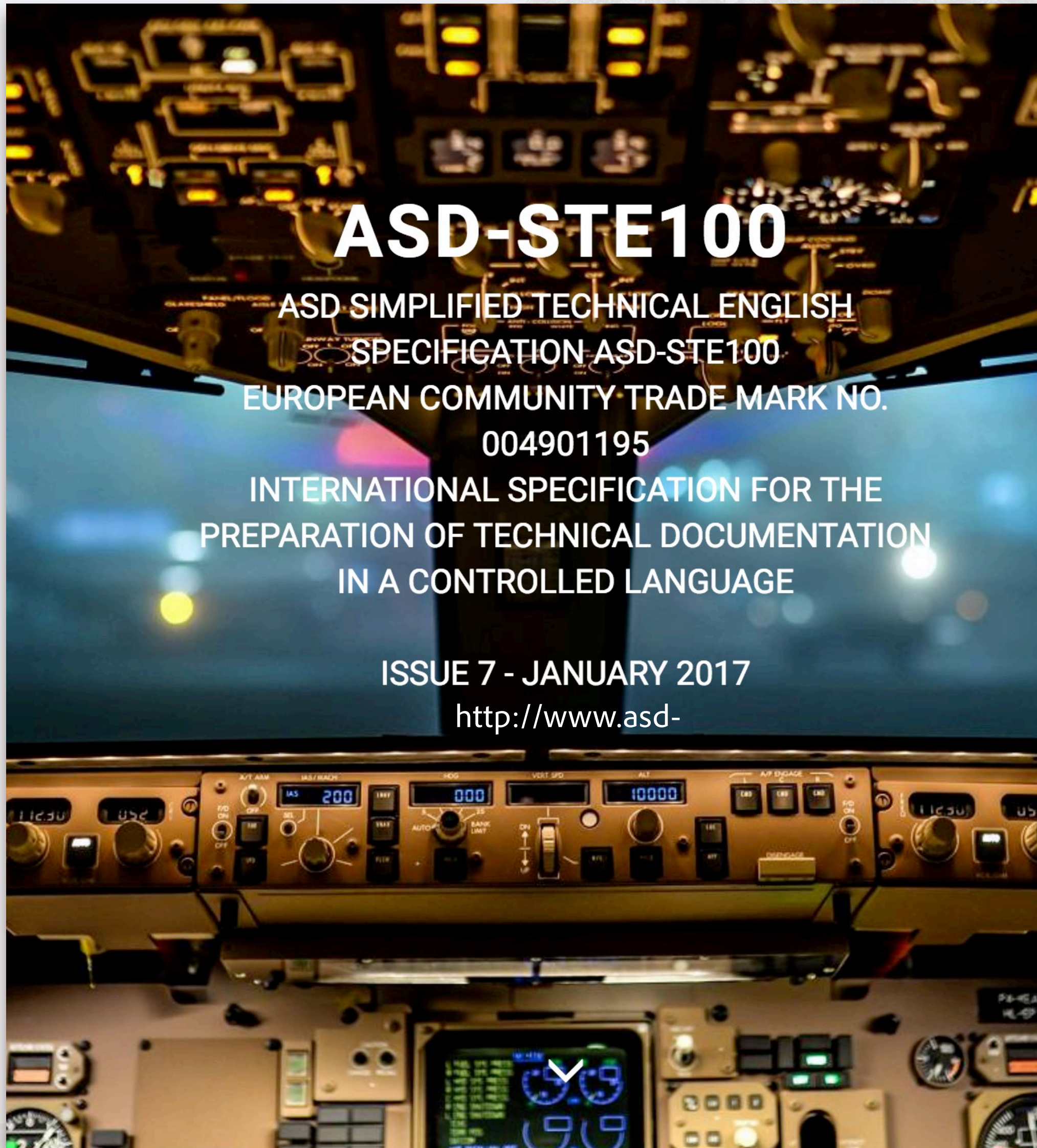
Complicated English → ASD-STE100

All valves must be turned slowly in order to prevent strong steam jets which can damage both hose lines and components.

Turn all valves slowly to prevent strong jets of steam.

Steam can damage hose lines and components.

Adobe

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Self-contained messages

[WEBSITE] please review the staged /board content

Bertrand Delacretaz <bdelacretaz@apache.org>

Hi

That section of the website is currently built from its own svn repository, for historical reasons, and it makes sense today to move it under the main www-site repository.

For now I have moved the content to a preview branch, see https://issues.apache.org/jira/browse/INFRA-22772 for details.

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I'll wait for the discussion (if any) to settle down before letting infra activate this new setup to serve https://www.apache.org/board/

-Bertrand

Body & References

Radiating Intent

Do not require more conversations than strictly needed.

Say it in a single message.

Allow for lazy consensus when possible

Can be even worse in chat, starting with "hello"

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Radiating Intent

Express what you intend to do,
unless someone objects

"Lazy Consensus",
Apache voting style,

https://community.apache.org/committers/lazyConsensus.html
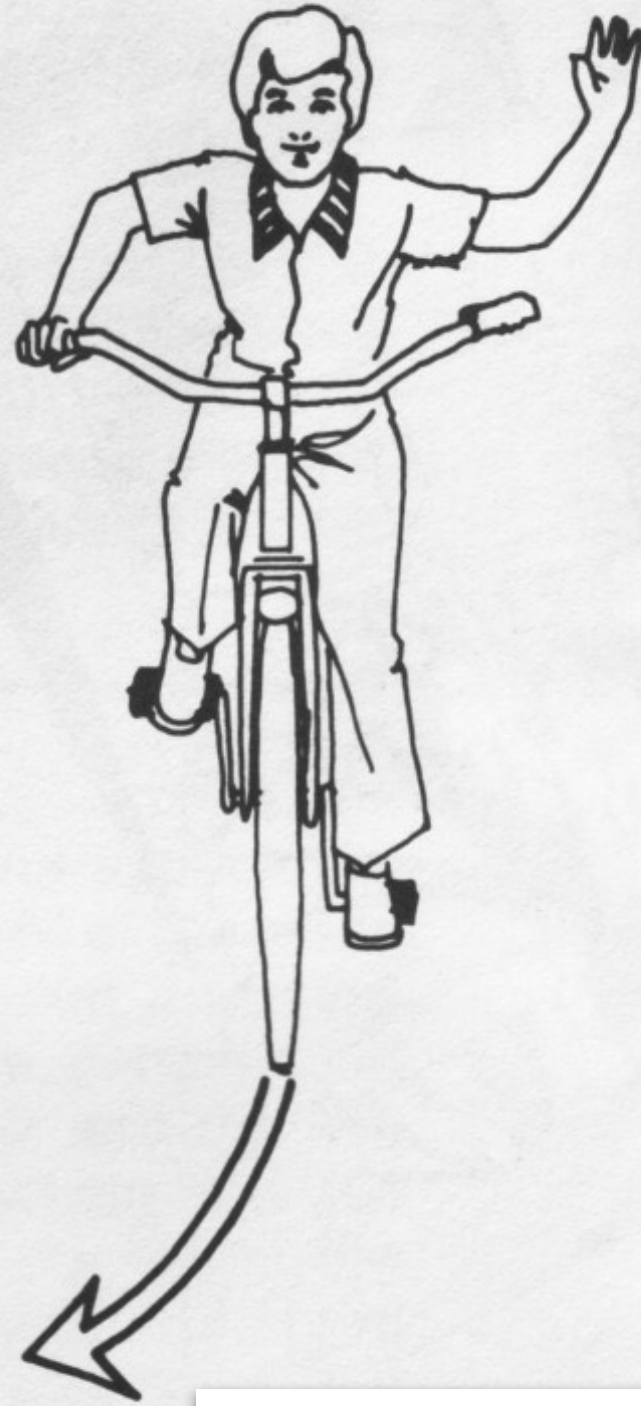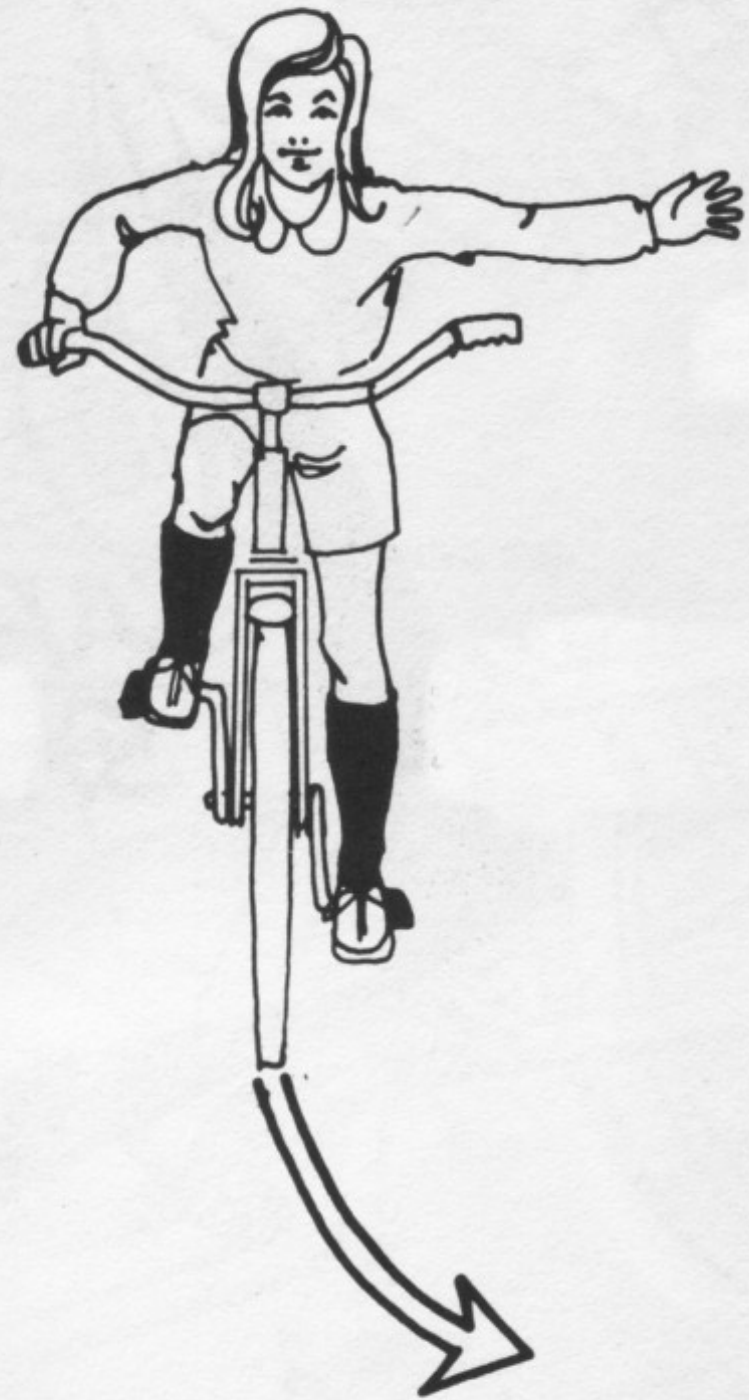
Image from "Hand Signals" on Wikipedia

I'll wait for the discussion (if any) to settle down before letting infra activate this new setup to serve https://www.apache.org/board/

-Bertrand

See also, Elizabeth Ayer on Medium: https://medium.com/@ElizAyer/dont-ask-forgiveness-radiate-intent-d36fd22393a3
and "Turn the ship around", book by David Marquet, https://davidmarquet.com/

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Use Precise Quoting

Bertrand Delacretaz <bdelacretaz@apache.org>
À dev ▾

Hi,

On Fri, Jun 8, 2018 at 4:48 PM <davidb@apache.org> wrote:
> ...It's a bit strange because as a committer I can publish the artifact into
> Maven Central...

Previous message

Maven Central is not an official source of Apache Releases, even
though our release archives do also end up there.

> ...Would it be an idea to change the rules around the Sling dist directory so
> that committers can also commit to it in addition to PMC members?...

Previous message

I'm fine with that, for specific committers who ask for access.

The svn notifications for
https://dist.apache.org/repos/dist/release/sling/ go to
commits@sling.apache.org, so we have reasonable PMC oversight.

-Bertrand

Without
Precise Quoting,
all discussions
are shallow...

also known as Usenet Quoting:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usenet_quoting

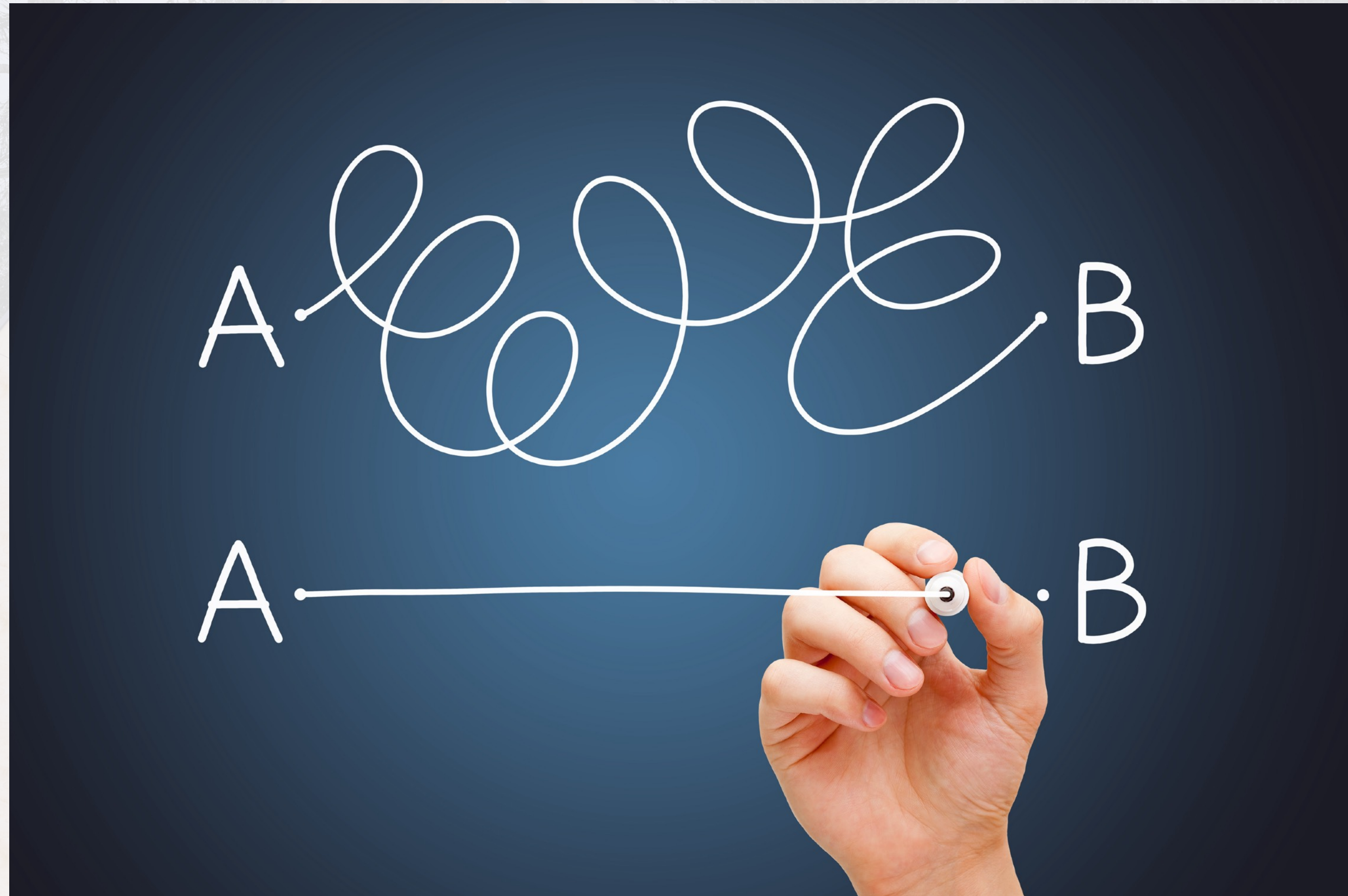# Create your own set of reworking questions

What else can I remove?

Write elsewhere and ping?

Would I read all this?
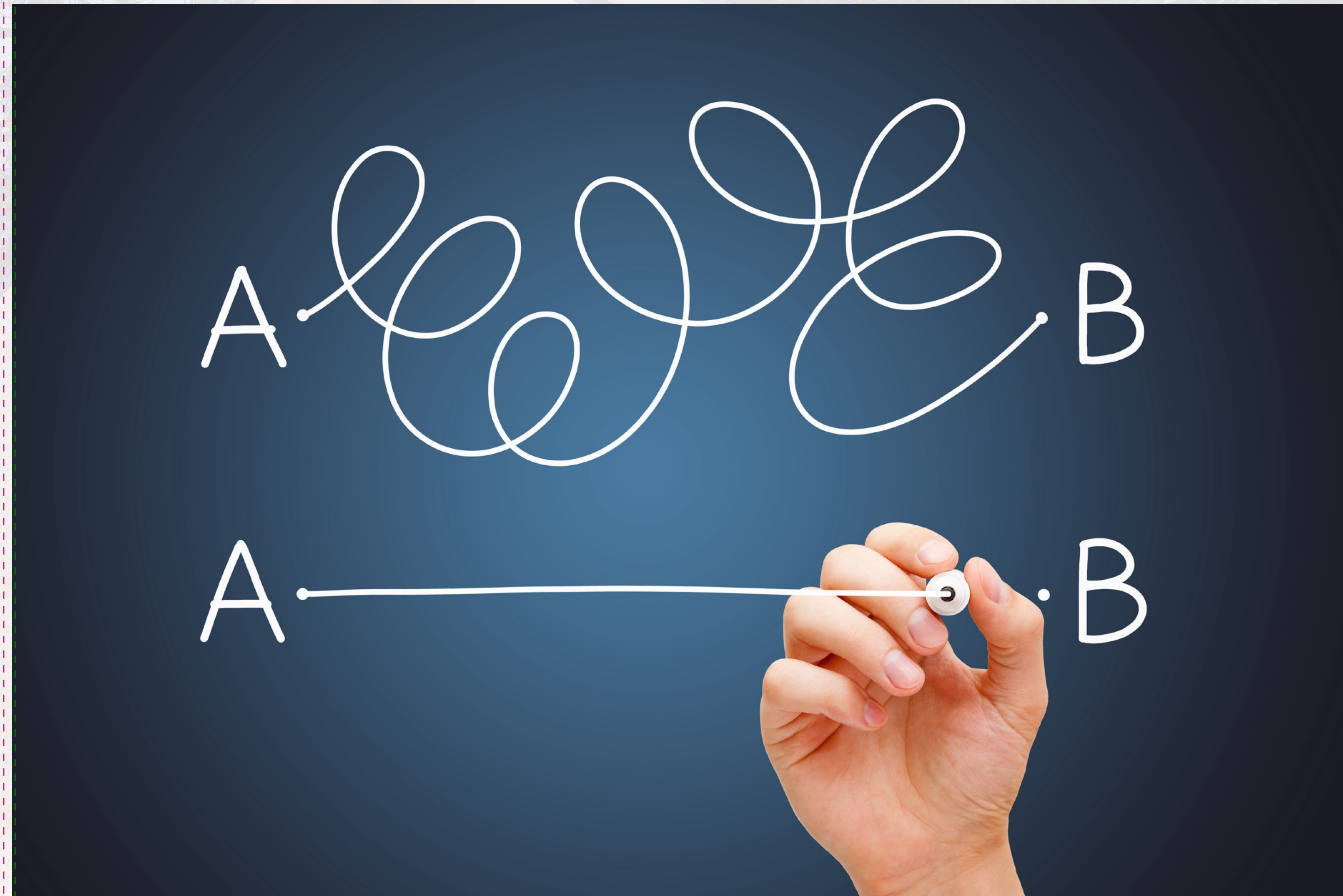
More URL references?

What's my boredom level?

Use diagrams!

HIGH cognitive load

LOW cognitive load

What else can I remove?

Write elsewhere and ping?

Would I read all this?

More URL references?

What's my boredom level?

A   B

A   B

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Coda

Coda

You are **architecting a conversation.**

Clear & concise is **more work** for you.

Written form debate is hard: **work on it** !

H A P P Y   R E A D E R S   !