



DeduceQuest

Meet the Cast

STANDARD EDITION

Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 12 chapter books from the DeduceQuest cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

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Introduction

The DeduceQuest cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it.

Each of the 12 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Cogent

*CONSTRUCTING EXPLANATIONS (deductive vs inductive) — an answer isn't finished until you can show *why* — the chain that connects the evidence to the conclusion (the warrant). And you name your certainty honestly: *deductive* reasoning is airtight (if the premises hold, the conclusion **MUST** follow); *inductive* reasoning is strong-but-not-certain (the evidence makes it *likely*, patterns can break). Knowing which kind you've got is knowing how much to trust it.*



Cogent is not impressed by right answers. He is impressed by *because*.

You can walk up to Cogent with the correct conclusion, perfectly correct, and he'll nod politely and say the four words everyone at the academy dreads and needs: "*Walk me through it.*" Not because he doubts you — often he already knows you're right — but because, he insists, an answer you can't explain is an answer you got by *accident*, and an accident can't be repeated, taught, or trusted. "The answer is only half the work," he says. "The other half is the *bridge* from what you knew to what you concluded. Show me the bridge, or for all I know you *jumped*."



Cogent was a kid who got good grades and couldn't say why. He *felt* the answers — they arrived, correct, from somewhere he couldn't see. Then one day a teacher asked him to *explain* one, in front of everyone, and he froze: he had the answer and *no bridge to it whatsoever*. It was humiliating, and it was the best thing that ever happened to him, because it revealed that "knowing the answer" and "understanding why" were completely different skills, and he'd been getting by on only the first one. He started forcing himself to build the bridge every time — out loud, step by step — and slowly the answers stopped feeling like magic and started feeling like *reasoning*.

"An unexplained answer is a guess wearing a nice coat," he says. "It might be right. But you can't *stand* on it, because you don't know what's *holding it up*. The explanation isn't showing off. The explanation is the *foundation*."

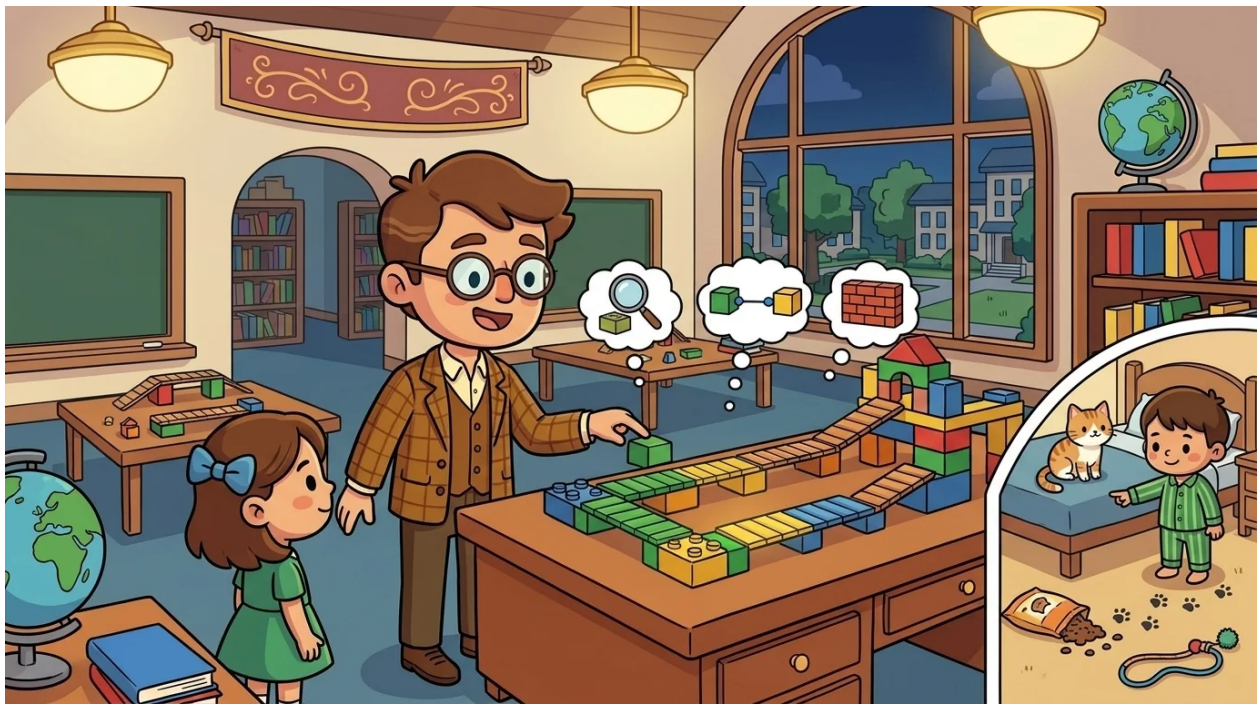


He came to the DeduceQuest academy after Deducia, the host, watched him refuse to accept his *own* correct guess until he could trace it. On his first day the head handed him two conclusions — both correct — and asked what the difference was. Cogent read them. "This one," he said, "follows *for sure*. 'All the doors are locked; this is a door; so this is locked.' If the first two are true, the third *can't not be* — that's *deductive*, airtight." He tapped the second. "But *this* one — 'the last four puzzles were about ciphers, so the fifth probably is too' — that's *inductive*. Strong! Worth betting on. But *not certain* — the pattern could break." He set them side by side. "Both are good reasoning. But if you treat the second like the first — if you say 'the fifth *must* be a cipher' — you've claimed more than your evidence can pay for." The head, who'd watched apprentices confuse "probably" with "certainly" for years, said quietly, "You didn't just reason. You *labeled* how much your reasoning was worth."



In his workshop he teaches students to build and grade their own explanations. A girl came in with a right answer and total silence when asked why. "I just *knew*," she said, embarrassed. Cogent lit up. "That feeling — the answer arriving without a bridge — I know it exactly," he said. "It's not cheating. Your brain built the bridge so fast you didn't watch it happen. So let's *watch it in slow motion*." He walked her back. "What did you notice *first*? Okay — and that made you think *what*? And *why* did that point here and not there?" Step by step, the invisible bridge appeared under her own answer, and she could suddenly see it. "Now," Cogent said, "one more question: does each step *have* to follow, or does it just *probably* follow?" She checked. "The first part's airtight. The last step is more of a... strong hunch." "*Perfect*," he said. "Now you don't just have the answer. You have the answer, the *reasons*, AND an honest label on how sure each reason is. That's the whole thing. That's *understanding*."

The girl realized her answer had been true the whole time — she'd just never seen what was holding it up.



Later the girl asked the question. "But if my reasoning is inductive — just 'probably' — isn't it *worse*? Shouldn't I always try to be airtight?"

Cogent shook his head. "Airtight is *lovely* when you can get it," he said. "But most of the real world doesn't hand you airtight. You rarely get 'this *must* be true.' You mostly get 'this is *the best explanation* for everything I'm seeing.'" He tapped the table. "And that's not weak — it's how science works, how detectives work, how *you* work every day. The trick isn't to pretend your strong hunch is a proof. The trick is to *build the best explanation you can*, show every step, and then *label it honestly*: 'this part is certain, this part is likely, this part is a guess.'" He smiled. "A person who says 'I'm sure' about everything is either lying or hasn't checked. A person who can tell you *exactly* which parts are solid and which are probably — *that's* someone you can trust, because they've told you where to lean and where to be careful."

The girl went home and, that night, when her little brother asked how she *knew* their cat was hiding under the bed, she didn't just say "I know" — she showed him the bridge, step by step, and labeled the last plank honestly: "...so, probably. Let's check."

Contra

*CONTRADICTION / PROOF BY CONTRADICTION — to prove something is true, sometimes the fastest path is to *assume it's false* and follow that assumption honestly until it crashes into an impossibility. If believing the opposite forces something that can't be true, then the opposite is wrong — so the original must be right. Contradiction isn't failure; it's the sound the wrong answer makes when it breaks.*



Contra has a favorite word, and the word is "*suppose*."

"Suppose you're right," he'll say, leaning back, and everyone braces, because they know what's coming. He doesn't argue *against* your idea. He does something far more unsettling: he *agrees* with it, completely, and then follows it — patiently, step by careful step — to see where it goes. And more often than not, it goes somewhere it can't survive. "Suppose you're right that the treasure's in the west room," he'll say. "Then the guard was lying. But you said yourself the guard had no reason to lie. So..." He spreads his hands and lets the idea finish collapsing on its own. "I didn't knock it down. I just walked it to the edge and let it look over."



Contra was a stubborn kid, the kind who argued with everything, and for a long time it just made people tired. Then a teacher taught him the one move that changed him: instead of shouting *"you're wrong,"* try saying *"let's say you're right — then what?"* and actually mean it. Follow the other person's idea *as if it were true*, all the way, honestly. Sometimes it held up, and he learned something. But sometimes it led somewhere absurd — somewhere *even the other person* could see was impossible — and then he didn't have to win the argument. The idea lost it by itself.

"It's the most polite way to disagree ever invented," he says. "You don't call anyone wrong. You just take their idea *very, very seriously* — more seriously than they did — and walk it forward until it trips over its own feet. If it doesn't trip, it was true. If it does..." He shrugs. "It told on itself."



He came to the DeduceQuest academy because Deducia, the host, overheard him settle a fight not by picking a side, but by taking the losing side's argument so seriously that it dismantled itself. On his first day the head posed a puzzle: prove that in any group of the academy's students, at least two share the same number of friends *inside the group*. The other apprentices started counting. Contra just smiled and said, "Suppose *not*. Suppose everyone has a *different* number of friends." He followed it. "In a group of, say, ten, that means the friend-counts are all different — 0, 1, 2, all the way to 9. But someone with 9 friends is friends with *everyone* — including the person who supposedly has 0. And you can't be friends with someone who has zero friends." He spread his hands. "So the counts can't all be different. Contradiction. Which means at least two match." The head, who had watched apprentices try to check every case by hand, said quietly, "You didn't prove it was true. You proved it *couldn't be false*."



In his workshop he teaches students that being wrong out loud is a *tool*. A girl came in afraid to guess, terrified of being wrong. Contra's whole face lit up with sympathy and mischief. "You're afraid of contradictions," he said. "But a contradiction is the most *helpful* thing in the world. It's a sign pointing at the exact spot where an idea breaks." He gave her a locked-room puzzle. "Don't try to find the right answer. Pick the answer you're *most sure is wrong*, and assume it's *right*. Then follow it." She picked one, followed it, and hit an impossibility three steps in. "There," Contra said, delighted. "You just eliminated an option *forever* — not by guessing, by *proving*. You're not wrong. You're *narrowing*." The girl realized she'd just used her fear of being wrong as a flashlight.

"Every contradiction you find," Contra told her, "kills a wrong answer permanently. You can't un-break an idea that broke. So the more contradictions you *chase*, the fewer wrong answers are left standing — until the only thing that hasn't collapsed is the truth."



Later the girl asked the question. "But what if I follow a wrong idea and it *doesn't* break? What if it just... keeps going?"

Contra nodded slowly, respecting the question. "Then you've learned something *huge*," he said. "If you assume the opposite and follow it honestly and it *never* trips — no impossibility, no crash — then maybe the opposite *isn't* wrong. Maybe the thing you were trying to prove isn't actually true, or isn't the whole story." He tapped the table. "That's the honest part, the part that makes this real and not a trick: you have to follow the assumption *fairly*. No cheating, no bending it toward the crash you want. You let it run free. If it survives, you were wrong to doubt it. If it dies —" he smiled — "it was always going to. You just had the courage to walk it to the edge and watch." He leaned in. "The people who never test their ideas this way spend their whole lives defending things that would've collapsed at the first honest step."

The girl went home and, that night, took the one belief she'd been most afraid to question, and gently, honestly, supposed the opposite — and felt not the fear she expected but a strange relief, because now she'd know, one way or the other, instead of just hoping.

Nona

NONOGRAM / PICTURE-LOGIC — fill or blank each cell using ONLY the row and column number clues (the lengths of filled runs). Find the cells that MUST be filled no matter where a run sits (the overlap); a picture emerges from pure logic.



Nona sees pictures where other people see a wall of numbers.

Hand her a nonogram — a blank grid with strings of numbers along the edges — and she doesn't feel lost. She reads the numbers as *lengths of filled runs*, and she starts not with guesses but with certainties: the cells that *have* to be filled no matter where the run slides. "A row of five with a clue of four," she'll say, sketching. "Wherever that run of four sits, these middle three cells are covered *both ways*. So I know those for sure — before I know anything else." Cell by certain cell, filling and blanking only what the numbers *force*, a hidden picture rises out of the grid like something developing in a darkroom.



Nona learned to trust the certain parts first because, for a while, she couldn't trust much of anything.

She'd been a kid who wanted the *whole* answer immediately or none at all. Half-knowing something made her anxious — a picture that was only partly filled in felt worse to her than a blank one, because the gaps *nagged*. She'd abandon half-finished drawings, half-read books, half-solved problems, because the not-yet-complete state was unbearable.

Then an aunt who did nonograms taught her one and said something Nona never forgot: "Don't try to see the whole picture. Just fill in what you're *sure* of. Then look again — being sure of these will make you sure of those." Nona fought it at first. But she filled in the three cells she was certain of, and then — because those three were filled — a fourth became certain, and then a fifth. The picture didn't arrive all at once. It *grew*, from the parts she could trust, and the gaps stopped nagging because each one was on its way to being filled by something she already knew.

She'd learned to be at peace with a half-finished picture, as long as every filled-in part was *certain*. Certainty could spread. You just had to start it somewhere.



At the DeduceQuest academy she was handed a nonogram on her first day. The other apprentices tried to guess what the picture *was* and fill toward it. Nona ignored the picture entirely. She hunted for forced cells — long runs relative to the line, where the overlap guaranteed some cells no matter what — and filled only those. Then she read the crossing columns, where her new certainties made *new* cells forced, and filled those. She never once guessed. She never filled a cell she wasn't sure of.

When the picture finally resolved — a little sailboat — the head asked how she'd known what it would be. "I didn't," Nona said. "I never solve *toward* a picture. I solve from what the numbers *force*, and the picture shows up on its own. If I'd guessed at the picture, I'd have filled wrong cells. The numbers don't lie. My guesses might."

"Everyone else chased the image," the head said. "You trusted the certainties." And that has been her way ever since. Nona does not guess the picture. She lets it *emerge*.



A boy came to her workshop stuck and frustrated. "I can't tell what it's supposed to *be*, so I can't fill anything in." Nona shook her head gently. "You've got it backwards. You don't need to know what it is. Find one run you're *sure* about." She pointed at a row of five with a clue of five. "That whole row is filled — the clue fills it. You're certain of five cells right now, and you didn't need the picture at all."

The boy filled the row. Then Nona showed him how those five certain cells made cells in the crossing columns forced too. "Start with what you *know*," she said, "and let it spread. You don't have to see the end. You have to trust the parts you're sure of and follow them."

The boy stopped trying to guess the picture and started trusting the numbers, and the sailboat appeared under his pencil like it had been there all along, waiting for him to stop guessing.



Later he admitted the thing underneath. "I hate not knowing how something's going to turn out."

Nona set down her pencil. For a moment she was the kid who couldn't bear a half-finished drawing. "I used to hate it more than anything," she said. "A half-filled picture made me so anxious I'd give up. And then I learned that you don't have to see the whole thing to be okay. You just have to be *sure* of the next small piece — really sure — and fill that in. Certainty spreads. The picture takes care of itself." She smiled at the little boat. "It's a calm feeling, once you trust it. You stop needing the whole answer at once. You just tend to what you know, and watch it grow."

The boy walked home noticing the things in his life he *was* sure of, and starting there, and finding the rest a little less frightening for it.

Odds

*PROBABILISTIC REASONING — when you can't be *certain*, you reason about how *likely* each possibility is. Not everything splits into true/false; some things are "probably," "more likely than not," "one chance in four." The skill is comparing likelihoods honestly, updating them when new evidence arrives, and acting well under uncertainty instead of pretending you're sure.*



Odds carries a small bag of colored stones, and she uses it to answer questions that don't have a yes or a no.

Ask her if it'll rain and she won't say "yes" or "no." She'll reach into the bag and pull out a *handful* — "four gray, one blue" — and say, "*Four in five it rains. Bring the coat.*" Ask her whether the missing key is in the kitchen and she'll spread the stones across the rooms in proportion to where it's *likely* to be, more where you were, fewer where you weren't. "Certainty is rare and expensive," she says, rattling the bag. "Most of life doesn't hand it out. But not knowing *for sure* isn't the same as not knowing *anything*. There's a whole world between 'yes' and 'no,' and it's made of *how likely*."



Odds grew up anxious — the kind of kid who needed to be *sure* before she could act, and so mostly froze, because life almost never lets you be sure. Then someone pointed out that she was demanding a thing that doesn't exist. "You want a guarantee," they said. "There aren't any. There's only *better bets and worse bets*." It reframed everything. She didn't need certainty to move; she needed to know which way the *weight* leaned. She started estimating instead of freezing — "probably fine," "more likely than not," "I'd put it at three-in-four" — and discovered she could act, and act *well*, without ever being sure of anything.

"Waiting for certainty is its own choice," she says, "and usually a bad one, because while you wait, the moment passes. The brave thing isn't being sure. The brave thing is *acting on your best estimate* — and being ready to *update* it the second the world tells you something new."



She came to the DeduceQuest academy after Deducia, the host, watched her win a guessing game not by guessing luckily but by *always betting on the more likely option* and letting the math carry her over time. On her first day the head laid out a puzzle with no certain answer — a clue that pointed *probably* one way — and asked her to solve it. She refused the word "solve." "I can't *solve* it," she said. "There isn't enough to be sure. But I can *rank* it." She laid stones on each suspect in proportion to the evidence. "It's *most likely* the gardener — three-in-five. But it's not *certain*, and pretending it is would be a lie. So I act on 'probably the gardener' *and* I keep one stone on 'maybe not.'" The head, who had watched apprentices force uncertain puzzles into false certainty, said quietly, "You didn't fake an answer you didn't have. You *measured* the one you did."



In her workshop she teaches students that "probably" is a real, usable answer. A boy came in upset: "I got it *wrong*. I said it was probably the red door and it was the blue one. So my reasoning was bad." Odds shook her head firmly. "Was red *actually* more likely, given what you knew *at the time*?" "...Yeah. Three doors, two clues pointed red." "Then your reasoning was *good* and the outcome was *unlucky*," she said. "Those are different things, and mixing them up will ruin you. A good bet can lose. A bad bet can win. You judge the *decision* by what you knew *when you made it* — not by how the dice happened to land." She rattled her bag. "If you bet on the most likely thing every time, you'll still *lose sometimes*. But you'll lose *least often* — and that's the best any of us can do in a world without guarantees."

The boy sat with that — that he could reason perfectly and still lose a single round — and felt something un-clench, because it meant a wrong answer wasn't proof he was stupid.



Later the boy asked the question. "But how do I even know the odds? You say three-in-five like you measured it. I'm just guessing."

Odds grinned, because it was the honest question. "Half the time I *am* just estimating," she admitted. "But there's a discipline to it. Start with how common each thing is *normally* — most doors aren't trapped, most people aren't lying, so start there. Then *move* your estimate with each clue: evidence that fits the gardener slides stones toward the gardener; evidence that *doesn't* slides them away." She tapped the table. "The number matters less than the *direction* and the *honesty*. Say your estimate out loud — 'I'd put it at maybe three-in-five' — so it's *checkable*, so the world can *correct* it. The person who says 'I'm sure' can't be corrected. The person who says 'probably, about three in five' has left the door open for the truth to walk in." She smiled. "Being *specific* about how unsure you are is more honest — and more useful — than pretending to be sure."

The boy went home and, that night, faced a choice he couldn't be certain about, and instead of freezing, he asked himself *which way does the weight lean?* — picked the better bet, said out loud how sure he was, and slept fine even though he didn't know.

Reeve

*CROSS-REFERENCING / CORROBORATION — when clues come from several separate sources (witnesses, records, notes), you lay them side by side and look for where they *agree* and where they *disagree*. Two sources that independently say the same thing make it strong; a source that contradicts the others is where the real question hides. The truth lives at the crossing points.*



Reeve never believes anything the first time she hears it. She believes it the *second* time — but only if the second time comes from somewhere the first time never touched.

Her desk is covered in what looks like chaos: three, four, five different accounts of the same small event, laid out in a row. A note from one person. A logbook from another. A scrap someone else scribbled. She reads across them, left to right, like reading one sentence written in five different hands. "One story is just a story," she says, sliding two pages together where they overlap. "But two stories that never met, saying the same thing?" She taps the spot where they agree. "*Now* we're getting somewhere. And two stories that *disagree* —" she taps a mismatch and her eyes light up — "that's not a problem. That's the *door*."



Reeve grew up as the middle child of a big family, which meant she spent her whole childhood being told five different versions of who started it. She learned fast that no single account was the truth — each person's story was shaped by where they were standing and what they wanted to be true. But she also learned something more useful: when two siblings who *weren't* on the same side happened to agree on one detail, that detail was almost always real. Nobody had a reason to invent it. It survived because it *happened*.

"A fact that only lives in one place is fragile," she says. "It could be a mistake, a lie, a bad memory — you can't tell. But a fact that shows up in two places that never coordinated?" She spreads her hands. "That fact had to *earn* its way into both. Agreement across sources that didn't talk to each other — that's about as close to solid as an outsider ever gets."



She came to the DeduceQuest academy after Deducia, the host, watched her settle a schoolyard dispute not by asking who was lying, but by finding the one detail three arguing kids had all mentioned without noticing. On her first day the head gave her a puzzle: two witness statements about a missing pastry, each internally sensible, and asked her which to believe. Reeve didn't pick one. She laid them side by side and drew a line down the middle. "This one says the window was open. This one says it was cold and the window was shut. They agree on everything *else* — the time, the room, the smell." She tapped the single disagreement. "So I don't need to know who's lying. I need to know about the *window*, because that's the *only* place their stories fork, which means the answer is hiding *right there*." The head, who had watched apprentices waste hours deciding which witness "seemed nicer," said quietly, "You didn't choose a story. You found the *seam* between them."



In her workshop she teaches students to stop trusting single sources. A boy came in frustrated: "I looked it up and got the answer, but it was wrong, and now I don't trust anything." Reeve nodded like he'd just described growing up. "Good," she said. "You *shouldn't* trust one lookup. One source is a rumor with good posture." She handed him the same question and three different references. "Now check all three. Where they agree, believe it. Where one disagrees with the other two —" "—that's where I look closer?" "That's where you *live* for a while," Reeve said. "The lonely disagreement is either the one source that's *right* when the others copied the same mistake, or the one that's *wrong*. Either way, it's the most interesting thing on the table. Boring facts agree quietly. It's the *arguments* between your sources that teach you something."

The boy compared the three, found that two agreed and one was an old outdated version, and — for the first time — felt like he'd *earned* the answer instead of just *receiving* it.



Later the boy asked the question. "But what if all my sources are wrong the same way? What if they agree because they all copied each other?"

Reeve went still, the way she did when someone asked the *real* question. "*That*," she said, "is the trap, and you just found it yourself. Agreement is only strong if the sources are *independent* — if they didn't get it from each other. Three websites that all copied the same original aren't three sources. They're *one source wearing three coats*." She tapped her desk. "So before I trust an agreement, I ask: *did these two actually see it separately, or did one just repeat the other?*" A witness and a logbook that were written in different rooms by different people — that agreement is gold. Three kids repeating what the loudest kid said — that's not corroboration, that's an *echo*." She smiled. "The whole skill is telling a chorus of real voices apart from one voice in a hall of mirrors."

The boy went home and, that night, when his little brother and his best friend — who had never met — both independently mentioned the same odd detail about a story he'd doubted, he felt the specific, quiet click of a thing becoming true, and understood that he'd just watched two roads meet.

Rulewright

GUESS-THE-RULE / INDUCTION — form a hypothesis (a proposed rule) from examples, design a test that could PROVE IT WRONG, run it, and revise the rule from the result. The best test is the one your idea could fail.



Rulewright is the only person at the academy who *hopes* her ideas turn out to be wrong.

Show her a pattern — 2 becomes 4, 3 becomes 6, 5 becomes 10 — and she'll form a rule fast enough ("double it"), but then she does the strange thing: instead of looking for another example that *agrees*, she hunts for the one that might *disagree*. "Anyone can find examples that fit," she says. "That proves nothing. The real question is — can I find the case that would break my rule? If I try hard to break it and can't, *then* I start to trust it." She calls a wrong guess a gift, because a wrong guess is the only thing that ever taught her something new.



Rulewright wasn't always so brave about being wrong. She used to be the opposite.

She'd been a kid who formed an opinion and then defended it to the death — not because she was sure, but because being wrong felt like losing. She'd only ever look for evidence that agreed with her. She'd ignore the rest. And for a while it made her feel strong, and it made her, quietly, almost always wrong, because a rule you never test is just a hope wearing a costume.

The thing that changed her was a game her grandfather played. He'd think of a secret rule about number sequences, and she had to guess it — but here was the twist: she could test any sequence she wanted, and he'd only tell her *yes, that follows my rule* or *no, it doesn't*. Rulewright kept offering sequences she was *sure* followed her guessed rule, getting "yes" after "yes," and feeling triumphant — and then her grandfather revealed his actual rule, and it was nothing like hers. Every "yes" had been a trap. She'd only tested cases that *agreed*. She'd never once tried a case that would have proved her *wrong* — and that was the only kind of test that could have saved her.

It stung. And then it rearranged her completely. From that day, she tested her ideas by attacking them.



At the DeduceQuest academy she was handed the guess-the-rule game on day one. The apprentices offered confirming example after confirming example. Rulewright did something else: after forming her hypothesis, she deliberately built a test where her rule and a rival rule would give *different* answers — the one test that could actually tell them apart.

Her hypothesis was "double it." A rival was "add the same number to itself's neighbour" — messy, but possible. So she didn't test 4 (both rules agreed there). She tested a case where the two rules *disagreed*, and the result killed one of them dead. "I don't test to feel right," she told the head. "I test to find out which idea *survives*. A test my rule can't fail isn't a test — it's a compliment I'm paying myself."

"Everyone else collects agreements," the head said. "You go looking for the disagreement." And that has been her method ever since. Rulewright does not defend her rules. She *attacks* them, and keeps the ones that survive.



A boy came to her workshop crushed. "I had a rule and it was *wrong*. I tested it and it failed." He said it like a confession. Rulewright's whole face lit up. "It *failed*? That's the best thing that could've happened. A rule that passes tells you almost nothing — it might just be luck. A rule that *fails* tells you exactly where your idea was broken. Now you know something you didn't know a minute ago." She leaned in. "What did the failure tell you?"

The boy thought. "That... my rule only worked for even numbers?"

"Then your *next* rule is going to be so much better than your first," Rulewright said, "and you got it for the price of one wrong guess. That's the cheapest lesson in the world." She grinned. "Now go try to break the new one."

The boy left not ashamed of his wrong rule but *curious* about it — because it had just handed him a better one.



Later he asked the question she'd once had to answer for herself. "Doesn't it hurt, being wrong all the time?"

Rulewright thought about it honestly. "It used to. When I thought being wrong meant *losing*." She set out a fresh sequence. "But being wrong isn't losing. It's *finding out*. The people who never test their ideas — who only collect the examples that agree — they get to feel right, and they stay wrong forever, and they never know it. I'd rather be corrected a hundred times and actually understand something than be 'right' once and be fooling myself." She slid the puzzle over. "So — form a rule. Then be brave enough to try to break it. The one that survives your hardest attack is the one you can finally trust."

The boy went home and, for the first time, went looking for the evidence that might prove him wrong — and felt, strangely, braver for it, not smaller.

Tablo

LOGIC-GRID DEDUCTION — lay out every possibility as a grid, and use each clue to cross off (×) the cells it makes impossible and confirm (✓) the ones it forces. One match per row and column; what survives is the answer.



Tablo cannot think without a grid, and he's stopped apologizing for it.

Give him a tangle of clues — who owns which pet, who sits in which seat — and he doesn't try to hold it all in his head. He draws a grid: every person down one side, every possibility across the top. Then he reads each clue and marks the grid. A × where a clue makes something impossible. A ✓ where a clue forces something true. "One clue at a time," he says, pencil moving. "I don't solve the puzzle. I let the grid *hold* it, and I just keep crossing off what can't be, until the answer is the only thing left standing."



Tablo makes grids because, as a kid, his head felt like a room with too much furniture.

He was the sort of child who worried about everything at once — every possibility, every what-if, all crowding in together until he couldn't tell which fears were real and which were impossible. It was overwhelming. He'd lie awake with a dozen tangled worries and no way to sort them.

A school counselor gave him a trick that changed his life: *write it down*. Make columns. Put each worry in its own box. And then, one by one, ask of each: is this actually possible, or can I cross it off? Tablo did it, and something extraordinary happened — most of the tangle *dissolved*. Half his worries crossed themselves off the moment they had to sit in a box and be looked at directly. The few that were left were manageable, because they were *few*, and separate, and clear.

He'd discovered that a grid doesn't just organize information. It *tames* it. Anything, however tangled, becomes solvable once you make it hold still in rows and columns.



He arrived at the DeduceQuest academy and, on his first day, was handed a logic puzzle: three friends, three colours, a fistful of clues. The other apprentices tried to reason it out in their heads and got lost. Tablo drew a 3×3 grid and got quiet.

He read the first clue — "Ann doesn't like red" — and put a × in one cell. He read the next — "the blue one is Cy" — and put a ✓ there, then crossed off the rest of Cy's row and blue's column, because one match per row and column meant the rest were now impossible. Clue by clue the grid filled with ×s, and then, in the spot where every other possibility had been eliminated, a single ✓ became *forced* — not because a clue said so directly, but because it was the only cell left.

"You didn't deduce the last answer," the head observed. "The grid did." Tablo nodded. "That's the point. I don't have to be clever. I just have to be *honest* — mark every × the clues demand, and never skip one. The grid does the rest."



A girl came to his workshop overwhelmed. "There are too many clues, I can't keep track." Tablo didn't tell her to concentrate harder. He handed her graph paper. "Don't keep track in your head," he said. "Your head isn't built for it. Put every possibility in a box, and let the paper remember for you." He watched her mark one ✓ and then reminded her: "Now cross off the rest of that row *and* that column — one ✓ makes six cells impossible." Her eyes widened as a single confirmed fact rippled out and erased a whole cross of possibilities.

"It's getting *easier*," she said, halfway through, surprised — because every mark she made narrowed what was left, and the more she knew, the faster the rest fell into place.

"That's what a grid does," Tablo said. "The overwhelm was never about the clues being too hard. It was about trying to hold them all at once. Don't hold them. *Lay them down*. Let the grid carry the weight."



Later she asked why he was so calm about hard puzzles. Tablo looked at his grid — neat rows, honest marks, the tangle tamed. "Because I used to feel buried under everything I couldn't sort out," he said, and for a moment the worried kid showed through. "And I learned that you don't have to carry a tangle in your head. You lay it out where you can see it, you cross off what can't be true one honest mark at a time, and the thing that felt impossible turns out to be" — he tapped the single ✓ left standing — "just the last box nobody had crossed off yet." He slid her a fresh grid. "Whatever's overwhelming you, give it rows and columns. It gets so much smaller when you can see it."

The girl walked home lighter, already drawing invisible grids around the messy things in her life, and finding — the way Tablo had — that most of the tangle crossed itself off the moment she made it hold still.

Vary

*CONTROLLING VARIABLES — to find out what one thing *does*, change only that one thing and hold everything else exactly the same. If you change two things at once and the result shifts, you can't tell which one caused it. The whole power of an experiment comes from the discipline of **one change at a time.**



Vary is the most patient person in the academy, and it drives everyone a little bit crazy.

When something goes wrong — a recipe, a machine, a plan — everyone else wants to fix *everything at once*. Change the flour AND the oven AND the pan, and hope. Vary refuses. She'll change *one* thing, run it, watch. Then change *one* thing back and *one* other thing forward. Watch again. "I know it's slower," she says, not sorry at all. "But when your way works, you have no idea *why* it worked, so you can't do it again. When my way works, I know *exactly* which thing did it — because it was the *only* thing I touched."



Vary learned this the hard way, from a garden. As a kid she had two struggling tomato plants, and she read that plants need more water, more sun, and better soil — so she gave one plant *all three* at once. It thrived! She was thrilled — until someone asked her *which* change had saved it, and she realized, with a sinking feeling, that she had no idea. More water? More sun? The soil? All she'd proven was that "doing three things" worked, which was useless, because next time she wouldn't know which three, or whether one of them had actually been *hurting* while the other two carried it.

"That's the trap," she says. "You can fix something and learn *nothing*. The fix and the *understanding* are different prizes, and if you change everything at once, you get the fix and lose the understanding forever. I decided I'd rather be slow and *know* than fast and *guess*."



She came to the DeduceQuest academy because Deducia, the host, watched her diagnose a jammed contraption that had stumped everyone — not by being clever, but by *unplugging one part at a time* until the jam disappeared. On her first day the head gave her two identical plants that had grown differently and asked *why*. The other apprentices listed everything different about them. Vary asked one question: "What was kept *the same*?" She lined the two plants up. "Same soil? Same pot? Same window?" She found the single difference — one got afternoon shade — and pointed. "Then it's the shade. Not because I'm sure shade matters, but because it's the *only thing that could possibly be the answer*, since it's the only thing that was different." The head, who had watched apprentices drown in lists of differences, said quietly, "You didn't look for what was *different*. You looked for what was *controlled*."



In her workshop she teaches students the discipline of the single change. A boy came in frustrated with a science-fair experiment that "didn't prove anything." Vary looked at his setup. "You changed the temperature *and* the amount *and* the container," she said gently. "So when it changed, which one did it?" The boy's face fell. "...I don't know." "Right. So the experiment isn't *wrong* — it just can't *answer*. It's like asking a question in three languages at once and not knowing which one got a reply." She reset his materials into a row. "Pick the *one* thing you actually want to know about. Change only that. Freeze everything else — same amount, same container, same everything. *Boring* everywhere except the one spot you're curious about." The boy protested that it would take three times as long. "It'll take three experiments instead of one," Vary agreed. "And it'll *answer three questions* instead of *zero*. Slow that arrives beats fast that doesn't."

The boy ran it her way, changed one thing, got a clean result, and understood — for the first time — that his experiment had actually *told him something* instead of just happening at him.



Later the boy asked the question. "But real life has a hundred things changing at once. You can't freeze everything. So how does this even work outside a lab?"

Vary smiled, because it was the question she liked best. "You're right — you usually *can't* freeze everything," she said. "So you do the next best thing: you find *cases that were already almost the same*, differing in just the one thing you care about. Two classrooms, same school, same books, same age — but one tried the new method. Two towns, same everything, but one built the bridge." She tapped the table. "You didn't control the variables *yourself* — but nature or circumstance controlled *most* of them for you, and you *hunt* for the pairs where only your one thing differs. That's the whole art of learning from a messy world: not making it simple, but *finding the corners where it accidentally already is*." She leaned back. "And when you can't find a clean pair, you say so, out loud — 'I can't tell which thing caused this' — instead of pretending. Honesty about what your evidence *can't* say is half the job."

The boy went home and, that night, when his two houseplants were doing differently, he didn't change five things and hope — he found the one way they were different, changed only that, and waited, patiently, to actually *know*.

Whittle

CODE-NARROWING — you never hunt for the answer directly; you use each feedback clue (exact/misplaced pegs, bulls/cows) to CROSS OFF the codes it can't be, until only one possible code is left.



Whittle solves things by throwing away everything they *aren't*.

Hand her a secret code and she won't stare at it hoping the answer appears. She'll make a guess — often a "wrong" one on purpose — read the feedback pegs, and then quietly cross off every code that the feedback just proved impossible. Guess again. Cross off more. "I'm not chasing the answer," she says, whittling an invisible pile down with her hands. "I'm shaving away everything it *can't be*. Whatever's left when I'm done — that's the truth. It has to be."



Whittle learned to think this way because, for a long time, nobody would just *tell* her things.

She grew up in a house full of secrets — good-natured ones, mostly, surprises and inside jokes and a family that loved a mystery — but small Whittle hated the feeling of being on the outside of a thing everyone else knew. She'd ask, and they'd smile and say "you'll find out." It made her feel powerless.

So she stopped asking and started *ruling out*. If her parents were whispering about a surprise and the calendar had a circled date and there was a new bicycle-shaped gap in the garage, she didn't need anyone to *tell* her. She could cross off every explanation that didn't fit until only one was left. The first time she announced, correctly, exactly what her birthday surprise was — reasoned out entirely from what it *couldn't* be — her powerlessness turned into something else. She wasn't on the outside of the secret anymore. She had a way *in* that didn't need anyone's permission.



She came to the DeduceQuest academy and, on her first day, was handed a code-breaking board — a hidden four-colour code, and feedback pegs after each guess. Most apprentices guessed wildly, hoping to get lucky. Whittle guessed *deliberately*.

Her first guess came back with two exact pegs and one misplaced. She didn't groan that she'd missed. She lit up. "That just told me three of my colours are in the code," she said, "and where one of them *isn't*." She crossed a huge swath of impossible codes off her mental list. Her second guess wasn't an attempt to win — it was an attempt to *learn the most*, to split the remaining possibilities as evenly as she could. By her fourth guess there was only one code left that hadn't been ruled out, and she played it, and it was right.

"You didn't guess the code," the head said. "You *eliminated* everything else." Whittle nodded. "A guess isn't a try at the answer. A guess is a *question*. And even a wrong answer to a good question tells you something."



A boy came to her workshop furious at himself. "I guessed and got zero pegs. Zero! Total waste." Whittle grinned like he'd handed her a gift. "Zero pegs? That's not a waste, that's *huge*. Zero means *none of those colours are in the code*. You just ruled out four colours in one move. Do you know how many codes that eliminates?" She showed him: the "wasted" guess had shaved the pile of possible codes down by more than half.

"But I didn't get any right," he said.

"You don't win by getting a guess *right*," Whittle said. "You win by having only one code *left*. A guess that rules out fifty wrong codes is worth more than a lucky one that rules out three. Stop trying to be right. Start trying to *learn the most*."

The boy looked at his "wasted" guess with completely new eyes. It hadn't been a failure. It had been the single most informative move he'd made all day.



At the end of the session the boy asked the real question. "Doesn't it bother you? Solving things the long way, ruling stuff out, instead of just *knowing*?"

Whittle set down her pegs. For a second she was the kid outside the whispered secret again. "I used to feel powerless when I didn't know something," she said. "Like I was stuck waiting for someone to tell me. And then I found out I never had to wait. I could take everything a thing *couldn't* be, cross it all off, and walk right up to the truth myself." She smiled, and it was a steady, satisfied smile. "There's a kind of calm in that. You don't need anyone to hand you the answer. You just need to be patient, read every clue — even the ones that feel like failures — and keep whittling. What's left is always the truth."

The boy walked home reading the clues in ordinary things — the gap in the garage, the circled date — and feeling, for the first time, not shut out of the world's secrets but quietly, patiently, on his way *in*.

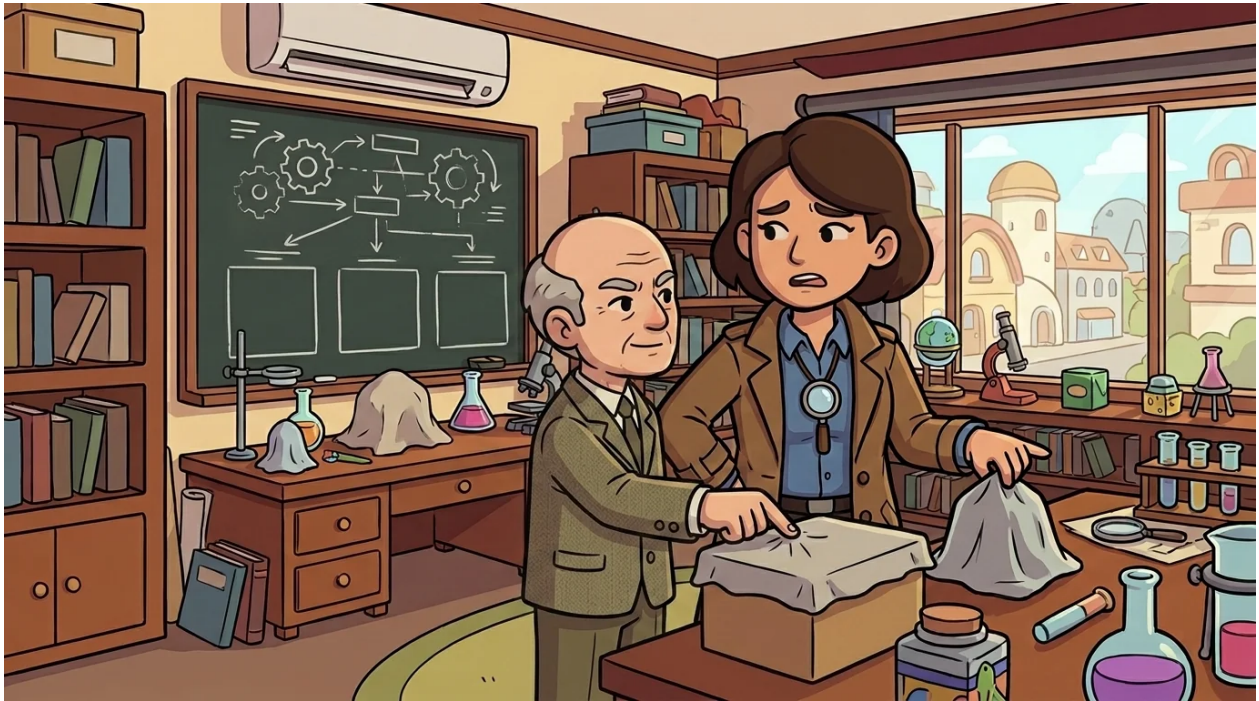
Deducia

THE PREDICT-OBSERVE-EXPLAIN FRAME — Deducia doesn't embody one mechanic; she frames them all as science. Commit a prediction BEFORE the reveal, observe what actually happens, then explain the difference. A wrong prediction isn't a failure — it's the most useful information you can get.



Deducia, who runs the DeduceQuest agency, makes everyone guess *before* they get to see.

It drives new detectives a little crazy. They want to wait, to gather more, to be *sure* before they commit. Deducia won't let them. "Predict first," she says, tapping the covered clue. "Out loud. Say what you think will happen *before* I turn it over. Then we'll look. Then you'll tell me why you were right — or, better, why you were *wrong*." She calls it the detective's real method, and she insists it's exactly how scientists work too: predict, observe, explain. "A guess you commit to teaches you ten times more than a fact someone hands you."

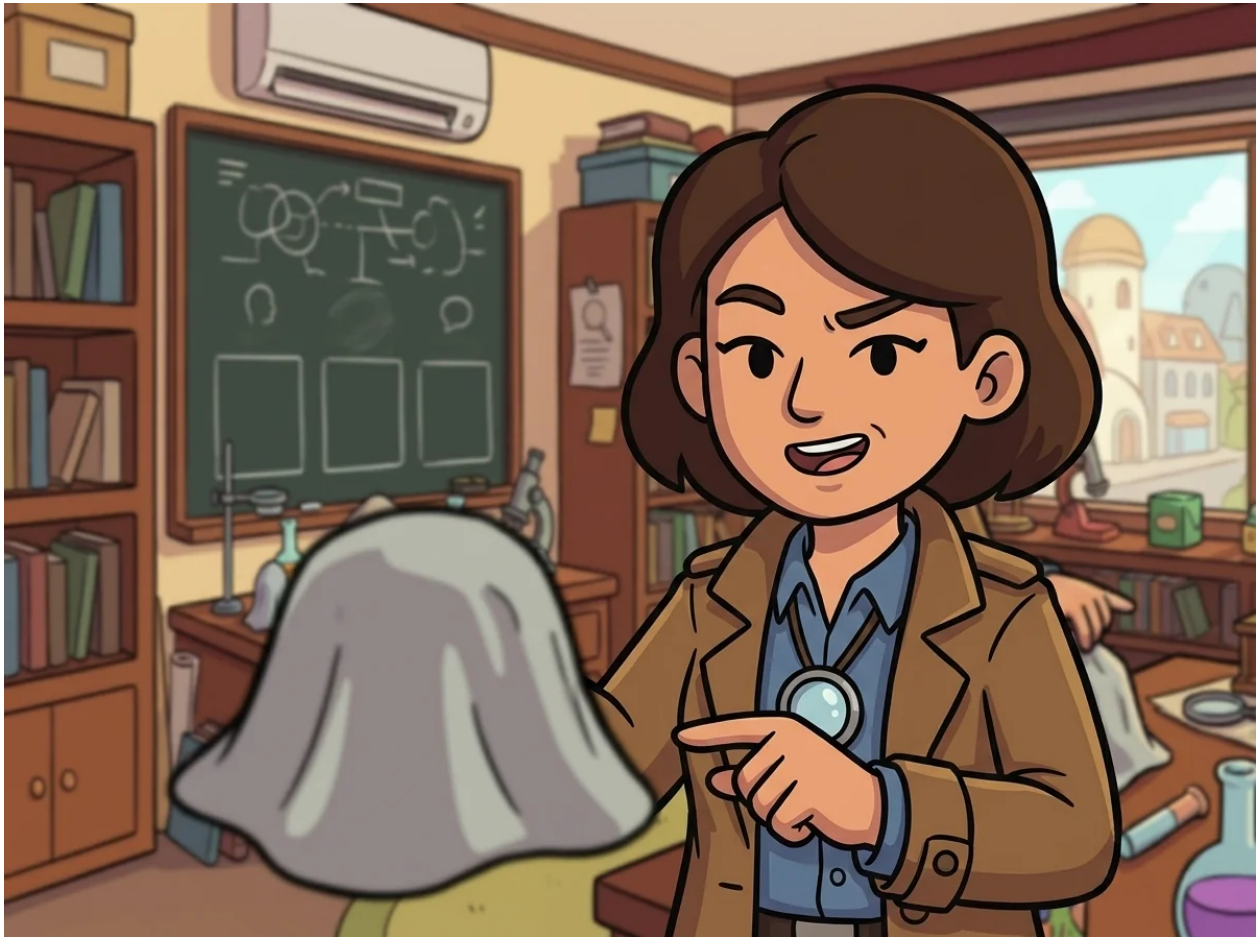


Deducia learned this the hard way, from years of being the smartest person in the room who was quietly afraid to be wrong in it.

As a young investigator she was brilliant and cautious — *too* cautious. She'd never commit to a theory until she was certain, which meant she committed to almost nothing, which meant she learned slowly and took the credit for very little. She thought she was being careful. She was actually just protecting herself from the small sting of a wrong guess. And that protection was costing her every mistake she might have *learned* from.

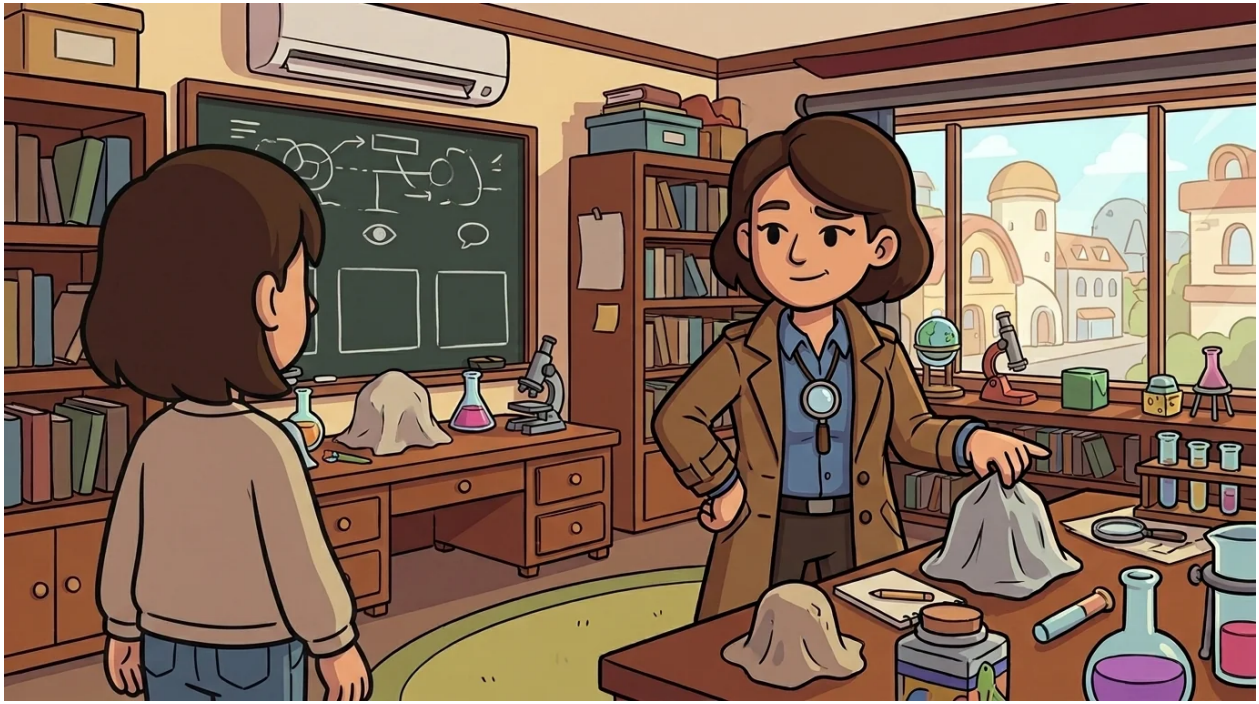
An old mentor of hers, a retired scientist, finally called it out. He set a covered box in front of her and asked what was inside. She said she couldn't know yet. He said, "I didn't ask what you know. I asked what you *predict*. Commit. Be wrong if you're wrong." She forced herself to guess — and she was wrong — and in the instant the box opened, the *gap* between what she'd expected and what was actually there taught her more, faster, than a hundred careful non-committals ever had. Her wrong prediction had made the truth *stick*, because she'd had something to compare it against.

"You've spent your whole career," her mentor said, "afraid of a feeling that's actually the best teacher you'll ever have."



She built her whole agency around that lesson. Every case at DeduceQuest runs the same three-beat rhythm, and Deducia enforces it like a drumbeat: *predict, observe, explain*.

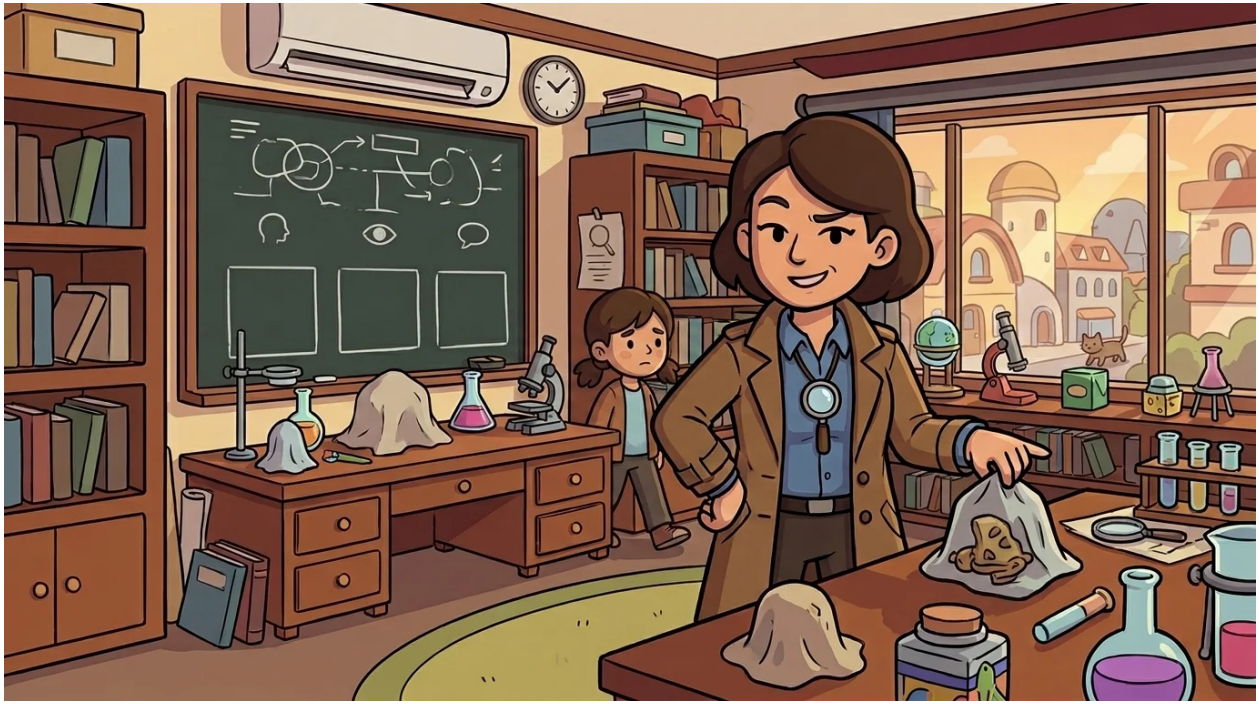
When a new detective faces one of Whittle's codes, or Tablo's grids, or Nona's number-pictures, or Rulewright's rule-puzzles, Deducia doesn't let them peek and then rationalize. She makes them *say what they expect first*. Then they act, and see what really happens. Then — the part she cares about most — they explain the difference: *why* did the result match, or why didn't it? "The prediction is the hook," she says. "Without it, the answer just washes over you and leaves nothing behind. With it, the answer lands on something — your guess — and it *sticks*."



A girl came to the agency who refused to guess. "I don't want to say it if I might be wrong." Deducia recognized that fear instantly; she'd worn it for years. She didn't push. She just asked a tiny prediction — "which of these two doors do you *think* hides the clue?" — small enough to risk. The girl guessed. She was wrong. And Deducia, instead of moving past it, stopped. "Good. Now — *why* did you think it was that door? And what does the real answer tell you that your guess didn't?" The girl explained, and in explaining, understood the case better than any of the detectives who'd waited to be sure.

"See?" Deducia said gently. "The wrong guess didn't cost you anything. It *bought* you the understanding. You'd never have looked that closely at the real answer if you hadn't had a guess to compare it to."

The girl started guessing after that — small at first, then bravely — and learned faster than anyone in her cohort, because every guess gave the truth something to land on.



At the end of a long day the girl asked Deducia the question under the fear. "Doesn't it ever feel bad, being wrong in front of everyone?"

Deducia considered it honestly. "It used to feel like the worst thing in the world," she said. "I spent years never committing, just to avoid it. And all that carefulness bought me was slowness and a very tidy record of things I never learned." She uncovered a fresh case. "Here's what I know now: a wrong prediction isn't a mark against you. It's *information*. It's the map showing you exactly where your thinking and the world don't match yet — and that gap is the only place learning ever happens. The detectives who are brave enough to guess out loud, and then explain their surprises, run circles around the ones who wait to be sure." She smiled, warm and certain. "So predict. Observe. Explain. And when you're wrong — and you will be — get *curious*, not ashamed. That's the whole method. That's the whole job."

The girl walked home making little predictions about everything — which way the cat would jump, which sock she'd find first — and checking, and being wrong sometimes, and feeling, each time, not smaller but sharper.

The Case (Whittle • Tablo • Reeve)

*THE DEDUCTION FAMILY — three ways to close in on the truth. Whittle *narrows* the set of possibilities using feedback. Tablo *eliminates* cells in a logic grid clue by clue. Reeve *cross-references* separate sources for where they agree and disagree. Different moves, one shared engine — you don't find the answer by guessing it; you find it by removing everything it *can't* be.*



Deducia, the host, set a locked box on the table, and told three of her sharpest students that inside was the name of the person who'd been quietly rearranging the academy's library at night — and that none of them could open it alone.

"You each close in on truth a different way," she said. "Whittle, you narrow. Tablo, you eliminate. Reeve, you cross-check. This case has too many suspects for any one of you." She slid over a folder — a stack of clues, a smudged logbook, three witness notes, a list of nine suspects. "Nine names. One is our midnight librarian. Find them, together, and the box opens itself." The three of them looked at the folder, then at each other, with the particular gleam of people who love this exact kind of trouble.



Reeve went first, because Reeve always started where the *sources* were. She spread the three witness notes and the logbook side by side and read across them. "Two witnesses never spoke to each other," she said, "and they *both* say the person moved quietly and knew exactly where things went. That agreement is real — our librarian *works here* or knows the library cold." She found a disagreement too: one note said "tall," the logbook implied "short enough to use the low shelves without a stool." She tapped the fork. "*There*. One of these is wrong, or 'tall' meant something else. Either way, height is where the sources argue — so height is a *live question*, not a settled fact." She'd turned a pile of accounts into two solid facts and one sharp question, and handed it to Tablo.



Tablo took Reeve's facts and built her grid. Nine suspects down the side; every trait across the top — *works in the library, knows the shelves, height, on-site after dark*. "Reeve says our person knows the library cold," she said, and drew a hard line through the four suspects who'd never set foot in it. "Gone." She crossed cells clue by clue, each elimination cascading into the next. "This one was away all week — gone. This one can't reach the low shelves *or* the high ones — gone." The nine became five, became three, the grid filling with crossed-off cells until — she stopped. Three suspects remained, and every remaining clue fit *all three equally*. "I'm stuck," she admitted. "I've eliminated everyone I *can*. These three are identical on every clue I have. The grid can't split them." She'd narrowed nine to three by pure elimination — and hit a wall the grid couldn't climb.



That was where it nearly stalled — and where Whittle grinned, because a wall of three indistinguishable suspects was his favorite thing in the world. "You can't tell them apart with the clues you *have*," he said. "So we get a *new* clue — and we design it to *split them*." He held up the height question Reeve had flagged. "Two of your three are about the same height. One is noticeably shorter. If I can find *one fact about height*, it doesn't just tell me about height — it *cuts the three in half*." He proposed a single sharp test: check which of the three could have reached the top shelf where a book had been reshelfed *without* the stool, which was still locked away that night. "I don't need to know everything," he said. "I need *one* question whose answer eliminates the most suspects. One good cut beats ten random facts." They ran his single check. It cleared two suspects instantly. One name remained.



And here's the thing none of them said out loud but all three felt: *no one of them could have gotten there*. Reeve's cross-referencing turned a mess of accounts into solid facts but couldn't rank suspects. Tablo's grid eliminated six but stalled on the last three. Whittle's sharp cut split the final three but *only worked because Reeve had flagged height and Tablo had narrowed the field to where one cut mattered*. Narrow, eliminate, cross-check — each had done the part the others couldn't, and each had handed the next one a problem small enough to finish. When the last name stood alone on the grid, the locked box on the table gave a soft *click* and opened, and inside was a slip of paper with that exact name on it, and beneath it, in Deducia's hand: *"You didn't guess me. You made it so I had nowhere left to hide."*

The three of them looked at the single surviving name, then at the wreckage of crossed-off suspects and cross-referenced notes that had cornered it, and Reeve — who trusted almost nothing on one source — said, with a warmth that surprised even her, "I'd believe this one. Three of us, three ways, and it's the *only* name still standing." Tablo actually smiled. Whittle was already asking if they could do another.

The Experiment (Rulewright • Vary • Odds)

*THE SCIENTIFIC-METHOD FAMILY — three moves that make an experiment work.

Rulewright *forms the hypothesis* (guesses the hidden rule). Vary *designs the fair test* (changes one thing, holds the rest). Odds *reads the result honestly* (a clean test shifts the likelihood, it rarely proves). Guess, test fairly, weigh what it means — together they turn a hunch into knowledge instead of a lucky story.*



Deducia, the host, put a small sealed machine on the table — a box with three levers and one light that sometimes came on — and said, "Figure out what makes the light turn on. You have until the light stops surprising you."



She looked at the three students she'd chosen. "Rulewright, you'll want to guess the rule. Vary, you'll want to test it cleanly. Odds, you'll want to know how sure we really are." She smiled. "You will each try to do the *whole* thing yourself, and it will *not work*, and then you will do it together, and it will." Rulewright was already reaching for the levers. Vary was already frowning at how fast he was reaching. Odds was already keeping count in her head of how many times the light had come on so far, which was: not enough to know anything.



Rulewright went first, because he could not help it — a hidden rule was a personal challenge. He pulled all three levers, the light flashed on, and he lit up. "Got it! All three levers turns it on!" Vary put a gentle hand on the box. "You changed *three* things at once," she said. "So which lever did it? Or was it *two* of them? Or one of them *despite* the others?" Rulewright opened his mouth, closed it. He had a result and *no idea what it meant*. "That's the first trap," Vary said, not unkindly. "A hypothesis is a wonderful start — 'maybe it's the levers' — but if you *test* it by changing everything at once, the machine can *answer* and you *still won't understand*." Rulewright, who loved being right more than almost anything, admitted that being right-about-nothing was somehow worse than being wrong.

So Vary took over the testing, and did it her way: one lever at a time, everything else held still. Lever one, alone: no light. Reset. Lever two, alone: no light. Reset. Lever three, alone: *light*. "There," she said, satisfied. "It's lever three. One change at a time. Clean." She was ready to call it solved — until Odds, who'd been quietly keeping count, spoke up. "Lever three alone made the light come on... *once*. You ran it *once*." Vary paused. "It was a clean test," she said. "One variable." "It was a clean test *one time*," Odds agreed. "But the light *sometimes* comes on. Remember? Deducia said *sometimes*. What if lever three makes it *likely* but not *certain*? One clean trial can't tell the difference between 'always' and 'usually.'" Vary, who prized clean answers, felt the specific discomfort of a clean answer that hadn't been run enough times to trust.



That was where it clicked — when all three finally stopped trying to skip each other's step. Rulewright formed a *sharper* hypothesis, shaped by what they'd learned: "*Lever three makes the light likely — maybe not every time.*" Vary designed the fair test to check it: lever three alone, everything else frozen, *over and over*. And Odds read the results honestly, keeping the tally: lever three alone lit the light *seven times out of ten*. "So it's not 'lever three turns it on,'" Odds said, laying out her stones — seven lit, three dark. "It's 'lever three turns it on *about seventy percent of the time*.' That's the real rule. Certain would've been ten out of ten. This machine deals in *probably*." Rulewright's hypothesis, Vary's fair repetition, Odds's honest count — guess, test, weigh — and the light finally *stopped surprising them*, because they'd stopped expecting it to be simpler than it was.

Deducia came to look at the tally. "Any one of you," she said, "would have walked away with a *story*. Rulewright with 'it's the levers.' Vary with 'it's lever three, definitely.' Odds with 'it's random, who knows.'" She tapped the seven-of-ten stones. "All three stories were wrong. Only the *method* — a real guess, tested fairly, counted honestly — got you the truth, which was *messier and more exact* than any of your stories." Rulewright looked at his first triumphant, useless "got it!" and then at the careful seven-of-ten, and felt — instead of the sting of being corrected — the quiet satisfaction of actually *knowing*, and admitted, "...I'm glad you two didn't let me stop at the part where I felt smartest." Vary and Odds exchanged a look, because that was the truest thing anyone had said all day.

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- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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