

TRAINING YOUR ACADEMICS TO WRITE KICK ASS COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

SPEAKER:



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FOUNDER AND CHIEF CONTENT
STRATEGIST, PICKLE JAR AND
CONTENTED

**WHY DOES
IT GO SO
WRONG?**

**CREATING
SHARED
STANDARDS**

**SUPPORTING
THEM TO DO
IT WELL**

BUT FIRST...

DISCUSS

- ▶ What is the best model for creating course content?
- ▶ Who should do what?


WE NEED SOMEONE WHO ...

...knows the course
and its features
and benefits well

...knows the target
audience and their wants
and needs

...knows how to write
compelling SEO
marketing copy

...knows how to meet
audience needs
through copy



**WE DON'T LIKE IT WHEN
THEY THINK THAT THEY
CAN DO OUR JOB...**



**...BUT THEN WE ASK
THEM TO DO OUR JOB**

WHY DOES IT GO SO WRONG?



~~BLAME~~

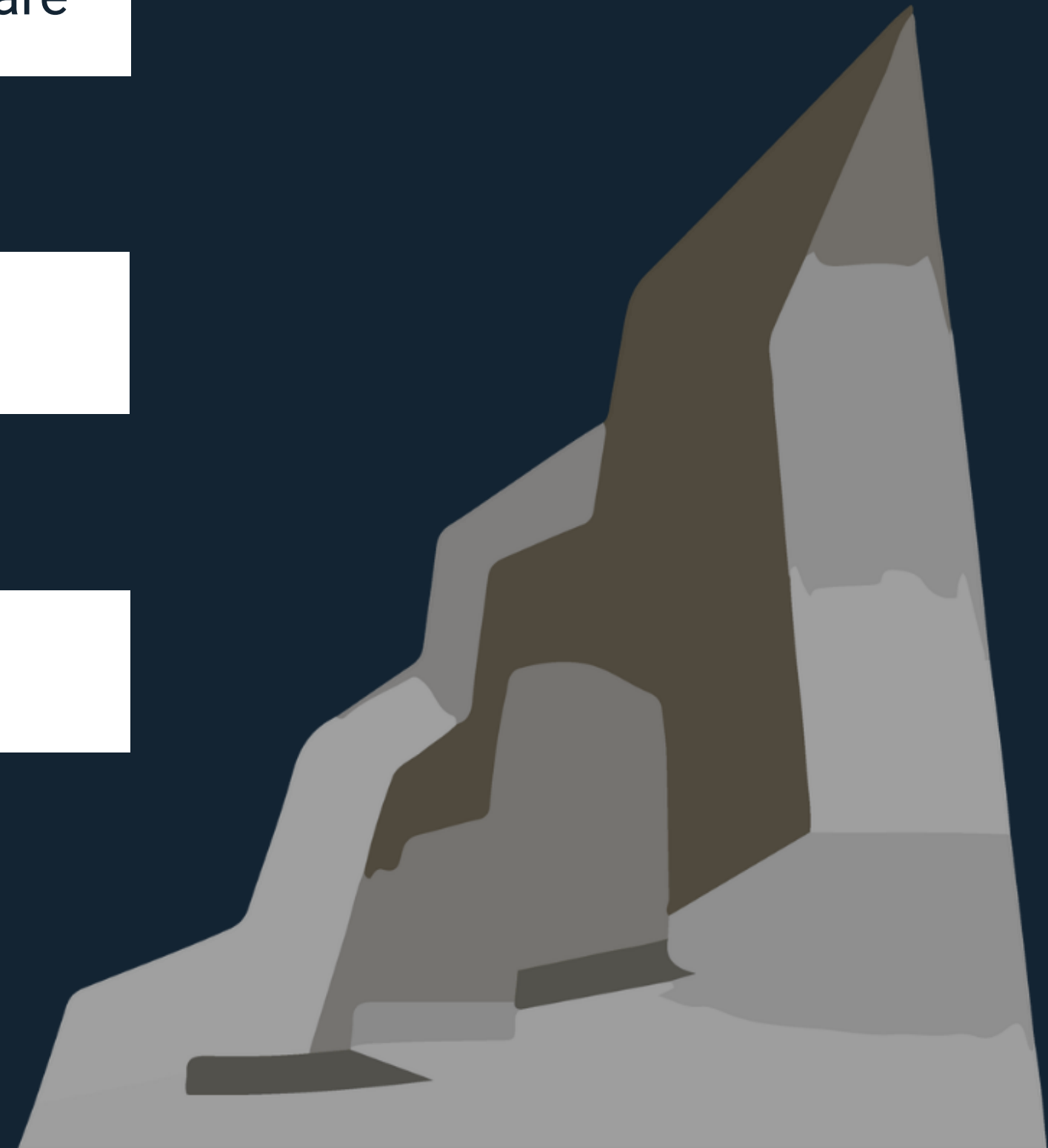
RECRUITMENT TEAM

COURSE LEADS

What our priorities are

What we know

What we fear



COURSE LEAD

MINDSET

Work in pairs on your table to write some user stories about academics.

**"As a ...
I need ...
so I can ..."**

COURSE LEAD

MINDSET

Work in pairs on your table to write some user stories about academics.

Example:

As an early career researcher I need to secure funding so I can continue my career.

COURSE LEAD

MINDSET

Work in pairs on your table to write some user stories about academics.

**"As a ...
I need ...
so I can ..."**

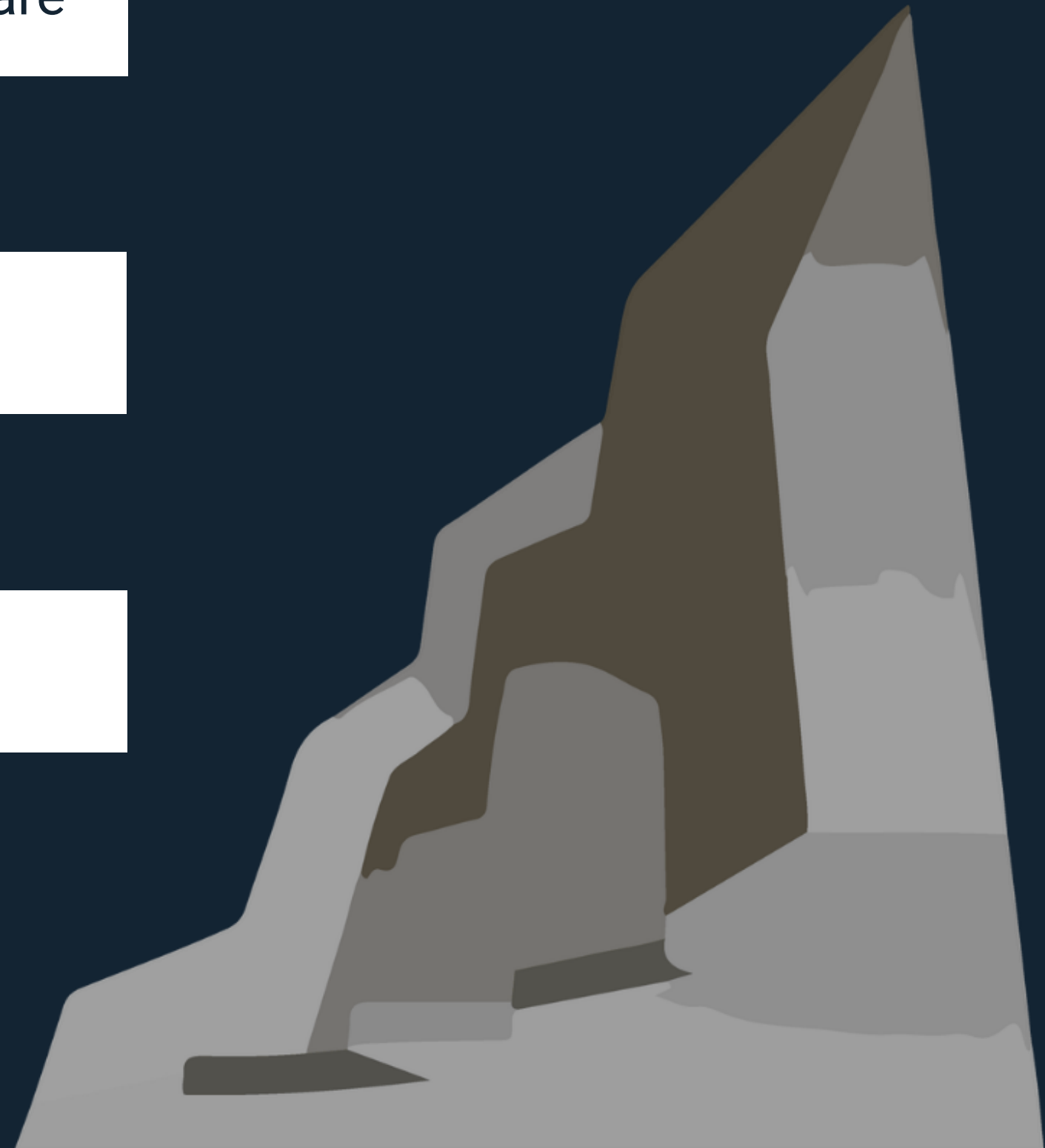
RECRUITMENT TEAM

COURSE LEADS

What our priorities are

What we know

What we fear



RECRUITMENT TEAM

COURSE LEADS

Hitting admission targets
Moving prospects through pipeline
Proving ROI and efficiencies

What our priorities are

Teaching workload
Research priorities
Securing future funding

Marketing strategy
Customer engagement
Persuasive copywriting

What we know

Their subject area
Teaching
Writing academic papers

Not hitting targets
Letting students down
Academics (!)

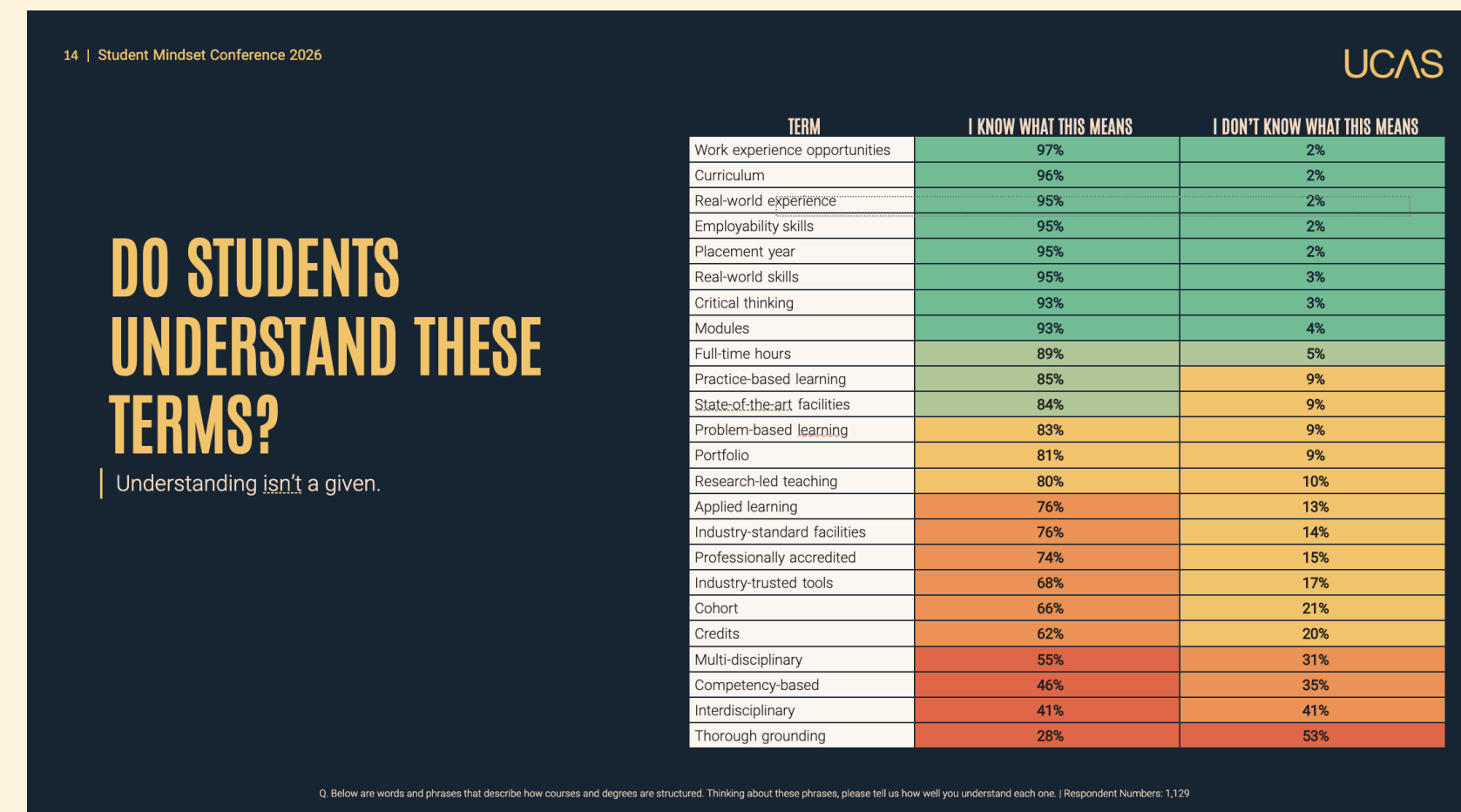
What we fear

Peer perspectives of them
Losing their job
Not doing enough

THE ROOT CAUSE

2

LACK OF AUDIENCE INSIGHT



THE ROOT CAUSE

3

ABSENCE OF CLEAR FRAMEWORKS

Are our frameworks written for them or for us?

EDITORIAL GUIDES

e.g. Style and tone guidelines

Tells us how we should stand
A step on from brand guidelines
Written for content creators

VS

CONTEXT GUIDES

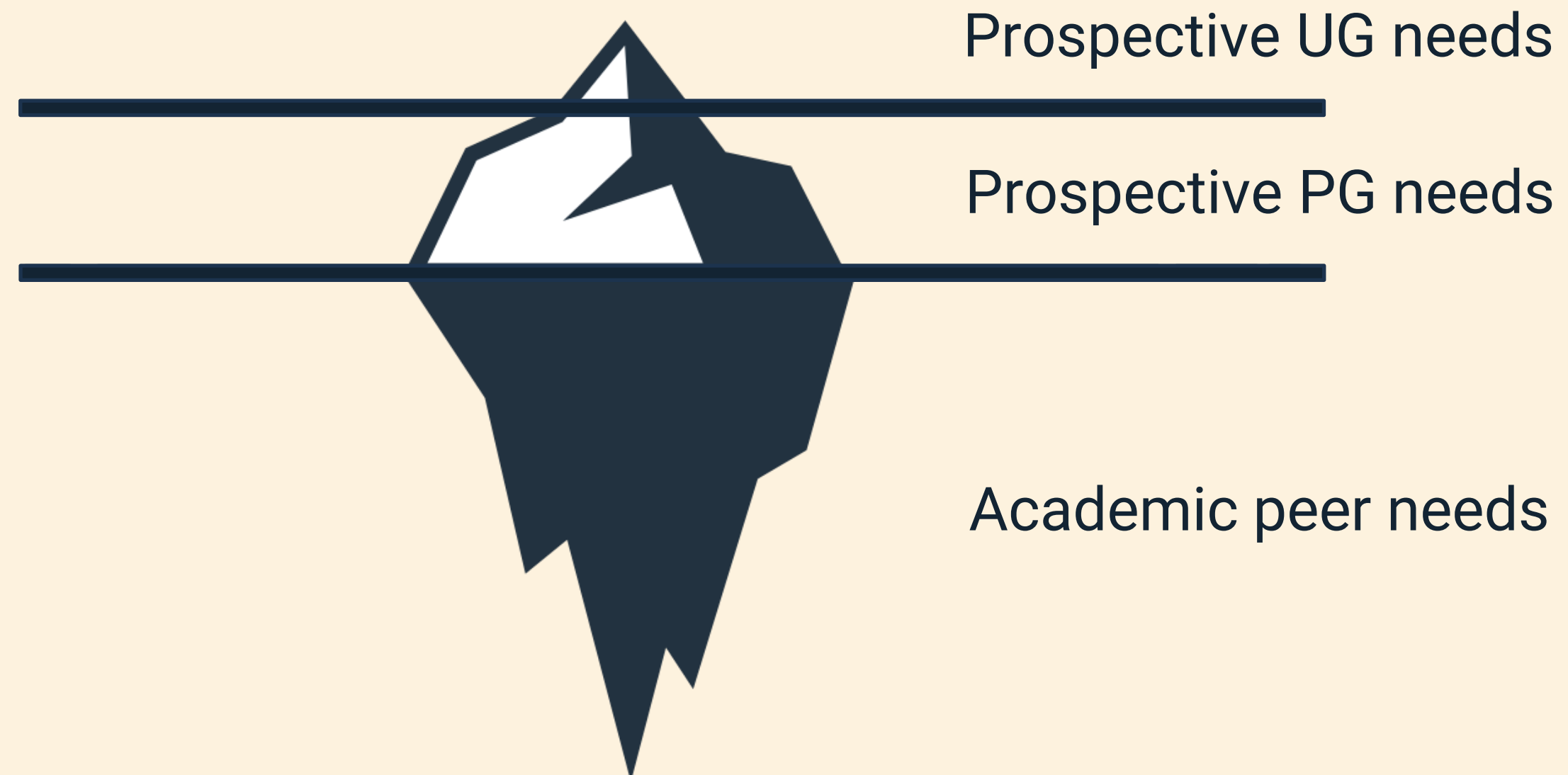
e.g Writing a great course page

Tell how to write specific items
Practical – why, how and what
Written for content contributors

THE ROOT CAUSE

4

FEAR OF OVERSIMPLIFICATION



THE ROOT CAUSE

5

CAPACITY AND CONFIDENCE GAPS

I don't have
enough time

I don't know
how to do it

I don't have time to
be perfect at this

THE ROOT CAUSE

6

CONFIDENCE SURPLUS

I use the internet therefore I'm an expert on web content. I know exactly how this should be done and the university marketing team doesn't know what they're doing

THE ROOT CAUSE

7

LACK OF INVESTMENT IN COPYWRITING

Imagine if Procter and Gamble made the R&D team create the Head & Shoulders ads



THE ROOT CAUSE

8

COURSES APPROVED WITH NO PROOF OF DEMAND

"We're including courses on our website that haven't recruited a single student in over 8 years"

(A real quote from a person that will remain unnamed)



**IF WE REALLY WANT BETTER
COURSE CONTENT, WE DON'T
START BY REWRITING IT**

**WE START BY REDESIGNING
THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH IT'S
WRITTEN**

TOWARDS SHARED STANDARDS



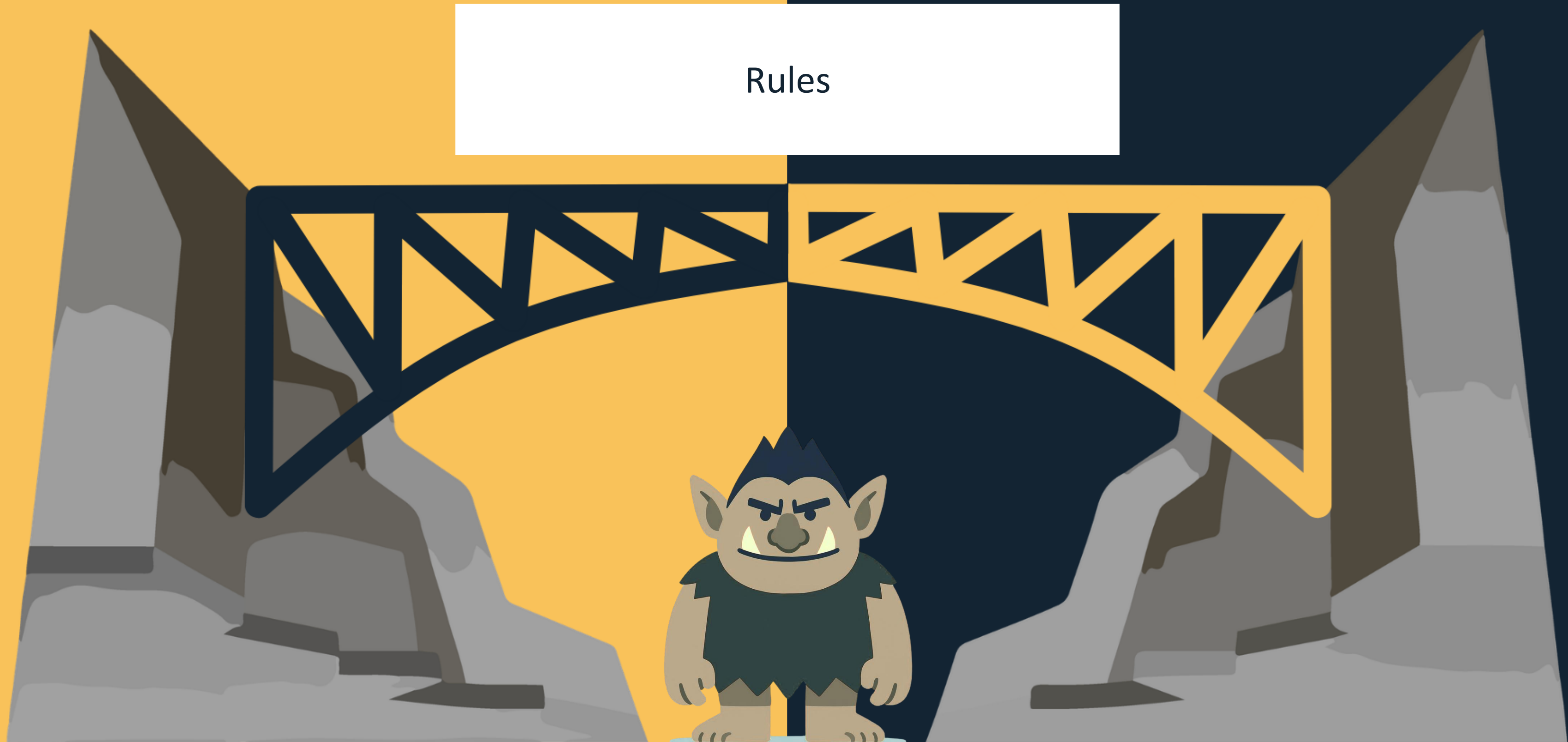
TOWARDS SHARED STANDARDS



RECRUITMENT TEAM

COURSE LEADS

Rules



RECRUITMENT TEAM

COURSE LEADS

Shared understanding of, and care for, the students



WHAT IF WE CREATED DECISIONS, NOT RULES?

PROOF

PRINCIPLES

PATTERNS

PLAYBOOKS

WHAT WE KNOW

The evidence, insight and audience understanding that show us what good content needs to achieve.

User stories, empathy maps, top tasks.

PROOF

PRINCIPLES

PATTERNS

PLAYBOOKS

HOW WE THINK

The shared beliefs and standards that shape how we approach content and decision-making.

The 10 essentials of great course descriptions

PROOF

PRINCIPLES

PATTERNS

PLAYBOOKS

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The structures, and content models that create consistency and clarity. Examples, examples, examples and more examples

Examples, "this not that", checklists

PROOF

PRINCIPLES

PATTERNS

PLAYBOOKS



HOW WE DO IT: PRODUCTION TOOLS

The practical guides, templates and step-by-step support that help people create better content with confidence.

Workbooks, madlibs activities, AI tools

A TOOL TO HELP...



COURSE COMPANION GPT

go.wearepicklejar.com/course-copy



SUPPORTING THEM TO DO IT WELL



TRAINING

TOOLS

DEMONSTRATION

1 Writing workshops

2 Short webinars

3 Recorded micro-learning

4 Audience insights briefings

5 Peer review training

6 Worksheets

7 "Madlibs" structures

8 Checklists

9 AI prompt libraries

10 AI review tools

11 "This not that" examples

12 Annotated reviews

13 Live copy editing

14 Before and after examples

15 Subject-specific examples

COLLABORATION

16 Peer review sessions

17 Content office hours

18 Content crits (team sessions)

19 Drop-in clinics

20 Pair writing sessions

REINFORCEMENT

21 Template writing prompts

22 Tooltip guidance

23 Content refresh sessions

24 Post-training coaching

25 Content reviews/feedback

ENABLEMENT

26 Protected writing time

27 Clear approval routes

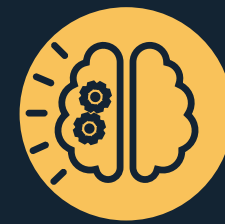
28 Access to content support

29 Faculty content champions

30 Guidance broken down

COURSE IS KING RESOURCES

Dive deeper into Course is King - download our three PDFs for further insights you can apply to your recruitment strategy.



UNDERSTANDING OF KEY TERMS

When students think they understand – but don't.



LANGUAGE THAT LANDS

When wording changes perceived quality.



WHAT EMPLOYABILITY SIGNALS TO STUDENTS

When 'employability' means something very specific.

QUESTIONS?

Thank you for joining us today.

If you have any questions, please drop them in the chat or Q&A.

THANK YOU

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