

# Word Smatter

Exploring Semantics, Testers,  
and Problems

# About Me



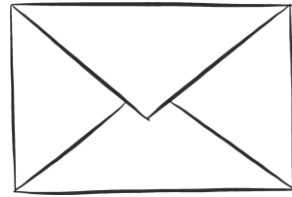
Damian Synadinos



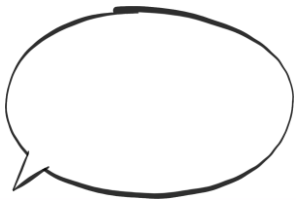
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"Hey, Damian!"



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# Agenda

- Purpose and expectations
- A smattering of semantics
- Phrase deconstruction and analysis

# So what?

- Primer on semantics
- New and/or practical insight into a tester's role and responsibilities

**Words matter!**

# "It's just semantics!"

- It's only a difference of words.
- It's merely a minor difference!
- It's a fundamental difference!
- Shut up! This conversation is over.

# Definitions

**Semantics**, n.

The meaning of a word, phrase, sentence, or text.

# Definitions

**Definition**, n.

A statement of the exact meaning of a word.



# Definitions

**Meaning**, n.

What is meant by a word,  
concept, or action.

# "It's just semantics!"

- It's only a difference of words
- It's merely a minor difference!
- It's a fundamental difference!
- Shut up! This conversation is over.
- It's just **definitions!**
- It's just **meaning!**

# **It's just semantics?**



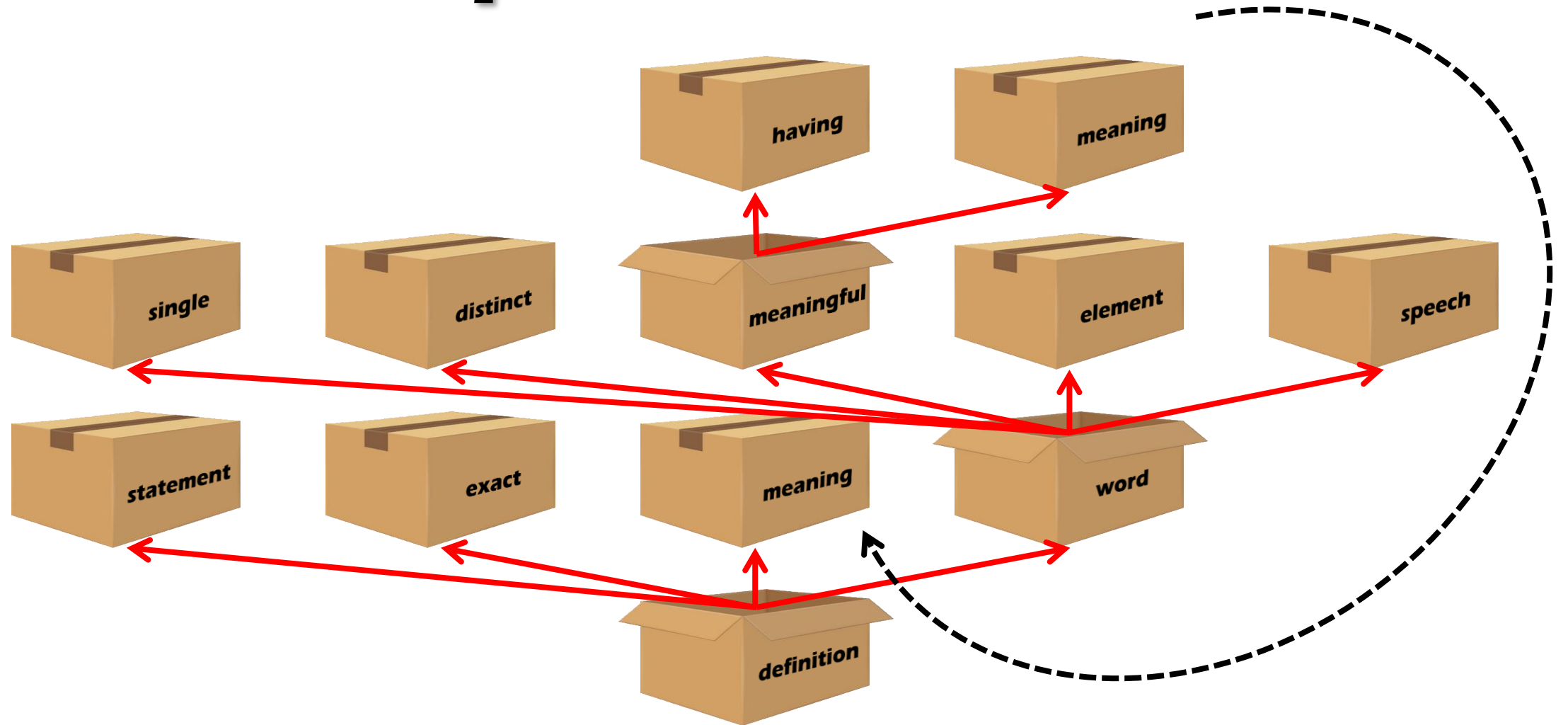
# It's just semantics?



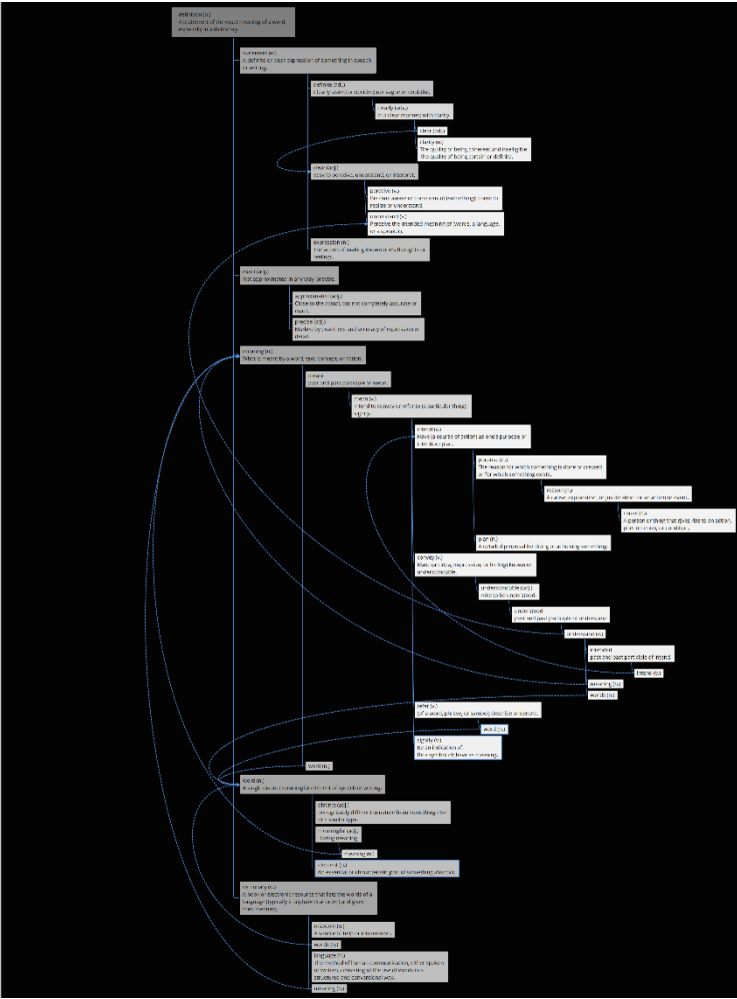
# A smattering of semantics

- Boxes metaphor
- Humpty Dumpty
- Disputed words
- Same, but different
- Life of a word
- Strange Creatures
- The name is not the thing

# Boxes Metaphor



# Boxes Metaphor



# Humpty Dumpty



There's *glory*  
for you!

Communicating involves an unspoken, unwritten contract between players: That the words they use mean roughly what they're supposed to mean.

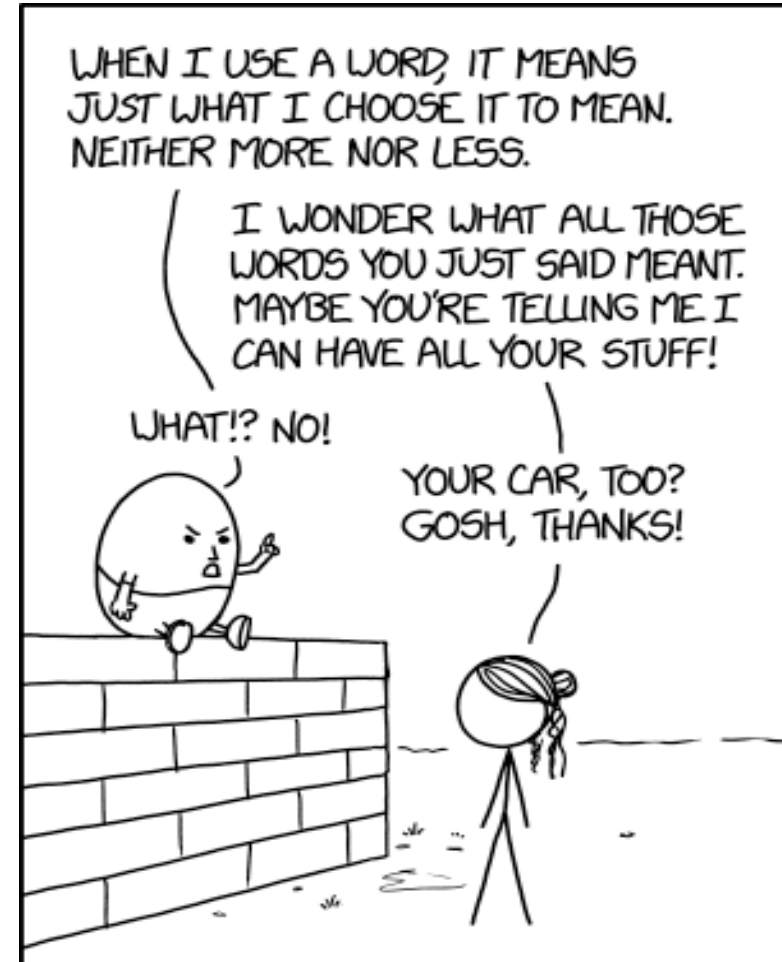


# Humpty Dumpty

*The greatest enemy of communication  
is the illusion that it has taken place.*

-William H. Whyte

# Humpty Dumpty



# Disputed Words

- fewer / less
  - Fewer people have less patience for discussing semantics.
- anticipate / expect
  - She anticipated a difficult test...so she studied hard.
  - She expected a high grade...because she studied hard.
- literally, ironically, resources
- done / finished / complete
- best practice

# Best Practice



Stella is my

*best*

friend and Avery is my

*best*

friend!

# Best Practice



Stella is my  
*really good*  
friend and Avery is my  
*really good*  
friend!

# Best Practice

**Best**, adj.

That which is the most excellent,  
outstanding, or desirable.

# Best Practice

**Practice**, n.

The actual application or use of an idea, belief, or method.

# Best Practice

**Best Practice**, n.

The most excellent, outstanding, or desirable application or use of an idea, belief, or method.



# Best Practice

**Best Practice**, n.

Procedure that is accepted or prescribed as being correct or most effective.

# "Best Practice"



# Disputed Words

- fewer / less
  - Fewer people have less patience for discussing semantics.
- anticipate / expect
  - She anticipated a difficult test...so she studied hard.
  - She expected a high grade...because she studied hard.
- literally, ironically, resources
- done / finished / complete
- best practice

# Same, but different

## Distinction without a difference

An artificially created distinction where no real or meaningful distinction exists.

# Same, but different



*That's not a knife.  
That's a knife!*

If there is no “real” difference, then what is the purpose of the distinction?

# Life of a word

**Neologism**, n.

A newly coined word or expression.

# Life of a word

- unbirthday, noob, truthiness, neuroplasticity
- Google, spam, cloud, ask
- bully, awesome, awful
- brunch, spork, done-done-done
- fudgel, brabble, apricity

# Strange Creatures

## Tardigrade (Water Bear, Moss Piglet)

Water-dwelling, eight-legged, segmented micro-animals (about 0.5 mm when fully grown). Among the most resilient animals known. Can survive extreme temperatures, radiation, pressure, and the vacuum of space.



## Geoduck

Species of very large, saltwater clam (mollusk). Native to the west coast of North America. Shell ranges from 15-20 cm. Has long “neck” or siphon that extends from the shell. Burrows deep in sand and shoots spouts of water at random intervals. Often bred and eaten.





# The name is not the thing

“What’s in a name?  
That which we call a  
*rose*  
by any other name  
would smell as sweet.”  
-Romeo and Juliet



# The name is not the thing

“What’s in a name?  
That which we call a  
*stink blossom*  
by any other name  
would smell as sweet.”  
-Romeo and Juliet



# The name is not the thing

“What’s in a name?  
That which we call a  
*phlegm flower*  
by any other name  
would smell as sweet.”  
-Romeo and Juliet



# Summary

- Boxes metaphor
- Humpty Dumpty
- Disputed words
- Same, but different
- Life of a word
- Strange Creatures
- The name is not the thing

# **Phrase deconstruction and analysis**

**Testers**

**[do | don't]**

**(help)**

**[prevent | detect]**

**"problems"**

# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "**problems**"

**Problem**, n.

A matter or situation regarded as unwelcome or harmful and needing to be dealt with and overcome.

# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "**problems**"

**Problem**, n.

A difference between things as desired  
and things as perceived. (Weinberg)

# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "**problems**"

**Bug**, n.

An error in a computer program or system.



# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "**problems**"

**Bug**, n.

Anything that bugs someone.  
(Pettichord)

# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "**problems**"

- Defect
- Issue
- Failure
- Glitch
- Error
- Exception
- Fault
- Flaw
- Mistake
- Incident
- Goof
- Slip-up
- Blunder
- Oversight
- Anomaly
- Hiccup

# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "**problems**"

## **Relativism**, n.

The doctrine that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute.

**Testers [do|don't] (help)  
[prevent|detect] "problems"**

## **Relative Rule**

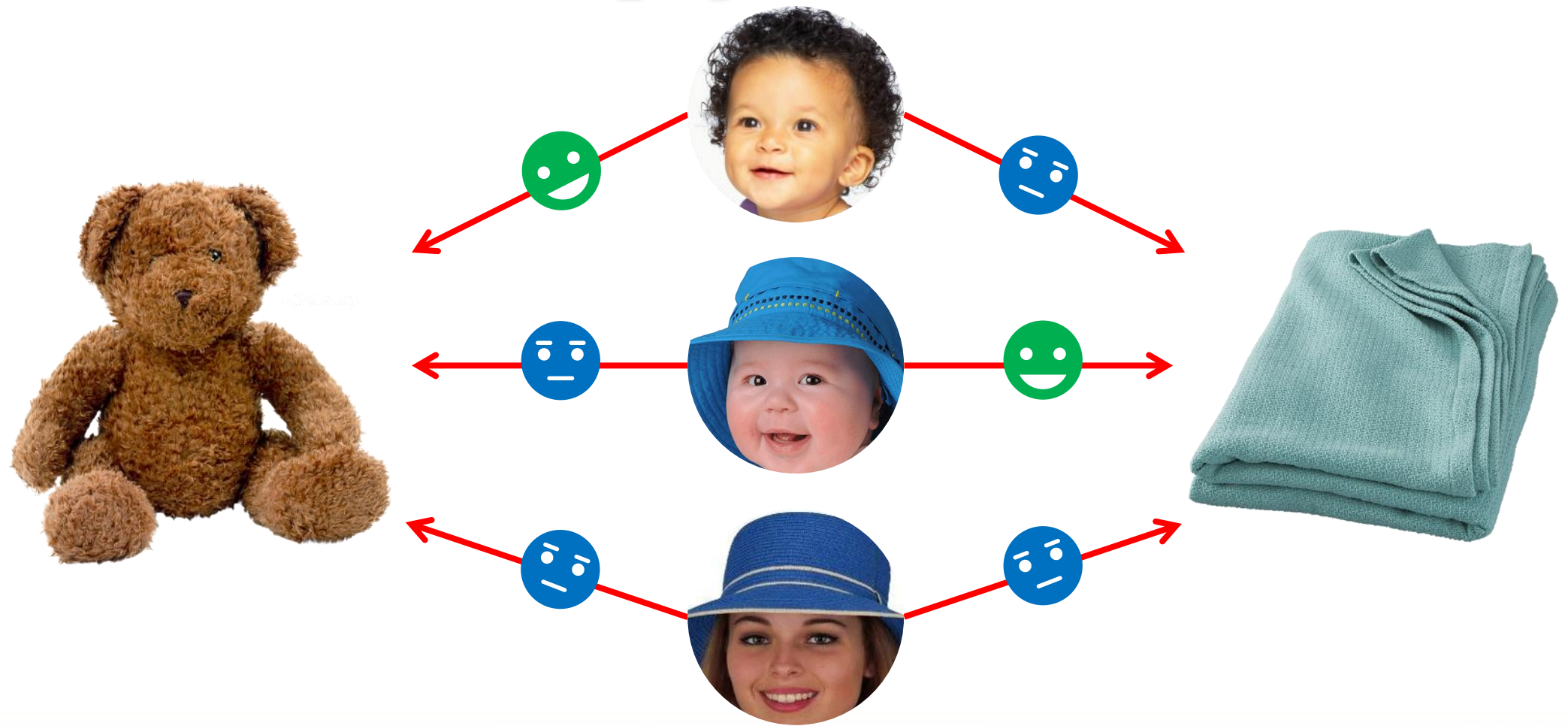
For any abstract X, X is X to  
some person, at some time.

# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "problems"

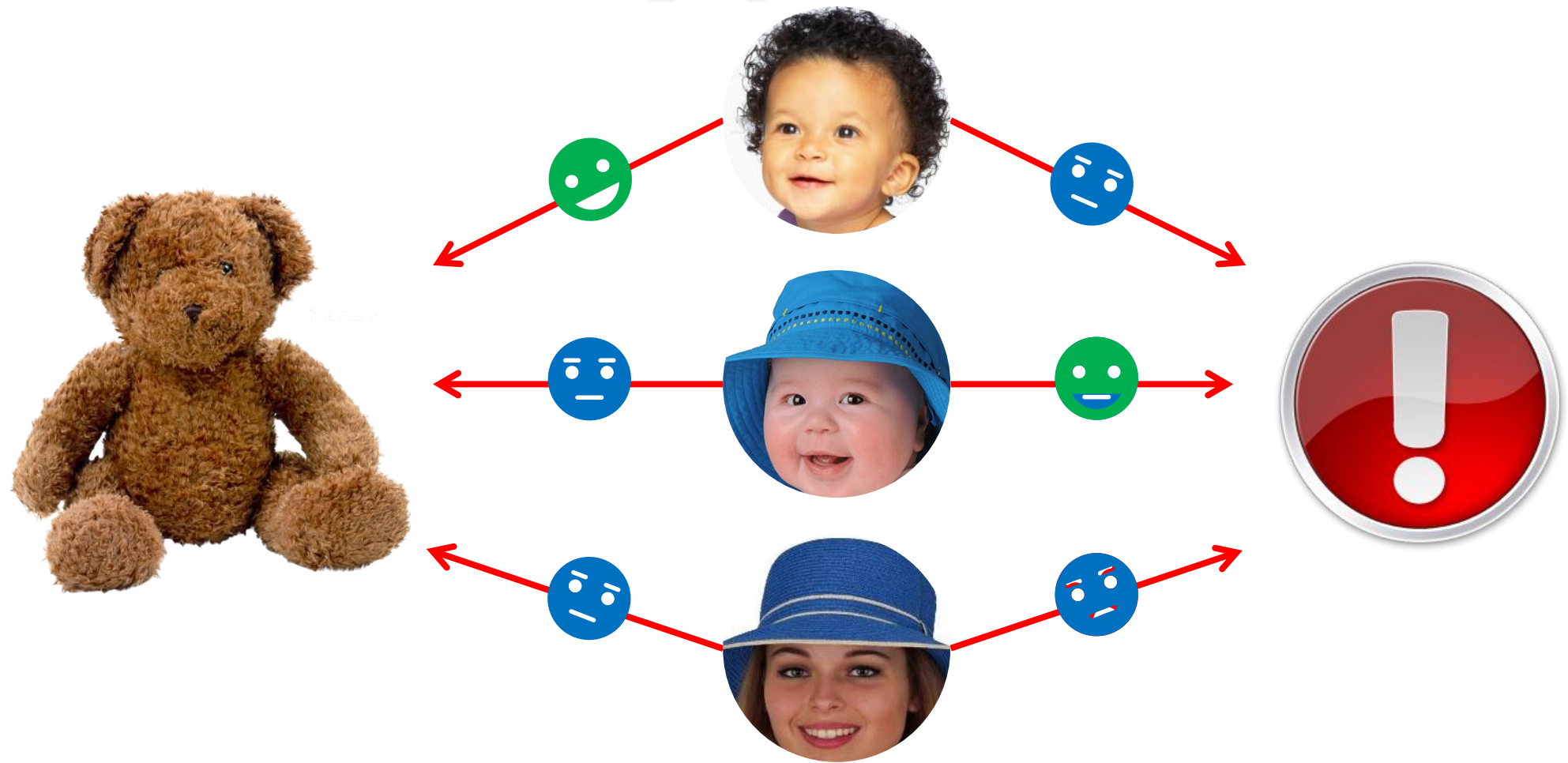
## Relative Rule

Describes the relationship between someone (who) and something (what) at sometime (when).

# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "problems"



# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "problems"



# So what?

- What we call “problems” might matter.
- Remember that “problems” are relative (subjective).



# Testers [do | don't] (help) [prevent | detect] "problems"

**Prevent**, v.

Keep something from happening or  
arising.



# Testers [do | don't] (help) [prevent | detect] "problems"

**Detect**, v.

Discover or identify the presence or  
existence of.



# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "problems"

- Can AI **detect** fake news?
- Locusts can **detect** cancer in humans
- New Video Tech Will Help Minnesota Police **Detect** Suspects



# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "problems"

- Installation of technology to **prevent** rail crashes nears completion
- San Antonio firefighters **prevent** fire from spreading to University Hospital
- Mayo Clinic Study UnCOVERS Dietary Trick To Help **Prevent** Kidney Stones

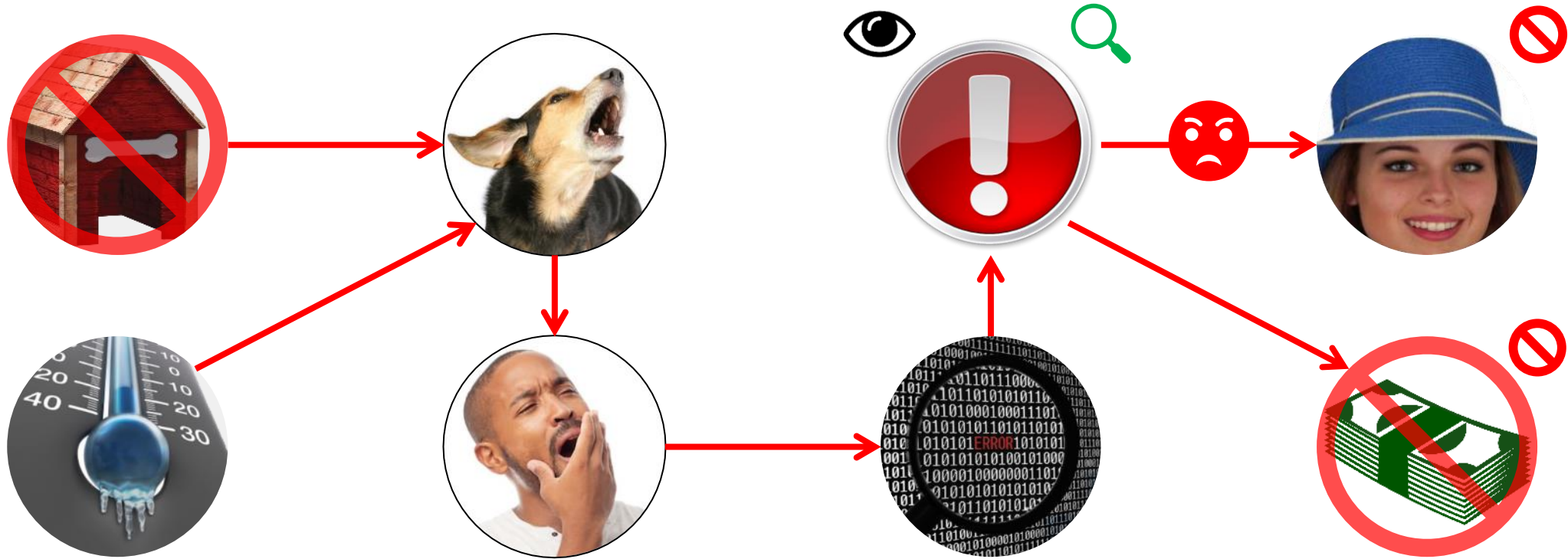


# Testers [do | don't] (help) [prevent | detect] "problems"

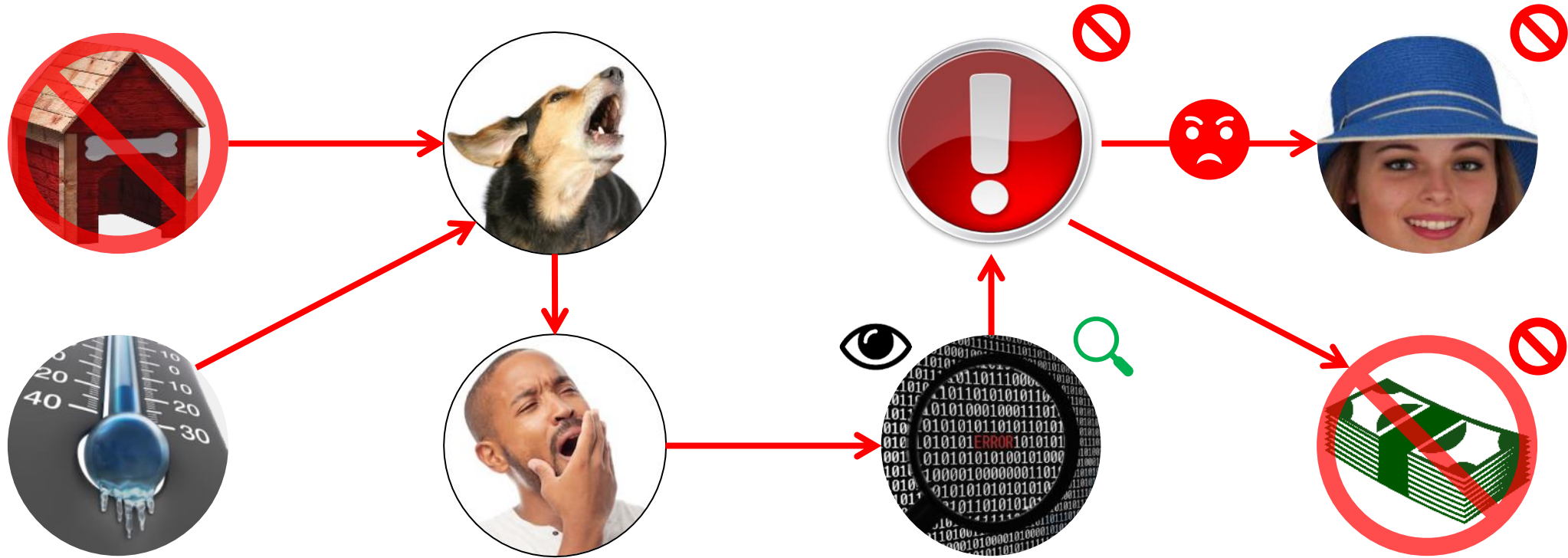
**Causality**, n.

The relationship between cause and effect.

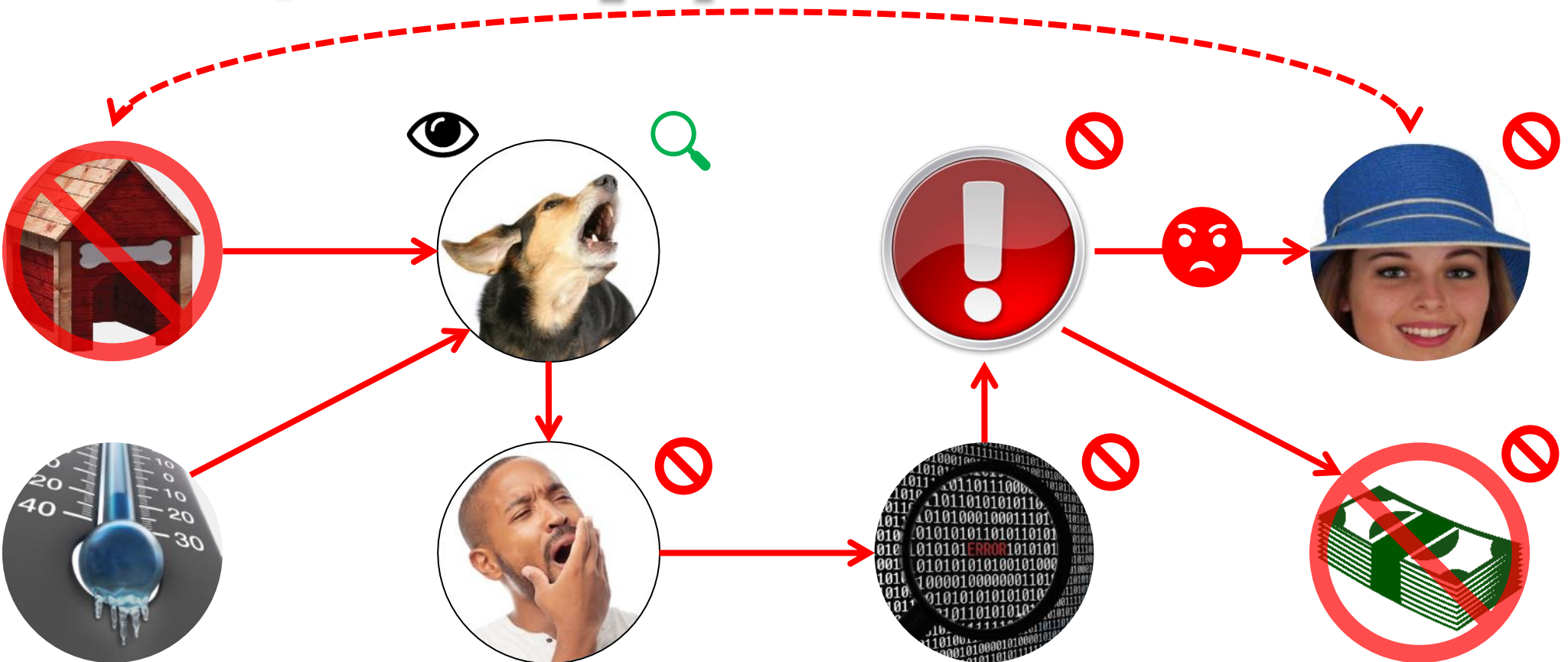
# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "problems"



# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "problems"



# Testers [do | don't] (help) [prevent | detect] "problems"





# So what?

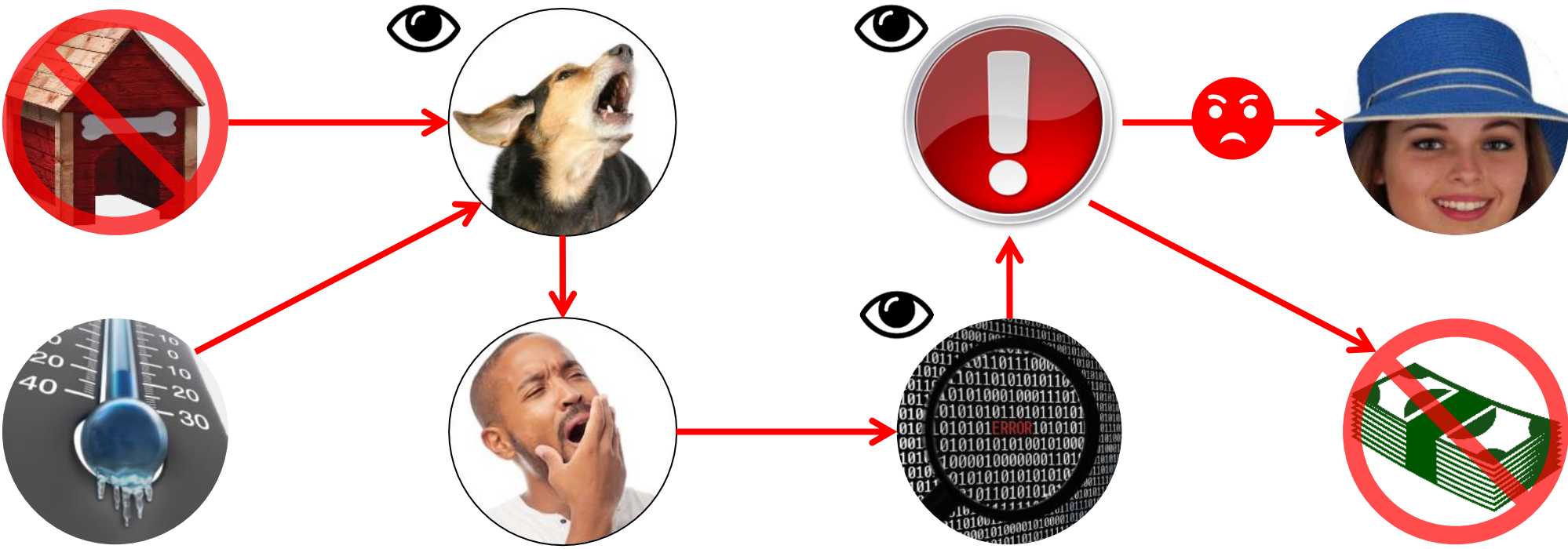
- Potential effects of word choice.
- Consider causality and perspective.

# Testers [do|don't] (**help**) [prevent|detect] "problems"

**Help**, n.

Make it easier (for someone) to do something; improve (a situation or problem); be of benefit or assistance to.

# Testers [do|don't] (**help**) [prevent|detect] "problems"



# So what?

- Inclusion or exclusion of the word “help” might change the meaning of the phrase.
- Consider the specific problem, and if detection or prevention of the problem can be done alone or if it requires assistance.

# Testers [**do** | **don't**] (help) [prevent | detect] "problems"

## Helping Verbs, n.

Verbs that help the main verb in a sentence by extending its meaning; convey complicated shades of meaning.

# Testers [**do** | **don't**] (help) [prevent | detect] "problems"

## *Auxiliary Verbs*, n.

A verb used in forming the tenses, moods, and voices of other verbs.

# Testers [**do** | **don't**] (help) [prevent | detect] "problems"

- Auxiliary verbs
  - do/don't – present tense
  - did/didn't – past tense

# Testers [**do** | **don't**] (help) [prevent | detect] "problems"

## **Modal Verbs**, n.

An auxiliary verb that expresses necessity or possibility.



# Testers [**do** | **don't**] (help) [prevent | detect] "problems"

- Modal verbs

- can/could – ability, possibility
- may/might – permission, possibility
- will/would – request, consequence
- must – necessity, requirement
- shall/should – obligation, correctness, suggestion

# Testers [**do** | **don't**] (help) [**prevent** | **detect**] "problems"

- Testers [**do**] (help) [prevent | detect] problems
- Testers [**didn't**] (help) [prevent | detect] problems
- Testers [**can**] (help) [prevent | detect] problems
- Testers [**may**] (help) [prevent | detect] problems
- Testers [**will**] (help) [prevent | detect] problems
- Testers [**must**] (help) [prevent | detect] problems
- Testers [**should**] (help) [prevent | detect] problems

# Testers [**do** | **don't**] (help) [prevent | detect] "problems"

**Descriptive Statement**, n.

Makes an assertion based on empirical evidence; facts.

# Testers [**do** | **don't**] (help) [prevent | detect] "problems"

**Normative Statement**, n.

Expresses a value judgement; opinions.

# Testers [**do** | **don't**] (help) [prevent | detect] "problems"

*Descriptive is an eleven-letter word.*

*Normative is a better word.*

# So what?

- Identify the helping verb used (or omitted/implied) to better understand what might actually be meant.
- Consider if it is a statement of fact or opinion.

# **Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "problems"**

## **Testing, n.**

The process of evaluating a product by learning about it through exploration and experimentation, which includes to some degree: questioning, study, modeling, observation, inference, etc. (RST)

# **Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "problems"**

**Testing**, n.

An investigation conducted to provide stakeholders with information about the quality of the product or service under test. (Kaner)



# **Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "problems"**

## **Testing, n.**

Utilizing various tools and approaches in some combination and to some degree to help evaluate quality characteristics via exploration and experimentation often to obtain pertinent, useful information and provide it to relevant stakeholders to enable more informed, confident decisions which may also indirectly lead to increased quality.

# **Testers** [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "problems"

**Tester**, n.

One who performs testing.

# **Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "problems"**



# So what?

- The definition of “testing” might change the meaning of the phrase.
- Consider the actions performed to better understand the accuracy of the phrase.

# Testers [do|don't] (help) [prevent|detect] "problems"

- Testers detect defects
- Testers don't prevent problems
- Testers must help detect bugs
- Testers should help prevent bugs
- Testers can prevent failures
- Testers can't help prevent issues

# Summary

- **Testers**
  - Understand the definition of “testing” to better understand the role and responsibilities of “tester” and the meaning of the phrase.
- [**do** | **don't**]
  - Identify the helping verb and consider if it is a statement of fact or opinion.
- (**help**)
  - Consider how the inclusion/exclusion of this word affects the meaning of the phrase.
- [**prevent** | **detect**]
  - Consider the word choice and point of view.
- **problems**
  - Problems (by any other name) are subjective.

# Summary



**Keith Klain**  
@keithklain



What if we spent more time talking to each other about what words actually mean instead of being wound up about what we think people meant by them...

**Words matter!**



# Thank You!



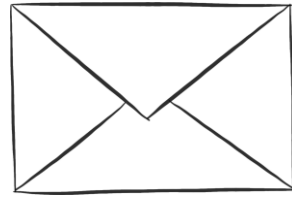
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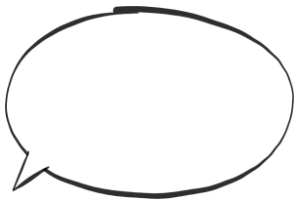
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