How to write a coherent article-based thesis with a framing introduction

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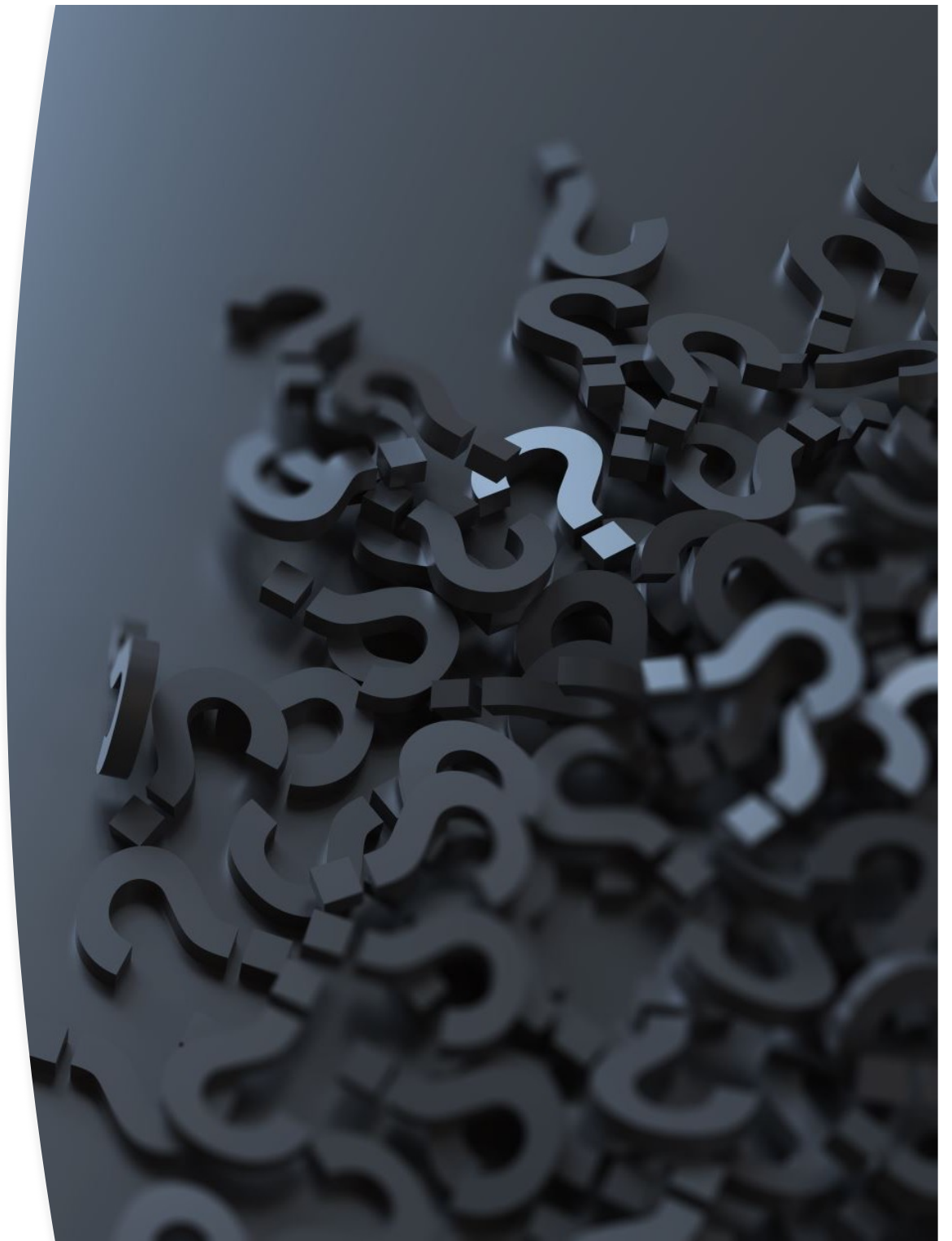
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This brief talk…

- From a workshop for PhD candidates at InfoMedia, usually followed by recent and current PhD candidates sharing experiences

- A mixed metaphor bonanza! Pick your favourite, discard the rest

- Foundation:
    - Dissecting article-based dissertations in our department
    - Considering the formal requirements from the faculty
    - Voicing and answering the questions candidates struggle with

Candidate approaches to writing the framing introduction

- **Pragmatist:** Articles are more or less done. I am sooo done. The thesis is what it is. Fulfil the formal requirements – hand in. Is that it, then?

- **Liberated:** I am so sick of word limits! Now I can finally elaborate on the important stuff. I want to write a big book where it will all come together. But how do I get started?

- **Overwhelmed:** Wait, I am just getting the hang of the article format, and now I have to do a whole new thing? What is a framing introduction anyway? Who am I writing this for?

- **Procrastinating:** Maybe it will be easier when all the articles are fully done (sorry, it won't). Maybe I should write another article (nope, not for the thesis). Maybe I should include that side-project thing, how do I know if it fits?

Regulations by the SV faculty PhD programme

Article-based theses

Several works may be approved as parts of a thesis if their content constitutes a whole. In addition to the individual parts, the thesis must have a framing introduction that documents the cohesiveness of the thesis as a whole.

In addition to the framing introduction, the thesis must consist of at least three standard-length scholarly articles or article manuscripts where the candidate is the sole or first author. If this condition is not met, the number of articles must be increased. The number of articles indicated here is a general guideline, and the overall scope of the articles part of the thesis must be assessed in the light of the empirical and theoretical complexity. The committee will assess the academic quality of the articles, regardless of whether they have already been accepted for publication.

Framing introduction in article-based theses

The candidate must be the sole author of the framing introduction in an article-based thesis. The framing introduction shall collate the research questions and conclusions presented in the articles in a way that documents the cohesiveness of the thesis. The framing introduction should demonstrate how the thesis relates to the existing research in the field, indicate its contribution to the field, outline the broader theoretical framework of the study, and provide an in-depth methodological discussion. It should normally be between 20 and 80 pages long.

Further points to note

Rules for co-authorship of articles and documentation apply

The requirements changed in 2019 – older theses follow a different set of guidelines

International, institutional and disciplinary practice may vary
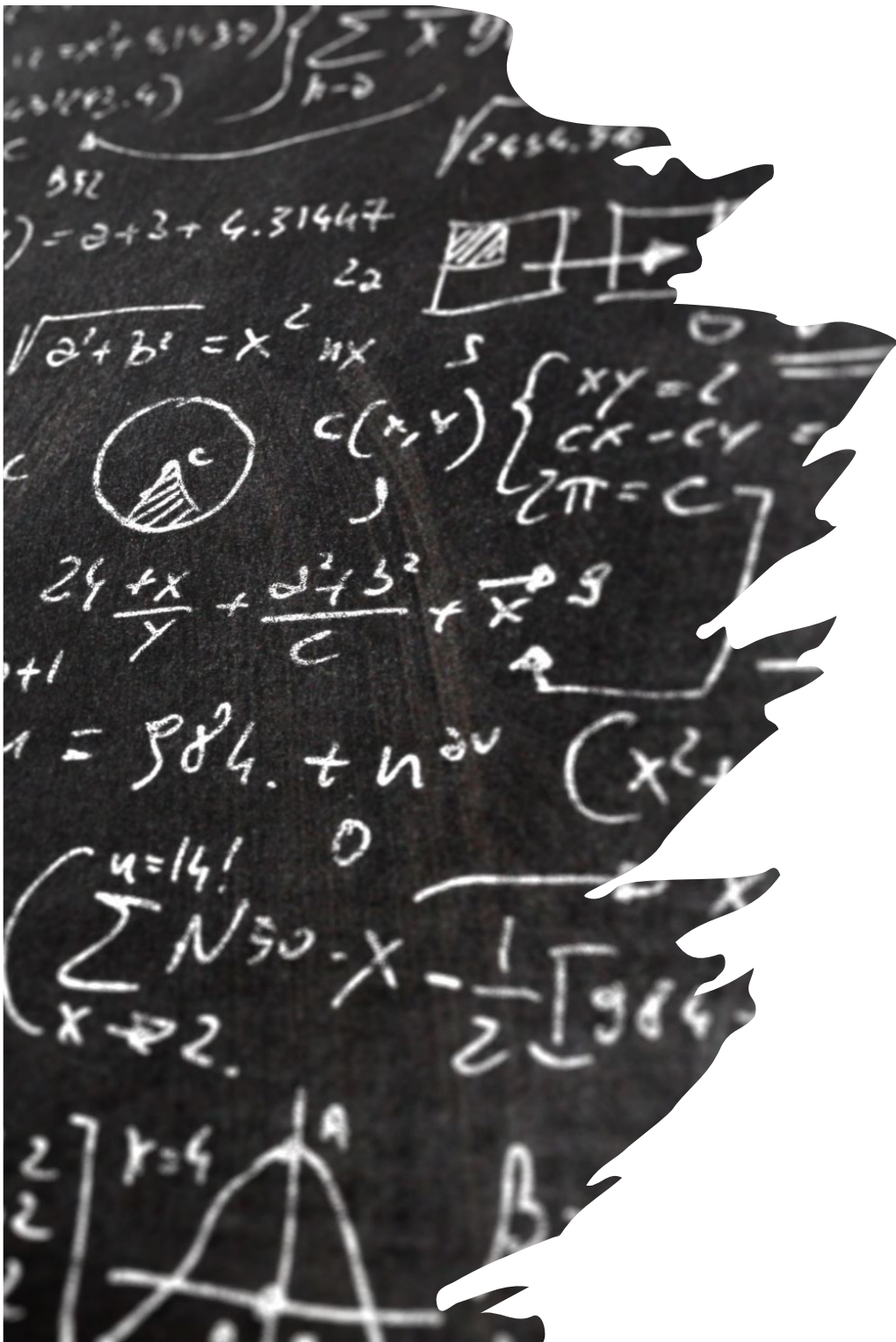
So, the framing introduction should…

Document	document the **cohesiveness** of the thesis as a whole
Collate	collate the research questions and conclusions presented in the articles
Demonstrate	demonstrate how the thesis **relates** to the existing research in the field
Indicate	indicate its **contribution** to the field
Outline	outline the **broader** theoretical framework of the study
Provide	provide an **in-depth** methodological discussion
&	normally be between 20 and 80 pages long

Cohesiveness?! But my thesis is all over the place!

A cohesive thesis is a thesis that does one thing

- In Norwegian: **«En rød tråd»**

- You need to formulate what the one thing is and explain how the different parts of the thesis relate to it

- (Yes, it is ok to split the one thing into smaller items. No, it is not a good idea to do several vaguely related things)

- The one thing can be an aim, ambition, contribution, or an overarching research question to answer

- The one thing can come together – cohesiveness can be produced – in many different ways. **The framing introduction is the space where you make this happen.**

- For the sake of simplicity, we will now refer to the one thing as the research question for the thesis as a whole (the RQ)

Models for how the articles connect to each other and the RQ

Prism models

The articles shed light on different aspects relevant to answering the RQ:

- Same RQ - different operationalized RQs

- Same RQ - different methods, approaches or cases

- Same RQ - different hypotheses or explanations

- Same RQ - different perspectives or theories
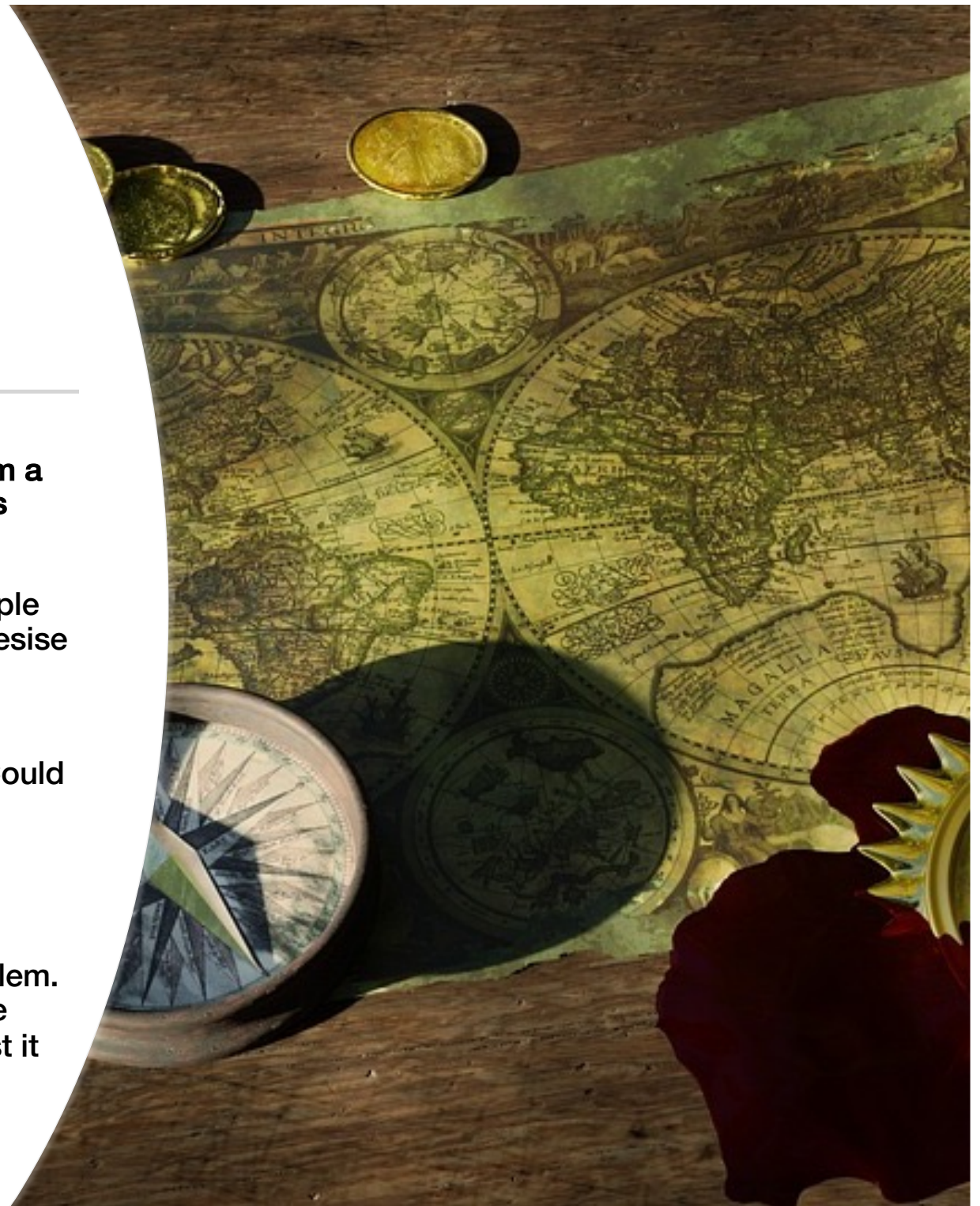
- Or combinations!

Story models

The articles (A, B, C and maybe D) form a story that answers the RQ of the thesis

- **The dialectic model:** Some people say A. Others say B. If we synthesise we get C.

- **The detective model:** Why A? Could the answer be B? No, look at problem C! Which takes us to solution D.

- **The inventor model:** A is a problem. Let us try to fix it by B. Nope, we need to develop C. And then test it by D.

What about the framing introduction then?

The prequel metaphor

The framing introduction produces coherency by **setting the stage** for the articles:

- Providing context and background
- Building the world in which the articles play their roles
- Highlighting grander themes, debates and contributions

Please note the requirements for "in-depth" discussion of methods and "broader" theoretical frameworks!

The cape metaphor

The framing introduction produces coherency by **covering** what is already in the articles, enveloping them in a protective "kappe":

- An introduction and a conclusion in one

- Allows you to focus on the aspects of the articles that work together, not what drives them apart

Please note the requirements to collate findings and conclusions from the articles "in a way that documents cohesiveness", and to indicate your contributions!

Practical writing tips

- **Explain your thinking.** This can include comments on format, such as why you chose article-based and what this means for you.

- **Adapt the proposed content** of the framing introduction to your needs, but consider each point in the requirements for relevance.

- **Utilize the relatively free format** to prioritize what you find most interesting – answer the "so what"-question!

- **Adapt length** in the range of 20-80 pages – look to examples close to your own work.

- **Short-name the articles** in terms of their function and relationship to the RQ, point to them while writing the framing intro

- **Switch around** the order of articles to make sense to outsiders to your process

Bonus tip: Visualization!

Vindenes, Joakim (2023) User-Environment Relations. A postphenomenology of Virtual Reality. PhD thesis, UiB

Find this and other theses at bora.uib.no

You can also visualize contributions, methods, theories or other aspects of the papers that you want to bring attention to

Article 3: Empirical Study
"Constructing Hermeneutical Relations: A Postphenomenological Inquiry into Immersive VR Memory Palaces"

(Vindenes & Wasson, submitted)

Article 1: Theoretical Background
"A Postphenomenological Framework for Studying User Experience of Immersive Virtual Reality"

(Vindenes & Wasson, 2021)

Article 2: Methical Development
"Show, don't tell: Using Go-along Interview in Immersive Virtual Reality"
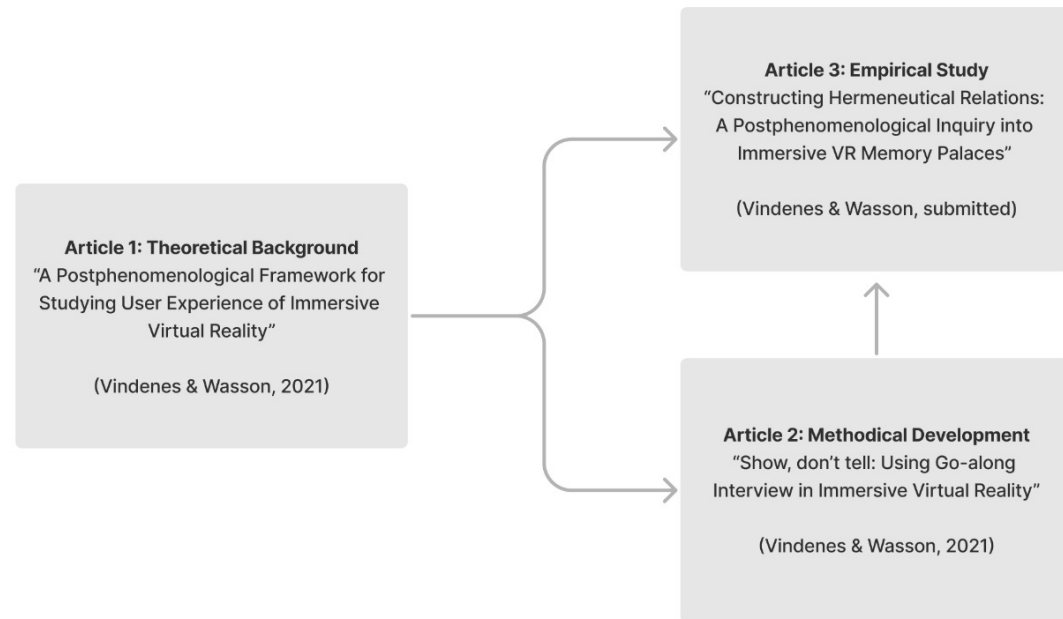
(Vindenes & Wasson, 2021)

Figure 1.1: Display of the relationship between the articles comprising this dissertation

The role of the framing introduction in producing cohesiveness

- So, you built a house! Now you are taking the committee on a guided tour...

- You need to tell them where the house is – basic directions first

- You point to attributes you want to emphasize. The beautiful location! The bold colour-choices! But more importantly, the functional floor plan and solid foundation.

- It's ok that there is still rubble some places, because you guide them safely through

- You decide if the tour includes a trip to the garden or not, but you don't suddenly wander off there

Thank you for your attention!

Remember:

Superheroes transform when putting on the cape -

Candidates produce cohesiveness when writing the "kappe"!