One Rung Up

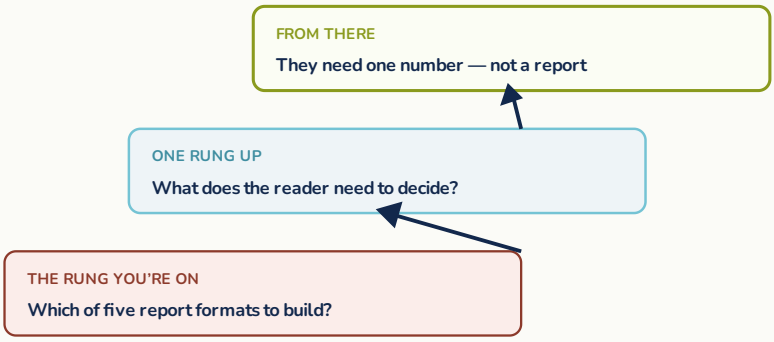
Quick guide · 🟢 SOLO 🔵 TEAM

> **The one idea:** the harder you work a problem, the more complicated it gets — often because you're solving it on the wrong level. One Rung Up steps you from the tangled detail to the goal the task serves, where the real problem — or its disappearance — becomes clear. A **rung** is a level: you're on the task; the rung above is the goal behind it. Climbing one rung usually simplifies the view.

· WHAT DO I DO?

What to do — name the rung, step up one BOTH

Write the problem as you're stuck on it. Ask "what is this for?" to find the rung above, and write that. Then stay on the higher rung a moment — look at the problem from there before climbing back down.



Ask "what is this for?" — one rung only. A five-way argument becomes a one-number answer.

🟢 SOLO — a minute, in your head or on a card

1. Name the rung you're on.

Write the problem exactly as you're stuck on it — the detailed version.

2. Step up one.

Ask "what is this for?" Write the goal one level higher. Just one rung.

3. Stay there for a moment.

Is the problem simpler now — or a different problem? Linger before climbing back down.

🔵 TEAM — two minutes, one facilitator

1. Name the rung.

Write the problem the team's stuck on where everyone sees it — the detailed version.

2. Step up one, together.

Ask the room "what is this for?" Agree the one goal a rung above. Hold them to a single rung.

3. Stay there — don't rush back.

From the higher rung, has the argument simplified or changed? Let it sit before deciding.

· BAD, BETTER, BEST?

Bad › Better › Best BOTH

The difference between stepping up and either staying stuck or going too high:

BAD

"Let's compare all five formats in detail."

Stuck on the low rung. The more detail you add, the more complex it gets.

BETTER

"What's our long-term data strategy?"

Climbed too far. Now it's abstract and unanswerable — no help with today's problem.

BEST

"What does the reader need to decide?"

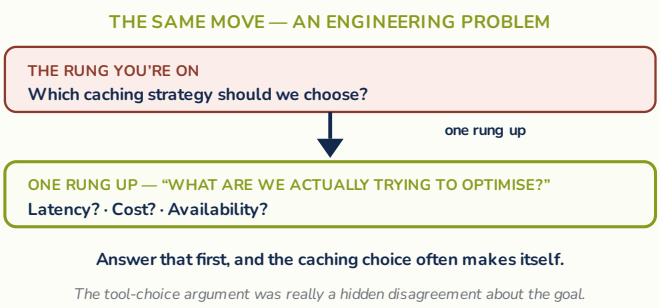
Exactly one rung up. The detailed problem simplifies — maybe disappears.

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· DOES IT WORK IN MY WORLD?

The same move, in engineering BOTH

It isn't just for reports. Any "which option?" argument may really be a hidden disagreement about the goal — and one rung up surfaces it.



· WHEN DOES IT HELP — AND WHEN DO I STOP?

Where it helps — and when not to climb BOTH

WHERE IT HELPS MOST

Lost in detail — the problem grows the closer you look; step up one rung. **Arguing about how** — the team's deep in implementation; rise to what it's for. **An over-specified task** — "build exactly this"; check the goal it serves first. **A stuck decision** — the rung above often makes the choice obvious.

WHEN NOT TO CLIMB

Go up exactly one rung, not to the top. Leap straight to "our mission" and the problem gets vaguer, not simpler. The immediate goal the task serves is where complexity usually drops — stop there.

The over-climb test: if your answer could fit every company, you've climbed too far. Come back down one rung.

· HOW DO I MAKE THIS A HABIT?

The habit to keep BOTH

THE HABIT

"Whenever a problem gets more complicated the deeper you go, climb one rung before doing anything else."

Tied to a trigger — the feeling of a problem getting *worse* the harder you work it — this becomes a reflex against complexity. The simplest version of a problem usually lives just above it.

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WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym BOTH

If instead...	Use this
the problem is simpler if you **remove** something, not zoom out	**Subtraction Game** — simplify by taking away, not by stepping up.
you need to rebuild the problem from its basics	**First Principles** — dig *down* to what must be true, rather than up to the goal.
a belief is blocking you and you need to test if it's true	**Assumption Breaker** — test what's fixed versus only assumed.

Rule of thumb: One Rung Up steps **up** to the goal the task serves. Subtraction Game removes to simplify; First Principles digs down to rebuild. Step up, strip away, or dig down.

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