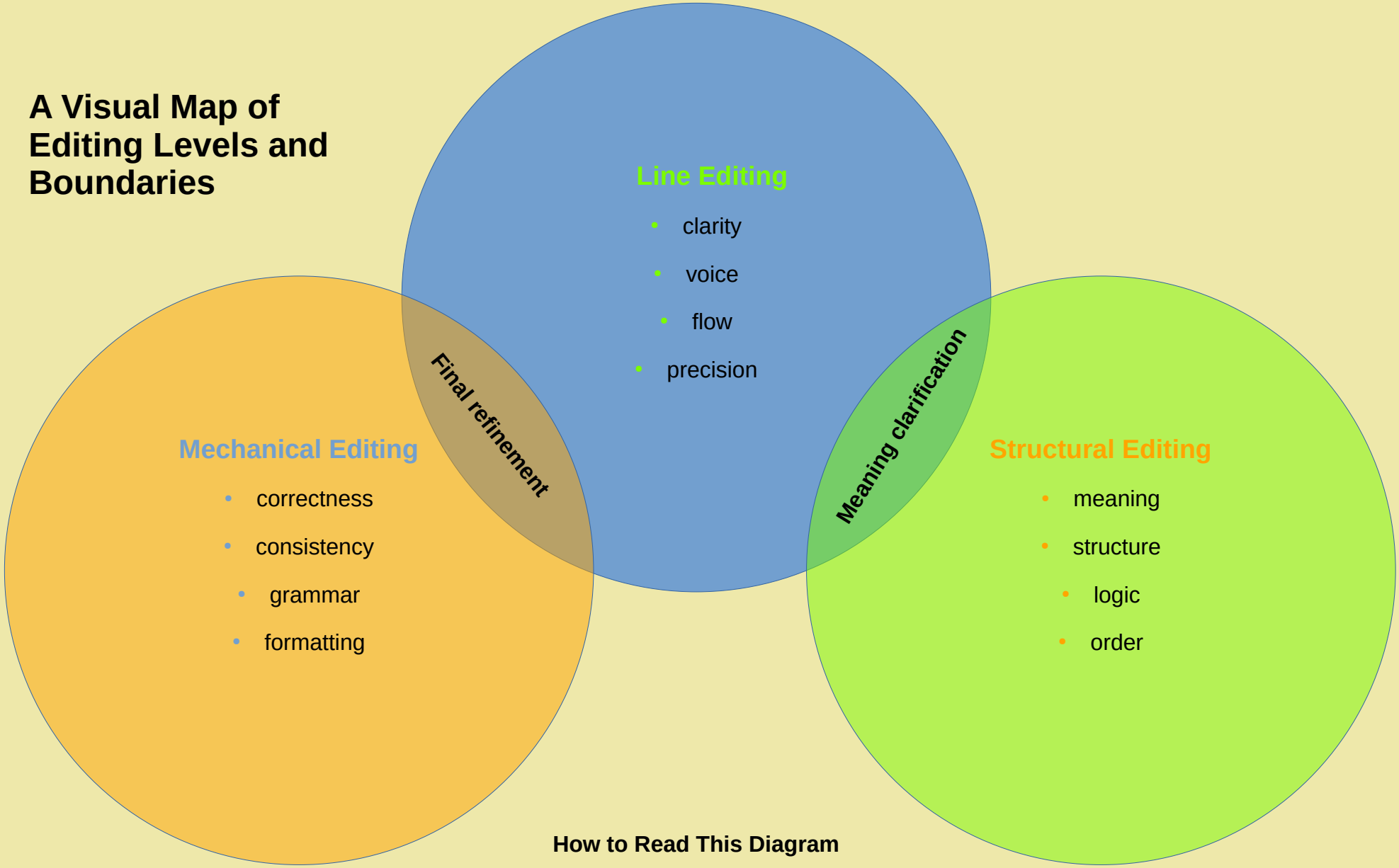
A Visual Map of Editing Levels and Boundaries



How to Read This Diagram

This diagram shows the three primary levels of editing and the boundaries between them. Each circle represents a different kind of decision-making: Structural editing focuses on meaning, logic, order, and structure. Line editing focuses on clarity, voice, flow, and precision. Mechanical editing focuses on correctness, consistency, grammar, and formatting.

The overlapping areas show where limited crossover is appropriate — and where it becomes risky. The overlap between Structural and Line Editing represents clarifying meaning after structural decisions have been made. The overlap between Line and Mechanical Editing represents final refinement, which typically occurs late in the editing process. There is no overlap between Structural and Mechanical Editing. Polishing grammar cannot fix structural problems. If editing feels frustrating or unproductive, the problem is often not what you are editing, but where you are working in the process.

Use this diagram as a navigation tool. When in doubt, step back, identify the level you are in, and return to the kind of editing that belongs there.

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