



# the reduction: the one-page framework

---

Black Oak Lane LLC

Every technical lesson in this novel reduces to a small number of durable principles. Here they are, in the order they appear.

## 1. The Loop

Your code runs the agentic loop. Claude participates in it. `stop_reason: tool_use` means continue. `stop_reason: end_turn` means stop. Everything else is error handling. The model re-reads the full conversation history on every iteration - it does not remember, it re-reads.

## 2. Enforcement vs. Request

A rule in a system prompt is a request. A rule in code is a fact. For any behavior that must occur every time without exception - identity verification, threshold checks, escalation on explicit customer request - use code, hooks, or forced tool selection. Probabilistic compliance is appropriate for communication style. Deterministic compliance is required for business rules.

## 3. The Interface Is the Work

Tool descriptions, CLAUDE.md files, path-specific rules, few-shot examples, and JSON schemas are not documentation. They are the interface through which the model understands what it is supposed to do. A correctly implemented tool with a bad description fails as reliably as a buggy tool with a good one.

## 4. Show, Don't Describe

Describing an output format tells the model what you want. Showing it - source document and correct extraction as a paired example - tells the model what you mean by what you want. These are different things. Description works for clean cases. Examples generalize to cases you haven't seen yet.

## 5. Null Is a Finding

A schema that requires values that aren't always present produces fabricated values. Mark fields nullable when they may be absent. Null means: this field was looked for and not found. Empty means: this field contains nothing. Absent means: this field category does not appear in this document. These are three different states.

## 6. Addition Is Easy; Subtraction Requires Knowing What Matters

Context accumulates. Tool results appended in full, conversation history growing turn by turn, verbose outputs competing with specific case facts - these degrade quality gradually and invisibly. Trim tool outputs to the fields actually used. Persist the information that must always be prominent in a separate block. Subtract intentionally.



# the reduction: the one-page framework

---

Black Oak Lane LLC

## 7. Segment Before You Average

A 97% accuracy headline may conceal an 80% accuracy rate on the document types that matter most. Test coverage should be stratified by document type, field class, and consequence level. Set routing thresholds against actual segment error rates from labeled validation data.

## 8. Don't Ask the Builder to Inspect the Building

An independent review instance sees the output without the context of how it was produced. It catches different errors than the producing instance. For high-consequence outputs, two-instance review is worth the compute cost.

## 9. The Knowledge Doesn't Disappear

Institutional knowledge eliminated from the headcount appears in contractor invoices at a premium. The people who understand the systems are optional until the systems break. What Project Meridian demonstrated is that 'optional' is a temporary condition.

## 10. Document What You Decided and Why

An architecture document that records what was built and why - not just what it does, but the reasoning behind each decision - is the foundation for governance, succession, and the citizen developer model. The document is not the understanding. But when the understanding walks out the door, the document is what remains.

---

*The citizen developer model - a smaller senior technical core governing and enabling a broader population of users with AI tooling - is not an argument made in this novel. It is demonstrated. By the time the board approves Mary Cate's proposal, the reader has watched every element of the argument be earned.*