



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

HOW TO USE FEEDBACK EFFECTIVELY

DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL POLICY



A guide for students ■

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Adapted from the Developing Engagement with Feedback Toolkit, Naomi Winstone and Robert Nash <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/developing-engagement-feedback-toolkit-deft>

General advice

What is feedback?

Feedback is any kind of information that someone gives you about your performance, skills, and understanding, and can represent one of the best opportunities for improving.

Feedback could be a grade on your essay, or comments or suggestions given to you verbally or in writing. It might come from your teachers or academic mentors, but might also come from your peers, or even from yourself.

Act on your feedback!

Some students don't take any notice of their feedback! This can be for many reasons, but it's very difficult to improve 'magically' without getting any input on what to do differently, and how. Ignoring your feedback makes it difficult to improve.

What issues are being highlighted in the feedback?

Your feedback will tell you where you have earned marks, and where you can improve.

What solutions does the feedback propose?

Your feedback will include advice on how to improve, and it is important to act on this. For example, if you're told your essay structure was weak, this should make you think about how to improve your structuring in future, not just why it wasn't better last time.

You may find the reflection and planning questions at the end of this guide useful.

Focusing on specific areas

Some of the feedback comments that students receive come up time and again. Here are some of the common aspects that you may be asked to improve:

Being critical

When describing studies or theories, ask whether what you've learned about them is necessarily true – are the conclusions questionable? If so, why? Does the evidence actually support the ideas it claims to support?

Structure

The best way to improve structure is to plan your work thoroughly. What exactly do you want to say? What does the marker need to understand first, before they can understand the rest? How can you make each section of your work flow nicely into the rest, so that the marker won't get lost?

Referencing

Using references appropriately is often tricky, but it's also fairly easy to find out what to do. Check your feedback to see where you often go wrong. Sometimes it's an aspect of formatting that you didn't even know about. You can find referencing style guides online, or you can look in published papers for examples. Have these to hand while you work.

Use of evidence

Sometimes students feel so confident in their understanding of a topic that they forget to show evidence to support their claims. Make sure you back up everything you say with evidence! Also, it's always best to read your primary sources carefully, rather than just reading descriptions of those sources - do they actually say what you think they say?

Writing style

Your writing style can be hard to change, and the expectations are often much higher at university compared with school or college. When you read papers, don't just focus on what they say, but also on how they are written. If you find papers that are really clear and easy to understand, keep them as examples of the kinds of style you could emulate.

What do they mean?

Sometimes, markers give you feedback and you are unsure what they mean. We asked students which terms can often be confusing when used in feedback, and we asked university teaching staff what they would mean when using these terms. We then summarised their responses.

Abstract

Being too vague about a point by not explaining it in specific language, or by failing to ground it in theory or to use examples (see also 'Concrete').

Address the question

Make sure you're answering the question that is being asked – students sometimes write about topics that miss the point. Make sure your arguments and material are relevant and clearly linked to the question, and you are not simply writing everything you know about the topic.

Assess the limitations of the study

Weigh up aspects of the study and consider weaknesses that might undermine the validity of the study, and/or suggest ways the research could be improved. The weaknesses could be methodological, but may also be with how the authors interpret and present their own findings.

Balanced argument

While it is often valuable to take a stance, be sure to present evidence for the other sides of the argument.

What do they mean? Continued

Clarity

Make sure the reader can easily understand what points you have made by writing clearly, and explaining why you have made these points. Sometimes it's just a case of writing straightforwardly, and not assuming the reader will automatically know what you were thinking.

Concise

In your work you need to explain ideas clearly but with fewer words – if you have a word limit, make effective use of it! The marker may think you are waffling. Be succinct and avoid needlessly complicated words and phrases.

Concrete

Make sure you're using clear and specific language to talk about a defined situation or a certain finding, not just vague ideas (see also 'Abstract').

Critically Evaluate/Critically Analyse

Show that you have actively thought about and questioned the claims you are describing or making. Even if the claims are completely valid, show that you haven't just accepted them at face value.

Depth/Elaborate

Make sure you explain your arguments in detail, using examples where appropriate and working through your ideas rather than simply glossing over them.

Flow

Creating a coherent argument by connecting points in a logical order to ensure that the work is easy to follow.

Illustrate

Give examples to back up the points you make, ideally using evidence.

Originality

Demonstrating your own thinking, perhaps by drawing upon research beyond the ones you learned about in class, to make an argument that not every student would have thought of.

Proof-read

Reading work back carefully, or getting another person to read it, to check for spelling and grammar mistakes. You should also check that your arguments make sense, and that everything is phrased clearly.

Range of material

Try and use more than just the material provided by the lecturers, and avoid basing too much of your work on just one or two references.

What do they mean? Continued



Specific

Give a more precise and detailed account of what is being described, drawing on particular examples.



Structure

A way of presenting your work so the reader can follow the argument. Make sure your paragraphs are in a logical order, that you show the connections between different paragraphs, and that each section has good beginning and ending sentences.



Synthesis/Integration

Show how different sources and theories go together to make a good argument. A lack of synthesis could mean your essay reads more like a list of research than an argument.



Transparent

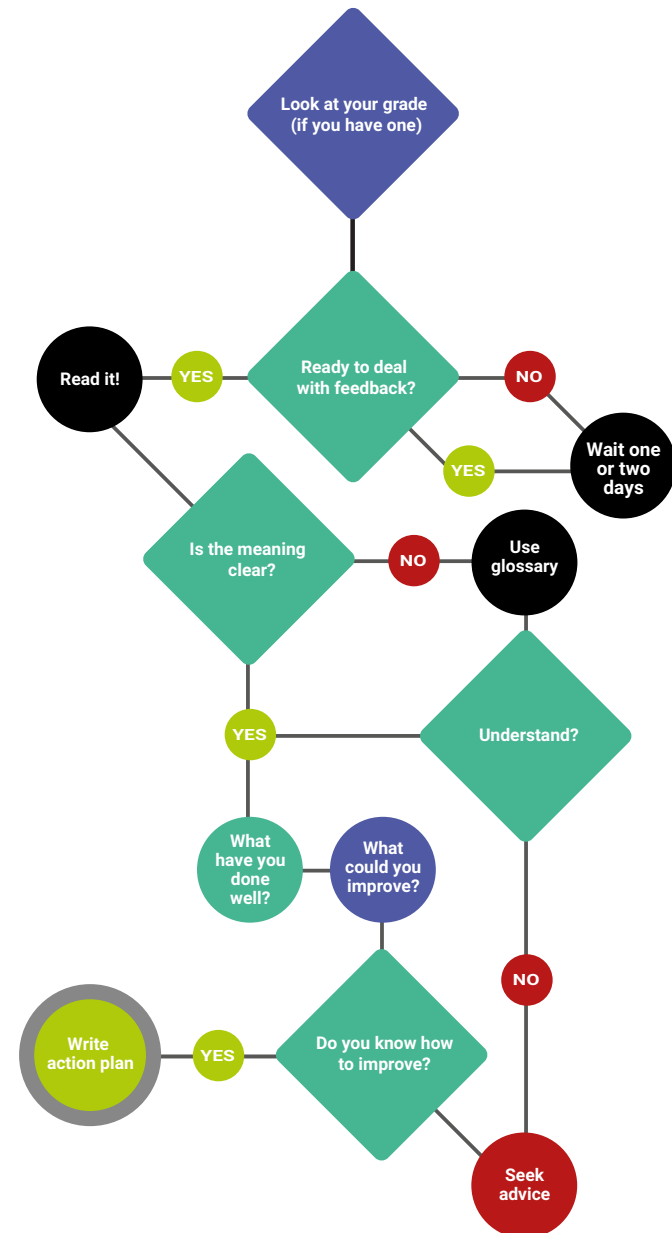
Making sure that the thought-process which underlies your argument is clearly expressed. Even if you have a good idea, it's not always easy for the marker to see your train of thought.



Unsubstantiated Claims

An unsubstantiated claim lacks evidence. Make sure you justify your argument by supporting each point with empirical evidence and references. This will create a more persuasive argument.

Feedback flowchart



Reflection and action plan

You can use the questions below to help you reflect on the feedback you have received and to plan what actions you need to take.

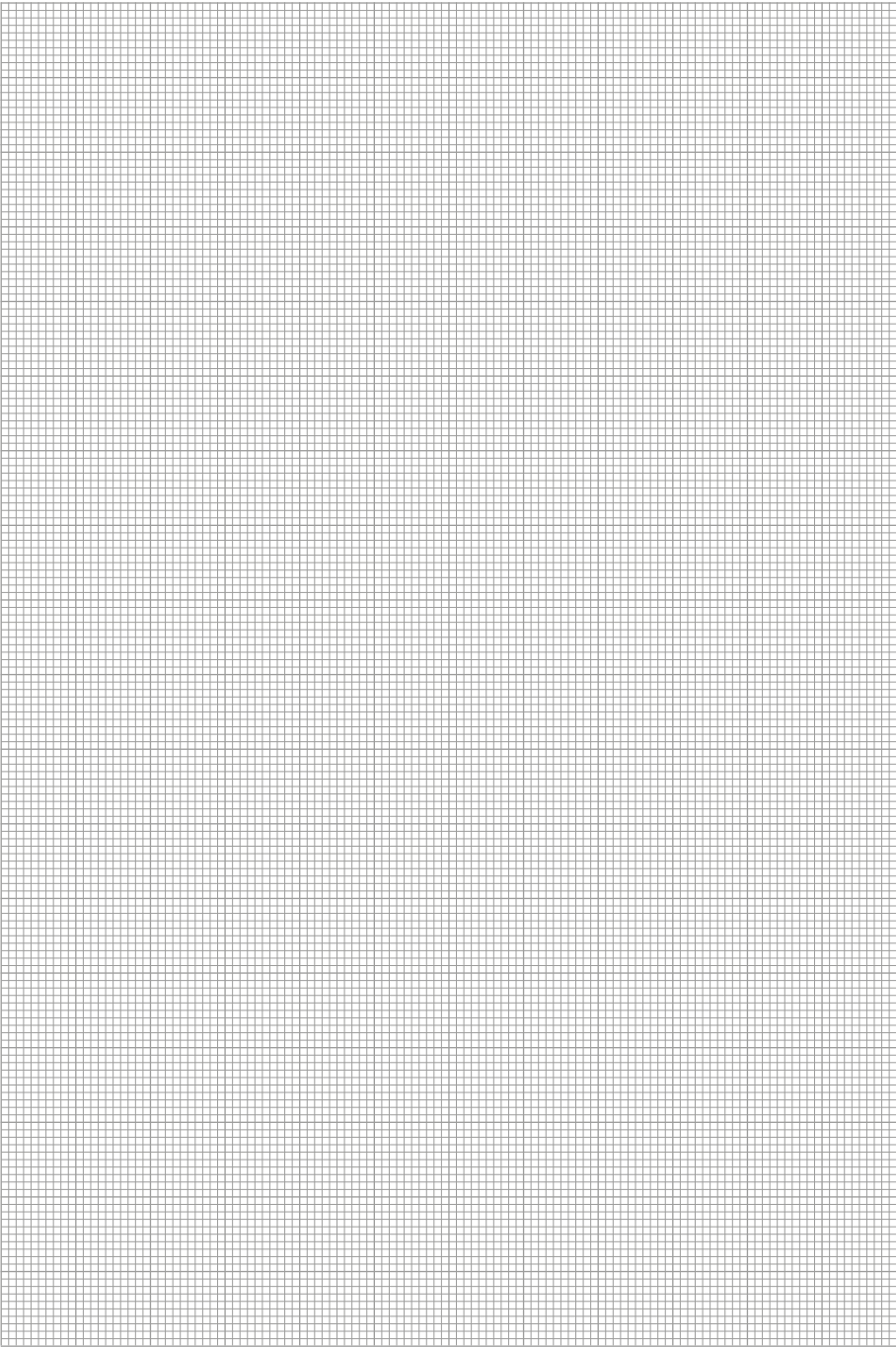
Reflection

- What are the main messages from the marker?
- Is there anything in the comments that you do not fully understand? If so, what?
- Look at the comments telling you what you have done well. Consider why you have done these things well, and consider what you need to do similarly for your next assignment.
- Look at the comments telling you what you need to do to improve. Consider why the marker has made those comments, and consider what you need to do differently for your next assignment.

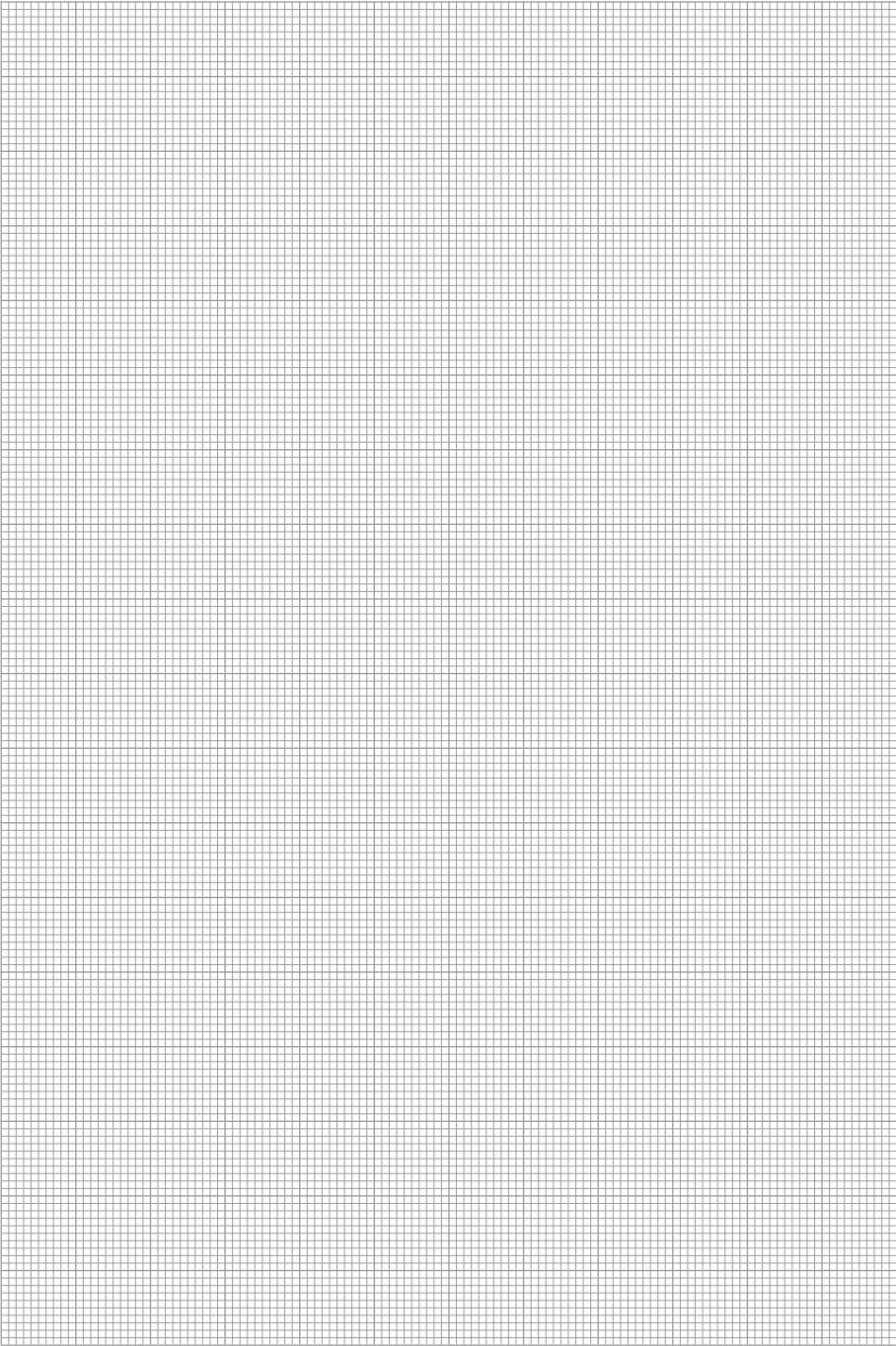
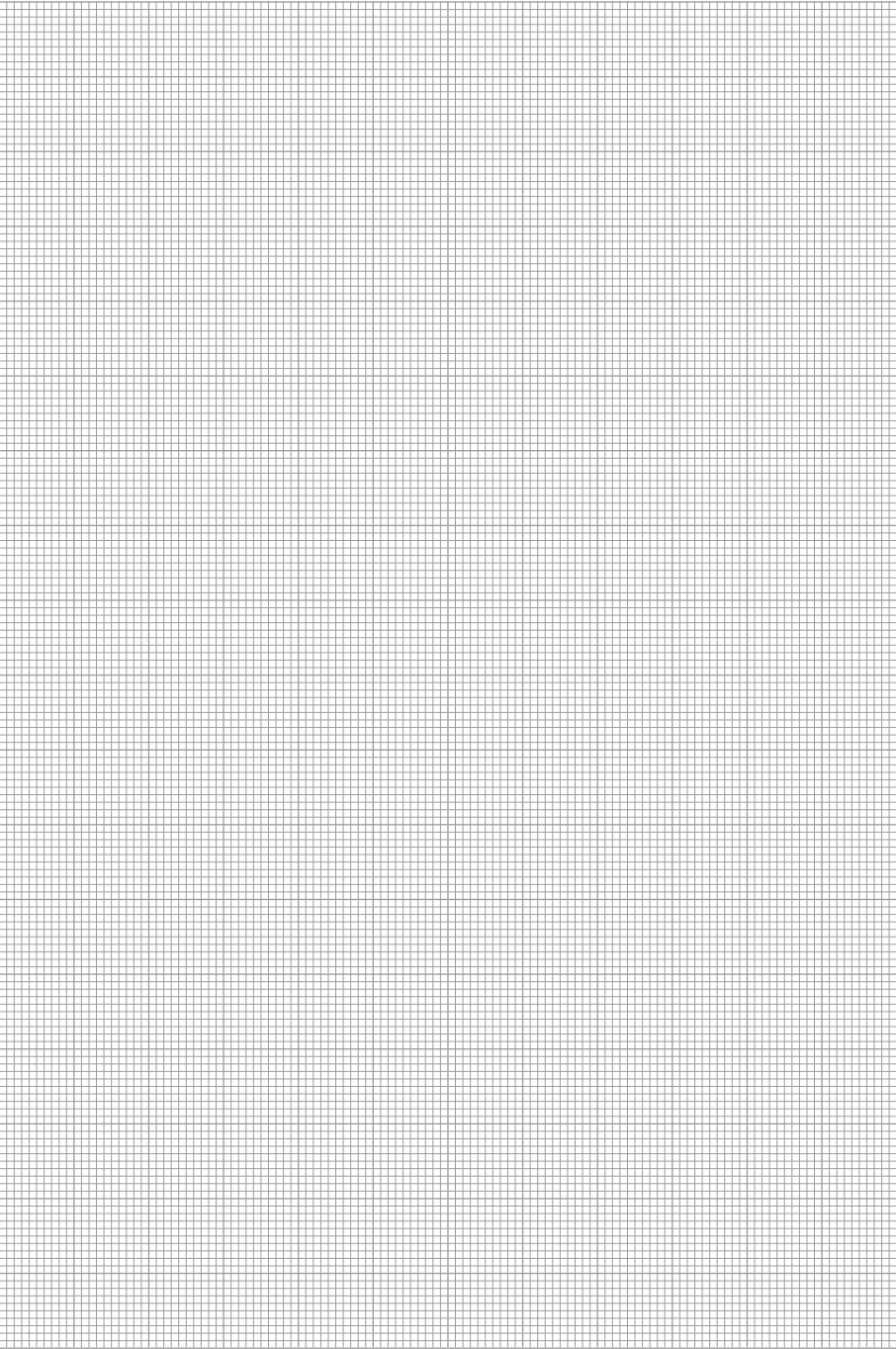
Action plan

- What skill/s do you need to develop?
- What resources could you use to help you (e.g. books, websites, LSE LIFE workshops)?
 - When and how will you access these resources?
- Who could you talk to for advice on how to improve this skill/s? (e.g. Academic mentor, course teacher, LSE LIFE study advisor?)
 - When will you talk to these people?

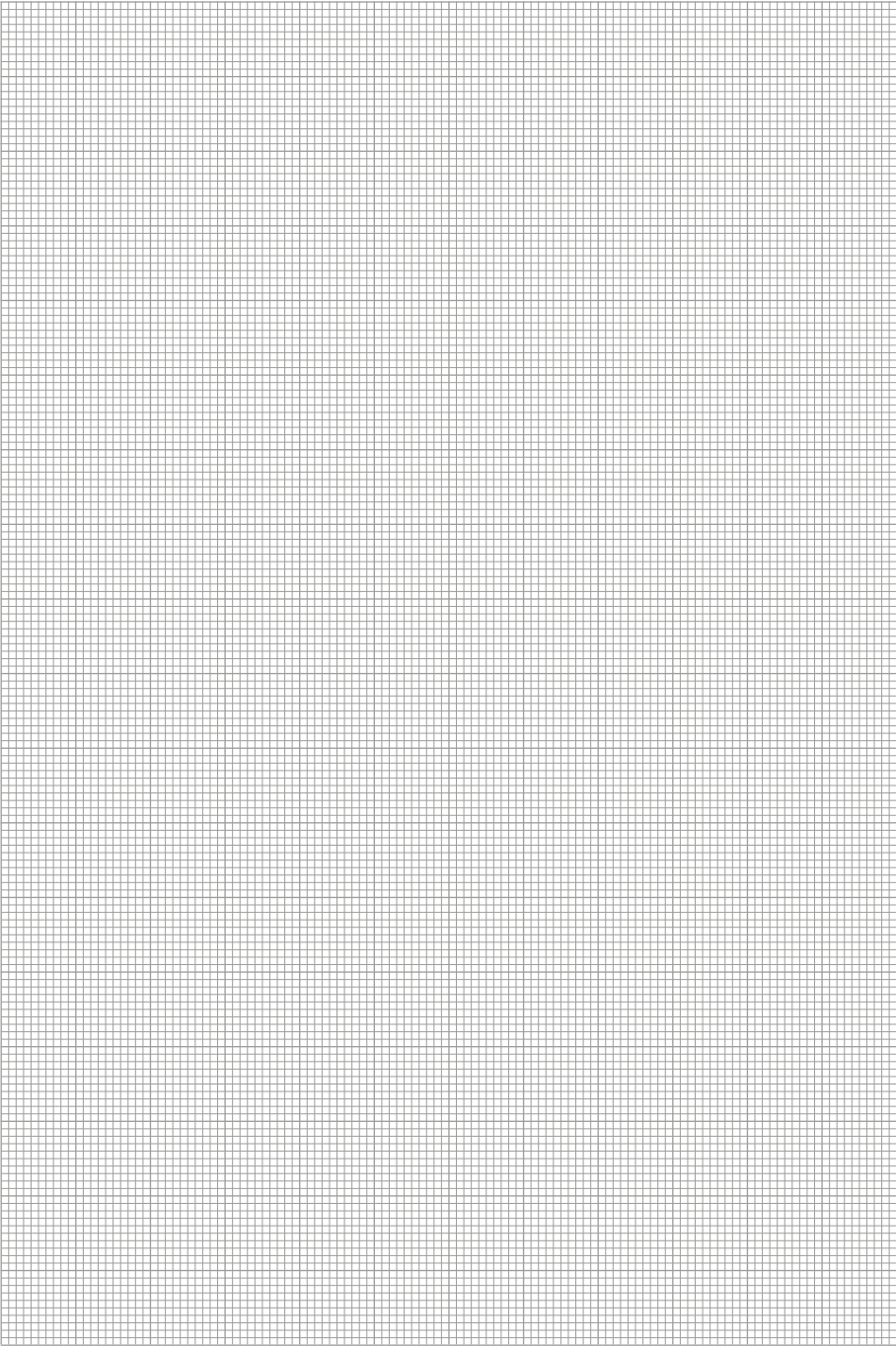
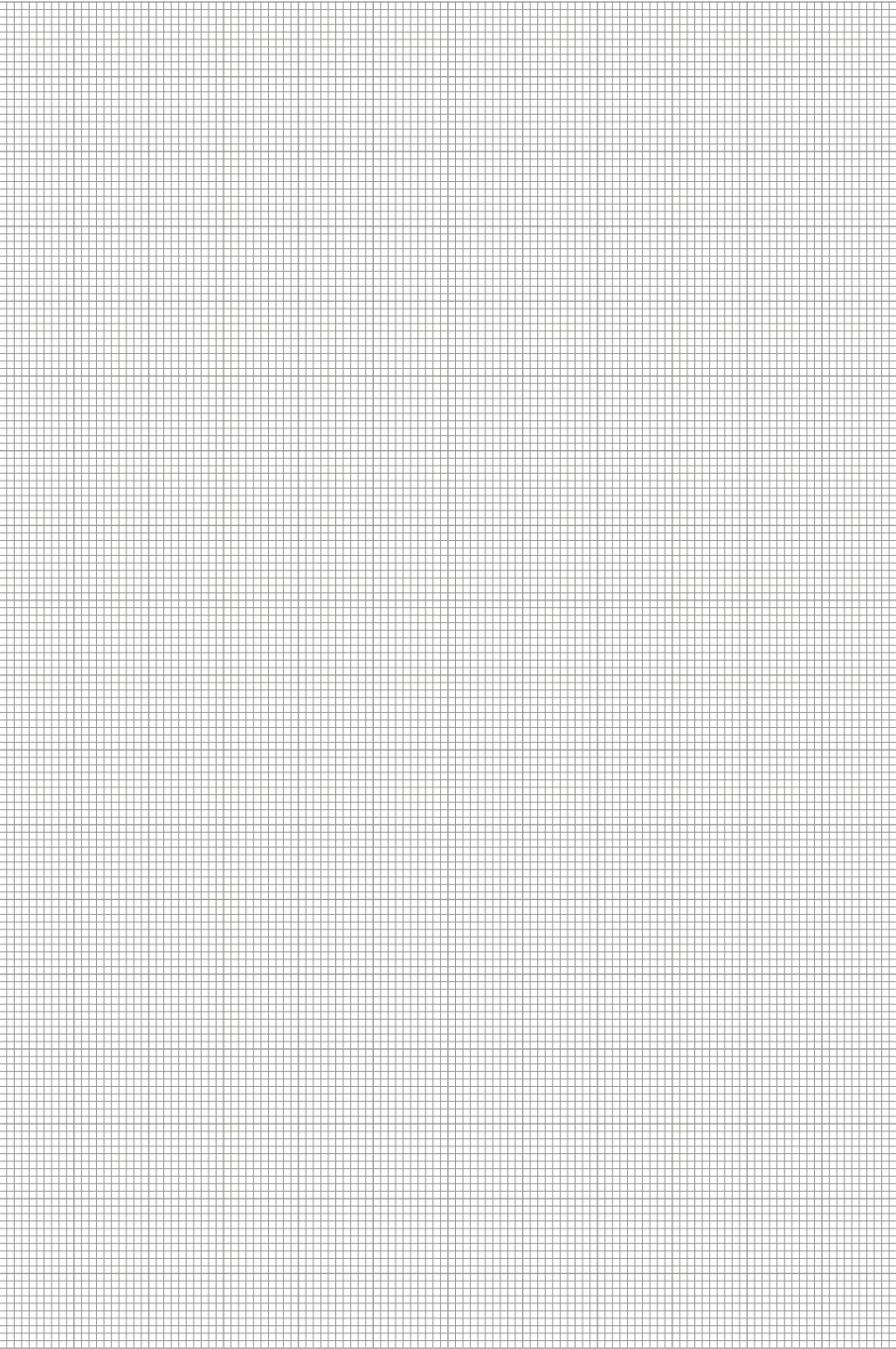
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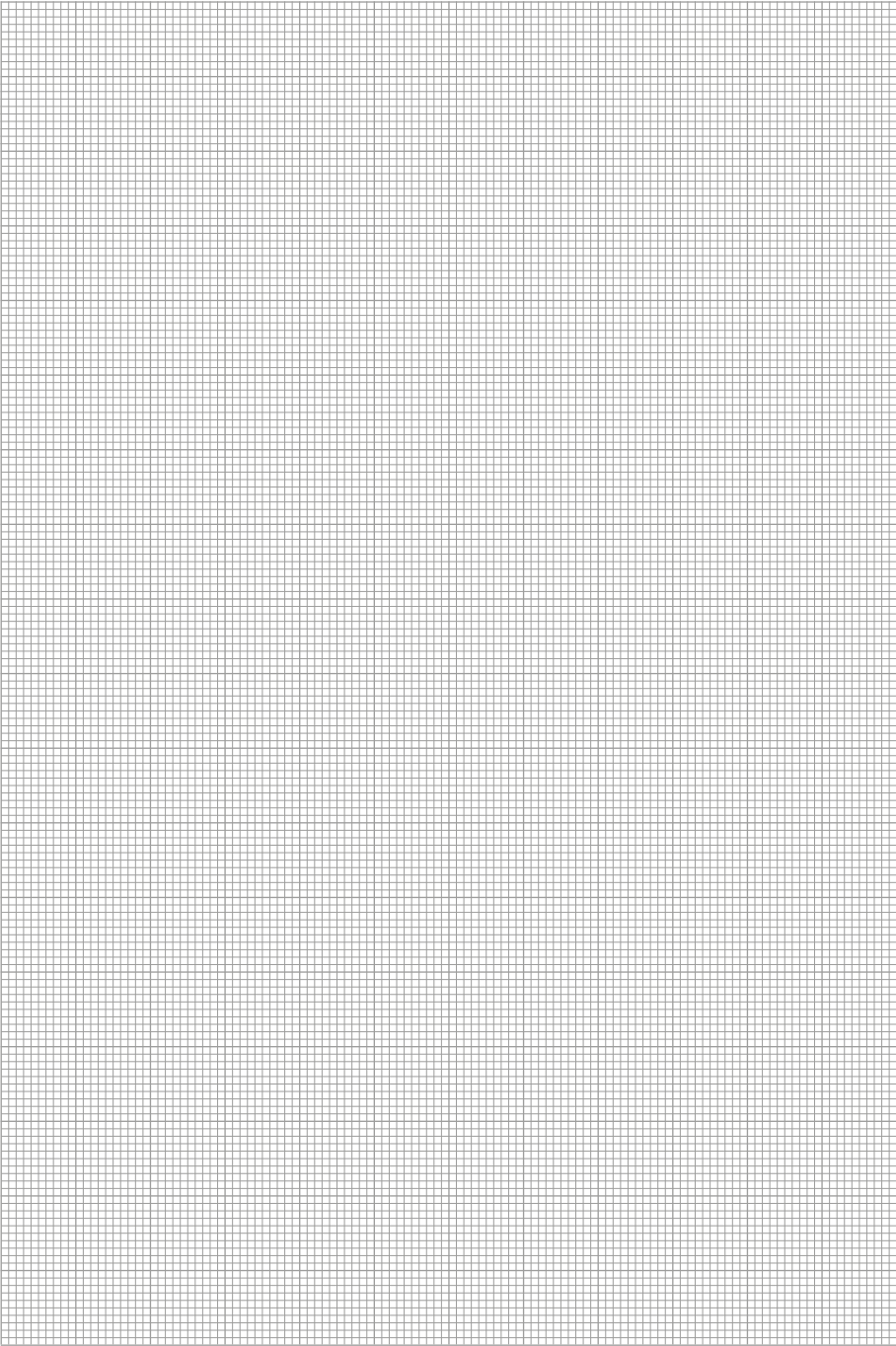
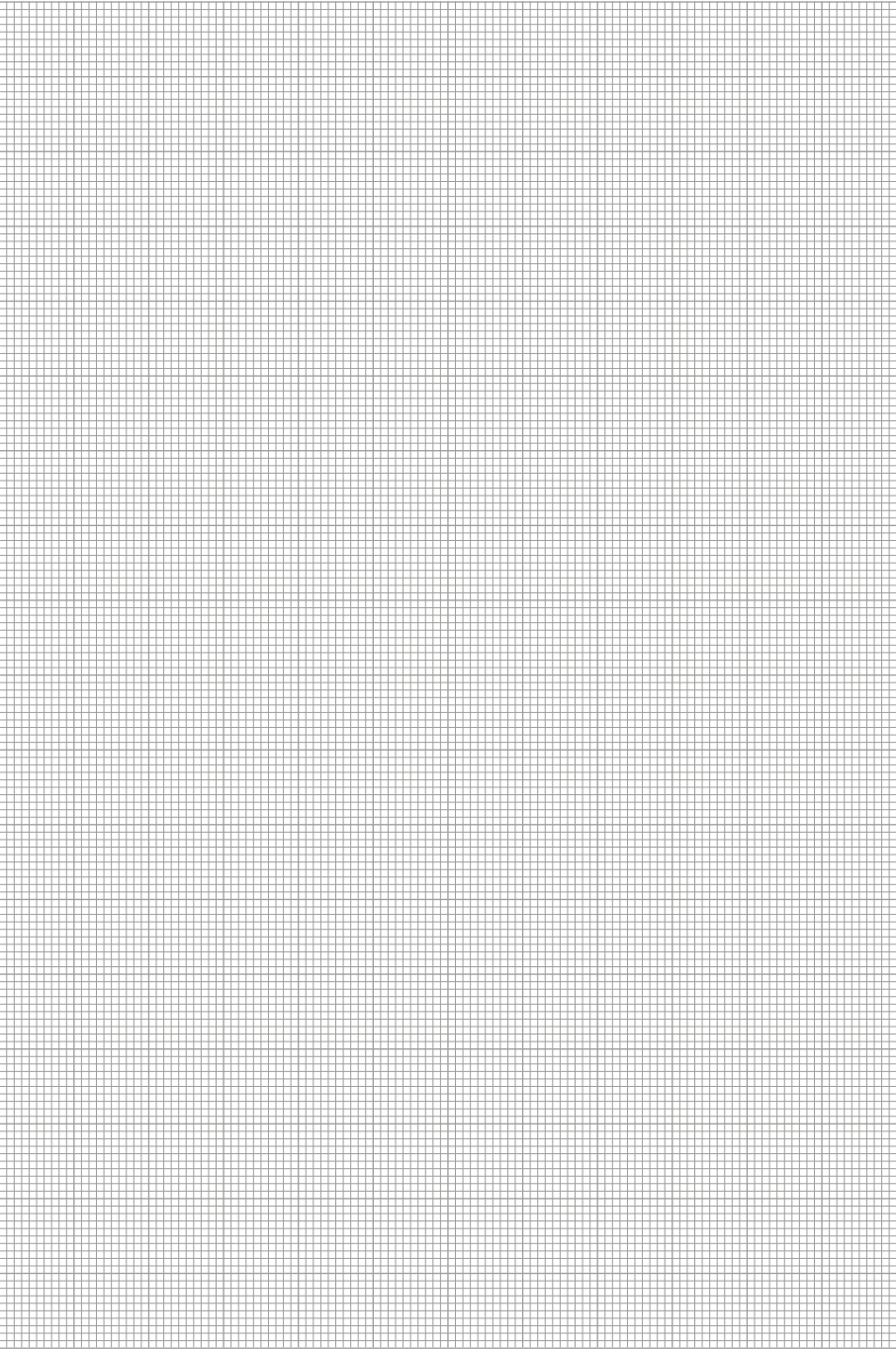
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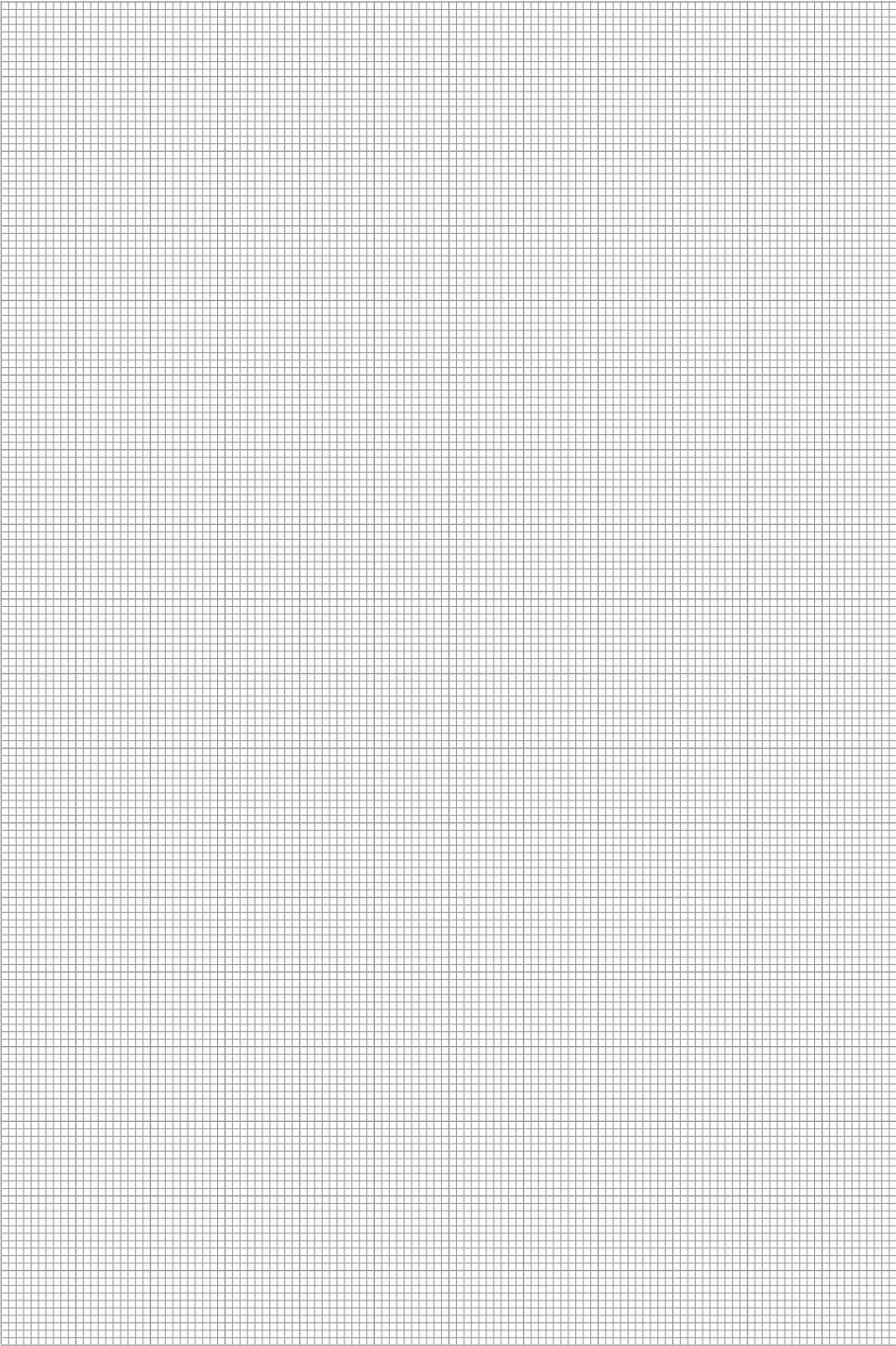
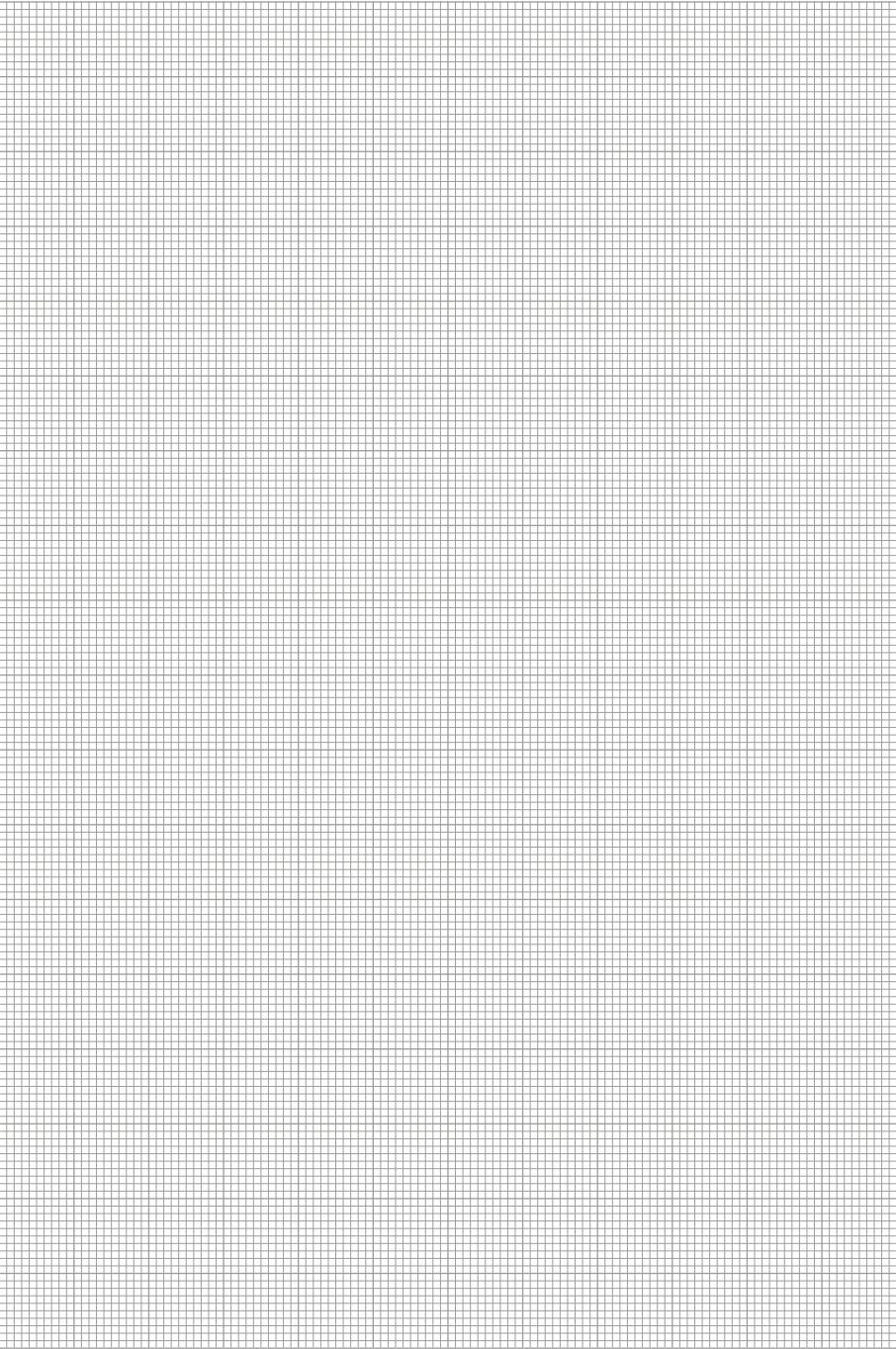
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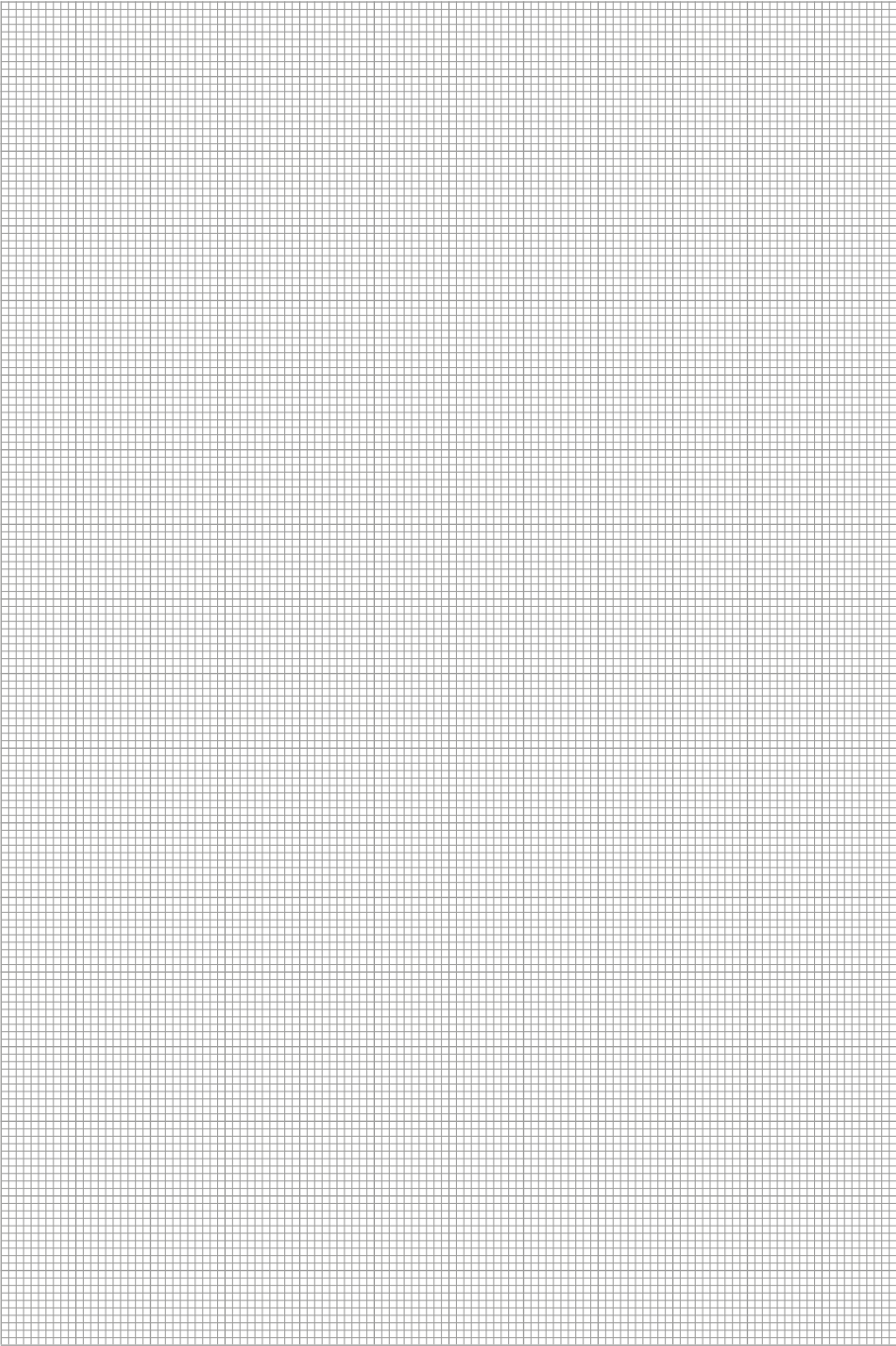
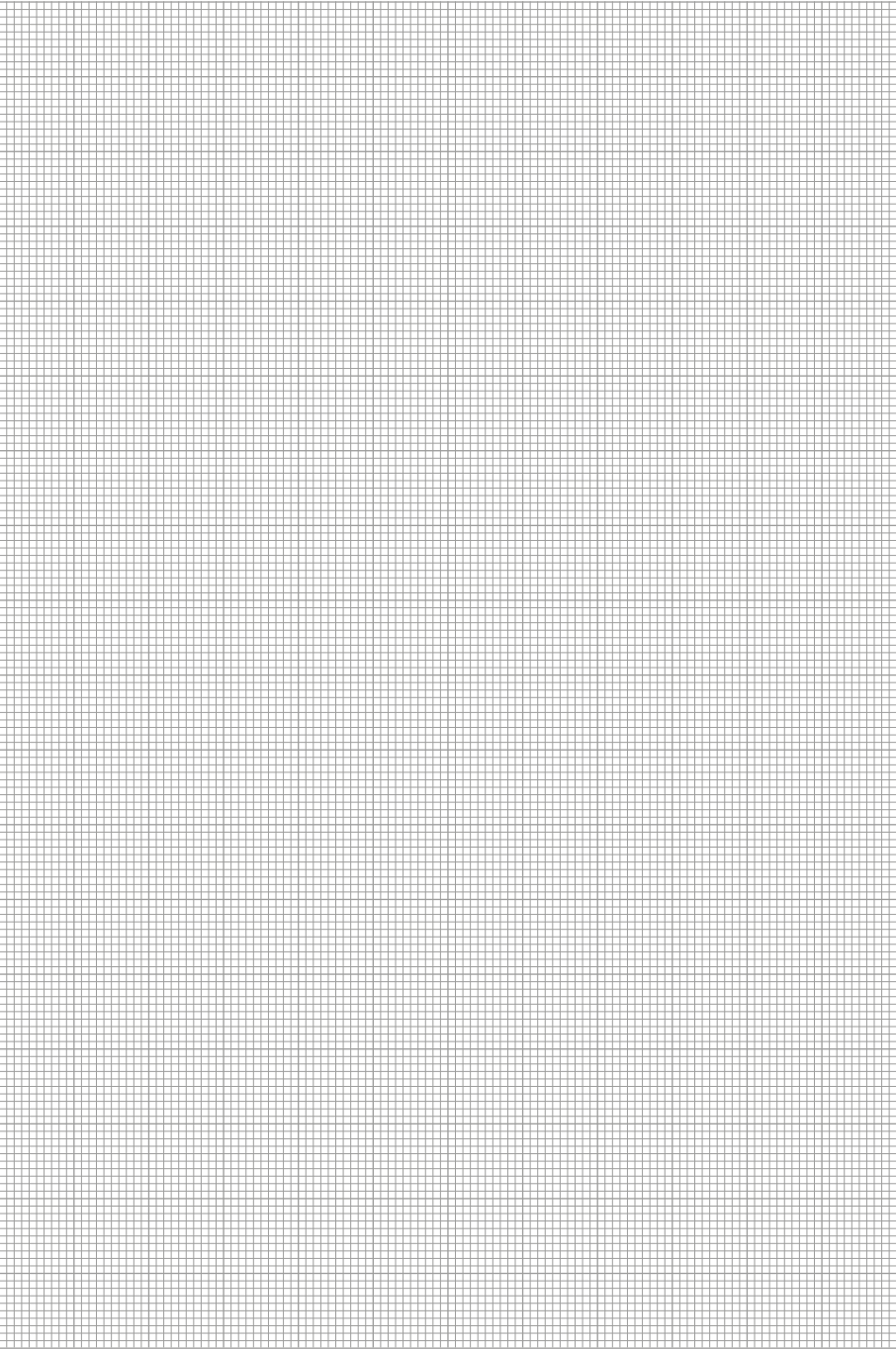
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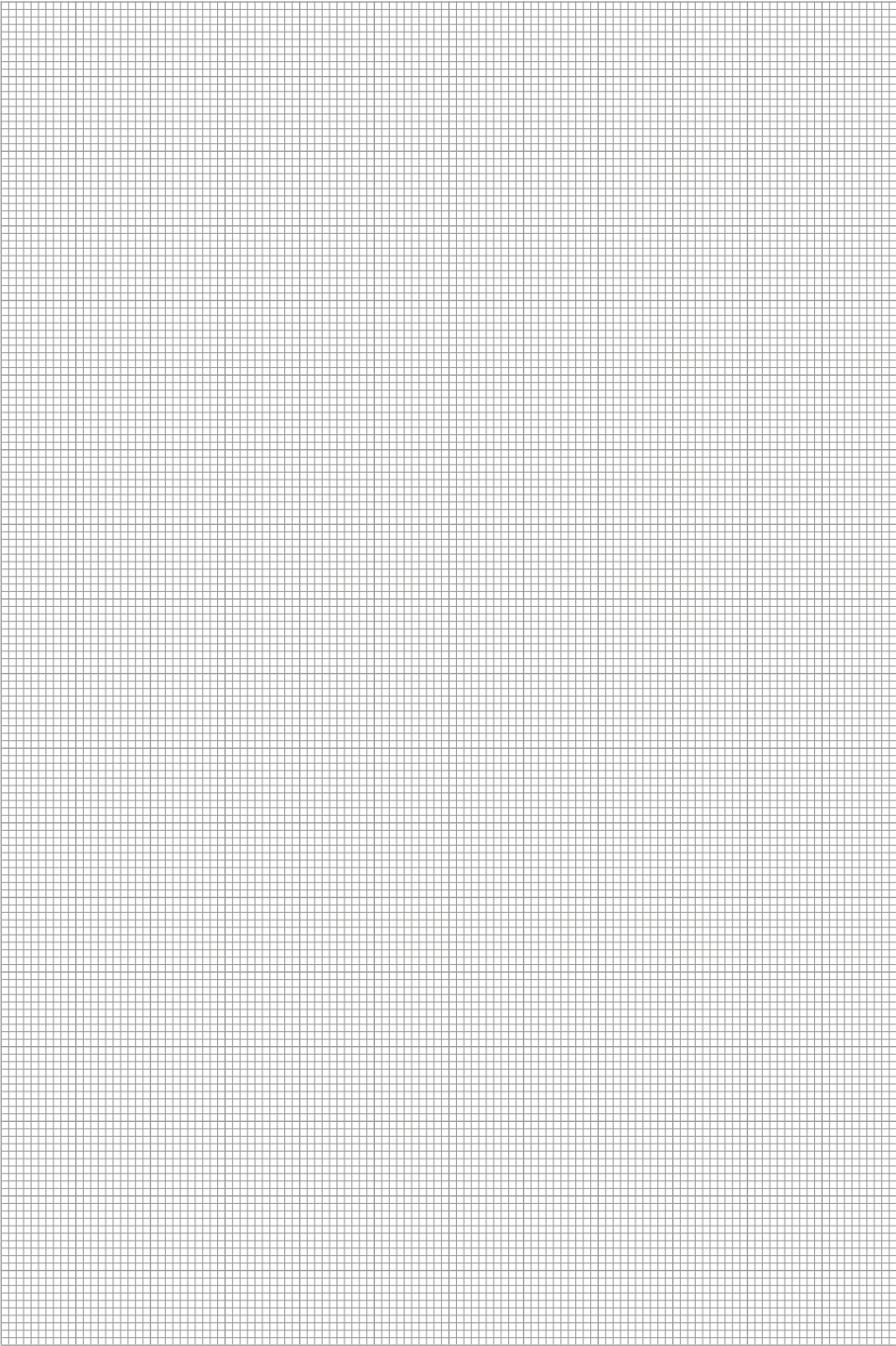
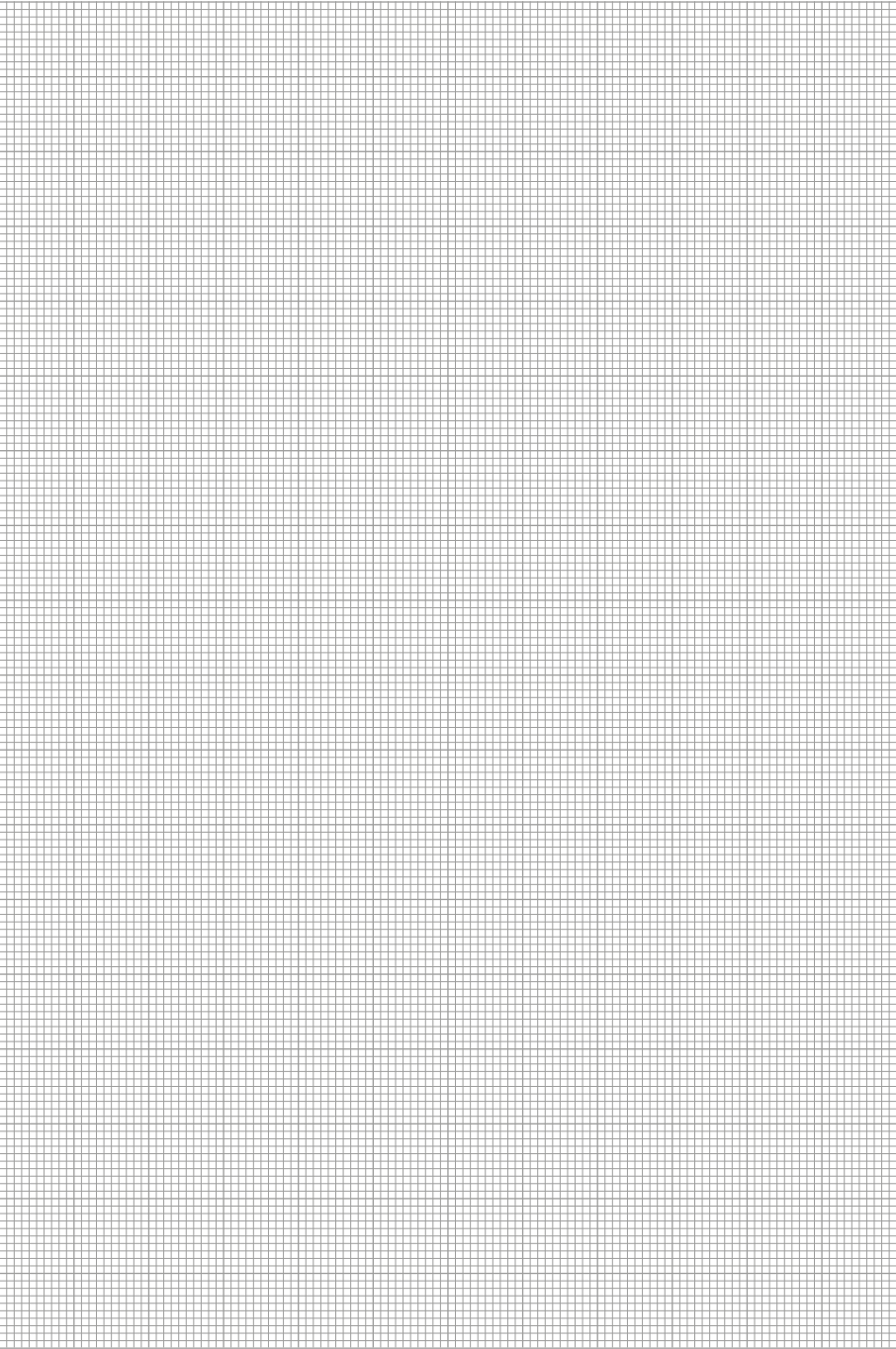
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