

# Natural Language Understanding, Generation, and Machine Translation

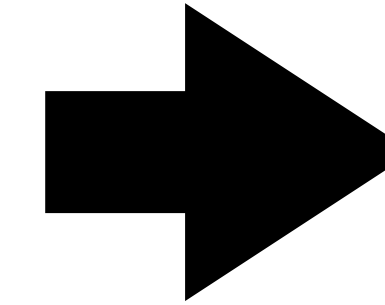
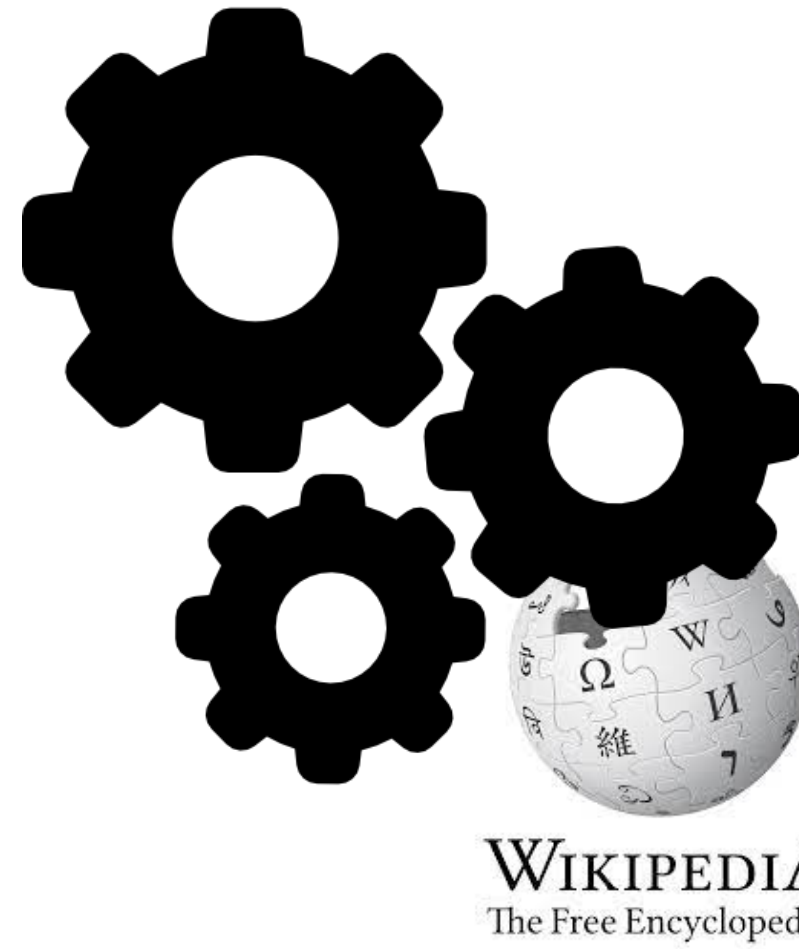
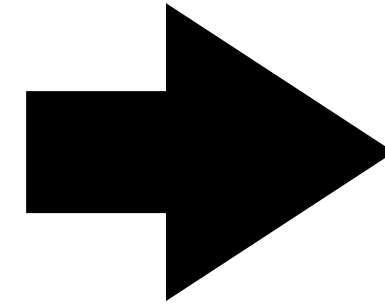
## Lecture 23: Retrieval Augmented Generation

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March 13th, 2024

# Open Domain Question Answering

Recap

Question (Q)

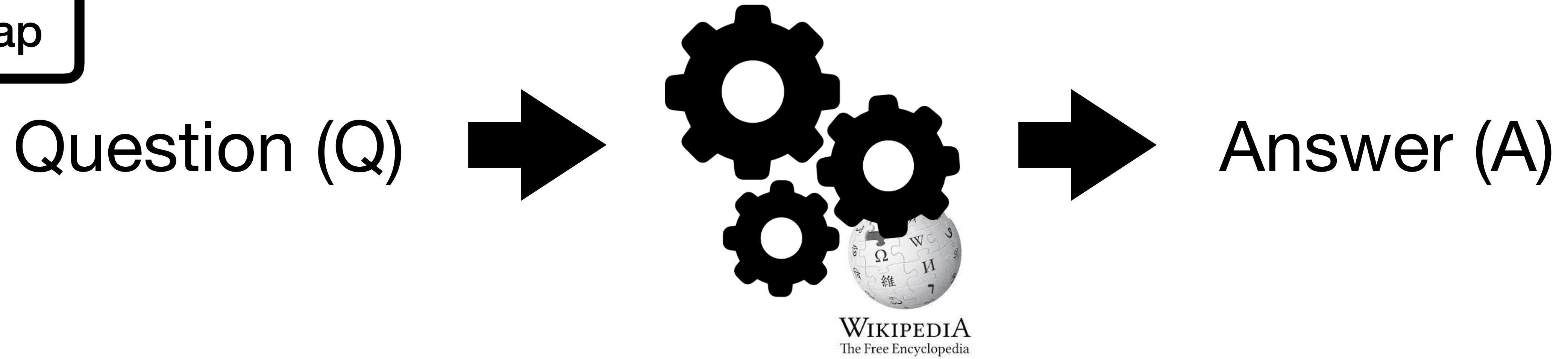


Answer (A)

**Open-Domain Question Answering (ODQA):**

# Open Domain Question Answering

Recap

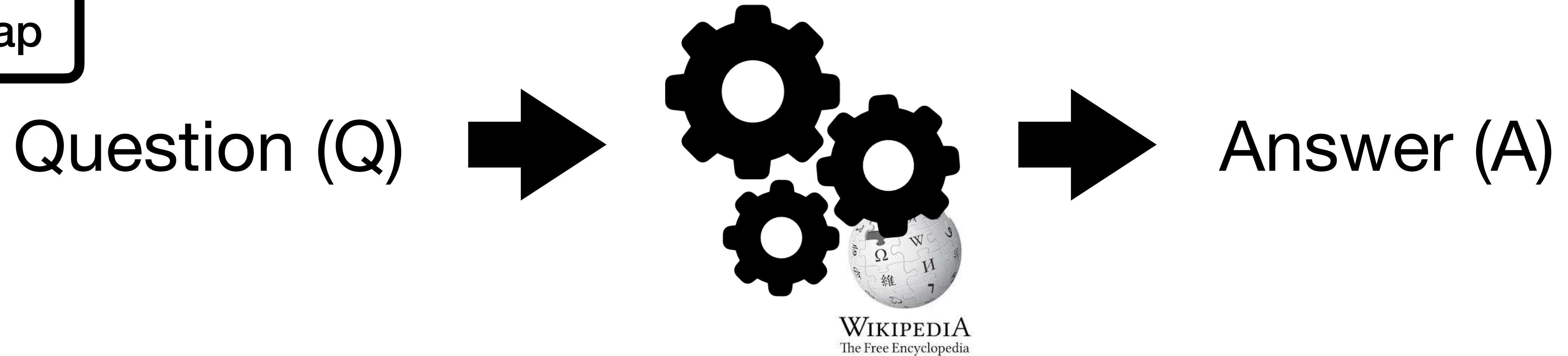


## Open-Domain Question Answering (ODQA):

We do not assume we are given a passage together with the question

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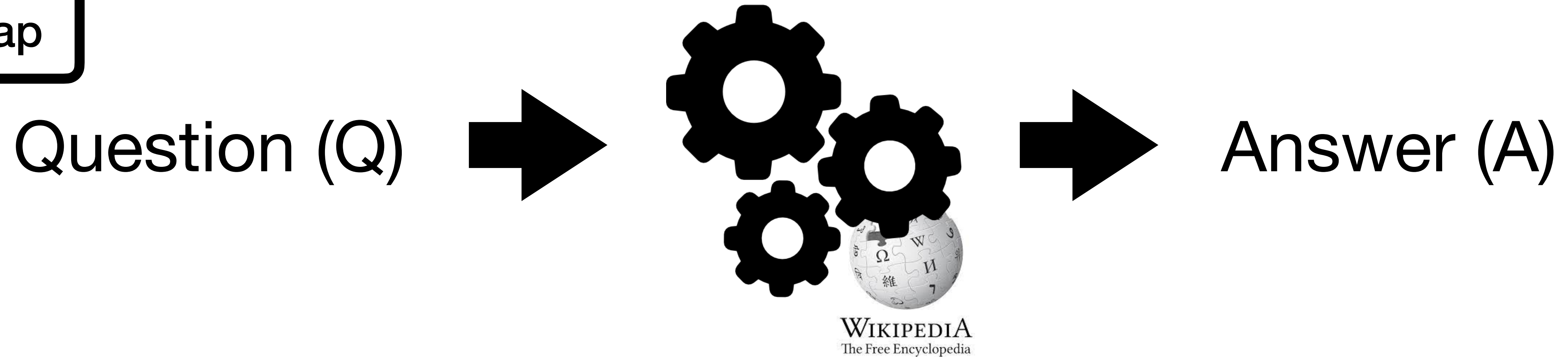
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We do not assume we are given a passage together with the question

We can only access a large collection of documents (e.g., Wikipedia) — we don't know which document contains the answer, and the goal is to answer any open-domain questions.

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We do not assume we are given a passage together with the question

We can only access a large collection of documents (e.g., Wikipedia) — we don't know which document contains the answer, and the goal is to answer any open-domain questions.

Both more challenging and more practical/useful!



Slot Filling

INPUT:  
Star Trek [SEP] creator

OUTPUT:  
Gene Roddenberry

PROVENANCE:  
17157886-1

zsRE

Open Domain QA

INPUT:  
When did Star Trek go off the air

OUTPUT:  
June 3, 1969

PROVENANCE:  
17157886-5

NQ

INPUT:  
Which Star Trek star directed Three Men and a Baby?

OUTPUT:  
Leonard Nimoy

PROVENANCE:  
17157886-4, 596639-7

TQA

INPUT:  
Treklanda (formerly “TrekTrax Atlanta”) is an annual convention for what American science fiction media franchise?

OUTPUT:  
Star Trek

 KILT

Knowledge source:  
5.9 Million Wikipedia pages

*Star Trek* 17157886

Star Trek is an American media franchise based on the science fiction television series created by Gene Roddenberry.<sup>1</sup> [...] It followed the interstellar adventures of Captain James T. Kirk (William Shatner) and his crew aboard the starship USS "Enterprise", a space exploration vessel built by the United Federation of Planets in the 23rd century.<sup>2</sup> The "Star Trek" canon includes "The Original Series", an animated series, five spin-off television series, the film franchise, and further adaptations in several media.<sup>3</sup> [...] The original 1966–69 series featured William Shatner as Captain James T. Kirk, Leonard Nimoy<sup>4</sup> as Spock, DeForest Kelley as Dr. Leonard "Bones" McCoy, James Doohan as Montgomery "Scotty" Scott, Nichelle Nichols as Uhura, George Takei as Hikaru Sulu, and Walter Koenig as Pavel Chekov. During the series' first run, it earned several nominations for the Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation, and won twice. [...] NBC canceled the show after three seasons; the last original episode aired on June 3, 1969<sup>5</sup>. [...]

*Three Men and a Baby* 596639

Three Men and a Baby is a 1987 American comedy film directed by Leonard Nimoy<sup>7</sup> and starring Tom Selleck, Steve Guttenberg, Ted Danson and Nancy Travis. [...]

*Treklanda* 28789994

Treklanda is an annual "Star Trek" convention based in Atlanta, Georgia that

Dialogue

INPUT:  
I am a big fan of Star Trek, the American franchise created by Gene Roddenberry. I don't know much about it. When did the first episode air?  
It debuted in 1996 and aired for 3 seasons on NBC.  
What is the plot of the show?

OUTPUT:  
William Shatner plays the role of Captain Kirk. He did a great job.

PROVENANCE:  
17157886-2

WoW

Fact Checking

INPUT:  
Star Trek had spin-off television series.

OUTPUT:  
Supports

PROVENANCE:  
17157886-3

FEV

Entity Linking

INPUT:  
[...] Currently the site offers five movie collections ranging from \$149 for 10 [START\_ENT] Star Trek [END\_ENT] films to \$1,125 for the eclectic Movie Lovers' Collection of 75 movies. [...]

OUTPUT:  
Star Trek

# The KILT Benchmark

- Open-Domain Question Answering (Natural Questions, TriviaQA, HotPotQA, ELI5)
- Fact-Checking (FEVER)
- Slot Filling (T-REx, zsRE)
- Dialogue (Wizard of Wikipedia)
- Entity Linking (AIDA, WNED-WIKI, WNED-CWEB)

# LLMs and their Limitations

## LLMs are Extremely Impressive —

- ✓ They can store vast amounts of knowledge in their parameters/activations
- ✓ Very strong results on many tasks, even in few-shot learning settings
- ✓ Very flexible — applicable on a variety of tasks

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- ✅ They can store vast amounts of knowledge in their parameters/activations
- ✅ Very strong results on many tasks, even in few-shot learning settings
- ✅ Very flexible — applicable on a variety of tasks

## However —

- ❌ It can be difficult to update and control their knowledge/memory
- ❌ LLMs are black-boxes — no provenance or interpretability
- ❌ Very large and expensive



# LLMs and their Limitations

**Input:** List the top five US states with the highest per-capita GDP, in order.

[Asai et al., 2024]

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Parametric LMs : Pre-trained on large-scale pre-training data



**LLMs and, more generally, neural models**

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**LLMs and, more generally, neural models**

**Retrieval-augmented LMs:** Incorporate data at inference



**Retrieval-Augmented Generation models**

[Asai et al., 2024]

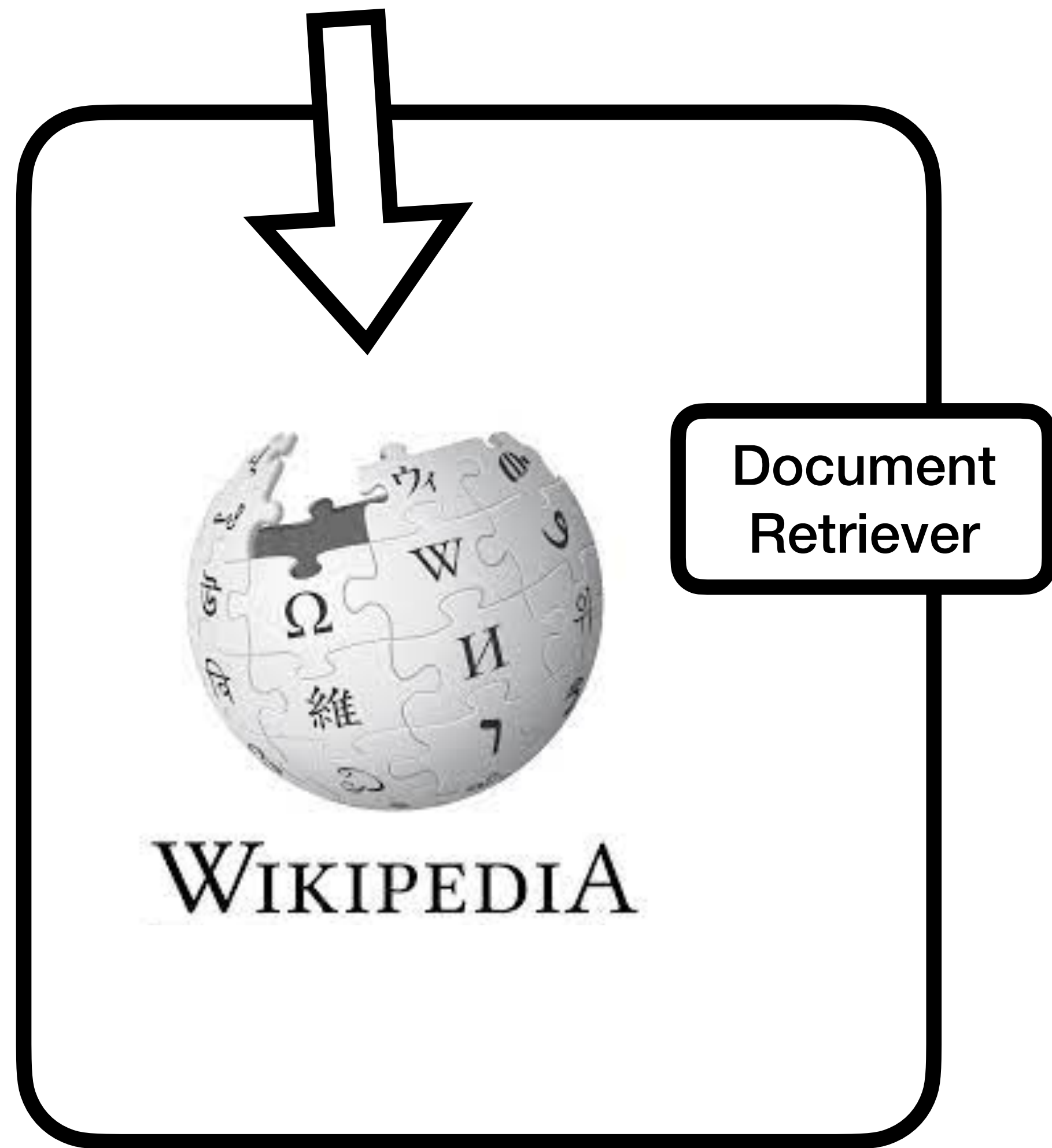
# The Retriever-Reader Framework

*“In what city is the University of Edinburgh located?”*

[Chen et al., 2017]

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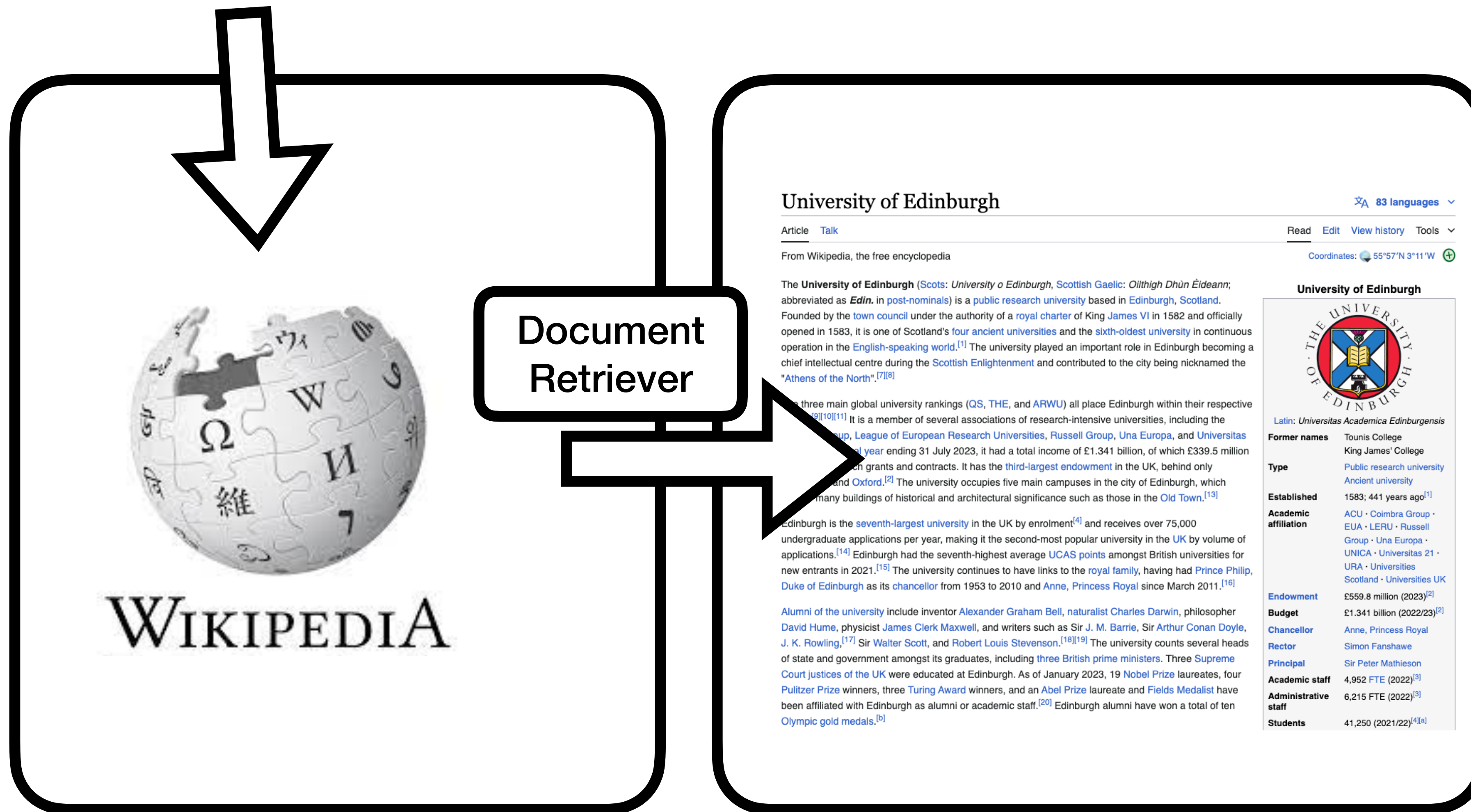


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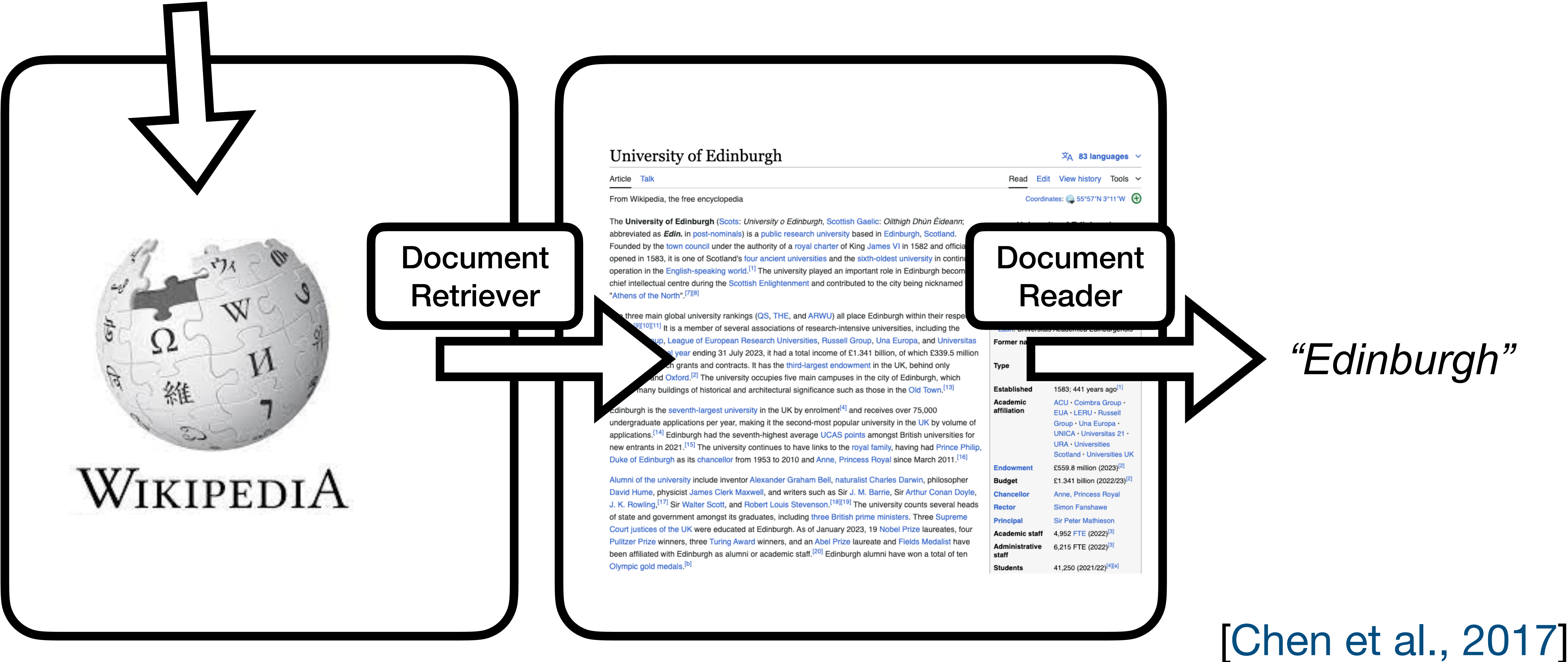
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**Reader:**  $\text{reader}(Q, \{P_1, \dots, P_k\}) \rightarrow A$ , similar to reading comprehension



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An early retriever-reader system is **DrQA** [Chen et al., 2017]:

**Retriever:** a standard, “classic” TF-IDF information retrieval module (fixed)

**Reader:** a neural reading comprehension model, trained on SQuAD via distant supervision (i.e., by using retrieved paragraphs rather than gold ones)



# Dense and Sparse Retrievers

**Goal:** find a small subset of elements (e.g., documents, paragraphs) in a datastore that are the most similar/related/relevant to the query

$\text{sim}(Q, P)$ : similarity score between a query  $Q$  and a paragraph  $P$

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$$\mathbf{q}_w = \text{TF}(w, Q) \cdot \text{IDF}(w, \mathcal{D})$$

Term Frequency

Inverse Document  
Frequency

$$\text{TF}(w, Q) = \frac{\text{freq}(w, Q)}{\sum_{w'} \text{freq}(w', Q)}$$

$$\text{IDF}(w, \mathcal{D}) = \log \frac{|\mathcal{D}|}{|\{P \in \mathcal{D} \wedge w \in P\}|}$$

# Dense Retrieval in Practice

**Goal:** find a small subset of elements (e.g., documents, paragraphs) in a datastore that are the most similar/related/relevant to the query

$\text{sim}(Q, P)$ : similarity score between a query  $Q$  and a paragraph  $P$

**Example:** Dense Retrieval

$$\text{sim}(Q_i, P_j) = \mathbf{q}_i^\top \mathbf{p}_j \text{ with } \mathbf{q}_i, \mathbf{p}_j \in \mathbb{R}^d$$

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**Example:** Dense Retrieval

$$\text{sim}(Q_i, P_j) = \mathbf{q}_i^\top \mathbf{p}_j \text{ with } \mathbf{q}_i, \mathbf{p}_j \in \mathbb{R}^d$$

$$\mathbf{q}_i = \text{Encode}(Q_i)$$

$$\mathbf{p}_j = \text{Encode}(P_j)$$

Entire research on how to improve or learn the similarity function!



# Dense Retrieval in Practice

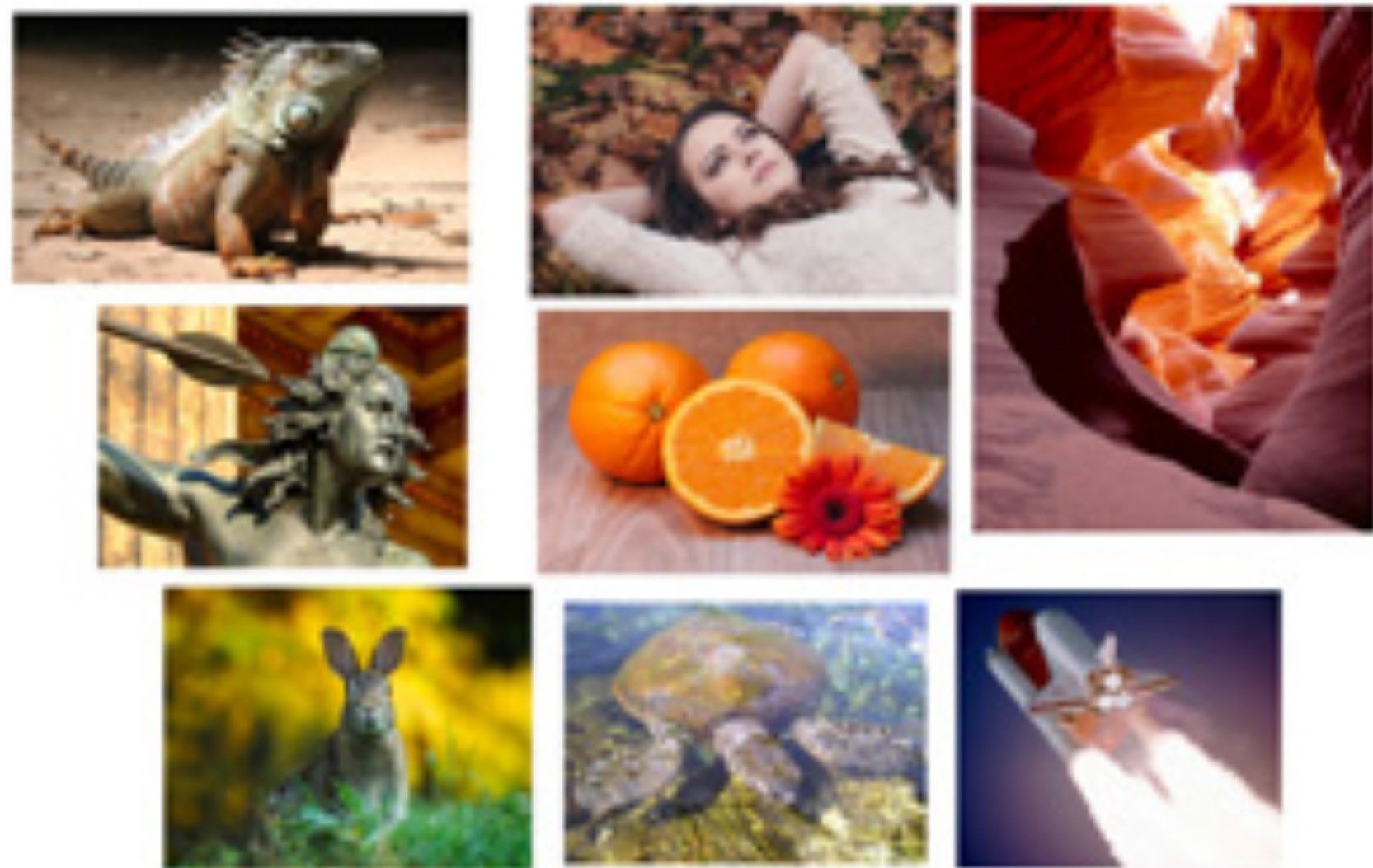
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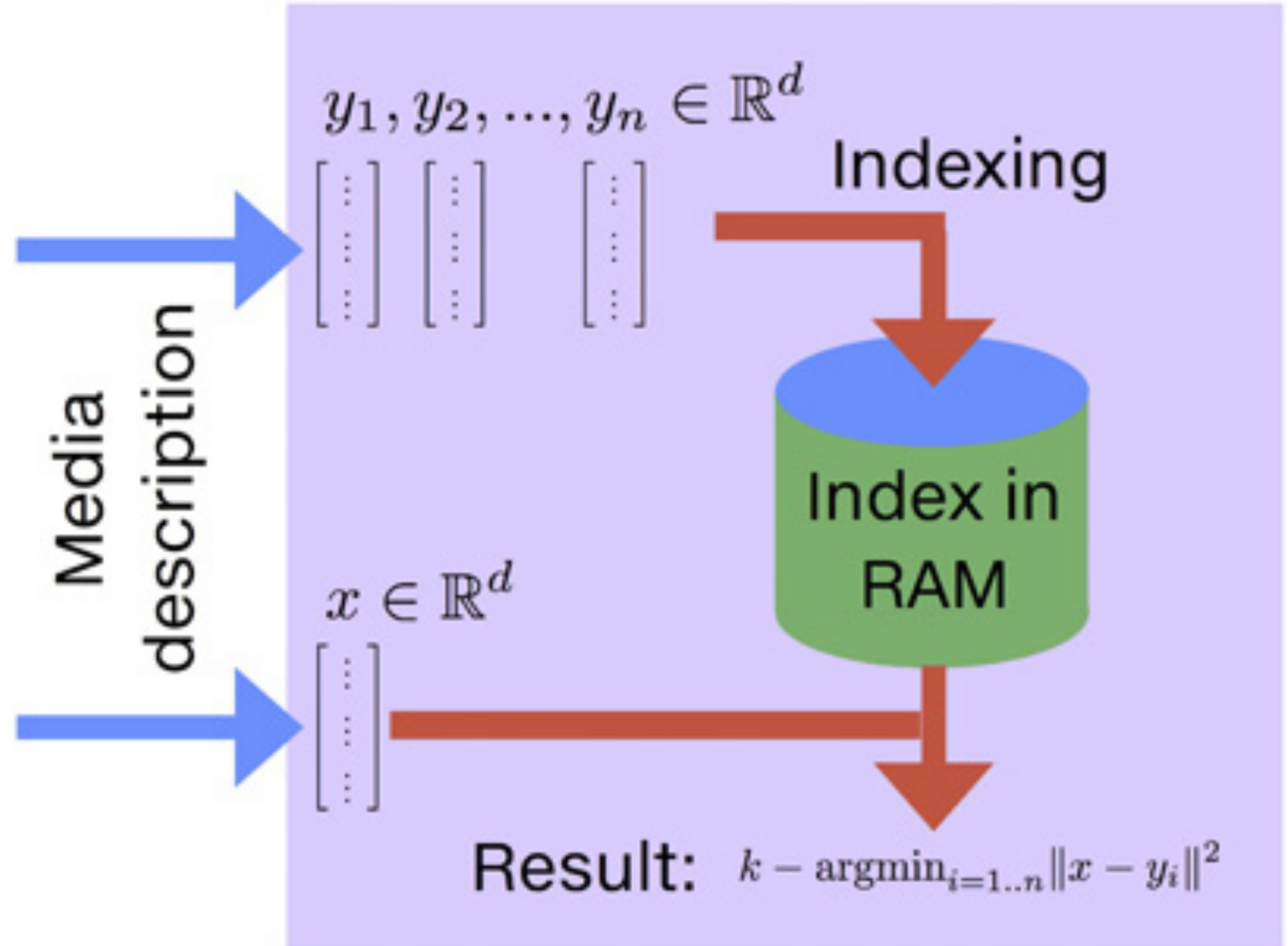
**Index:** given a query embedding  $\mathbf{q}_i \in \mathbb{R}^d$ , returns the top- $k$  paragraph embeddings  $\mathbf{p}_1, \dots, \mathbf{p}_k \in \mathbb{R}^d$  via **maximum inner-product search** (MIPS)

# Software: FAISS, ScaNN, Annoy, ...

Build index for a collection:



Query:





# Software: FAISS, ScaNN, Annoy, ...

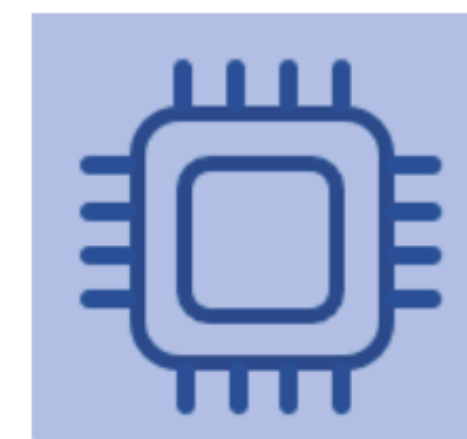
## Summary of methods

The basic indexes are given hereafter:

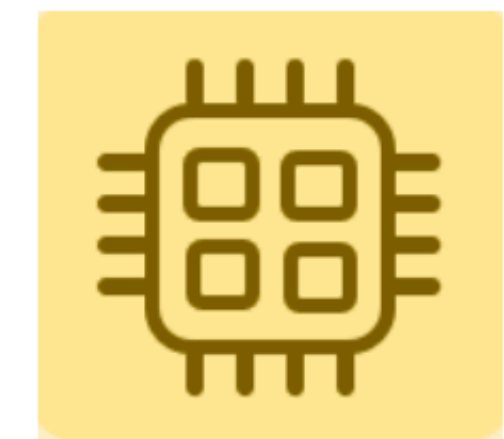
Method	Class name	index_factory	Main parameters	Bytes/vector	Exhaustive
Exact Search for L2	IndexFlatL2	"Flat"	d	4*d	yes
Exact Search for Inner Product	IndexFlatIP	"Flat"	d	4*d	yes
Hierarchical Navigable Small World graph exploration	IndexHNSWFlat	"HNSW,Flat"	d, M	$4*d + x * M * 2 * 4$	no
Inverted file with exact post-verification	IndexIVFFlat	"IVFx,Flat"	quantizer, d, nlists, metric	$4*d + 8$	no
Locality-Sensitive Hashing (binary flat index)	IndexLSH	-	d, nbits	$\text{ceil}(\text{nbits}/8)$	yes
Scalar quantizer (SQ) in flat mode	IndexScalarQuantizer	"SQ8"	d	d	yes
Product quantizer (PQ) in flat mode	IndexPQ	"PQx", "PQM"x"nbits"	d, M, nbits	$\text{ceil}(M * \text{nbits} / 8)$	yes

Exact Search

Approximate Search  
(Scales to Billions of vectors)

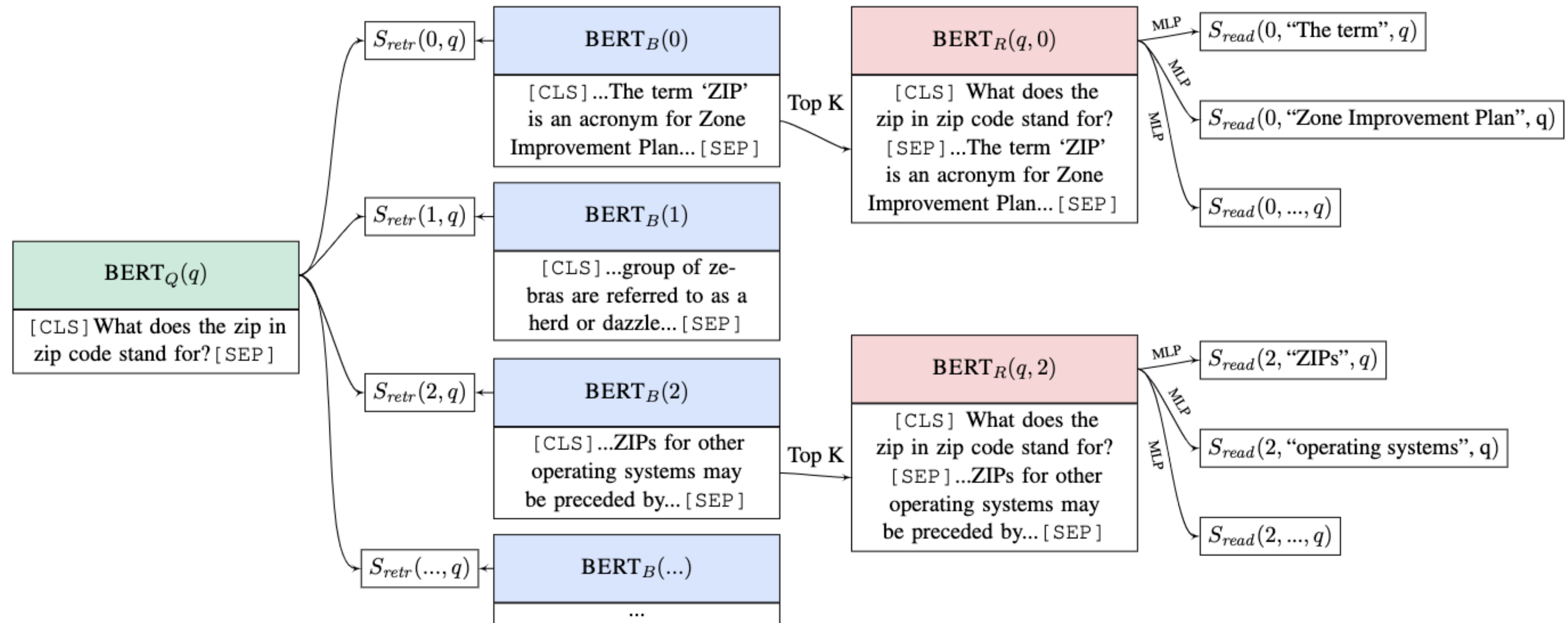


CPU vs. GPU



# Early End-to-End Trainable Reader-Retriever Models

Early method for training the retrieval component proposed by [Lee et al., 2019](#):

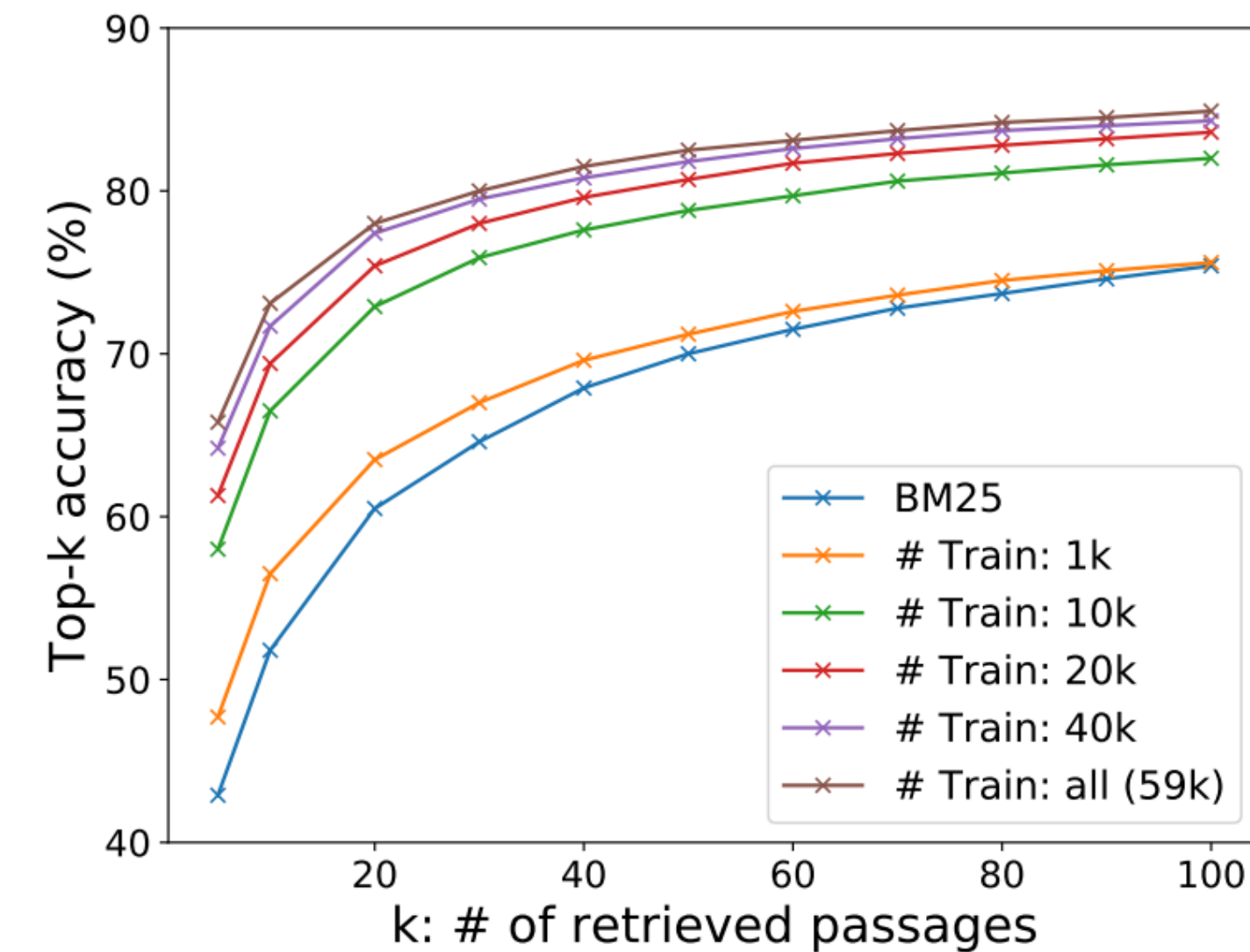
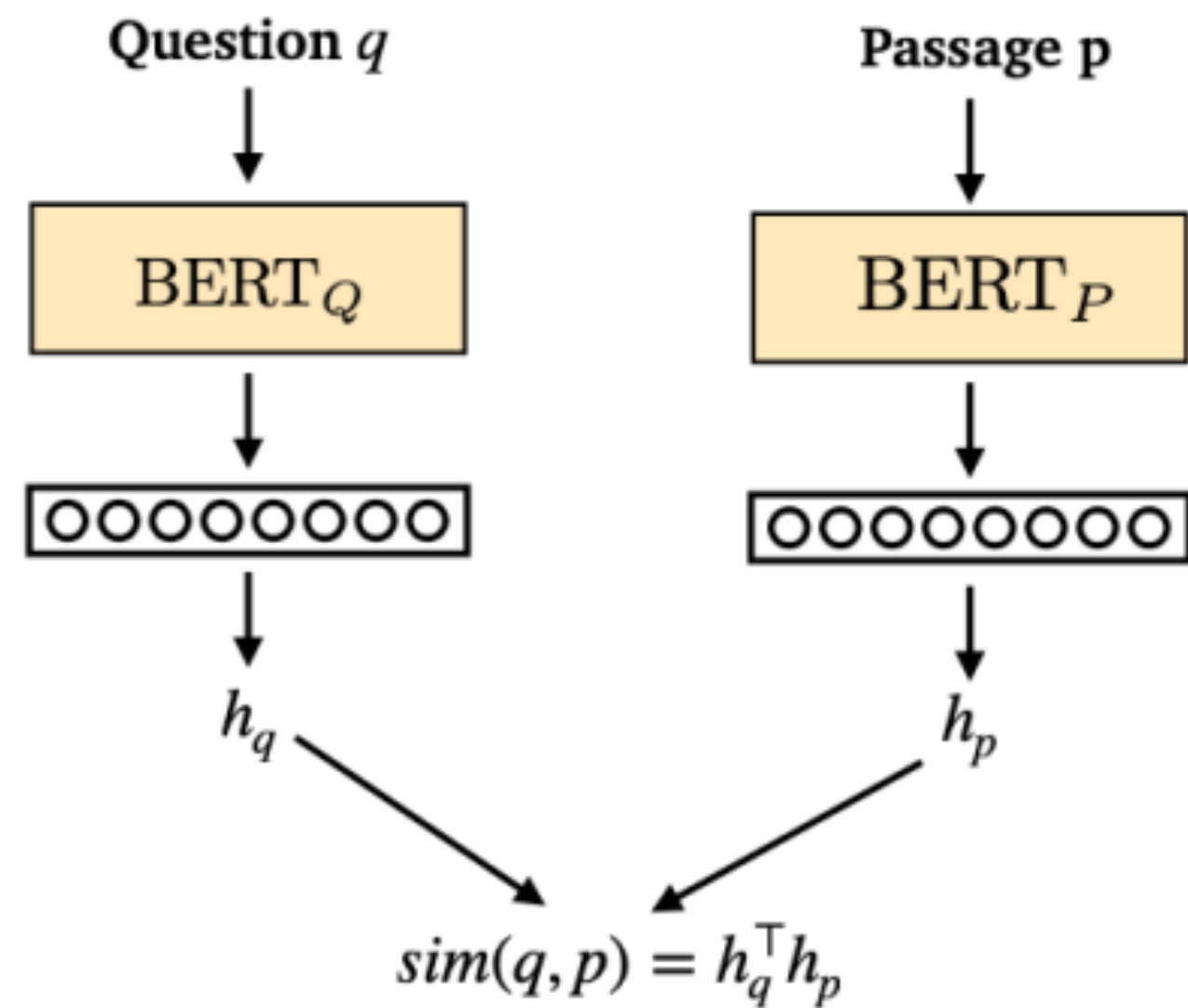


Each passage can be encoded as a vector using BERT and the retriever score can be measured as the dot product between the question and passage representations

Not easy to model as there are a huge number of passages (21M in Eng. Wikipedia)

# Early End-to-End Trainable Reader-Retriever Models

Later, Dense Passage Retrieval [DPR, [Karpukhin et al., 2020](#)] authors propose to **train the retriever using question-answer pairs**:

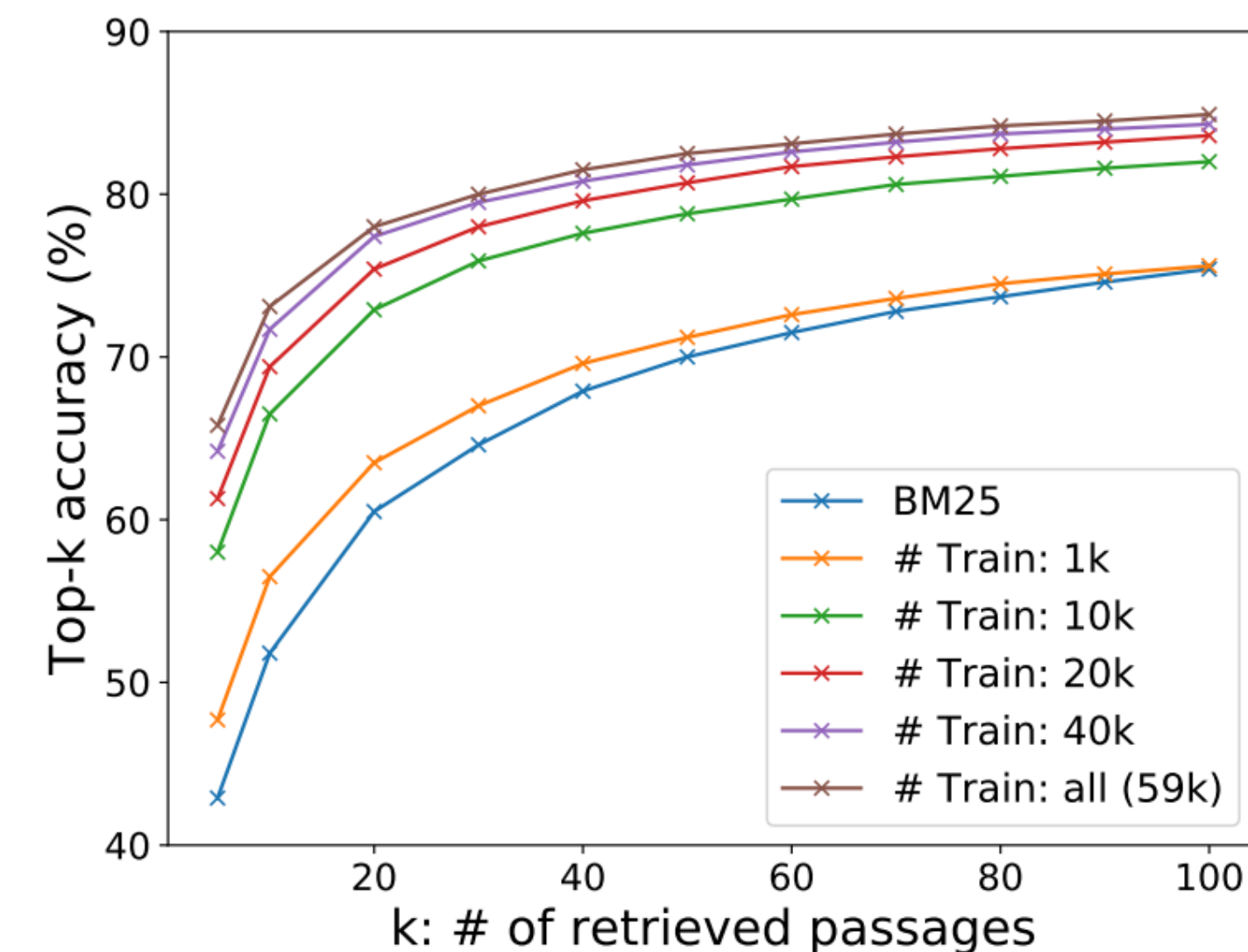
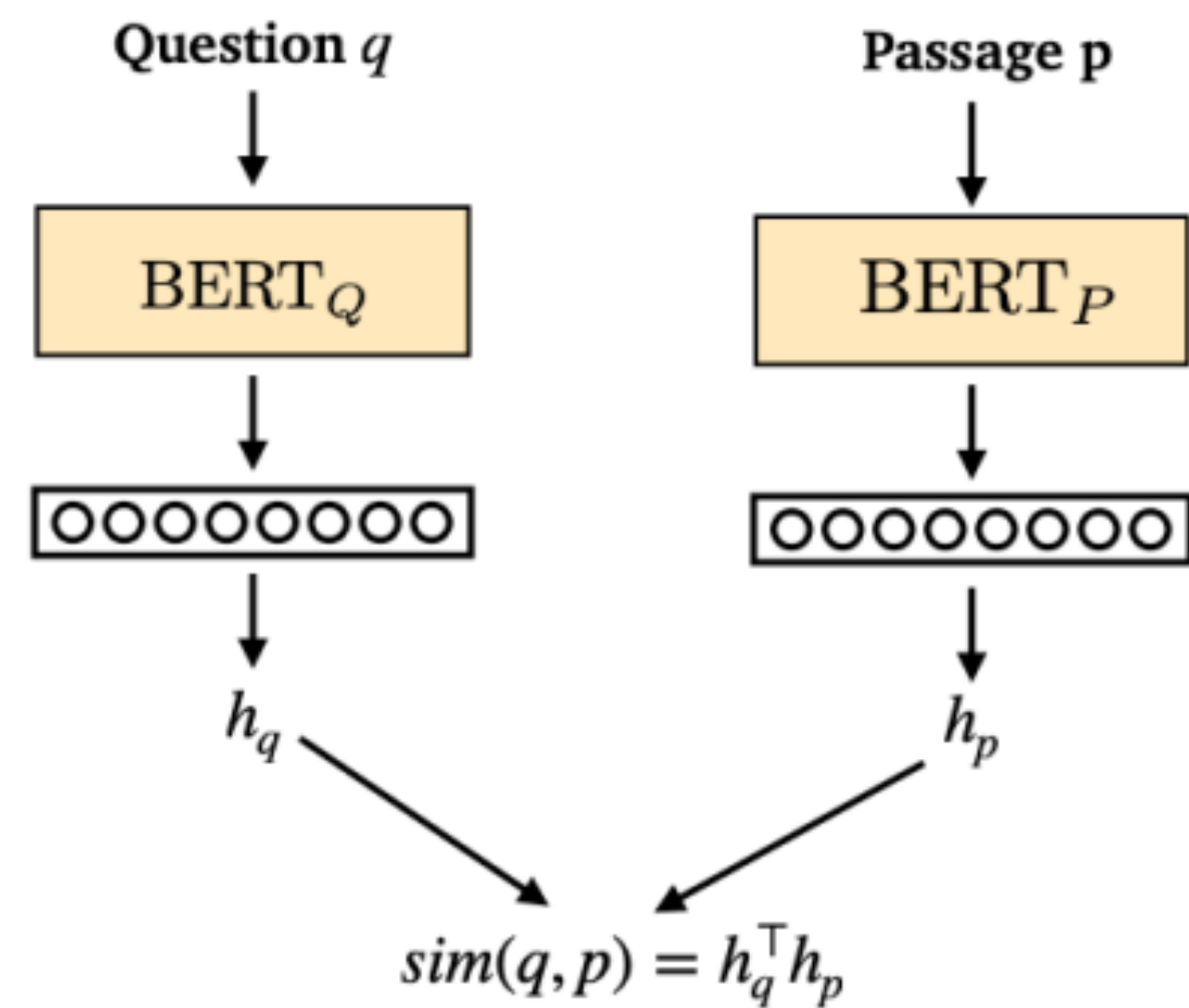


Trainable retriever (using BERT) can produce more accurate results than traditional IR models, such as BM25 and TF-IDF



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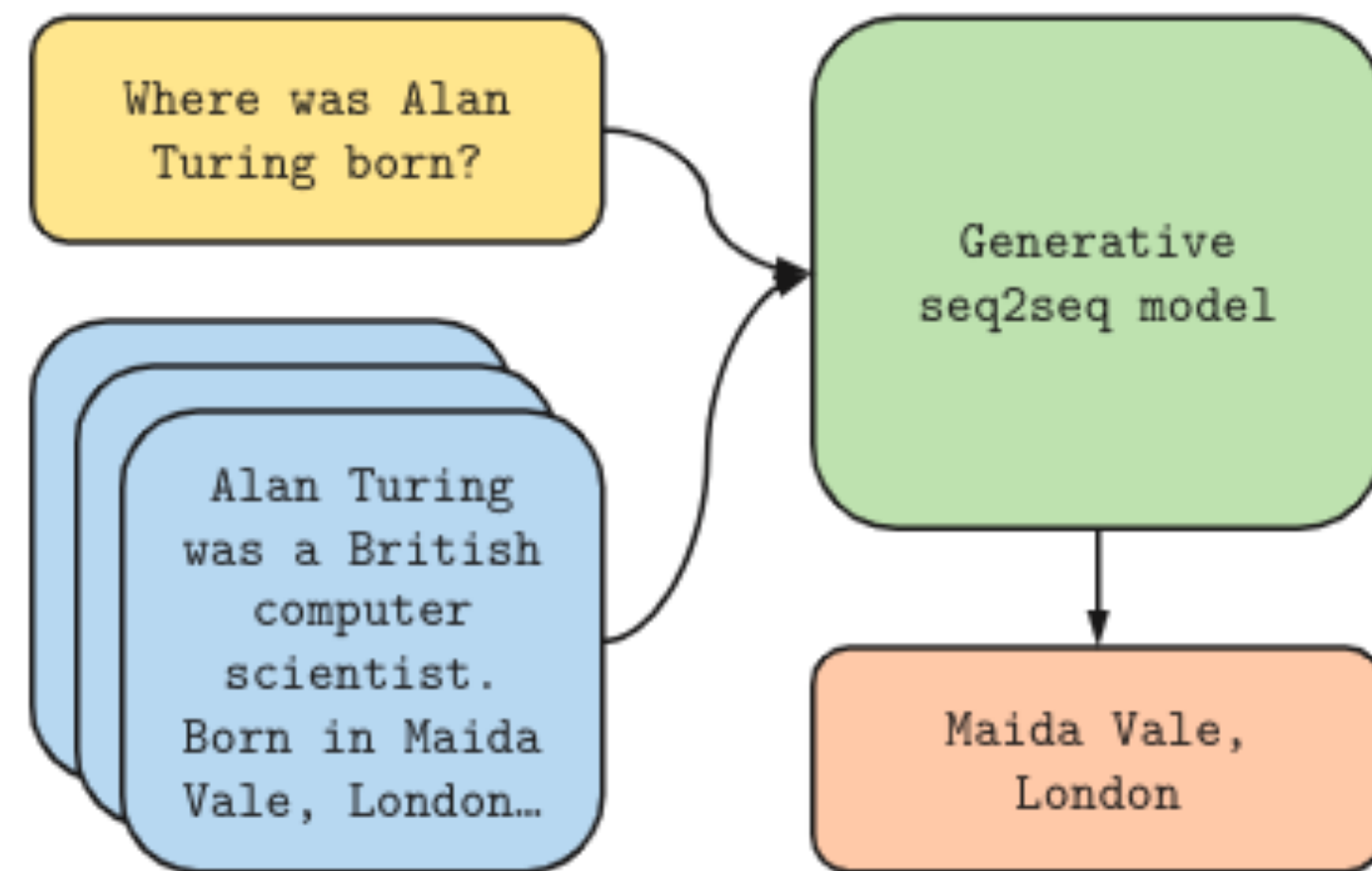
Trainable retriever (using BERT) can produce more accurate results than traditional IR models, such as BM25 and TF-IDF

...although this was slightly controversial — see e.g., “A Replication Study of DPR”

<https://arxiv.org/abs/2104.05740>

# Dense Retrieval and Generative Models

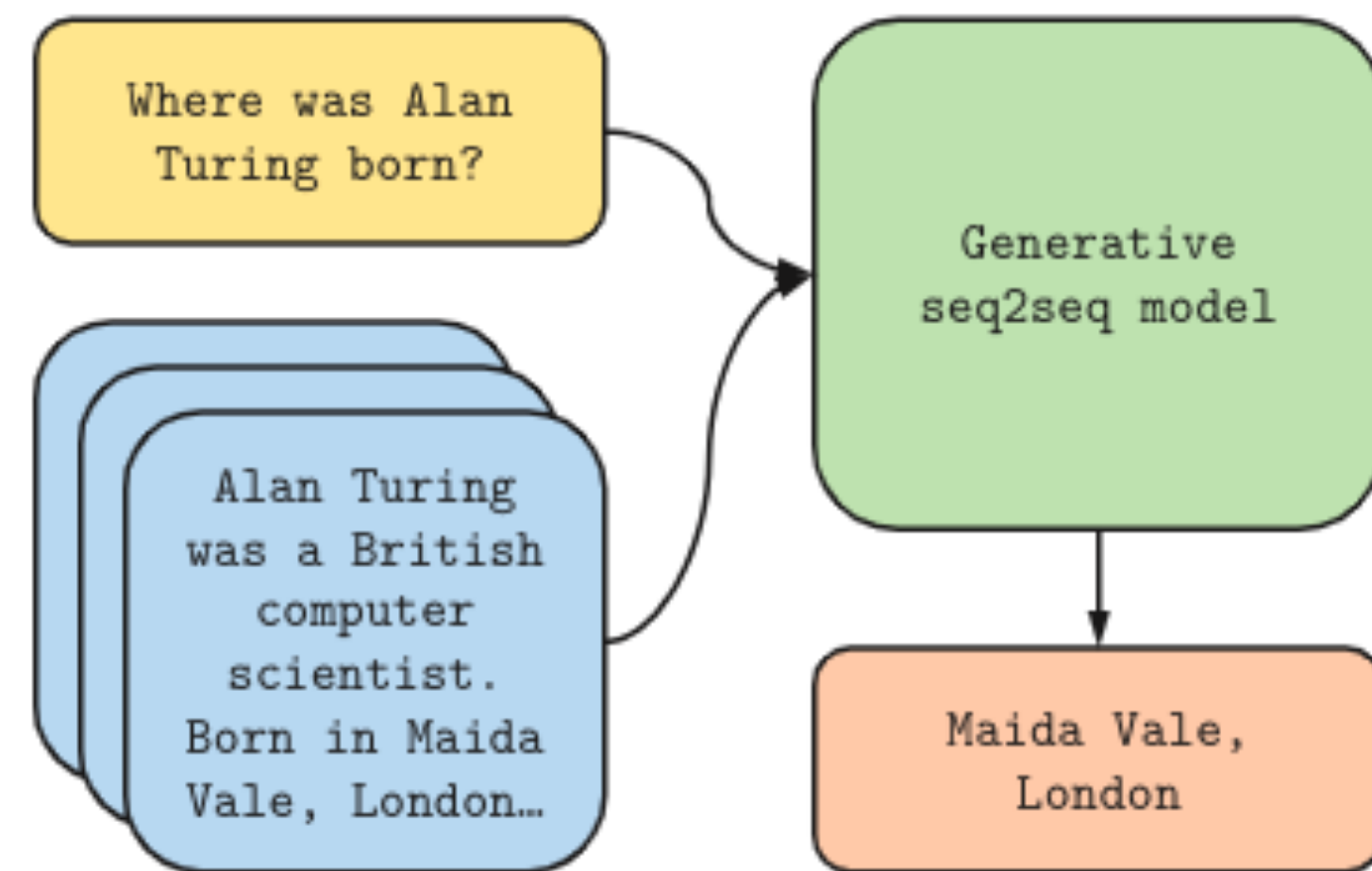
Recent works show that it can be beneficial to **generate answers** rather than **extracting them** from retrieved passages, e.g., Fusion-in-Decoder [[Izacard et al., 2021](#)]



Fusion-in-Decoder (FiD):  
DPR & T5

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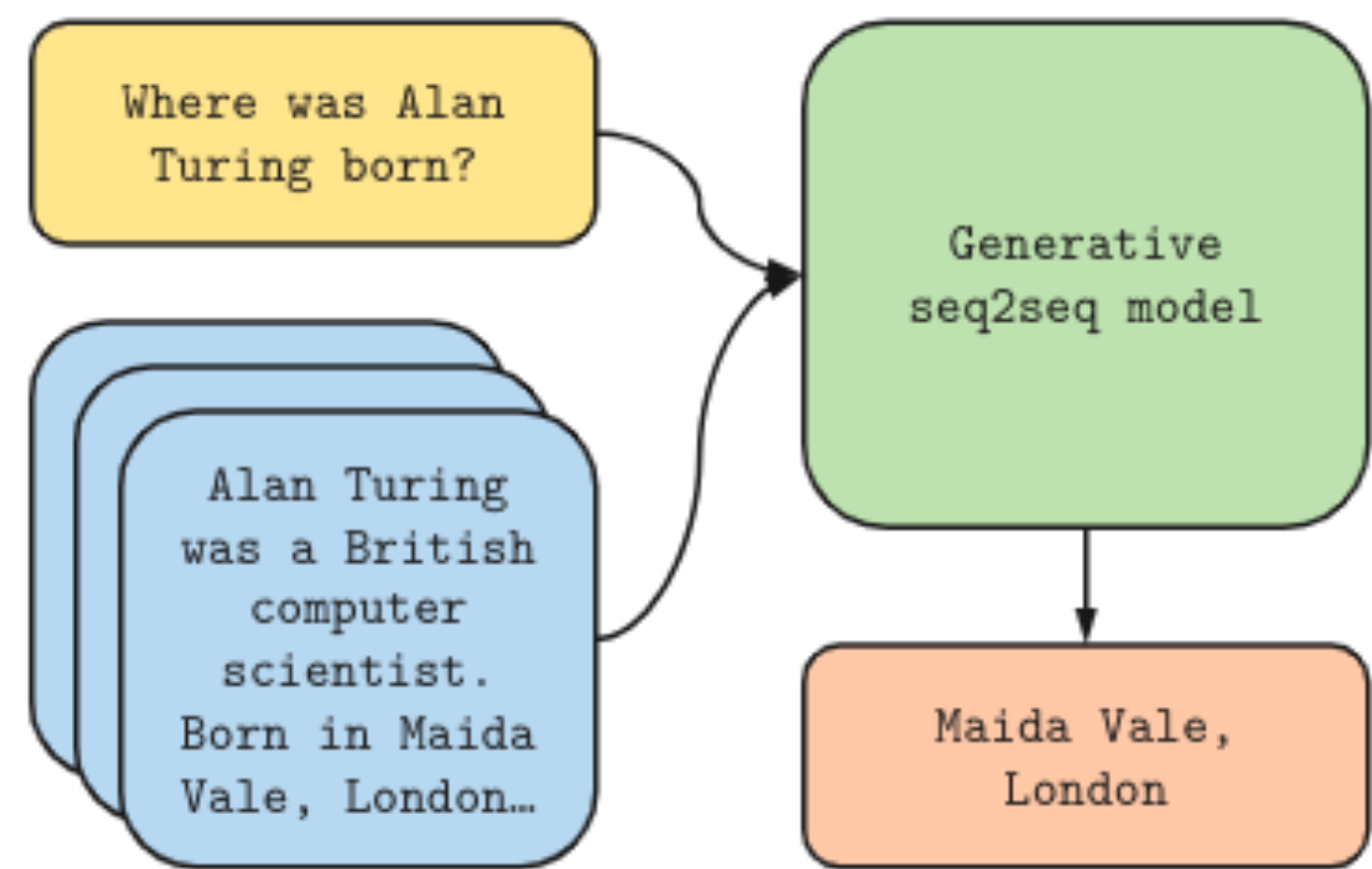
Fusion-in-Decoder (FiD):  
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Model	NQ EM	TriviaQA EM	EM	SQuAD Open EM	F1
DrQA ( <a href="#">Chen et al., 2017</a> )	-	-	-	29.8	-
Multi-Passage BERT ( <a href="#">Wang et al., 2019</a> )	-	-	-	53.0	60.9
Path Retriever ( <a href="#">Asai et al., 2020</a> )	31.7	-	-	<b>56.5</b>	<b>63.8</b>
Graph Retriever ( <a href="#">Min et al., 2019b</a> )	34.7	55.8	-	-	-
Hard EM ( <a href="#">Min et al., 2019a</a> )	28.8	50.9	-	-	-
ORQA ( <a href="#">Lee et al., 2019</a> )	31.3	45.1	-	20.2	-
REALM ( <a href="#">Guu et al., 2020</a> )	40.4	-	-	-	-
DPR ( <a href="#">Karpukhin et al., 2020</a> )	41.5	57.9	-	36.7	-
SpanSeqGen ( <a href="#">Min et al., 2020</a> )	42.5	-	-	-	-
RAG ( <a href="#">Lewis et al., 2020b</a> )	44.5	56.1	68.0	-	-
T5 ( <a href="#">Roberts et al., 2020</a> )	36.6	-	60.5	-	-
GPT-3 few shot ( <a href="#">Brown et al., 2020</a> )	29.9	-	71.2	-	-
Fusion-in-Decoder (base)	48.2	65.0	77.1	53.4	60.6
Fusion-in-Decoder (large)	<b>51.4</b>	<b>67.6</b>	<b>80.1</b>	<b>56.7</b>	63.2



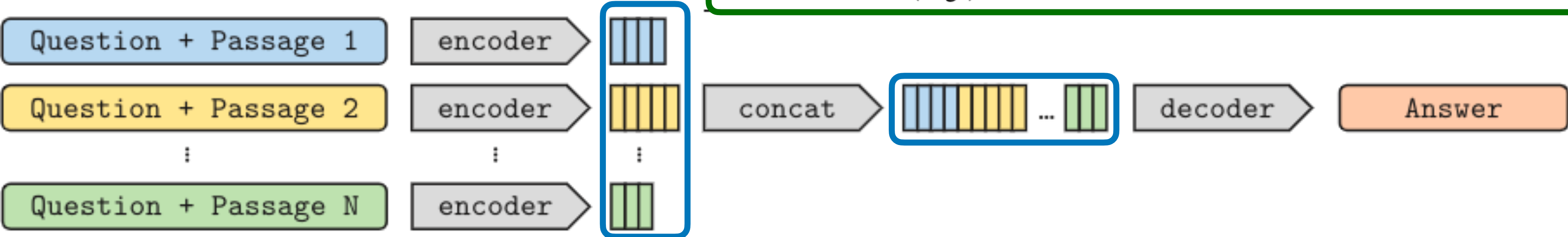
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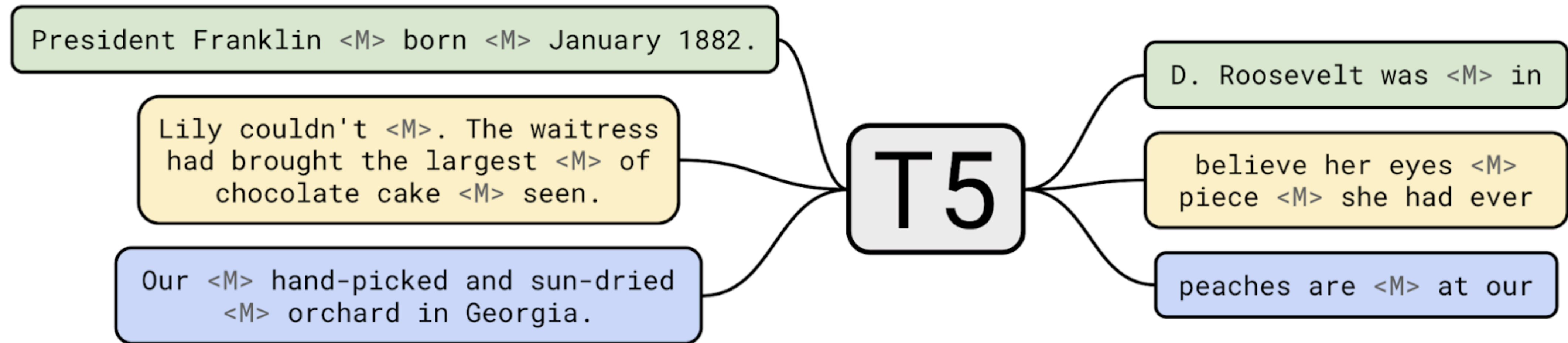
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# LLMs Can Do Open-Domain QA

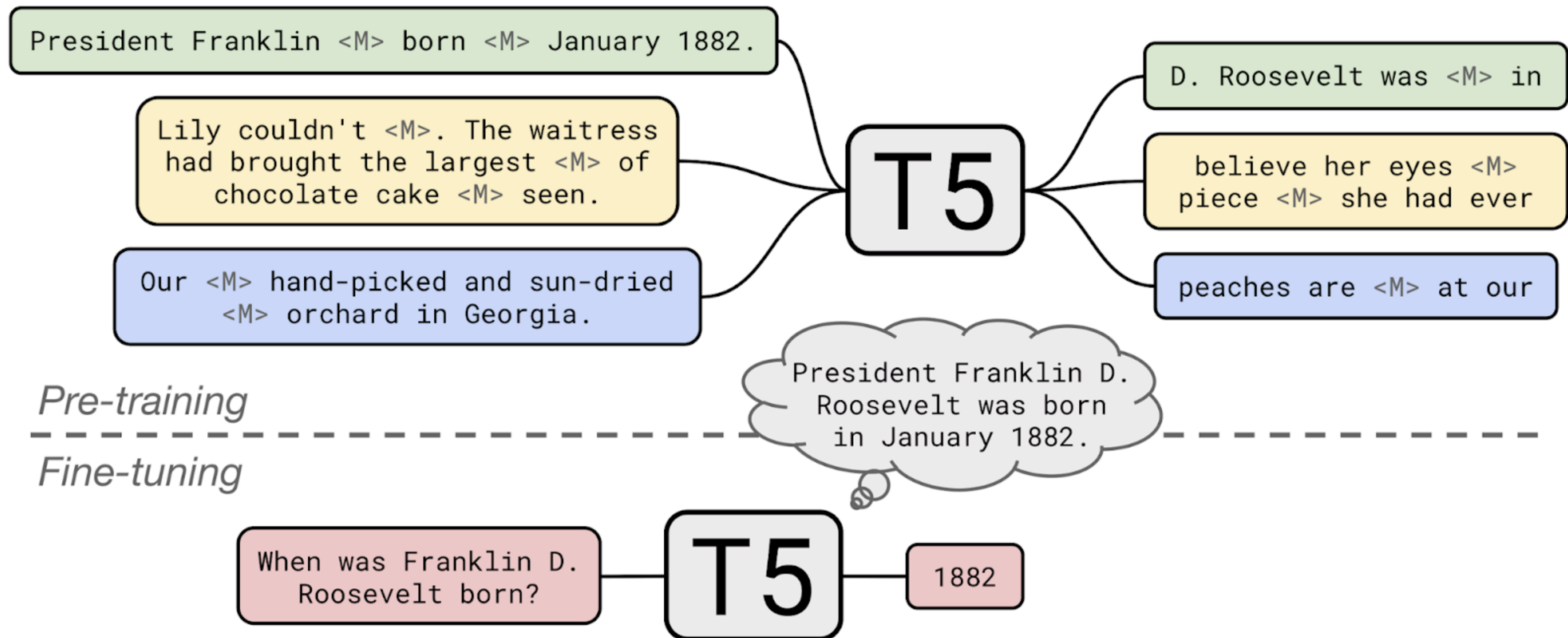
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[Roberts et al., 2020]

# LLMs vs. RAG — Generalisation

How do LLMs **really** compare with RAG models, in terms of accuracy and generalisation, on open-domain question answering tasks?

Model	Open Natural Questions				TriviaQA				WebQuestions			
	Total	Question Overlap	Answer Overlap Only	No Overlap	Total	Question Overlap	Answer Overlap Only	No Overlap	Total	Question Overlap	Answer Overlap Only	No Overlap
The question appears in the training set				The answer appears in the training set								

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Closed book	T5-11B+SSM	36.6	77.2	22.2	9.4	-	-	-	-	44.7	82.1	44.5	22.0
	BART	26.5	67.6	10.2	0.8	26.7	67.3	16.3	0.8	27.4	71.5	20.7	1.6



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Open book	RAG	44.5	70.7	34.9	24.8	56.8	82.7	54.7	29.2	45.5	81.0	45.8	21.1
	DPR	41.3	69.4	34.6	19.3	57.9	80.4	59.6	31.6	42.4	74.1	39.8	22.2
	FID	51.4	71.3	48.3	34.5	67.6	87.5	66.9	42.8	-	-	-	-
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Model		Natural Questions				TriviaQA			
		Total	Overlap	Comp -gen	Novel -entity	Total	Overlap	Comp -gen	Novel -entity
				Unseen entity- relation pair				New entity	
Parametric	T5-11B+SSM	36.59	<b>81.48</b>	17.47	12.56	-	-	-	-
	BART	26.54	76.34	5.88	3.35	26.78	78.38	11.37	10.09

[Liu et al., 2021]



# LLMs vs. RAG — Generalisation

How do LLMs **really** compare with RAG models, in terms of accuracy and generalisation, on open-domain question answering tasks?

Model		Natural Questions				TriviaQA			
		Total	Overlap	Comp -gen	Novel -entity	Total	Overlap	Comp -gen	Novel -entity
Non-parametric	RAG	44.49	75.75	30.41	37.69	56.83	87.12	47.58	47.81
	FiD	<b>53.13</b>	78.85	<b>40.00</b>	<b>47.74</b>	<b>67.69</b>	<b>90.39</b>	<b>58.10</b>	<b>66.23</b>
	DPR	41.27	71.33	25.88	33.84	57.91	82.31	46.11	58.99
	RePAQ	47.26	78.61	34.21	36.85	52.06	89.08	42.95	38.38
Parametric	T5-11B+SSM	36.59	<b>81.48</b>	17.47	12.56	-	-	-	-
	BART	26.54	76.34	5.88	3.35	26.78	78.38	11.37	10.09

# LLMs vs. RAG — Updateability

Train Set	Test-time Index	2017 Test Set Acc.		2020 Test Set Acc.	
		Closed-book	ATLAS	Closed-book	ATLAS
2017 answers	2017 2020	T5-XXL	Retrieval-augmented		
2020 answers	2017 2020				

# LLMs vs. RAG — Updateability

Train Set	Test-time Index	2017 Test Set Acc.		2020 Test Set Acc.	
		Closed-book	ATLAS	Closed-book	ATLAS
2017 answers	2017	12.1	Retrieval-augmented	2.9	
	2020	12.1		2.9	
2020 answers	2017	4.8		3.6	
	2020	4.8		3.6	

# LLMs vs. RAG — Updateability

Train Set	Test-time Index	2017 Test Set Acc.		2020 Test Set Acc.	
		Closed-book	ATLAS	Closed-book	ATLAS
2017 answers	2017	12.1	57.7	2.9	1.5
	2020	12.1	10.2	2.9	53.1
2020 answers	2017	4.8	50.1	3.6	4.2
	2020	4.8	3.5	3.6	60.5



# LLMs vs. RAG — Accuracy

Model	NQ		TriviaQA filtered		TriviaQA unfiltered	
	64-shot	Full	64-shot	Full	64-shot	Full
GPT-3 ( <a href="#">Brown et al., 2020</a> )	29.9	-	-	-	71.2	-
Gopher ( <a href="#">Rae et al., 2021</a> )	28.2	-	57.2	-	61.3	-
Chinchilla ( <a href="#">Hoffmann et al., 2022</a> )	35.5	-	64.6	-	72.3	-
PaLM ( <a href="#">Chowdhery et al., 2022</a> )	39.6	-	-	-	81.4	-
RETRO ( <a href="#">Borgeaud et al., 2021</a> )	-	45.5	-	-	-	-
FiD ( <a href="#">Izacard &amp; Grave, 2020</a> )	-	51.4	-	67.6	-	80.1
FiD-KD ( <a href="#">Izacard &amp; Grave, 2021</a> )	-	54.7	-	73.3	-	-
R2-D2 ( <a href="#">Fajcik et al., 2021</a> )	-	55.9	-	69.9	-	-

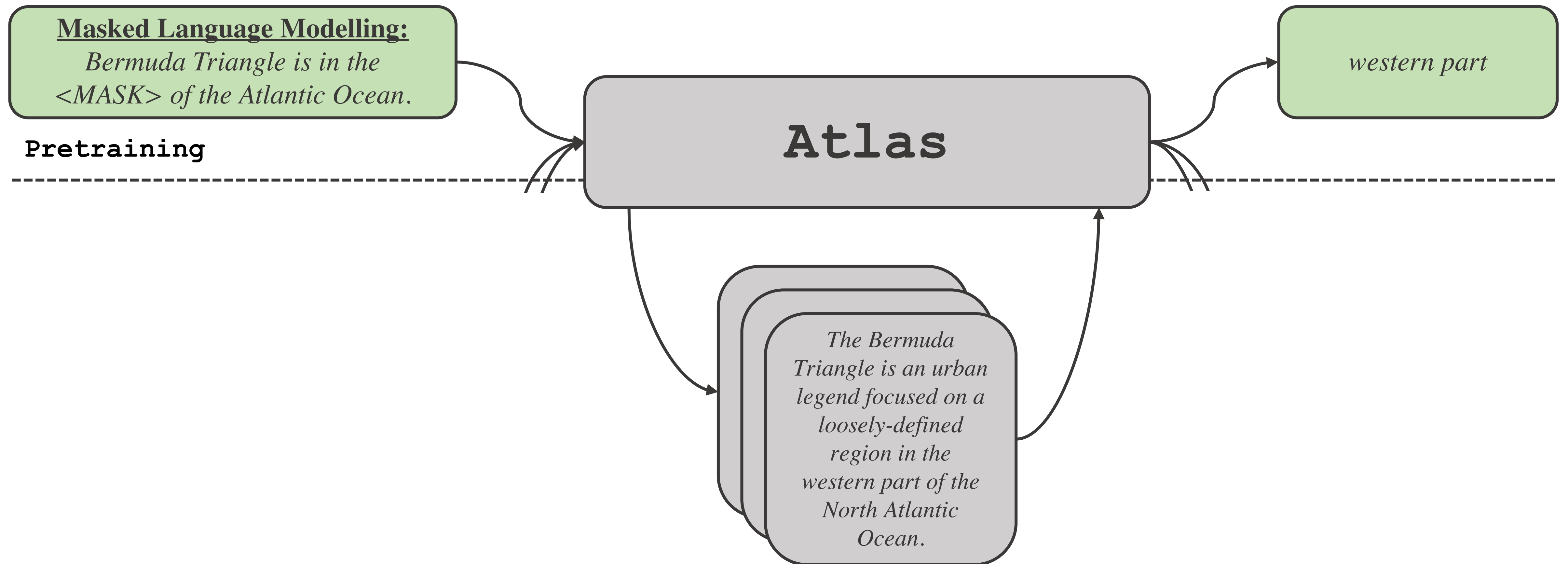


# LLMs vs. RAG — Accuracy

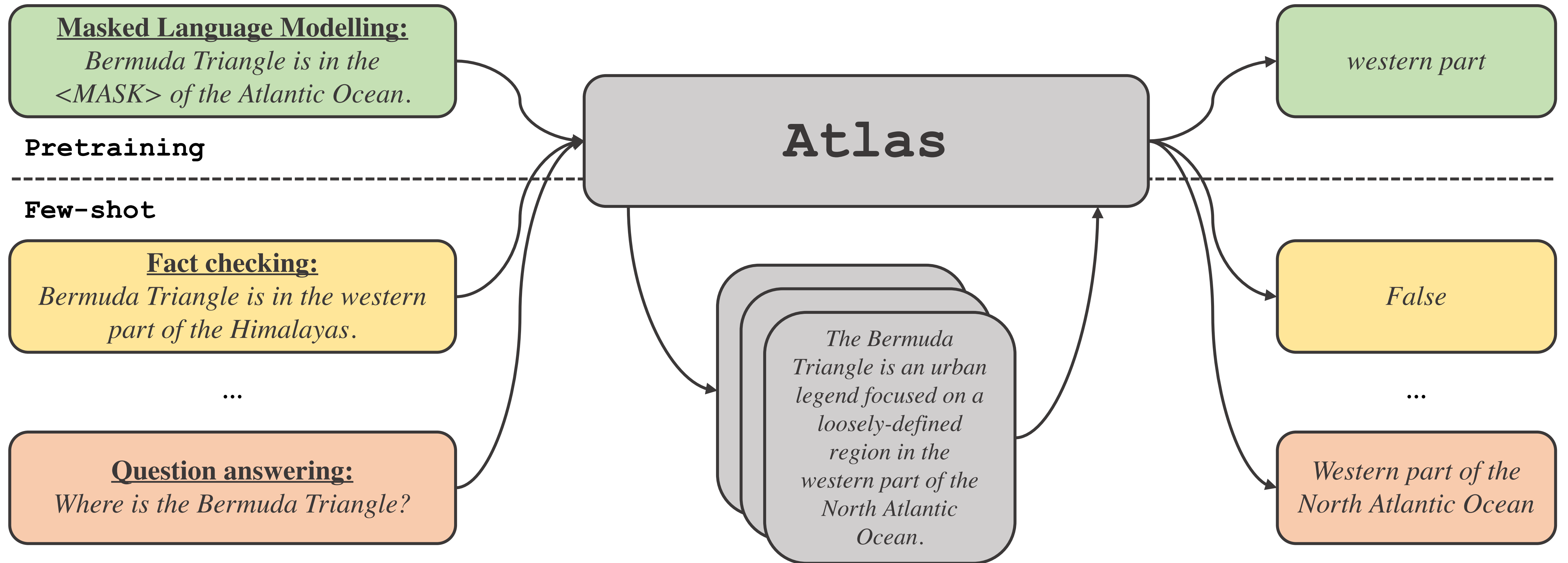
Model	NQ		TriviaQA filtered		TriviaQA unfiltered	
	64-shot	Full	64-shot	Full	64-shot	Full
GPT-3 ( <a href="#">Brown et al., 2020</a> )	29.9	-	-	-	71.2	-
Gopher ( <a href="#">Rae et al., 2021</a> )	28.2	-	57.2	-	61.3	-
Chinchilla ( <a href="#">Hoffmann et al., 2022</a> )	35.5	-	64.6	-	72.3	-
PaLM ( <a href="#">Chowdhery et al., 2022</a> )	39.6	-	-	-	81.4	-
RETRO ( <a href="#">Borgeaud et al., 2021</a> )	-	45.5	-	-	-	-
FiD ( <a href="#">Izacard &amp; Grave, 2020</a> )	-	51.4	-	67.6	-	80.1
FiD-KD ( <a href="#">Izacard &amp; Grave, 2021</a> )	-	54.7	-	73.3	-	-
R2-D2 ( <a href="#">Fajcik et al., 2021</a> )	-	55.9	-	69.9	-	-
ATLAS	42.4	60.4	74.5	79.8	84.7	89.4

[Izacard et al., 2022]

# ATLAS — A Retrieval-Augmented LM



# ATLAS — A Retrieval-Augmented LM



# Retrieval-Augmented LMs

**What** to retrieve?

Query



Text chunks (passages)?

Tokens?

Something else?



# Retrieval-Augmented LMs

**What** to retrieve?

Query

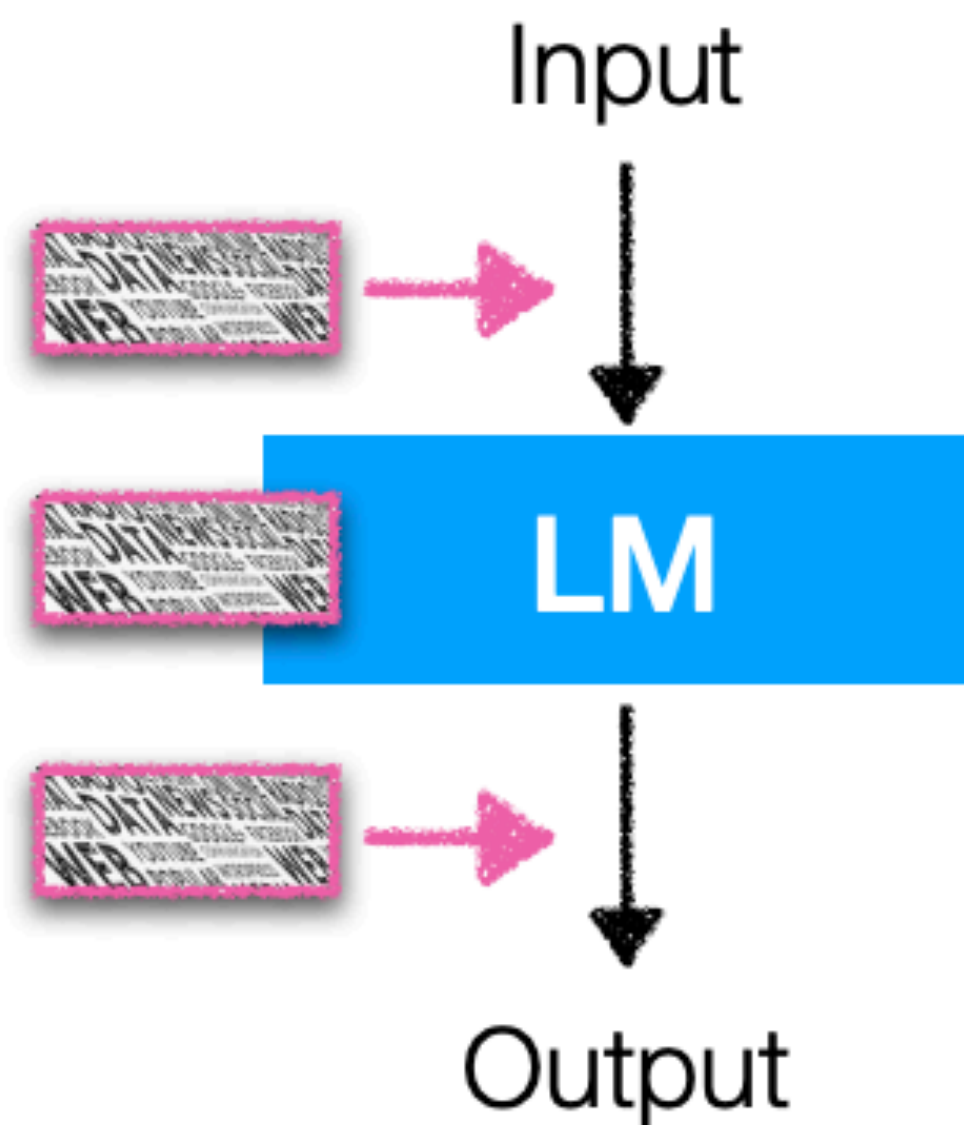


Text chunks (passages)?

Tokens?

Something else?

**How** to use retrieval?



# Retrieval-Augmented LMs

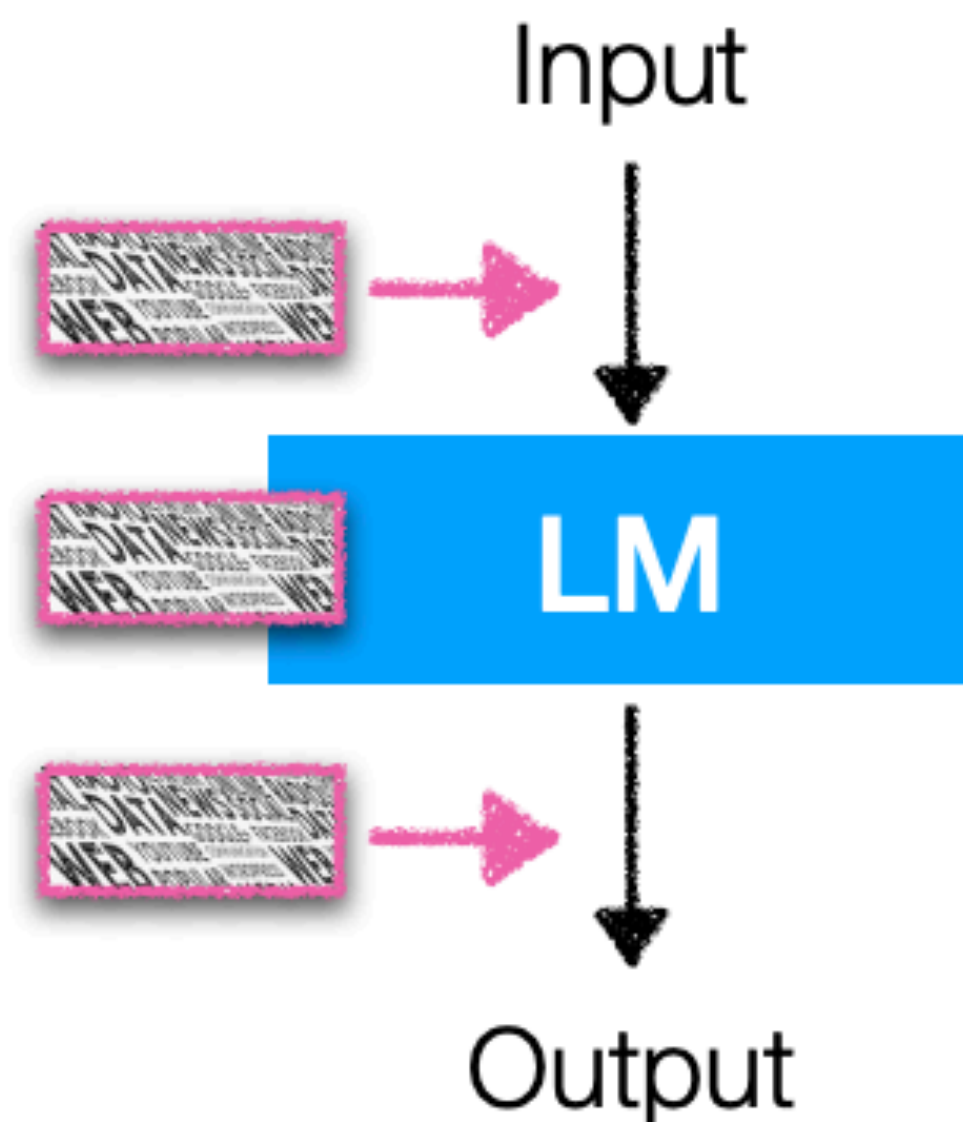
**What** to retrieve?

Query



Text chunks (passages)?  
Tokens?  
Something else?

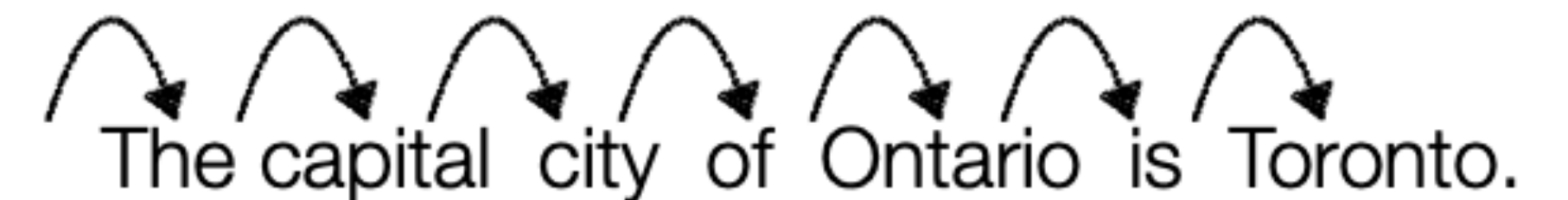
**How** to use retrieval?



**When** to retrieve?

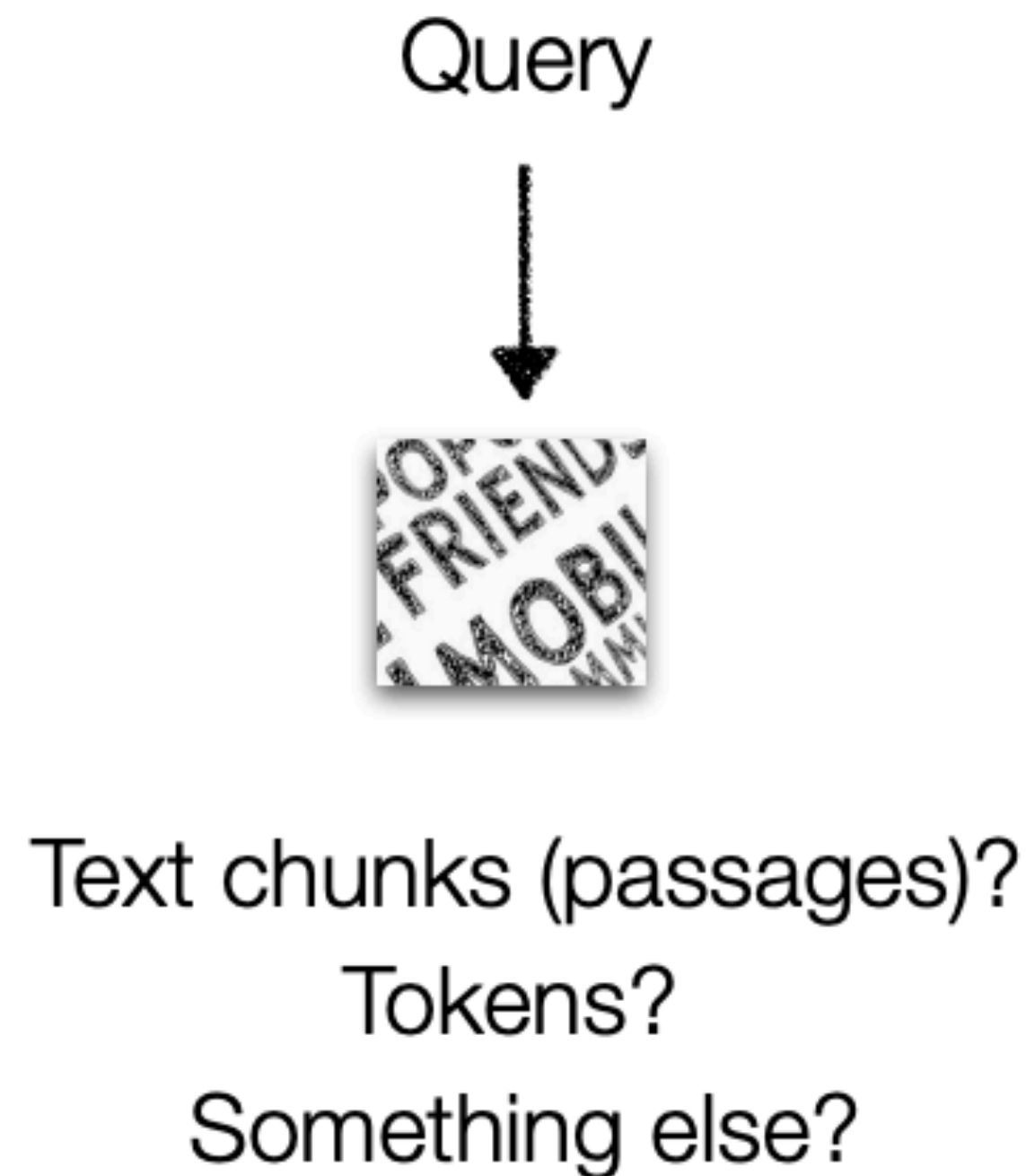
w/ retrieval

The capital city of Ontario is Toronto.

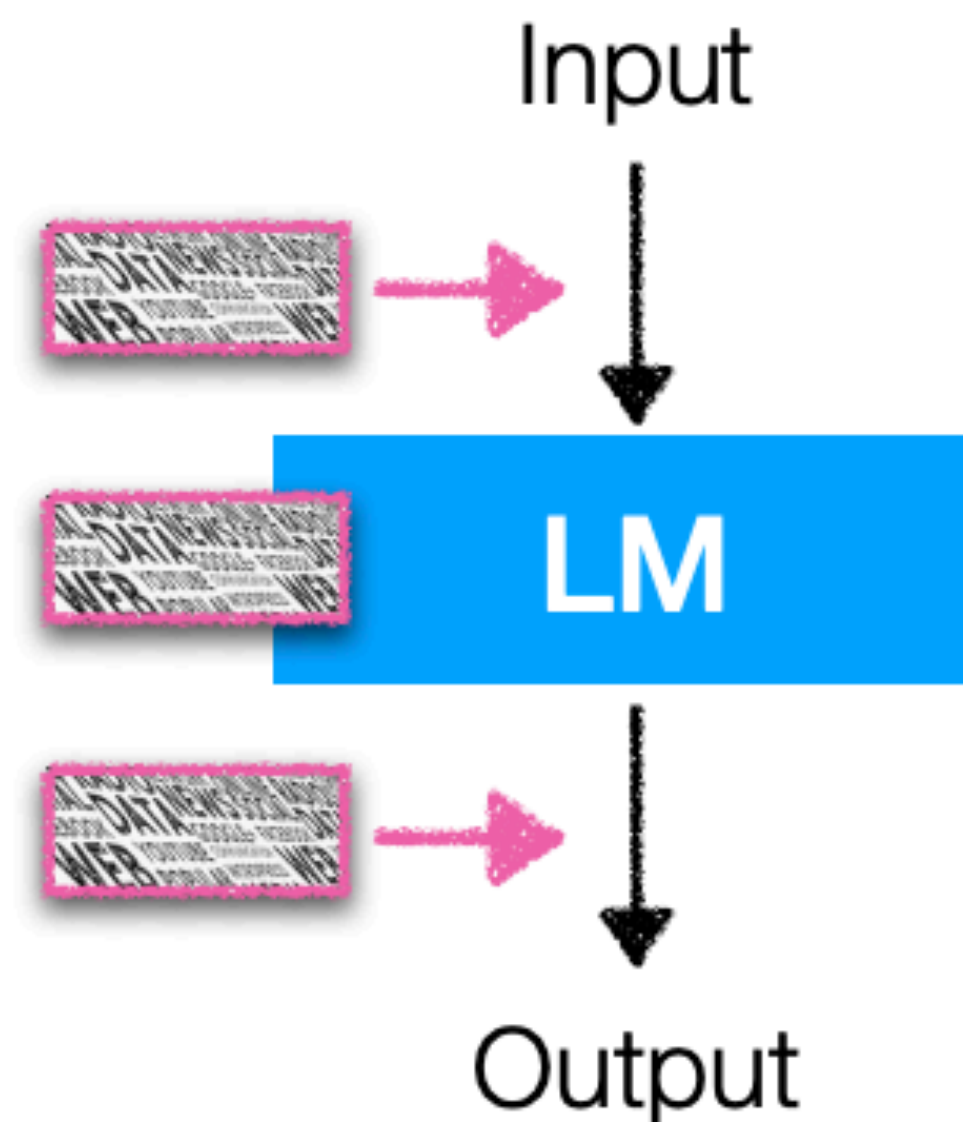
A diagram showing the sentence 'The capital city of Ontario is Toronto.' with curved arrows connecting the words in a sequence: 'The' to 'capital', 'capital' to 'city', 'city' to 'of', 'of' to 'Ontario', 'Ontario' to 'is', and 'is' to 'Toronto'. This illustrates the temporal or contextual flow of the sentence.

# Retrieval-Augmented LMs

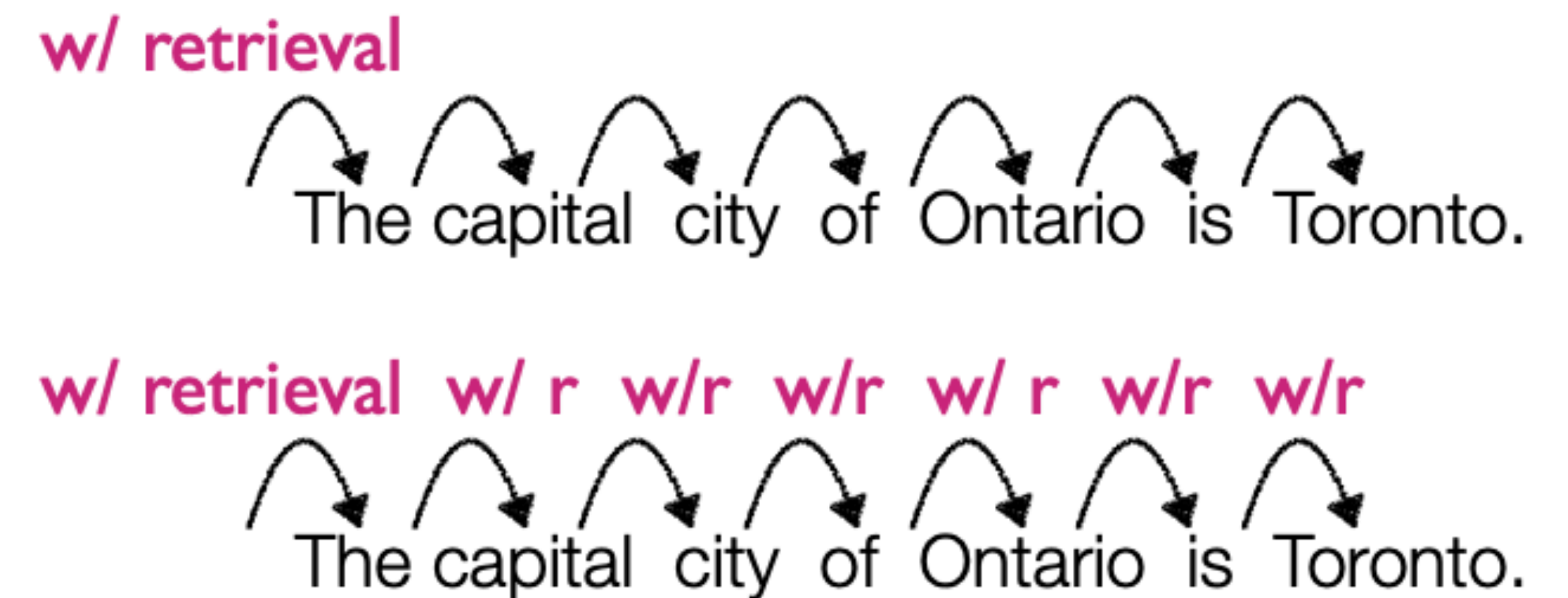
**What** to retrieve?



**How** to use retrieval?



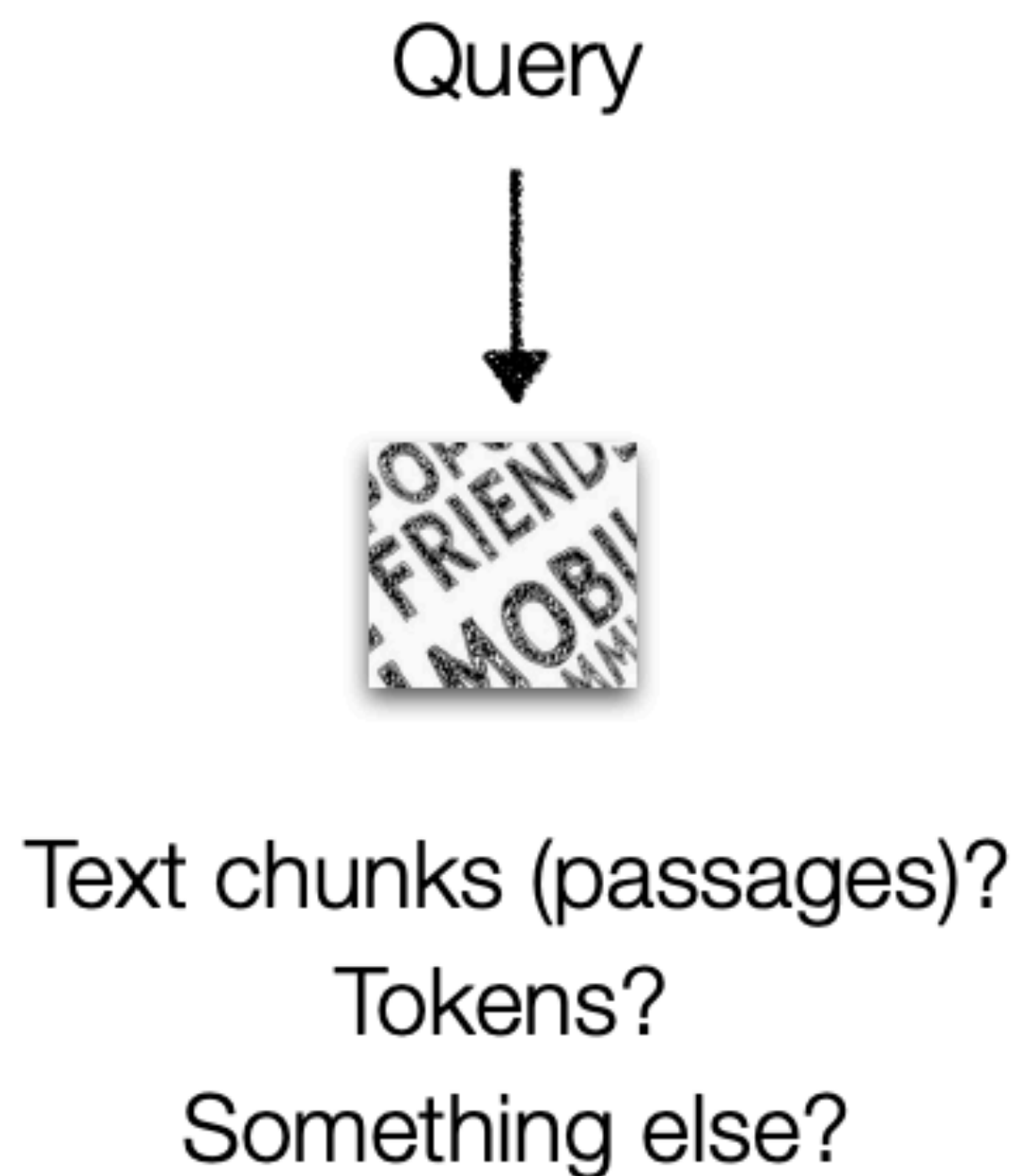
**When** to retrieve?



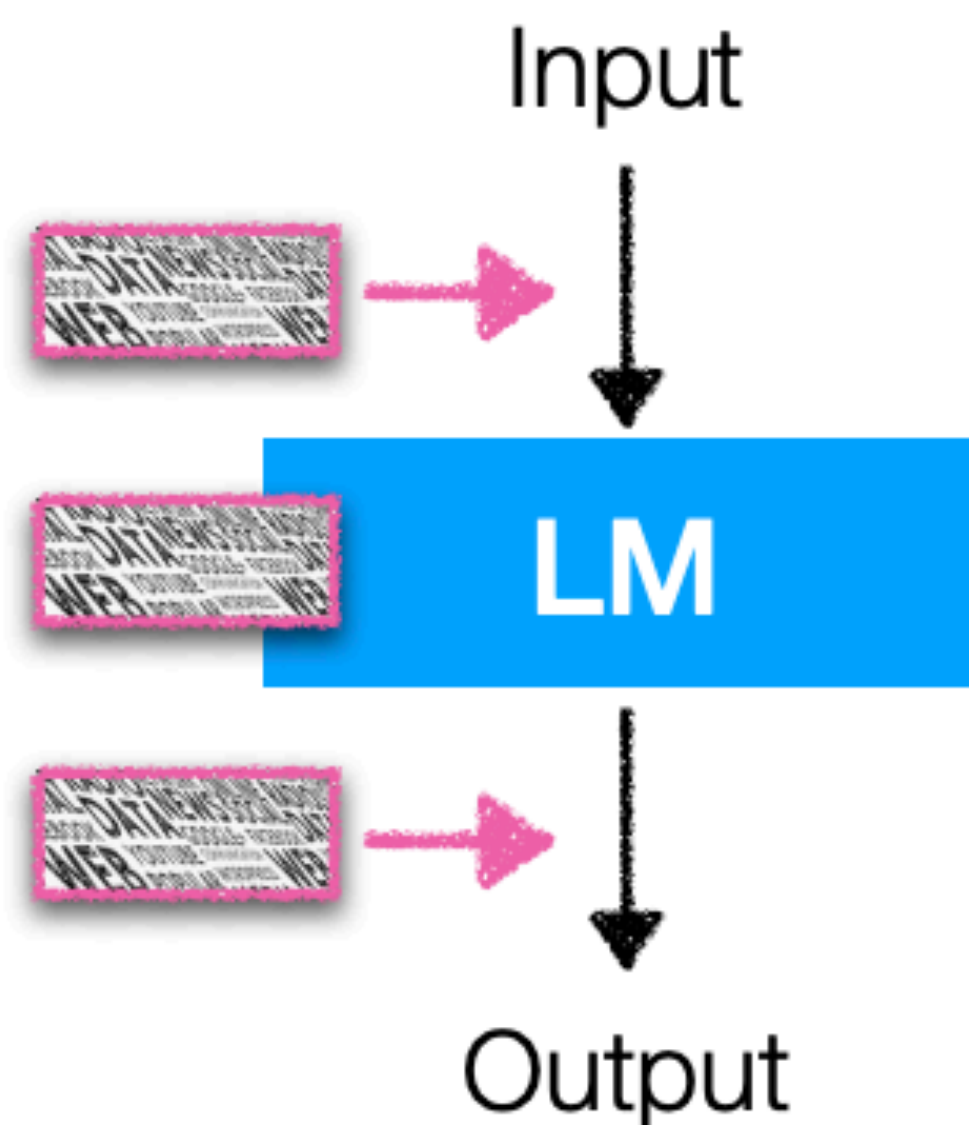


# Retrieval-Augmented LMs

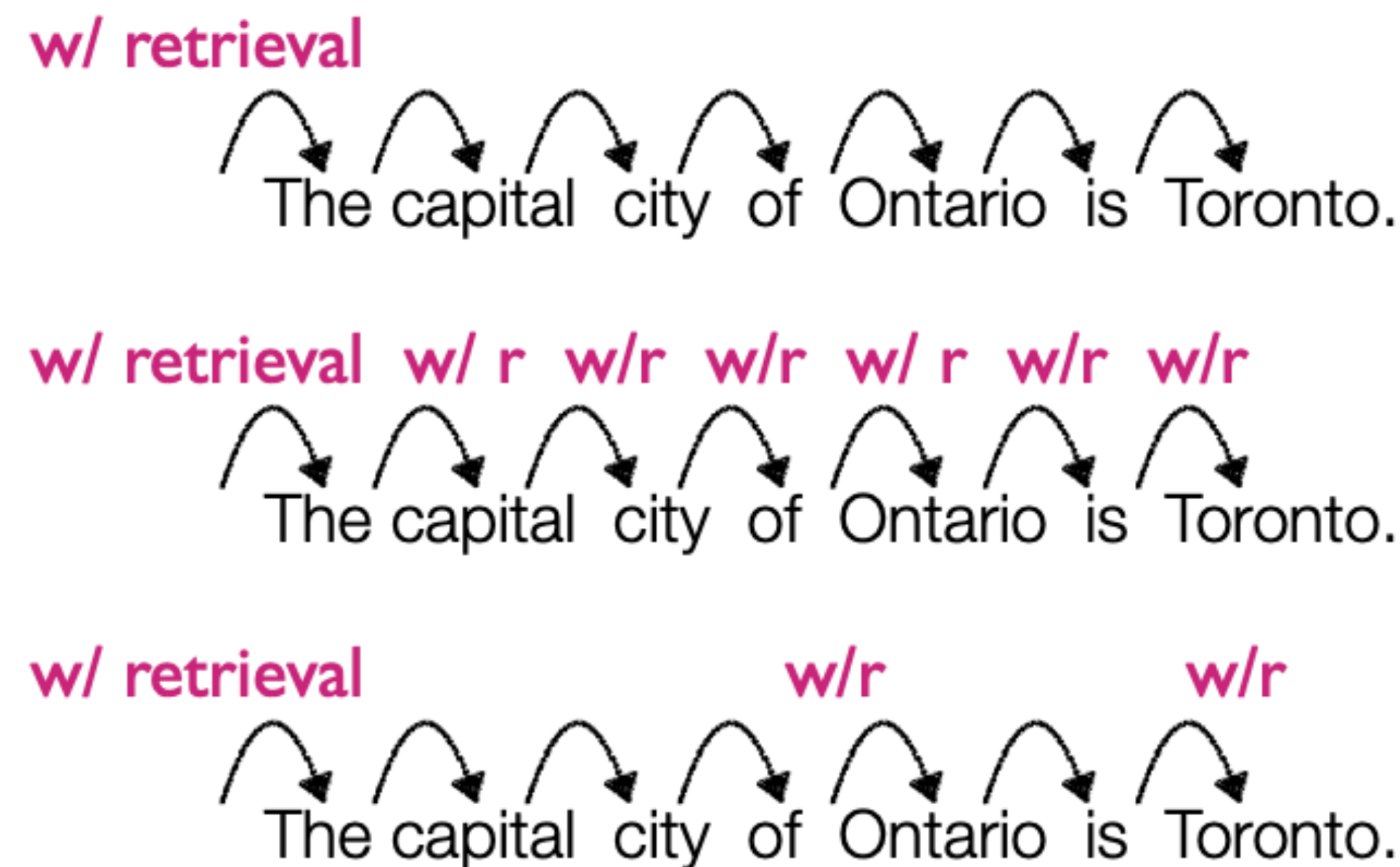
**What** to retrieve?



**How** to use retrieval?

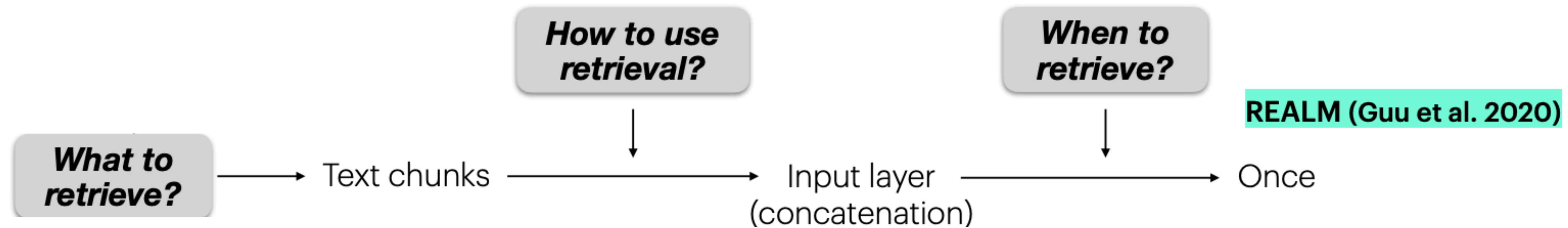


**When** to retrieve?

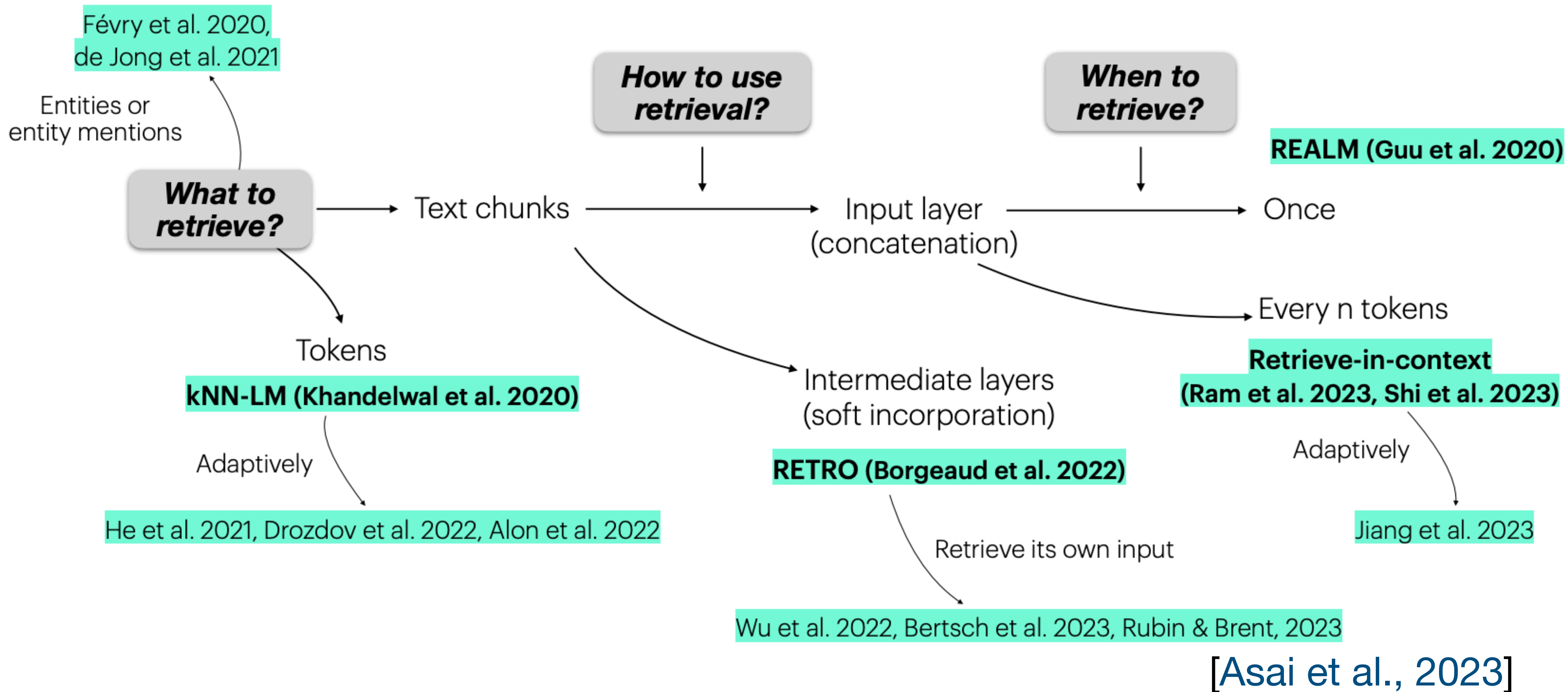




# Retrieval-Augmented LMs



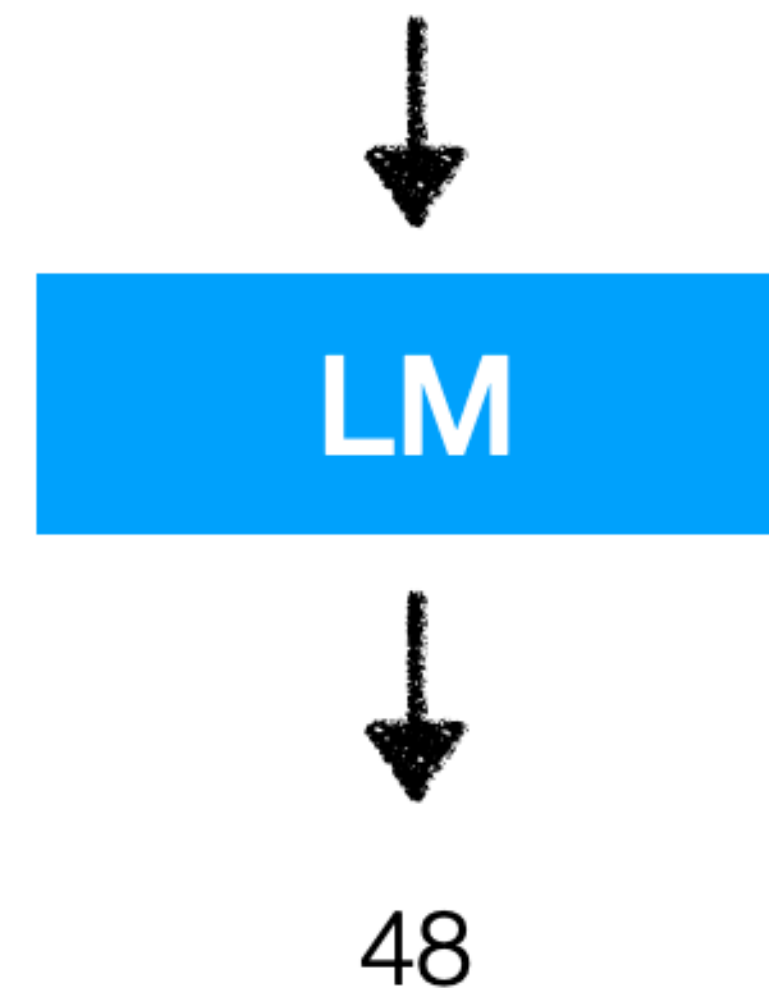
# Retrieval-Augmented LMs



# REALM [Guu et al., 2020]

**x** = World Cup 2022 was the last before the increase to [MASK] in the 2026 tournament.

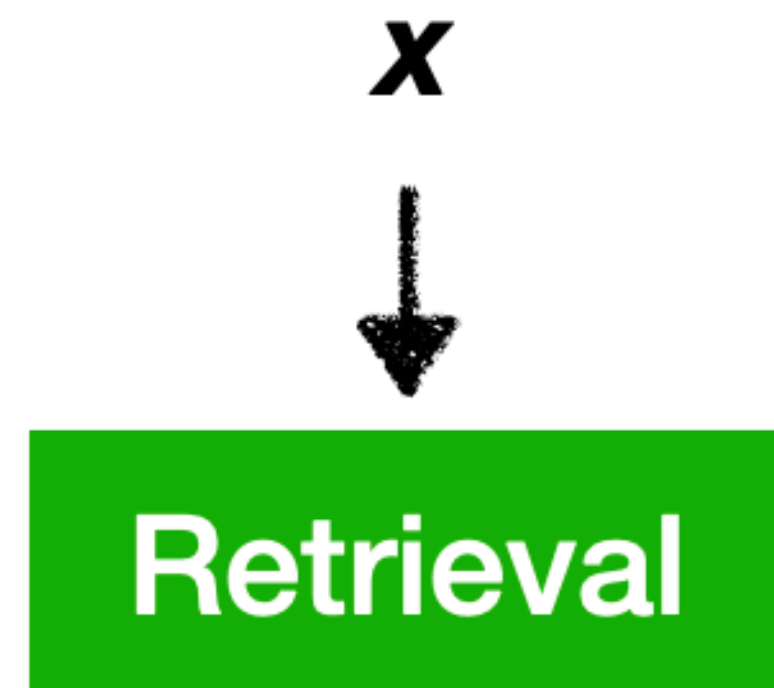
World Cup 2022 was ... the increase to [MASK] in 2026.



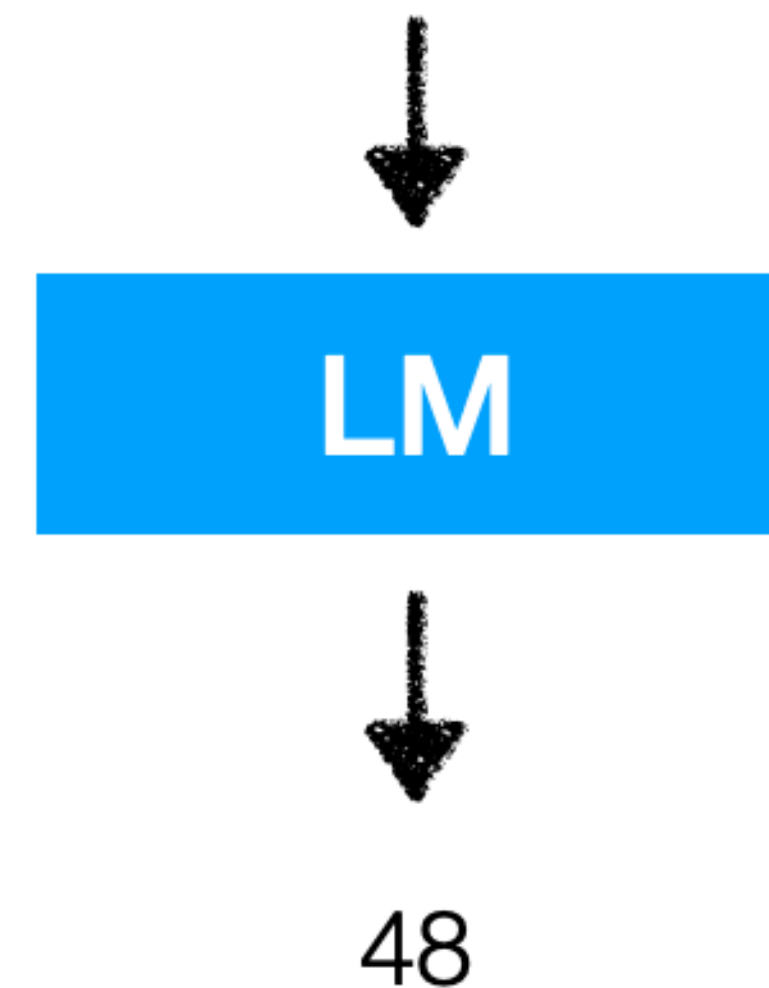
Read stage

# REALM [Guu et al., 2020]

$x$  = World Cup 2022 was the last before the increase to [MASK] in the 2026 tournament.



World Cup 2022 was ... the increase to [MASK] in 2026.



Read stage



# REALM [Gua et al., 2020]

$x$  = World Cup 2022 was the last before the increase to [MASK] in the 2026 tournament.

$x$



Retrieval



FIFA World Cup 2026  
will expand to 48 teams.

Retrieve stage

$k$  chunks of text  
(passages)

World Cup 2022 was ... the increase to [MASK] in 2026.



LM

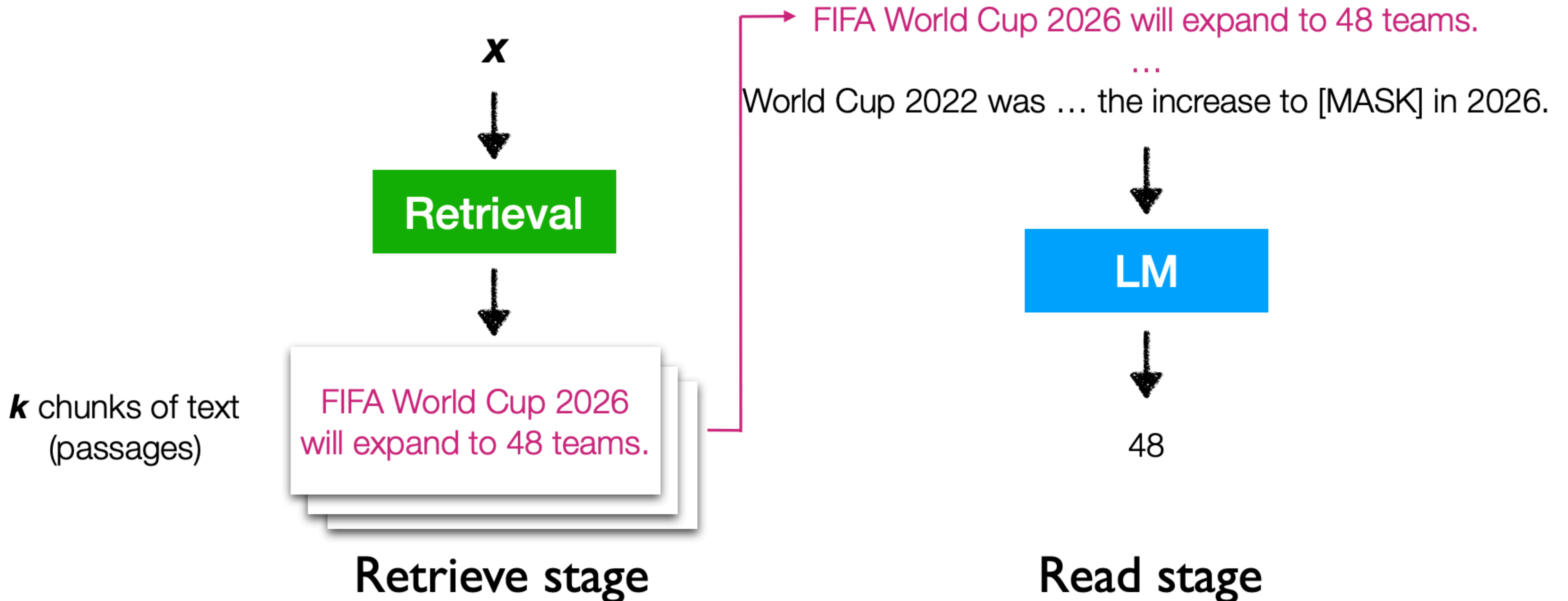


48

Read stage

# REALM [Gua et al., 2020]

$x$  = World Cup 2022 was the last before the increase to [MASK] in the 2026 tournament.



# REALM — Retrieval

FIFA World Cup 2026  
will expand to 48 teams.

In 2022, the 32 national  
teams involved in the  
tournament.

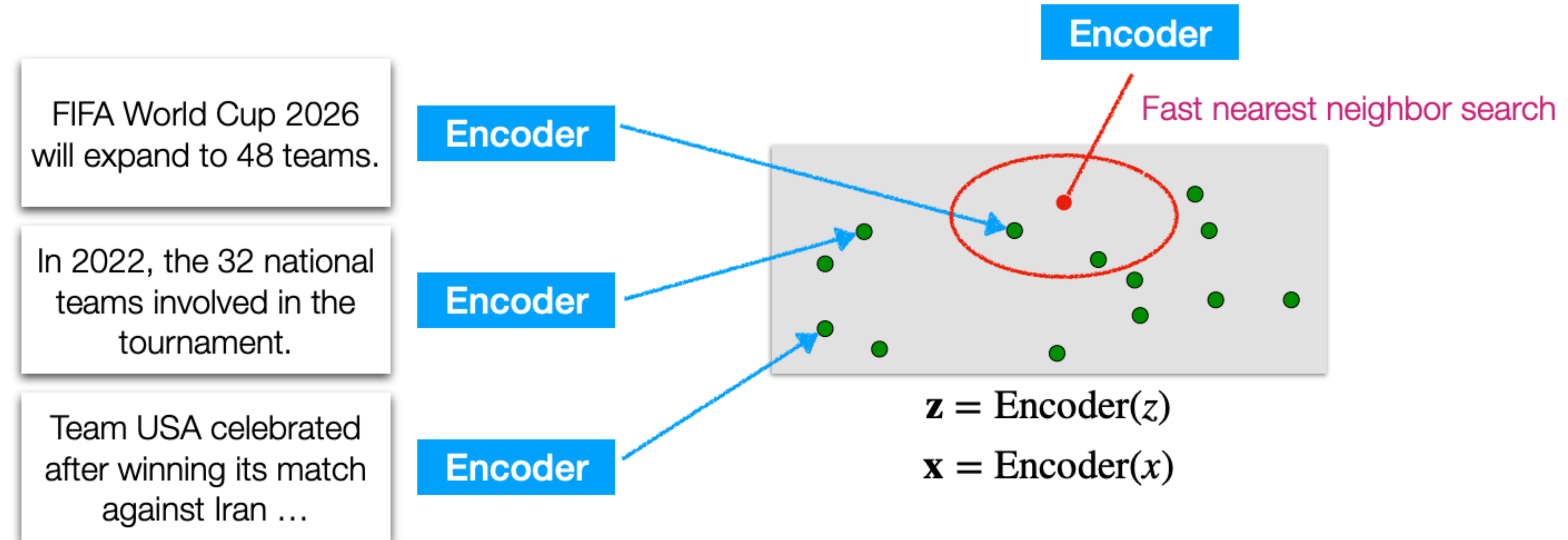
Team USA celebrated  
after winning its match  
against Iran ...

Wikipedia

13M chunks (passages)  
(called *documents* in the paper)

# REALM — Retrieval

$\mathbf{x}$  = World Cup 2022 was ... the increase to [MASK] in 2026.

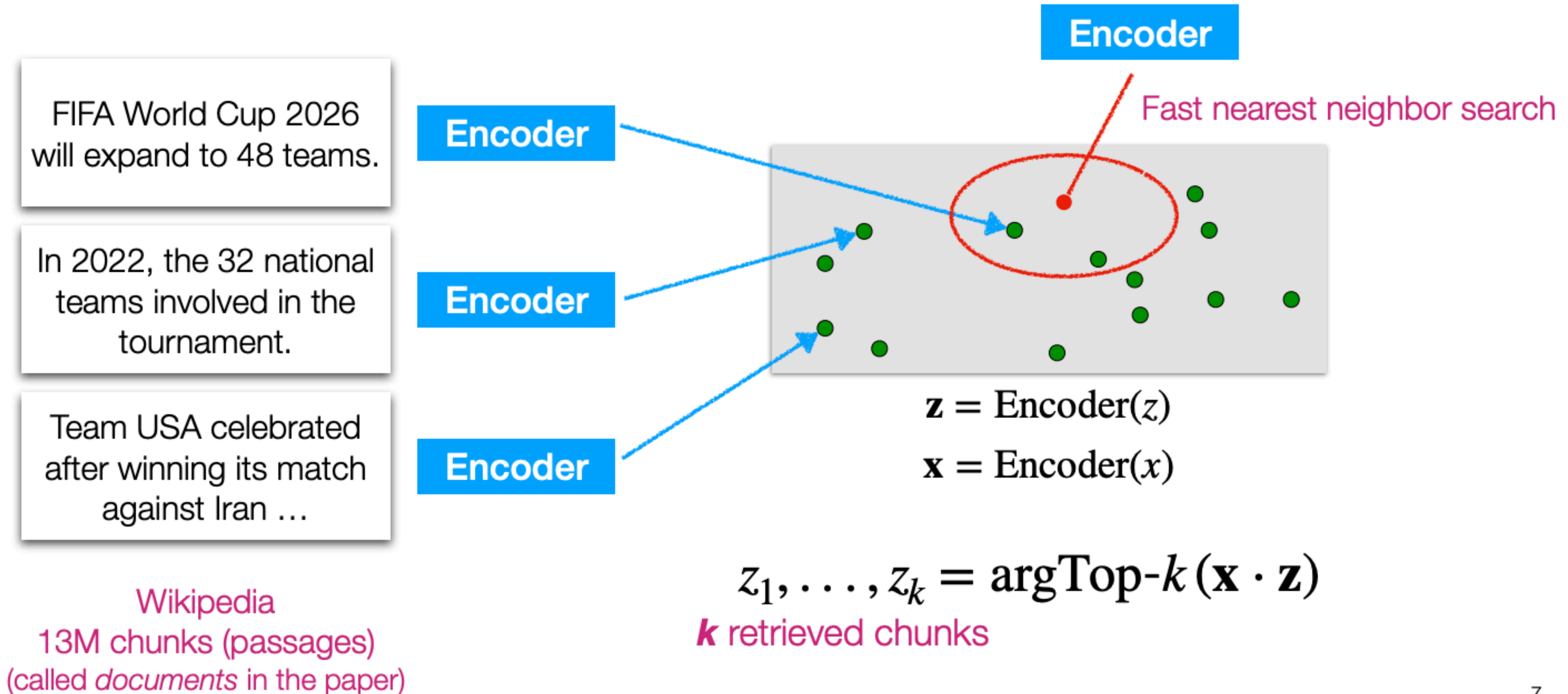


Wikipedia  
13M chunks (passages)  
(called *documents* in the paper)

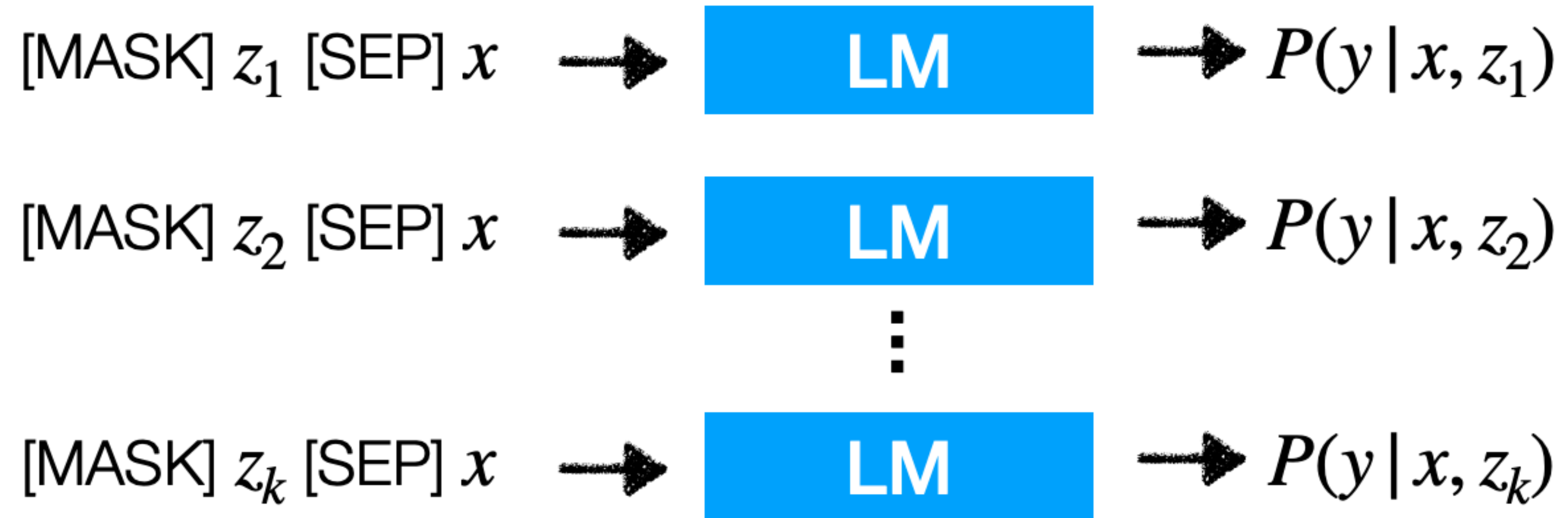


# REALM — Retrieval

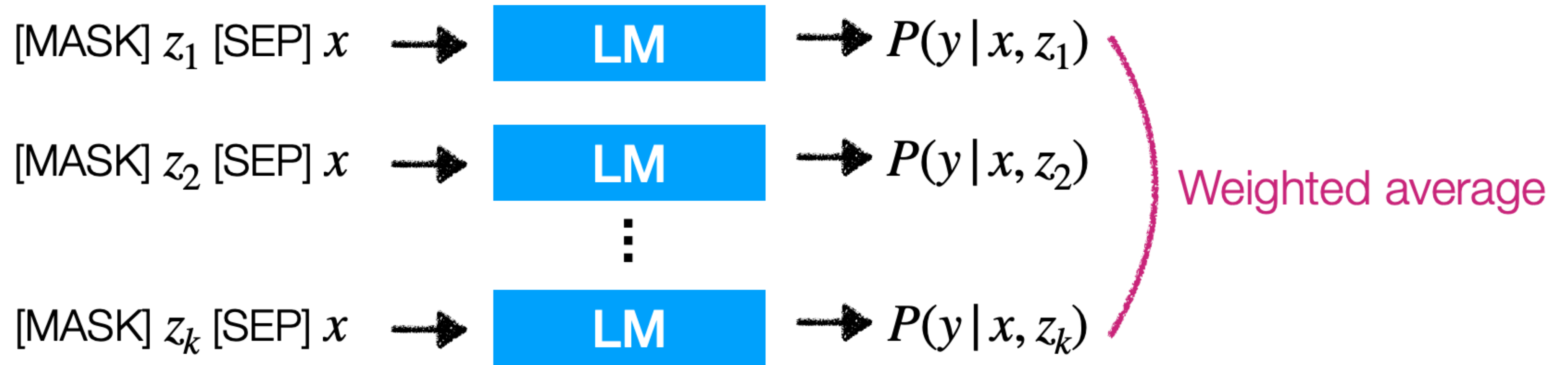
$\mathbf{x}$  = World Cup 2022 was ... the increase to [MASK] in 2026.



# REALM — Reading



# REALM — Reading



Need to approximate  
 $\rightarrow$  Consider top  $k$  chunks only

$$\sum_{z \in \mathcal{D}} \underbrace{P(z | x)}_{\text{from the retrieve stage}} \underbrace{P(y | x, z)}_{\text{from the read stage}}$$

0 if not one of top  $k$

# REALM [Guu et al., 2020]

**What** to retrieve?

- **Chunks** ✓
- Tokens
- Others



# REALM [Guu et al., 2020]

## What to retrieve?

- **Chunks** ✓
- Tokens
- Others

## How to use retrieval?

- **Input layer** ✓
- Intermediate layers
- Output layer

# REALM [Guu et al., 2020]

## What to retrieve?

- **Chunks** ✓
- Tokens
- Others

## How to use retrieval?

- **Input layer** ✓
- Intermediate layers
- Output layer

## When to retrieve?

- **Once** ✓
- Every  $n$  tokens ( $n > 1$ )
- Every token

# Overview — Retrieval-Augmented Models

**REALM** [Guu et al., 2020] — Masked Language Modeling (MLM) pre-training objective followed by fine-tuning, focusing on ODQA

**DPR** [Karpukhin et al., 2020] — pipeline training rather than joint training, focusing on ODQA with no explicit LM training objective

**RAG** [Lewis et al., 2020] — Generative training objective rather than MLM, focusing on ODQA and knowledge-intensive tasks (no explicit LM objective)

**ATLAS** [Izacard et al., 2022] — Combine RAG with a retrieval-based LM pre-training objective and an encoder-decoder architecture, focusing on ODQA and knowledge-intensive tasks

# Reading List

Reliable, Adaptable, and Attributable Language Models with Retrieval,

**<https://arxiv.org/abs/2403.03187>**

ATLAS: Few-shot Learning with Retrieval Augmented Language Models,

**<https://arxiv.org/abs/2208.03299>**

REALM: Retrieval-Augmented Language Model Pre-Training,

**<https://arxiv.org/abs/2002.08909>**

Reading Wikipedia to Answer Open-Domain Questions,

**<https://arxiv.org/abs/1704.00051>**

Question and Answer Test-Train Overlap in Open-Domain Question Answering Datasets, **<https://arxiv.org/abs/2008.02637>**

Challenges in Generalisation in Open Domain Question Answering,

**<https://arxiv.org/abs/2109.01156>**