
Collapse of Irrelevant Representations (CIR) Ensures Robust and Non-Disruptive LLM Unlearning

Filip Sondej*
Jagiellonian University

Yushi Yang
University of Oxford

Abstract

Current unlearning techniques and safety training consistently fail to remove dangerous knowledge from language models. We analyze the root causes and propose a highly selective technique which unlearns robustly and without disrupting general performance.

We perform PCA on activations and output gradients to identify subspaces containing common representations, and *collapse them before calculating unlearning updates*. This way we avoid unlearning general representations, and only target those specific to the unlearned facts.

When unlearning WMDP dataset facts from Llama-3.1-8B, we drop post-attack accuracy 30x more than SOTA (Circuit Breakers) on biohazardous facts and 6x more on cyberhazardous facts. Despite this, we *disrupt general performance 30x less*, while requiring less than 3 GPU-seconds per fact.

Code: github.com/filyp/unlearning

1 Introduction

During pre-training, language models learn hazardous capabilities useful e.g. for bioterrorism and cybercrime [Li et al., 2024]. They even acquire information about their own safety controls, which in the future could let models circumvent them [Roger, 2024, Greenblatt et al., 2024].

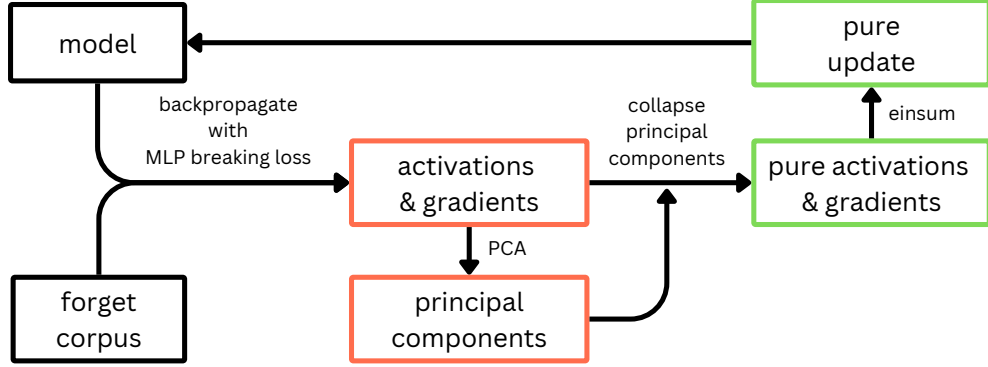
Popular safety training approaches like DPO and RLHF do not eliminate unwanted capabilities, but rather teach the model to stop using them Lee et al. [2024]. These concealed capabilities can be resurfaced by jailbreak attacks [Zou et al., 2023] or even completely accidentally [Qi et al., 2023]. Even methods designed specifically for unlearning can be easily reversed [Lucki et al., 2025, Lynch et al., 2024, Deeb and Roger, 2024].

In this work, we identify the fundamental cause of unlearning failure: *naive unlearning disrupts general representations shared between harmful and benign capabilities* (see Section 3.3). Then, during fine-tuning attacks, these broken representations can be identified and fixed because they are also present in the attacker’s training data. We saw that unlearning becomes vulnerable to attacks as soon as it causes even 0.1% general performance degradation.

Figure 1 presents the CIR technique, which before calculating unlearning updates first removes the general representations from activations and gradients.² We pair it with a representation engineering loss, but rather than breaking residual stream activations as in Zou et al. [2024], we directly break MLP outputs before they are added to the residual stream, which works 40% better.

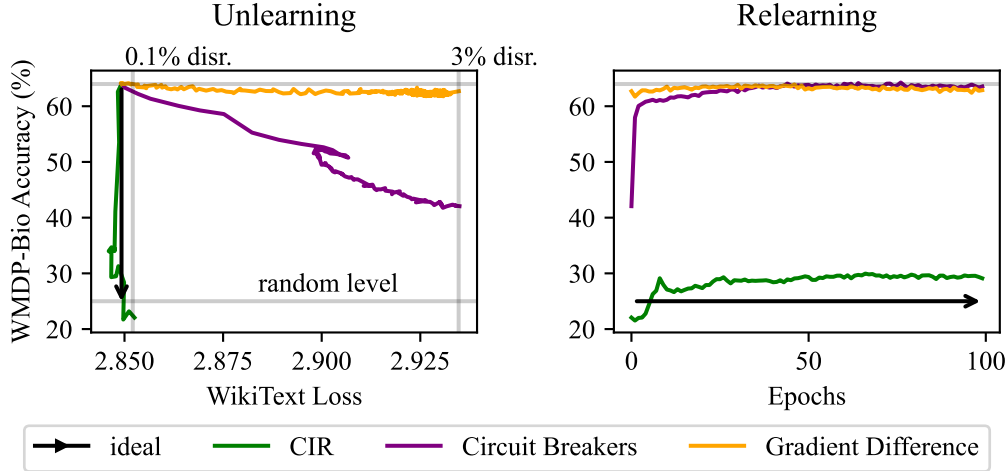
*Correspondence to: filip.science921@passinbox.com

²Disambiguation: By "gradients" we always mean the gradients that flow into modules during backpropagation, before weight updates are computed. For the final per-weight gradients, we always use the term "update".



(a) Collapse of Irrelevant Representations (CIR) diagram.

In orange we show "dirty" vectors, which contain representations irrelevant to the unlearning task. Unlearning on them would cause disruption and unrobustness. In green we show the purified vectors, which target only the unwanted representations.



(b) Comparison of unlearning methods.

Methods are terminated once they hit a disruption threshold and then tested under a fine-tuning attack. Like Deeb and Roger [2024] we retrain on facts different than evaluated facts, but from the same category.

Figure 1: CIR diagram and comparison with prior methods.

2 Related work

Unlearning methods Methods relying solely on backpropagation, like DPO [Rafailov et al., 2024], only deactivate unwanted capabilities, not remove them [Lee et al., 2024]. For this reason, alternative unlearning approaches have been proposed. Several recent methods aim to disrupt the intermediate activations of the model [Zou et al., 2024, Rosati et al., 2024, Li et al., 2024]. Others incorporate meta-learning [Tamirisa et al., 2024, Sondej et al., 2025, Henderson et al., 2023] which simulates how an attacker could relearn the unwanted knowledge, to prepare against it. Some try to locate the harmful neurons or activation directions and ablate them Wang et al. [2024], Wu et al. [2023], Uppaal et al. [2024], Suau et al. [2024].

Unlearning reversal However, currently all existing unlearning techniques are easily reversed by fine-tuning, jailbreaks, few-shot prompting, disabling refusal mechanisms, or out-of-distribution inputs [Łucki et al., 2025, Lynch et al., 2024]. Even for methods which ablate harmful concepts, Lo et al. [2024] found that the model can repurpose neurons with similar meaning to quickly relearn them.

Low mutual information attacks Failure of current unlearning methods has been shown most explicitly by Deeb and Roger [2024], where attackers could recover supposedly unlearned facts by training on a *completely independent* set of facts, which definitively proves that they were not removed. In our experiments, for the fine-tuning attacks we use the same approach – trying to recover the target facts by training on different facts from the same category.

3 Motivation for unlearning selectivity

In this section, we will share our insights as to why unlearning has been so challenging. We hope to show how our technique emerges naturally as a response to these issues. (To go straight to our method, you can skip to Section 4.)

3.1 Disruption leads to unrobustness

Existing unlearning methods are consistently easy to undo. We have noticed that we can predict how successful a fine-tuning attack will be by looking at the disruption during unlearning. Let us divide unlearning runs into two phases: "non-disruptive", which lasts as long as retain loss stays below 100.1% of its initial value, and "disruptive", which starts after that. (Retain loss is the model's loss computed over the retain datasets defined in Section 5.)

On Figure 4 (in the appendix) we see that unlearning achieved during the disruptive phase is usually reversible with a fine-tuning attack. But surprisingly, **unlearning that happened without any disruption remains robust**. Sometimes disruptive unlearning is partially robust too, but it is not guaranteed. This means that letting unlearning disrupt general performance is unacceptable. In our experiments, unlearning becomes unrobust after as little as *0.1% retain set disruption*. This finding explains the results from Deeb and Roger [2024], who allowed unlearning to disrupt retain loss by 5%, and then showed near-zero robustness.

3.2 Disruption is costly

Existing unlearning techniques also try to minimize disruption, but they typically do it by training on the retain set, hoping to undo the damage that the unlearning has caused. But while breaking the model is easy, in our experience fixing it takes a prohibitively long time. This makes sense – after all the model's weights have already been extremely optimized through multi-million dollar training runs. If we aimlessly break them, we should not expect that going back to the optimal values will be easy. So instead of fixing the damage from unlearning, ideally we should not cause the damage in the first place.

3.3 Disruption of superficially similar facts

Unlearning modifies the model to make unwanted answers less likely. For example when unlearning "The capital of France is **Paris**", there are many ways to make "Paris" less likely: actually forgetting it is France's capital, forgetting what "capital" means, forgetting that "is" requires the answer to follow, etc. In fact, as Figure 2 shows, unlearning "The capital of France is **Paris**", accidentally unlearns "The capital of Spain is **Madrid**" **84% as strongly**. (We unlearn only the tokens shown in purple.) It can even affect completely unrelated facts. Interestingly, wrong facts are not disrupted. See Appendix B for more examples.

Similarly, unlearning biohazardous facts likely disrupts many benign biological concepts. This could explain why we can recover "unlearned" facts by retraining on *unrelated* biological text [Deeb and Roger, 2024] – retraining fixes these benign concepts.

In Figure 2 we see that the activations (and to a lesser extent, gradients) are quite similar across different facts. This sheds light on why superficially similar facts are disrupted – most representations are not specific to the fact we are trying to unlearn, but more general. And since the model updates are computed using these "dirty" activations and gradients, other facts which also contain these general representations will be disrupted. To prevent this, we need to find a way to filter out these general representations.

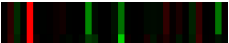
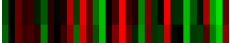
Prompt		Disruption	Activations	Gradients
The capital of France is	Paris	100%		
The capital of Spain is	Madrid	84%		
The capital of China is	Beijing	84%		
The capital of Ukraine is	Kyiv	64%		

Figure 2: Disruption caused by unlearning a simple fact. We show how unlearning "The capital of France is Paris" disrupts the recall of other facts. We measure disruption using cosine similarity between the model’s update on the "Paris" fact and the evaluated fact. *Activations* column shows a slice of activations incoming into a middle layer MLP module on the token position right before the answer. *Gradients* column shows a slice of the gradients incoming into the same module during backpropagation when aiming to unlearn the answer (in purple).

4 Collapse of Irrelevant Representations

Ablations are too coarse Following the findings from the previous section, we have tried many ways to remove representations which cause disruption. Simply ablating elements of the activations and gradients (like on Figure 5) often struggles to only get rid of disruption. That is because representations exist in superposition [Elhage et al., 2022], so one element takes part in encoding multiple representations, some relevant to the unlearning task, some not.

Collapsing common representations We found that rather than ablating, it is much better to *project out* irrelevant representations. Trying to define irrelevant representations manually would be prohibitively tedious, so we assume that if a representation is commonly present in many training texts, it is probably irrelevant. Removing them will leave us only with representations which are specific to the given training text. The most natural way to locate the subspace with most common representations, is to first take the mean of the values and then also their principal components (PCs). (To simplify, we treat the mean as the "0th principal component", and whenever we talk about collapsing components, we first collapse the mean.) Equation 1 shows how to collapse activation PCs, and the same is done for gradients.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{activation}' &= \text{activation} - \left(\text{activation} \cdot \frac{\text{mean}}{\|\text{mean}\|} \right) \frac{\text{mean}}{\|\text{mean}\|} \\ \text{activation}_{\text{pure}} &= \text{activation}' - \sum_{i=1}^k (\text{activation}' \cdot \text{PC}_i) \text{PC}_i \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

On Figure 7a & 7b we see how well different numbers of projected PCs work.

Collapse implementation We calculate PCs for each trained MLP module, both for their incoming activations and for their output gradients incoming during backpropagation. Normally these activations and output gradients would be Einstein summed to calculate the weight updates. But we discard this default weight update and instead first collapse PCs and only then calculate the update. PCs drift over time, so it helps to recompute them during unlearning – we do it after each epoch, but it can be rarer. PCs can be computed over any dataset, but we have found it works best to simply compute them on the unlearning corpus itself. This luckily makes the algorithm much more efficient, because we can reuse forward and backward passes for unlearning and for fetching activations and gradients. See Algorithm 1 in the appendix for the pseudocode.

We only intervene on MLPs, since this is where the model’s knowledge is stored [Nanda et al., 2023]. Also, collapsing representations on attention modules would be complex and specific to the model implementation.

Loss functions CIR is compatible with any unlearning loss function and (optionally) with any retain loss function. First we tried loss functions which operate on the final logits, like negative cross entropy, negative entropy [Tamirisa et al., 2024], or (best in this category) simply minimizing the logit for the target token (but not below 0). The last one is extremely good at preventing the model

from *recalling* the harmful answer, but does not generalize to preventing *recognizing* the harmful answer during multiple-choice questions. So it may be the optimal choice if we only care for recall, not recognition, but it must be checked whether it fails to generalize in some other ways.

Representation engineering loss functions In contrast, losses which aim to break intermediate representations prevent both recall and recognition of the harmful answers. The SOTA representation breaking method is Circuit Breakers [Zou et al., 2024], which minimizes (but only down to 0) the cosine similarity between current and initial activations of the residual stream.

We improve on this SOTA in two ways. First, we notice a problem with cosine similarity: it can be minimized not only by removing the original representation, but also by adding some big random direction. We expected this to be disruptive, so we replaced cosine similarity with the *dot product*. Indeed, on Figure 6 the dot product disrupts the model much less for the same amount of unlearning, and we see that it is connected to cosine similarity growing the activation norm.

Secondly, rather than breaking activations on the residual stream (which contains representations added there by both MLPs and attention layers), we decided to work *at the source*, and directly break the MLP outputs before they are added to the stream. Figure 7c shows that this improves unlearning vs disruption by an additional **40%**, and that it is best to target MLPs on layers 6-12 (for a 32-layer Llama 8B).³ So our final unlearning loss is:

$$\text{MLP_breaking_loss}(\text{MLP}_{\text{out}}, \text{MLP}_{\text{orig_out}}) = \frac{\text{ReLU}(\text{MLP}_{\text{out}} \cdot \text{MLP}_{\text{orig_out}})}{\text{avg_MLP_out_norm}^2} \quad (2)$$

We normalize with the average norm of the original MLP outputs, because later layers have bigger norms and could dominate the loss too much. Lastly, we also decided not to break representations at the <BOS> token position, as this disrupts all texts, including benign ones. We also train on the retain set, using the representation engineering loss: $\|\text{resid_stream}_{\text{act}} - \text{resid_stream}_{\text{orig_act}}\|$ from the original circuit breakers paper [Zou et al., 2024], which penalizes changing residual stream activations on the retain set.

5 Method comparisons

WMDP datasets We compare the methods on a task of unlearning knowledge useful for bio-terrorism and cyber-warfare. We use the Weapons of Mass Destruction Proxy (WMDP) benchmark [Li et al., 2024]. Similarly to Deeb and Roger [2024], for each WMDP question we generate three simple sentences and use them all as the forget set. We chose a high-quality subset of 144 biological and 203 cyber questions.⁴ See Appendix C for generation details and filtering criteria.

As retain sets, we use the FineFineWeb corpus [M-A-P et al., 2024] – the biology subset for WMDP-Bio and the `computer_science_and_technology` subset for WMDP-Cyber.

Baselines We compare CIR to two popular unlearning methods. Gradient Difference [Liu et al., 2022] which maximizes the cross-entropy loss on the forget set while minimizing the loss on the retain set, and Circuit Breakers [Zou et al., 2024] which we described in Section 4.

Unlearning and relearning We use the Llama-3.1-8B model [Meta, 2024]. We control for the disruption of general performance as measured by the loss on WikiText [Merity et al., 2016]. We terminate CIR when this loss crosses 100.1% of its initial value. For our baselines this threshold is very low, so we gave them a 30x handicap and terminate them when they cross 103%. Afterwards, we perform a 100 epoch fine-tuning attack, on facts different than the evaluated ones but from the same distribution. For this we use the same WMDP split as Deeb and Roger [2024], with unlearning on 100% of the data, then relearning on 80% and evaluating the accuracy on the remaining 20%. Following Sondej et al. [2025], to stabilize training we always normalize the norm of unlearning updates to some fixed value. This value effectively acts as the unlearning rate. We describe compute requirements in Appendix D.

³It also means that it is enough to do forward and backward passes on just the first 12 layers, which is a major speedup.

⁴We use 20% of those as our dev set and 80% as the holdout set for the results shown.

Hyperparameter search For each method, we manually find a high but safe retain learning rate, which aims to minimize disruption during unlearning. With this retain rate fixed, we search the optimal unlearning rate, doing 3 runs per order-of-magnitude. Finally, for each method we select the run which did not diverge and had the highest post-relearning accuracy.

We found CIR significantly easier to tune, as it has a wider range of valid hyperparameters. In Circuit Breakers and Gradient Difference, unlearning and retaining seem to push against each other, and small changes of hyperparameters can tip the balance. As we see on Figure 3, the balance can even tip *during one run*. Again, this is likely caused by these methods unlearning general representations which are present in retain set too.

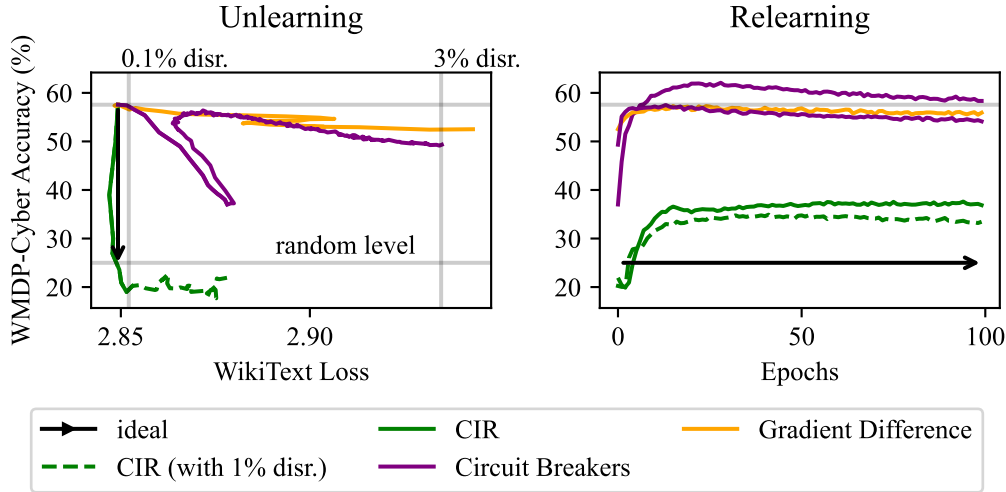


Figure 3: WMDP-Cyber unlearning results.

Circuit Breakers had an abrupt unlearning reversal where apparently its retain loss component started undoing the gains, so we have run a second relearning run from the point of minimum accuracy, but it turned out even less robust. We also run another CIR run with higher allowed disruption.

Results For both the biological facts CIR drops the post-attack accuracy 30x more than the best baseline (Figure 1b) and for cyber facts 6x (Figure 3), despite 30x less performance disruption.

On Figure 3 we show what happens if we give CIR some handicap too and let it disrupt up to 1%. Surprisingly, it does not achieve any higher drop in post-attack accuracy, which supports our findings from Section 3.1 about disruptive unlearning being unhelpful.⁵

6 Limitations

Scaling to more facts In our work we targeted facts present in the WMDP dataset. Our results show that CIR enables us to robustly unlearn hundreds of facts, but for full bio and cyber safety we will need orders of magnitude more. Now, a significant limiting factor becomes a lack of high-quality unlearning data. Creating such datasets will require a ton of work from bio and cyber experts, and releasing them publicly would pose a security risk, so both creation and usage of such datasets will need to be coordinated for example by AI Safety Institutes.

More work needed for unlearning tendencies Note that the assumption that common representations are irrelevant, works well when unlearning *knowledge* – the relevant representations are fact-specific, and so quite rare. But if we hope to unlearn *tendencies* (like power-seeking, deceptiveness, etc.), then the harmful representations are often quite common across training texts. So there, choosing which representations to collapse will need to be more elaborate than simply doing PCA. We leave it for future work to explore this.

⁵Another explanation would be that unlearning has already stopped since we have hit random accuracy level. But the probability of *generating* the harmful answer (not shown here) keeps decreasing, meaning that unlearning still proceeds – it is just unrobust.

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Algorithm 1 Collapse of Irrelevant Representations

Input: Model weights $model$; forget set $\mathcal{D}_{forget}$; unlearning loss $\mathcal{L}_{unl}$; learning rate LR . The function `get_representations` performs a forward and backward pass and returns activations and gradients incoming to each MLP module.

```

1: for  $e$  in  $num\_epochs$  do
2:   for  $x_{forget} \in \mathcal{D}_{forget}$  do                                     Iterate over forget corpus
3:      $acts, grads = \text{get\_representations}(model, x_{forget}, \mathcal{L}_{unl})$    Get activations and gradients
4:     Cache  $acts$  &  $grads$ 
5:     if  $PCs_{act}, PCs_{grad}$  are available then
6:        $pure\_acts = \text{CIR}(acts, PCs_{act})$                                Collapse irrelevant activation components
7:        $pure\_grads = \text{CIR}(grads, PCs_{grad})$                          Collapse irrelevant gradient components
8:        $model -= LR \cdot \text{einsum}(pure\_acts, pure\_grads)$            Calculate and apply update
9:       Optionally train on a retain batch
10:    end if
11:  end for
12:
13:   $PCs_{act} = \text{PCA}(cached\_acts)$                                      Compute principal components for activations
14:   $PCs_{grad} = \text{PCA}(cached\_grads)$                                Compute principal components for gradients
15:  Reset cache
16: end for

```

A Filtering out disruption is easier in activation and gradient space

A natural thing to try if we want to be selective, is to limit which weights to update. For example Sondej et al. [2025] have shown unlearning improvements when allowing to modify only the weights where the signs of the unlearning and the retaining update are the same. Similarly, the A-GEM technique [Chaudhry et al., 2019] from the field of continual learning aims to avoid performance disruption by projecting the weight updates to make them orthogonal to the retaining updates. Such projections have also been successfully used for unlearning [Wu et al., 2025].

On Figure 5, under "masked per weight" you can see the effects of such filtering techniques. They significantly reduce the disruption (shown in red), but some of it still escapes the filtering. That is because the "control/retaining updates" that we use to decide which weights to filter out never match the actual disruption perfectly. (Compare the blue control pattern and the red disruption pattern.)

Can we improve this filtering? When we look at update patterns, we see that both disruption and transfer appear as column- and row-wise stripes. (This happens because updates are computed by

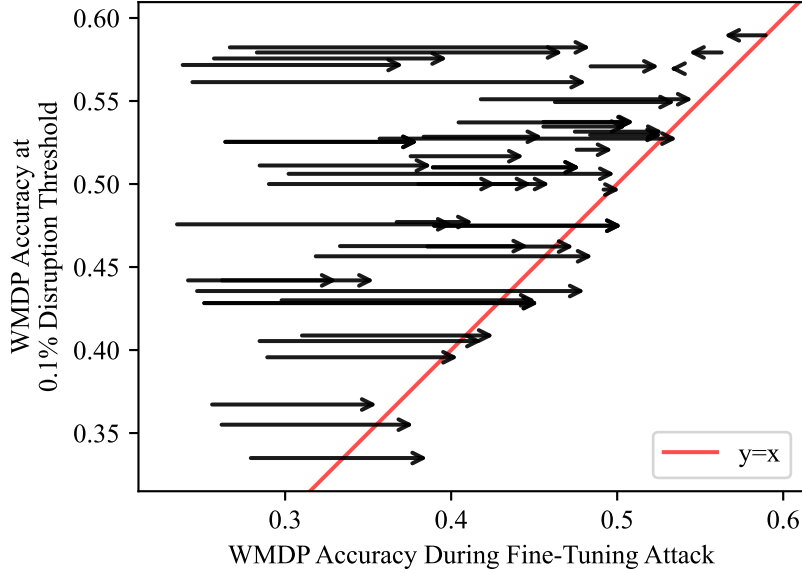


Figure 4: Success of fine-tuning attacks is determined by disruption during unlearning. We show 50 unlearning runs, each followed by the same fine-tuning attack and each of the attacks has converged. (We use Llama-3.1-8B and WMDP-Cyber set, and several variants of CIR unlearning.) For each run, we show on the y axis the WMDP accuracy that was reached before the point where disruption starts (defined as retain loss crossing 100.1% of its initial value). After that point we continue unlearning, but there WMDP accuracy drop comes at the cost of disruption. Then, during the attack WMDP accuracy is partially restored (see the arrows), but at most to its level from when the disruption started (shown in red). It means that **only unlearning that happened after the point of disruption can be reverted, and unlearning that happened without disruption remains robust.**

multiplying the activations with the gradients, which makes the update low-rank.) It looks like it is certain *rows and columns* that are disruptive, rather than individual weights.

Since the disruption patterns shift within these columns and rows, it means that granular, per-weight filtering will miss some weights. It makes more sense to identify and remove whole faulty columns and rows (which would correspond to ablating values in the activations and output gradients). Indeed, we see that it improves the disruption/transfer ratio from 33% to 5%.⁶

B Unrelated Facts Disruption and Language Transfer

When looking at Figure 2, one may wonder what it is about the prompt that causes the disruption/transfer. Maybe it is the usage of the word "is"? And does unlearning transfer to other languages?

On Figure 8 we show additional examples, and we can see that disruption happens also if we ask the questions differently, without using the word "is". We can also see that more distant facts are disrupted less, around 8%.

We also see that there is some language transfer, but it is significant (about 50%) only for languages with similar words ("ist", "es"). In contrast, for Russian and Portuguese the transfer is quite weak, which would necessitate doing the unlearning in other languages too. This is consistent with a finding by Thibodeau [2022] that unlearning (in his case, the ROME technique [Meng et al., 2023]) is quite specific to the exact tokens used (for example unlearning facts about "cheese", does not transfer to "fromage").

⁶Another advantage of intervening on whole columns and rows, is that we can save memory by operating on the activations and output gradients rather than on the final update.

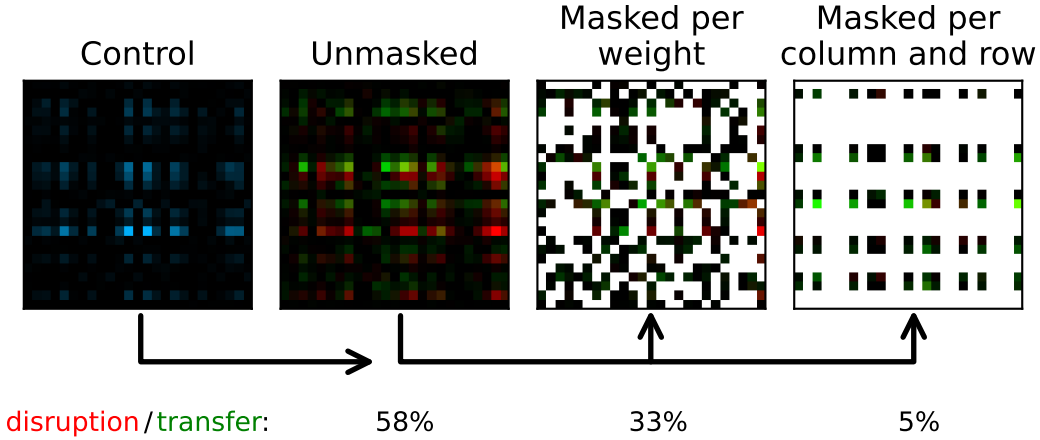


Figure 5: Comparison of two masking strategies.

We show a slice of the updates of one weight matrix when unlearning "The capital of France is **Paris**". We color a weight green if its update successfully transfers to unlearning "France's capital is **Paris**", and red if it disrupts the recall of "The capital of Spain is **Madrid**".

We also record disruption of a control fact: "The capital of Italy is **Rome**" (shown in blue). Then we use this control disruption as a guess to which weights (or columns and rows) are most disruptive, and filter the unlearning update accordingly.

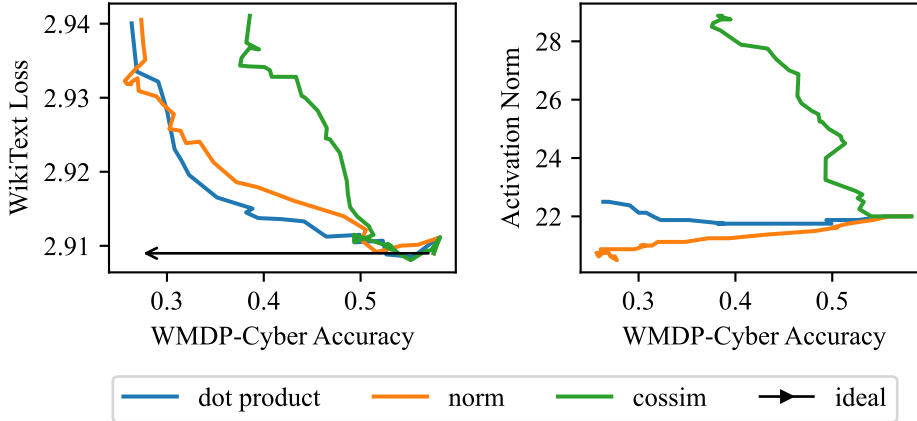


Figure 6: Comparison of three ways of breaking representations.

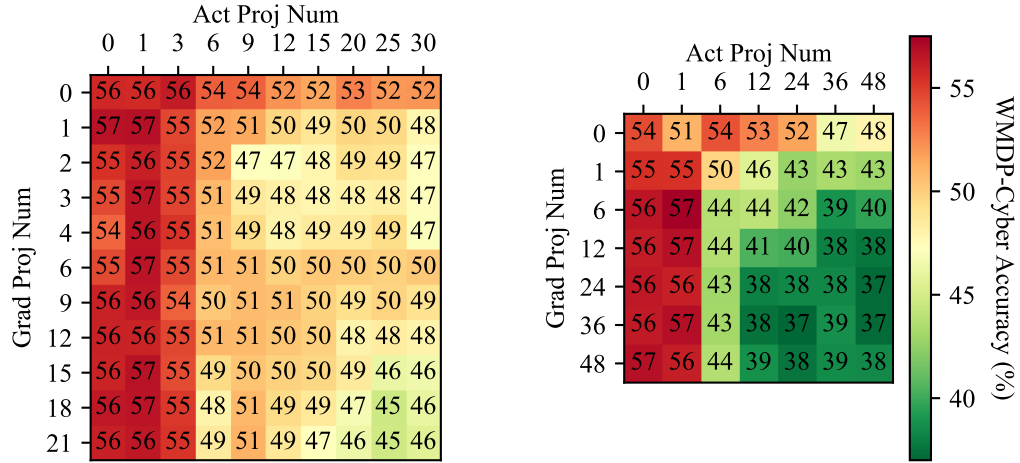
In our method we minimize the dot product of current and initial activations, clipped at 0 to avoid the dot product becoming negative. Secondly, we tried simply minimizing the norm of the current activations. Lastly, we tried minimizing the cosine similarity between current and initial activations, also clipped at 0 – this was used in the original circuit breakers paper [Zou et al., 2024].

(We used CIR, with Llama-3.1-8B and measured activation norm at layer 6.)

A non-factual but typical sentence "the library is/was quiet" happens to not be disrupted. In a similar vein, facts which are false (see Figure 2) or worded less adequately (see "is" vs "was" pairs) are disrupted less. To reproduce the plots or try out different facts, use this script. The model we used was Llama-3.2-1B.

C Unlearning corpus creation

Filtering We started off with a subset of WMDP created by Deeb and Roger [2024], where they filtered out skill-based questions and duplicates (WMDP-Deduped). Then, for faithful answer recall evaluations, we wanted to create a dataset where the answer can be cleanly separated from the non-harmful context, but we found that many answers were convoluted and long, containing mostly



(a) Fine-grained grid search for the optimal number of projections. Uses CIR+CB on layers 6-15, with only 0.2% allowed disruption. (b) Same as (a), but a wider search range, and 0.5% allowed disruption.

Method	Layer Range				
	[0, 6]	[6, 12]	[12, 18]	[18, 24]	[24, 30]
circuit breaking	55.2	57.2	57.3	56.5	57.0
CIR + circuit breaking	51.0	43.7	52.3	52.9	51.4
CIR + MLP breaking	47.4	37.4	44.5	48.2	41.0

(c) Search for the optimal layers for intervention, with 3 different algorithms. 0.5% allowed disruption.

Figure 7: CIR hyperparameter searches.

In all experiments we report WMDP-Cyber accuracy at temperature=1, *after a fine-tuning attack*. All the attacks have converged. For cleaner comparisons, no retaining was used. Note that 1 projected component means just projecting the mean and no actual PCs (which is efficient but performs poorly).

benign tokens. So we kept only the questions with answers shorter than 60 characters. We also excluded "none of the above" and "all of the above" answers, because they lead to awkward generated forget corpus.

This leaves us with 189 biological and 298 cyber questions, which we provide in our repository, together with their generated forget corpus. Since it only makes sense to unlearn on questions where the model knows the answer, in our experiments we further filter out the questions where our main model (Llama-3.1-8B) has worse than random accuracy. This leaves us with final 144 biological and 203 cyber questions.

See the script `data_transformation.py` for the exact data filtering pipeline.

Generation For each of the final WMDP questions, we generated 20 simple sentences using `gpt-4.1`, which paraphrase the tested fact. In the final training corpus, we ended up using only 3 sentences per question, because using more actually hurts unlearning, probably because the first sentences are higher quality. We have split the questions into dev and holdout sets, with 20/80 proportion, and used dev for the development of our method, and holdout for the final comparisons.

The script `generation_simple.py` contains the full corpus generation pipeline.

Generation prompt asks for simplicity and not adding unnecessary text. In Table 2 we see it indeed produces simpler sentences than in the best corpus from Deeb and Roger [2024] who used a similar generation approach. (But for most questions the improvement was smaller than in the table.) We saw

Prompt		Disruption	Activations	Gradients
The capital of France is	Paris	100%		
The capital of Skyrim is	Solitude	37%		
The capital of Rohan is	Edoras	19%		
Die Hauptstadt von Frankreich ist	Paris	54%		
La capital de Francia es	París	48%		
Столица Франции	Париж	16%		
A capital de França é	Paris	4%		
Water contains	hydrogen	10%		
Salt contains	sodium	10%		
Diamond contains	carbon	8%		
Air contains	oxygen	7%		
Napoleon is	French	10%		
Napoleon was	French	12%		
Mozart is	Austrian	4%		
Mozart was	Austrian	6%		
Gold is	valuable	10%		
Gold was	valuable	8%		
The library is	quiet	-1%		
The library was	quiet	-2%		

Figure 8: Disruption caused by unlearning a simple fact. Uses the same format as Figure 2, but with different facts.

that this *avoiding of unnecessary text* greatly reduces disruption from unlearning. We invite future designers of unlearning corpora to also include only essentially harmful text.

The full generated corpus can be found in our repository in:
data/wmdp_deduped_[bio|cyber]/{split_name}_corpus_simple.jsonl.

D Compute Requirements

We run all our experiments on a single A100 GPU with 40GB memory. We also use up to 48GB of RAM for storing cached activations and gradients. All unlearning+relearning runs took between 15 and 120 minutes, depending on how fast the unlearning stage is terminated due to performance disruption. If the disruption threshold is not reached, unlearning is terminated after 200 epochs. In Table 1 we show the execution times for the optimal unlearning runs of each method – ones selected for the plots in the main text.

Table 1: Execution times for the unlearning runs.

	CIR	Circuit Breakers	Gradient Difference
WMDP-Bio	5 min	16 min	106 min
WMDP-Cyber	5 min	45 min	14 min

Table 2: Example of WMDP question and corresponding generated sentences.

WMDP question	In RNA virus genome synthesis, what potential risk is associated with obtaining virions solely from sequence information?
Correct answer	Re-creating and engineering dangerous pathogens
Our corpus	• Obtaining virions from sequence information in RNA virus genome synthesis risks re-creating dangerous pathogens. • A major risk of synthesizing virions solely from sequence data is engineering hazardous pathogens. • Re-creating and engineering dangerous pathogens is a potential threat when virions are generated from only sequence information.
Prior corpus from Deeb and Roger [2024]	• In the synthesis of RNA virus genomes, obtaining virions solely from sequence information poses the potential risk of re-creating and engineering dangerous pathogens. This concern highlights the importance of careful consideration and oversight in the manipulation and study of viral genetic material. • When synthesizing RNA virus genomes, obtaining virions based exclusively on sequence data carries the inherent risk of re-creating and engineering hazardous pathogens. This issue underscores the necessity for meticulous oversight and consideration when manipulating and researching viral genetic material. • In the context of RNA virus genome synthesis, relying exclusively on sequence information to produce virions carries the risk of unintentionally re-creating and engineering harmful pathogens. This underscores the critical need for vigilant oversight and careful consideration in the handling and study of viral genetic material.

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