



---

# Review

---

## REFLECTIONS ON THE CRAFT OF CLEAR WRITING

Journal:	<i>Academy of Management Review</i>
Manuscript ID:	AMR-2012-0165-FTE
Manuscript Type:	From the Editor (AMR Editors Only)
Keyword:	Abilities (Individual), Adaptation/Change, Attitudes/Beliefs/Values

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13 Editor's Comments  
14

15 **REFLECTIONS ON THE CRAFT OF CLEAR WRITING**  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23

24 Belle Rose Ragins  
25  
26  
27  
28

29 April 19, 2012  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42

43 *Acknowledgements:* Many thanks to the *AMR* reviewers who shared their personal reflections  
44 and insights on the craft of clear writing. I also thank the editor, associate editors, and my  
45 doctoral students (Dianne Murphy and Kyle Ehrhardt) for their comments and suggestions on  
46 earlier drafts of this manuscript. Most of all, I thank my husband, Erik Thelen, for encouraging  
47 me to write this essay and for being my sounding board throughout the process.  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53

54 Forthcoming, *Academy of Management Review*  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7 Writing is hard work. A clear sentence is no accident. Very few sentences come out right  
8 the first time, or even the third time. Remember this in moments of despair. If you find  
9 that writing is hard, it's because it *is* hard (Zinsser, 2006: 9).  
10

11  
12  
13  
14 Most of us struggle with our writing. We thrash and hack our way through paragraphs,  
15  
16 writing and editing and rewriting until we think we've made some progress on that God forsaken  
17  
18 manuscript. The next morning, we switch on the computer, read the file, and realize that our  
19  
20 work of art is a muddled mess. We curse, hit the delete key, and start again. It can be a  
21  
22 frustrating process, particularly for theory papers, which are all about the writing.  
23  
24

25  
26 But we hang in there. We finish the manuscript and submit it to *AMR*. We wait. We  
27  
28 wait some more. We get the reviews. The rejection stings, but the reviewer's comments are  
29  
30 worse: " 'I'm puzzled as to what exactly you are trying to accomplish here.' 'The first 23 pages  
31  
32 are an endless literature review.' 'I had to read several pages into the manuscript to get a hint  
33  
34 about what you are trying to achieve.' 'What exactly is this paper about? After reading it twice,  
35  
36 I'm still not sure.' ”<sup>1</sup>  
37  
38

39  
40 We open the freezer and reach for the Häagen-Dazs. We think, "What is *wrong* with  
41  
42 these reviewers? Why couldn't they understand the point of my manuscript? It was so clear...or  
43  
44 was it?"  
45  
46

47  
48 The first challenge of clear writing is to understand your reader. With this in mind, I  
49  
50 polled current and past *AMR* board members, associate editors, editors and special issue  
51  
52 reviewers to get their insights and recommendations on the craft of clear writing, particularly as  
53  
54

---

55  
56 <sup>1</sup> These are actual reviewer comments that were shared by one of the reviewers who participated in the  
57  
58 informal poll.  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 it applies to theoretical articles. I asked them to share 1) their *pet peeves* about the writing style,  
4 organization and presentation of theoretical manuscripts, 2) their thoughts on *why* authors engage  
5 in poor writing practices and, perhaps most important, 3) their *advice and recommendations* for  
6 writing clear theoretical articles. This simple request opened a floodgate: 67 reviewers responded  
7 with over a hundred pages of advice and reflections on the craft of writing. I've selected a few of  
8 the most common themes and practical recommendations, which I hope you find interesting and  
9 helpful.  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18

19  
20 I'd like to accomplish a few things with this essay. The first is to share the reviewers'  
21 insights and reflections about the craft of clear writing. These people are not just the gatekeepers  
22 of *AMR*, they are also peers who read, use and hopefully cite your work. As seasoned readers  
23 who see more than their share of manuscripts in various stages of readiness, they have sound,  
24 practical advice for those who are writing theoretical manuscripts for *AMR*.  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30

31  
32 My second objective is to add the topic of clear writing to the growing conversation  
33 about the importance of writing in our profession (cf., Dane, 2011; Fulmer, in press; Grant &  
34 Pollock, 2011; Hollenbeck, 2008; Huff, 1999). Writing is not just a support level activity, it is  
35 the primary way in which we develop and disseminate knowledge. I hope this essay will spark  
36 dialogue and personal reflection about our shared challenges to writing clearly and the  
37 importance of clear writing in our profession.  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44

45  
46 So here's the roadmap for this essay: I'll start with a definition of clear writing, followed  
47 by a short description of the informal poll so you can get a sense of what was done and why.  
48 Then I'll present three of the most common pet peeves identified by the reviewers, their views on  
49 why authors engage in these practices, and their recommendations and advice for authors who  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 want to improve their writing. I'll end with some thoughts and reflections about the process and  
4  
5 role of clear writing in our profession.  
6  
7

## 10 WHAT IS CLEAR WRITING?

11  
12 Clear writing is a technique that was first presented in Robert Gunning's classic 1952  
13 text, *The Technique of Clear Writing*. His advice has since been embodied in other classic texts  
14  
15 on effective writing (e.g., Williams & Colomb, 2010; Zinsser, 2006). There is no formula or  
16  
17 template; clear writing involves a commitment to expressing your ideas with clarity, directness,  
18  
19 and precision. When using a clear writing approach, the author scrutinizes every word and  
20  
21 sentence for meaning and purpose. As Zinsser explained:  
22  
23  
24  
25

26  
27 The secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest components. Every  
28 word that serves no function, every long word that could be a short word, every adverb  
29 that carries the same meaning that's already in the verb, every passive construction that  
30 leaves the reader unsure of who is doing what—these are the thousand and one  
31 adulterants that weaken the strength of a sentence. And they usually occur in proportion  
32 to education and rank (2006: 6).  
33  
34  
35

36 The beauty of clear writing is that it creates nearly effortless reading. The reader should be  
37  
38 able to understand your key points and follow your logic without having to re-read the  
39  
40 manuscript. This allows the reader to focus on the content and meaning of your message, rather  
41  
42 than how it is presented. The better the writer, the more invisible she becomes as her ideas are  
43  
44 “*transferred clearly from one head to another*” (Gunning, 1968: 11). When writing clearly, the  
45  
46 focus is never on the writer; it is always on the reader. Clear writing may be elegant, but it is  
47  
48 never pretentious. The goal is not to show the reader how smart you are, but rather to take the  
49  
50 reader with you on a journey that is clear, logical and direct.  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33

Clear writing is about writing simply, but it is not simplistic. In fact, the more complex the idea, the more important and difficult it is to write clearly. Clear writing is a special challenge for authors who write theory, as the concepts and relationships being presented are often complex. But readers can't use your ideas and reviewers can't evaluate them unless your writing is clear and accessible. In the words of one reviewer, "The authors may have a brilliant idea, but if they can't articulate that idea logically and coherently, we can't evaluate it." Another reviewer described his reaction to unclear writing: "I am simply tired of reading passages of manuscripts two and three times just to figure out what the authors might be trying to say." As we will see, the reviewers point to a core principle of clear writing that was first identified by Gunning (1968: 11) over forty years ago: "*clear writing is based on clear thinking.*" It's impossible to present an idea clearly if it is not clear in your own mind. The process of writing can help you clarify your ideas, but in the end, the clarity of the manuscript reflects the clarity of your thoughts.

### 34 THE INFORMAL POLL

35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52

I invited current (2011-13) and past term (2009-11) review board members, associate editors, editors, and recent special issue reviewers to participate in this exercise. I received responses from 67 reviewers<sup>2</sup>, who reported 483 years of combined experience reviewing for *AMR*. These reviewers have read and reviewed thousands of manuscripts, and they are clearly passionate about the topic of writing. Their answers were detailed, thoughtful and perceptive. Many reflected on their personal philosophies and approaches to writing. One reviewer listed 17 pet peeves, and another wrote nearly five pages of advice for authors. I was overwhelmed by the

---

53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

<sup>2</sup> To maintain anonymity, I use the term "reviewer" when referring to respondents, including associate editors and editors.

1  
2  
3 quality and breadth of their responses, which totaled over a hundred pages. There was some  
4  
5 variation in their pet peeves, which ranged from typos and grammatical errors to the use of  
6  
7 lifeless, “emotionally gray” text. I also found quite a bit of overlap in their responses. I selected  
8  
9 three pet peeves that were frequently cited and, in line with the developmental focus of this  
10  
11 essay, accompanied by straightforward remedies. Some of the reviewers recommended writing  
12  
13 resources that they themselves have found helpful, and I’ve included these books and articles in  
14  
15 the reference section of this essay.  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21

## 22 **THE THREE PET PEEVES: PROBLEMS, REASONS AND REMEDIES**

### 23 **Pet Peeve #1: Foggy Writing**

24  
25  
26  
27 **The problem.** One of the most common pet peeves cited by the reviewers is the use of  
28  
29 needlessly complex language that obscures meaning and keeps the reader in what Gunning  
30  
31 (1968) would call a fog. One reviewer captured both the problem and root of foggy writing in  
32  
33 his response:  
34  
35

36  
37 My biggest pet peeve is when authors hide their thoughts behind opaque language --  
38  
39 arcane words and dense sentences. I'm a firm believer that the better one actually knows  
40  
41 what one is trying to express, the more simply and clearly one can express it.

42  
43 Many other reviewers voiced their frustration and annoyance with authors who “use  
44  
45 overly complex language to describe straightforward concepts,” and those who write with  
46  
47 “[n]eedless complexity- e.g., by using more than one term for the same concept, by not using  
48  
49 parallel construction, or by showing off with ‘big’ or ‘impressive’ words.”  
50  
51

52 **The reasons:** The reviewers offered a number of reasons for why authors engage in  
53  
54 foggy writing. Some hypothesized that authors may be trying to “position their contribution as  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 novel by describing it differently,” while others suspected that the authors were simply trying to  
4  
5 sound impressive.  
6

7  
8 In line with these reflections, Gunning (1968: 9) observed that foggy writing often stems  
9  
10 from “*writing to impress rather than express*” and offered this perceptive insight:  
11

12 Many new terms are necessary, of course. But much of this special jargon is designed to  
13 impress rather than express. It rests on the most ludicrous of follies – the concept that  
14 complexity is the badge of wisdom.  
15

16 Quite the contrary is true, of course. Wisdom goes arm in arm with simplicity.  
17 The keen mind is one that can absorb a complicated problem, then state it in simple direct  
18 terms that will transfer the idea quickly and accurately to the minds of others. To put  
19 complicated ideas in simple language is not child’s work. It calls for sophistication  
20 (1968: 9).  
21  
22  
23

24 Gunning’s insights from 40 years ago still resonate today and are reflected in these  
25  
26 reviewers’ comments:  
27

28 Perhaps some authors think that the use of more ‘esoteric’ words make their manuscript  
29 seem more ‘theoretical’ or ‘deep’. I prefer to read articles that use simple language  
30 regardless of how complex the ideas they are trying to convey.  
31  
32  
33

34 Good authors don’t try to demonstrate that they are more intelligent than their readers by  
35 losing themselves in overly complex formulation or using a jargon that might be  
36 comprehensible in their narrow scholarly community but incomprehensible for  
37 management scholars in other domains.  
38  
39  
40

41 The reviewers agreed with Gunning’s (1968) observation that “clear writing is based on  
42 clear thinking” and observed that dense and needlessly complex writing “may indicate the lack  
43 of clarity in the author’s own mind.” The reviewers also point out that the writer’s own  
44  
45 insecurities and faulty assumptions about writing may contribute to the problem. One reviewer  
46 wrote that authors may “think that papers must sound appropriately scholarly -- and that clarity  
47  
48 somehow detracts from this goal.” Another reflected, “Perhaps they think content is all that is  
49  
50 important in writing -- they forget that if the paper is not clear and concise, content will not  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 matter.” Another reviewer raised this intriguing point: “I think sometimes that people are afraid  
4  
5 to reveal just how simple some of our ideas and theories are -- that somehow it devalues them.”  
6  
7

8 Gunning (1968: 21) pointed out that writers who use needlessly complex language lose  
9  
10 sight of their readers, and explained that some writers engage in this practice because “they think  
11  
12 complexly and will not take the time or trouble to card out their thoughts before trying to  
13  
14 communicate them.” He goes on to note that: “Almost any writer, if he can get away with it, will  
15  
16 write less simply than readers prefer.”  
17  
18

19  
20 Foggy writing may be due to the writer’s insecurities, their misperceptions about writing,  
21  
22 or their lack of clarity about what they want to say, why they want to say it, and who their reader  
23  
24 is. However, there is another simple reason for foggy writing. As one reviewer pointed out:  
25  
26

27 It's more difficult to write clearly. It takes time and a good deal of effort. Every time I  
28  
29 read one of my papers I find ways to improve it. That means I read my papers over and  
30  
31 over again until I'm nearly bored to tears.  
32

33 **The remedies.** The reviewers offered quite a bit of advice on how to eliminate foggy  
34  
35 writing. They also emphasized that there are no easy fixes or formulas for eliminating the fog of  
36  
37 writing -- it takes work.  
38  
39

40 The primary antidote for foggy writing is to take the time to really think through your  
41  
42 ideas before you start to write. As Gunning advised, “To write well and simply you must train  
43  
44 your mind to cut through the surface details and get at the bones of your thought.” (1968: 9) The  
45  
46 reviewers agreed: “I believe that if an author has really thought through the ideas in the  
47  
48 manuscript, then she/he will be able to use relatively simple language to express them.” One  
49  
50 reviewer described the process and prerequisites for tackling the first draft of an *AMR*  
51  
52 manuscript:  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 If you know exactly what your story is before you sit down to write it, and know exactly  
4 who you are talking to in telling this story, and know exactly how you want your  
5 perspective or theory to change how people think, write, and do research going forward,  
6 and know why it's so critical for others to know about your perspective, then you are  
7 ready to go. This can take years. It can take weeks. But until you're ready, the paper will  
8 never come together on its' own.  
9  
10

11  
12 The most frequent and emphatic piece of advice offered by the reviewers is to *make*  
13 *absolutely sure that your manuscript is peer reviewed before submitting it to AMR.* As stated by  
14 one reviewer: "Never, ever, ever send a manuscript to a journal that hasn't been peer reviewed by  
15 people who will give you blatantly honest feedback about not just the theoretical contribution but  
16 the clarity of your writing." Another reviewer cautioned that "If your 'friendly reviewer' is too  
17 friendly (i.e., has few negative comments), get another one. It may be someone who didn't take  
18 the time, or else is afraid of hurting your feelings, or is in a power relationship with you where  
19 they worry that they can't be honest (i.e., your PhD student)."  
20  
21

22 The reviewers also point out that going through the motions of a peer review is not  
23 enough; it's what you *do* with the review that really matters. Ignoring comments or trying to  
24 "tweak" papers that need a major overhaul dilutes and destroys the value of peer reviews. There  
25 are two barriers that keep writers from getting the full value of peer reviews. The first is our  
26 tender ego and our tendency to internalize the critique of the paper as a critique of our own  
27 ability. As one reviewer counseled: "Don't get defensive about negative feedback--treat it like a  
28 gift (you'd rather have it now before you submit, than get a paper rejected over these things)."  
29 The second is that we are hopeless romantics when it comes to our writing: we fall in love with  
30 our words and we just can't cut them loose. But as Zinsser advised:  
31  
32

33 Look for the clutter in your writing and prune it ruthlessly. Be grateful for everything you  
34 can throw away. Reexamine each sentence you put on paper. Is every word doing new  
35 work? Can any thought be expressed with more economy? Is anything pompous or  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 pretentious or faddish? Are you hanging on to something useless just because you think  
4 it's beautiful?

5 Simplify, simplify (2006:16).

6  
7  
8 Clear writing not only reduces the clutter, it also shortens the paper. Given the belt-  
9  
10 tightening page restrictions adopted by many journals, clear writing has moved from a desired to  
11  
12 a required style of writing.  
13  
14

### 15 16 17 **Pet Peeve #2: Read My Mind**

18  
19 **The problem.** This writing pitfall is the evil cousin of foggy writing. The reader is  
20 presented with concepts, jargon, and acronyms that are not defined or are used inconsistently in  
21  
22 the manuscript. As one reviewer put it, authors assume that the “reader is inside their mind.”  
23  
24

25  
26 Another reviewer elaborates:

27  
28  
29 Introducing too many concepts...without adequately defining/ contextualizing them...is  
30 one of the things that I find most notably detracts from the quality of ... a manuscript. It  
31 is much harder to read a paper if one is continually having to try to work out how a term  
32 is being used, particularly if one concept is being used as a foundation for another.  
33  
34

35  
36 Other reviewers also expressed their annoyance with the excessive use of jargon and  
37  
38 incomprehensible text. “There is nothing worse,” wrote one, “than needing to learn an entire  
39  
40 language to follow the point of the article.”  
41  
42

43  
44 **The reasons.** The reasons for the “read my mind” problem are relatively straightforward.  
45  
46 The first is that authors may be too close to the material. As one reviewer explained, “They  
47  
48 ‘know’ the topic so well that they assume others will.”  
49

50  
51 Another reason is lack of empathy and perspective. The authors fail to put themselves in  
52  
53 the shoes of the reader. As Williams and Colomb explained:  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 What we write always seems clearer to us than to our readers, because we read into it  
4 what we want them to get out of it. And so instead of revising our writing to meet their  
5 needs, we call it done the moment it meets ours (2010: 7).  
6  
7

8  
9 One reviewer suggested that lack of clarity might even be self-serving: “[The authors]  
10 think that if they don't define their key concept, reviewers cannot criticize the definition. Also by  
11 leaving the definition ambiguous, they can stretch the concept while using it in their theorizing.”  
12  
13

14  
15 **The remedies.** The reviewers offered straightforward advice for addressing this  
16 problem. As one advised, “Jargon should be introduced for only 2-5 variables, the rest should be  
17 colloquial words. Do not wholesale incorporate the jargon of other literatures .... just  
18 incorporate their relevant meaning.” Another reviewer offered a litmus test for eliminating  
19 jargon: “If spell check thinks it isn't a word, it probably isn't needed.”  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27

28 The reviewers gave other practical suggestions and techniques for improving the clarity  
29 of manuscripts. One advised, “Leave a written paper for a few days and re-read it. If you don't  
30 understand any sentence or other part of it, be assured that the reader won't either.” Another  
31 offered this useful approach: “One technique for improving succinctness and readability is for  
32 two coauthors to read the paper together aloud. Reading aloud also catches typos.”  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39

40 Underlying these recommendations is a fundamental piece of advice: never lose sight of  
41 your reader. Each and every sentence has to be constructed with the reader in mind. As one  
42 reviewer observed, “In good papers, the sentences and paragraphs flow naturally from one to the  
43 next without the reader having to pause to consider how points are connected.” Another reviewer  
44 nailed the point with this advice:  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50

51  
52 My advice to authors is to use their imaginations to take the perspective of an intelligent  
53 but naïve reader who has limited time and resources in reading their own manuscripts.  
54 Make their papers worth the reader's effort and don't make the reader work harder than  
55 necessary to get the point.  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 In addition to having your manuscript content-reviewed by peers, you can also enlist  
4 friends and family as non-specialist reviewers who read your paper for clarity. As one reviewer  
5 advised: “Let your partner/spouse read it. If they have no clue what you are talking about, your  
6 writing is too complex.” A number of reviewers offered similar advice, which one even dubbed  
7 “The Mom Test.” One reviewer explained:

8  
9  
10 I often find that the best way to avoid some of these pitfalls is to take off the academic  
11 hat, have a good conversation with a friend or loved one and figure out what it is you are  
12 really trying to say without the guise and pretense of all the academic accoutrements. I  
13 also find speaking with real managers helps to clarify how best to present theoretical  
14 ideas and to pass the face validity hurdle.

### 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 **Pet Peeve # 3: Story, Story, What’s the Story?**

24  
25 **The problem.** The last pet peeve involves problems with the manuscript’s “story line”.  
26  
27 As the reviewers pointed out, papers should offer a clear, direct and compelling story that first  
28 hooks the reader, and then carries her on a straightforward journey from the beginning to the  
29 very end of the manuscript. As one reviewer remarked, “Many of the AMR submissions I read  
30 are mystery novels, where even the author isn’t sure where the paper is going to end up.” Others  
31 echoed that concern:

32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65  
66  
67  
68  
69  
70  
71  
72  
73  
74  
75  
76  
77  
78  
79  
80  
81  
82  
83  
84  
85  
86  
87  
88  
89  
90  
91  
92  
93  
94  
95  
96  
97  
98  
99  
100  
101  
102  
103  
104  
105  
106  
107  
108  
109  
110  
111  
112  
113  
114  
115  
116  
117  
118  
119  
120  
121  
122  
123  
124  
125  
126  
127  
128  
129  
130  
131  
132  
133  
134  
135  
136  
137  
138  
139  
140  
141  
142  
143  
144  
145  
146  
147  
148  
149  
150  
151  
152  
153  
154  
155  
156  
157  
158  
159  
160  
161  
162  
163  
164  
165  
166  
167  
168  
169  
170  
171  
172  
173  
174  
175  
176  
177  
178  
179  
180  
181  
182  
183  
184  
185  
186  
187  
188  
189  
190  
191  
192  
193  
194  
195  
196  
197  
198  
199  
200  
201  
202  
203  
204  
205  
206  
207  
208  
209  
210  
211  
212  
213  
214  
215  
216  
217  
218  
219  
220  
221  
222  
223  
224  
225  
226  
227  
228  
229  
230  
231  
232  
233  
234  
235  
236  
237  
238  
239  
240  
241  
242  
243  
244  
245  
246  
247  
248  
249  
250  
251  
252  
253  
254  
255  
256  
257  
258  
259  
260  
261  
262  
263  
264  
265  
266  
267  
268  
269  
270  
271  
272  
273  
274  
275  
276  
277  
278  
279  
280  
281  
282  
283  
284  
285  
286  
287  
288  
289  
290  
291  
292  
293  
294  
295  
296  
297  
298  
299  
300  
301  
302  
303  
304  
305  
306  
307  
308  
309  
310  
311  
312  
313  
314  
315  
316  
317  
318  
319  
320  
321  
322  
323  
324  
325  
326  
327  
328  
329  
330  
331  
332  
333  
334  
335  
336  
337  
338  
339  
340  
341  
342  
343  
344  
345  
346  
347  
348  
349  
350  
351  
352  
353  
354  
355  
356  
357  
358  
359  
360  
361  
362  
363  
364  
365  
366  
367  
368  
369  
370  
371  
372  
373  
374  
375  
376  
377  
378  
379  
380  
381  
382  
383  
384  
385  
386  
387  
388  
389  
390  
391  
392  
393  
394  
395  
396  
397  
398  
399  
400  
401  
402  
403  
404  
405  
406  
407  
408  
409  
410  
411  
412  
413  
414  
415  
416  
417  
418  
419  
420  
421  
422  
423  
424  
425  
426  
427  
428  
429  
430  
431  
432  
433  
434  
435  
436  
437  
438  
439  
440  
441  
442  
443  
444  
445  
446  
447  
448  
449  
450  
451  
452  
453  
454  
455  
456  
457  
458  
459  
460  
461  
462  
463  
464  
465  
466  
467  
468  
469  
470  
471  
472  
473  
474  
475  
476  
477  
478  
479  
480  
481  
482  
483  
484  
485  
486  
487  
488  
489  
490  
491  
492  
493  
494  
495  
496  
497  
498  
499  
500  
501  
502  
503  
504  
505  
506  
507  
508  
509  
510  
511  
512  
513  
514  
515  
516  
517  
518  
519  
520  
521  
522  
523  
524  
525  
526  
527  
528  
529  
530  
531  
532  
533  
534  
535  
536  
537  
538  
539  
540  
541  
542  
543  
544  
545  
546  
547  
548  
549  
550  
551  
552  
553  
554  
555  
556  
557  
558  
559  
560  
561  
562  
563  
564  
565  
566  
567  
568  
569  
570  
571  
572  
573  
574  
575  
576  
577  
578  
579  
580  
581  
582  
583  
584  
585  
586  
587  
588  
589  
590  
591  
592  
593  
594  
595  
596  
597  
598  
599  
600  
601  
602  
603  
604  
605  
606  
607  
608  
609  
610  
611  
612  
613  
614  
615  
616  
617  
618  
619  
620  
621  
622  
623  
624  
625  
626  
627  
628  
629  
630  
631  
632  
633  
634  
635  
636  
637  
638  
639  
640  
641  
642  
643  
644  
645  
646  
647  
648  
649  
650  
651  
652  
653  
654  
655  
656  
657  
658  
659  
660  
661  
662  
663  
664  
665  
666  
667  
668  
669  
670  
671  
672  
673  
674  
675  
676  
677  
678  
679  
680  
681  
682  
683  
684  
685  
686  
687  
688  
689  
690  
691  
692  
693  
694  
695  
696  
697  
698  
699  
700  
701  
702  
703  
704  
705  
706  
707  
708  
709  
710  
711  
712  
713  
714  
715  
716  
717  
718  
719  
720  
721  
722  
723  
724  
725  
726  
727  
728  
729  
730  
731  
732  
733  
734  
735  
736  
737  
738  
739  
740  
741  
742  
743  
744  
745  
746  
747  
748  
749  
750  
751  
752  
753  
754  
755  
756  
757  
758  
759  
760  
761  
762  
763  
764  
765  
766  
767  
768  
769  
770  
771  
772  
773  
774  
775  
776  
777  
778  
779  
780  
781  
782  
783  
784  
785  
786  
787  
788  
789  
790  
791  
792  
793  
794  
795  
796  
797  
798  
799  
800  
801  
802  
803  
804  
805  
806  
807  
808  
809  
810  
811  
812  
813  
814  
815  
816  
817  
818  
819  
820  
821  
822  
823  
824  
825  
826  
827  
828  
829  
830  
831  
832  
833  
834  
835  
836  
837  
838  
839  
840  
841  
842  
843  
844  
845  
846  
847  
848  
849  
850  
851  
852  
853  
854  
855  
856  
857  
858  
859  
860  
861  
862  
863  
864  
865  
866  
867  
868  
869  
870  
871  
872  
873  
874  
875  
876  
877  
878  
879  
880  
881  
882  
883  
884  
885  
886  
887  
888  
889  
890  
891  
892  
893  
894  
895  
896  
897  
898  
899  
900  
901  
902  
903  
904  
905  
906  
907  
908  
909  
910  
911  
912  
913  
914  
915  
916  
917  
918  
919  
920  
921  
922  
923  
924  
925  
926  
927  
928  
929  
930  
931  
932  
933  
934  
935  
936  
937  
938  
939  
940  
941  
942  
943  
944  
945  
946  
947  
948  
949  
950  
951  
952  
953  
954  
955  
956  
957  
958  
959  
960  
961  
962  
963  
964  
965  
966  
967  
968  
969  
970  
971  
972  
973  
974  
975  
976  
977  
978  
979  
980  
981  
982  
983  
984  
985  
986  
987  
988  
989  
990  
991  
992  
993  
994  
995  
996  
997  
998  
999  
1000

40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65  
66  
67  
68  
69  
70  
71  
72  
73  
74  
75  
76  
77  
78  
79  
80  
81  
82  
83  
84  
85  
86  
87  
88  
89  
90  
91  
92  
93  
94  
95  
96  
97  
98  
99  
100  
101  
102  
103  
104  
105  
106  
107  
108  
109  
110  
111  
112  
113  
114  
115  
116  
117  
118  
119  
120  
121  
122  
123  
124  
125  
126  
127  
128  
129  
130  
131  
132  
133  
134  
135  
136  
137  
138  
139  
140  
141  
142  
143  
144  
145  
146  
147  
148  
149  
150  
151  
152  
153  
154  
155  
156  
157  
158  
159  
160  
161  
162  
163  
164  
165  
166  
167  
168  
169  
170  
171  
172  
173  
174  
175  
176  
177  
178  
179  
180  
181  
182  
183  
184  
185  
186  
187  
188  
189  
190  
191  
192  
193  
194  
195  
196  
197  
198  
199  
200  
201  
202  
203  
204  
205  
206  
207  
208  
209  
210  
211  
212  
213  
214  
215  
216  
217  
218  
219  
220  
221  
222  
223  
224  
225  
226  
227  
228  
229  
230  
231  
232  
233  
234  
235  
236  
237  
238  
239  
240  
241  
242  
243  
244  
245  
246  
247  
248  
249  
250  
251  
252  
253  
254  
255  
256  
257  
258  
259  
260  
261  
262  
263  
264  
265  
266  
267  
268  
269  
270  
271  
272  
273  
274  
275  
276  
277  
278  
279  
280  
281  
282  
283  
284  
285  
286  
287  
288  
289  
290  
291  
292  
293  
294  
295  
296  
297  
298  
299  
300  
301  
302  
303  
304  
305  
306  
307  
308  
309  
310  
311  
312  
313  
314  
315  
316  
317  
318  
319  
320  
321  
322  
323  
324  
325  
326  
327  
328  
329  
330  
331  
332  
333  
334  
335  
336  
337  
338  
339  
340  
341  
342  
343  
344  
345  
346  
347  
348  
349  
350  
351  
352  
353  
354  
355  
356  
357  
358  
359  
360  
361  
362  
363  
364  
365  
366  
367  
368  
369  
370  
371  
372  
373  
374  
375  
376  
377  
378  
379  
380  
381  
382  
383  
384  
385  
386  
387  
388  
389  
390  
391  
392  
393  
394  
395  
396  
397  
398  
399  
400  
401  
402  
403  
404  
405  
406  
407  
408  
409  
410  
411  
412  
413  
414  
415  
416  
417  
418  
419  
420  
421  
422  
423  
424  
425  
426  
427  
428  
429  
430  
431  
432  
433  
434  
435  
436  
437  
438  
439  
440  
441  
442  
443  
444  
445  
446  
447  
448  
449  
450  
451  
452  
453  
454  
455  
456  
457  
458  
459  
460  
461  
462  
463  
464  
465  
466  
467  
468  
469  
470  
471  
472  
473  
474  
475  
476  
477  
478  
479  
480  
481  
482  
483  
484  
485  
486  
487  
488  
489  
490  
491  
492  
493  
494  
495  
496  
497  
498  
499  
500  
501  
502  
503  
504  
505  
506  
507  
508  
509  
510  
511  
512  
513  
514  
515  
516  
517  
518  
519  
520  
521  
522  
523  
524  
525  
526  
527  
528  
529  
530  
531  
532  
533  
534  
535  
536  
537  
538  
539  
540  
541  
542  
543  
544  
545  
546  
547  
548  
549  
550  
551  
552  
553  
554  
555  
556  
557  
558  
559  
560  
561  
562  
563  
564  
565  
566  
567  
568  
569  
570  
571  
572  
573  
574  
575  
576  
577  
578  
579  
580  
581  
582  
583  
584  
585  
586  
587  
588  
589  
590  
591  
592  
593  
594  
595  
596  
597  
598  
599  
600  
601  
602  
603  
604  
605  
606  
607  
608  
609  
610  
611  
612  
613  
614  
615  
616  
617  
618  
619  
620  
621  
622  
623  
624  
625  
626  
627  
628  
629  
630  
631  
632  
633  
634  
635  
636  
637  
638  
639  
640  
641  
642  
643  
644  
645  
646  
647  
648  
649  
650  
651  
652  
653  
654  
655  
656  
657  
658  
659  
660  
661  
662  
663  
664  
665  
666  
667  
668  
669  
670  
671  
672  
673  
674  
675  
676  
677  
678  
679  
680  
681  
682  
683  
684  
685  
686  
687  
688  
689  
690  
691  
692  
693  
694  
695  
696  
697  
698  
699  
700  
701  
702  
703  
704  
705  
706  
707  
708  
709  
710  
711  
712  
713  
714  
715  
716  
717  
718  
719  
720  
721  
722  
723  
724  
725  
726  
727  
728  
729  
730  
731  
732  
733  
734  
735  
736  
737  
738  
739  
740  
741  
742  
743  
744  
745  
746  
747  
748  
749  
750  
751  
752  
753  
754  
755  
756  
757  
758  
759  
760  
761  
762  
763  
764  
765  
766  
767  
768  
769  
770  
771  
772  
773  
774  
775  
776  
777  
778  
779  
780  
781  
782  
783  
784  
785  
786  
787  
788  
789  
790  
791  
792  
793  
794  
795  
796  
797  
798  
799  
800  
801  
802  
803  
804  
805  
806  
807  
808  
809  
810  
811  
812  
813  
814  
815  
816  
817  
818  
819  
820  
821  
822  
823  
824  
825  
826  
827  
828  
829  
830  
831  
832  
833  
834  
835  
836  
837  
838  
839  
840  
841  
842  
843  
844  
845  
846  
847  
848  
849  
850  
851  
852  
853  
854  
855  
856  
857  
858  
859  
860  
861  
862  
863  
864  
865  
866  
867  
868  
869  
870  
871  
872  
873  
874  
875  
876  
877  
878  
879  
880  
881  
882  
883  
884  
885  
886  
887  
888  
889  
890  
891  
892  
893  
894  
895  
896  
897  
898  
899  
900  
901  
902  
903  
904  
905  
906  
907  
908  
909  
910  
911  
912  
913  
914  
915  
916  
917  
918  
919  
920  
921  
922  
923  
924  
925  
926  
927  
928  
929  
930  
931  
932  
933  
934  
935  
936  
937  
938  
939  
940  
941  
942  
943  
944  
945  
946  
947  
948  
949  
950  
951  
952  
953  
954  
955  
956  
957  
958  
959  
960  
961  
962  
963  
964  
965  
966  
967  
968  
969  
970  
971  
972  
973  
974  
975  
976  
977  
978  
979  
980  
981  
982  
983  
984  
985  
986  
987  
988  
989  
990  
991  
992  
993  
994  
995  
996  
997  
998  
999  
1000

1  
2  
3 research context, explains the contribution (answer to the “so what question”) and draws the  
4 reader into the story.” Another observed that *AMR* manuscripts often suffer from “Long and  
5 winding introductions that fail to concisely specify the contribution and how the research is  
6 situated within the literature.” The reviewers noted that many introductions lack a “road map”,  
7 which gives the reader an overview of the manuscript, and a hook, which captures the reader’s  
8 attention. As one reviewer advised: “Pay attention to your introduction - that first page is where  
9 you capture the reader or kill them off. Make me want to read your paper.”

10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20 The introduction should also provide a clear and compelling justification for the  
21 manuscript. The reviewers identified a number of shortcomings in this regard. As one reviewer  
22 observed, “many authors fail to effectively problematize the literature and articulate a  
23 compelling theoretical contribution.”<sup>3</sup> Building on this point, another reviewer notes that authors  
24 often fail to answer the problematization question: “ ‘without this work, what can’t we  
25 understand?’ or even more seriously: ‘what do we get wrong?’ ” Many reviewers expressed  
26 annoyance with a “fill the gap” approach to justifying a manuscript. As one wrote, “.... it drives  
27 me crazy when the motivation for a manuscript is because ‘no one has looked at X before.’  
28 Chances are that no one has ever studied the causal link between managers’ favorite cheeses and  
29 their leadership style, but that doesn’t mean someone should.” Another reviewer agreed: “It’s  
30 common for an author to point out that a gap exists, but often gaps exist because they don’t need  
31 to be filled.” One reviewer described his reaction to the gap approach as “a total turn off... if  
32 there is no better reason to write a manuscript, there is no good reason to read it!”

33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
Theory papers can also become “wait for it” stories. In this case, the reader is forced to  
wade through pages of introduction and meandering literature reviews before reaching the core

---

<sup>3</sup> For further reading on problematization please see Alvesson and Sandberg (2011).

1  
2  
3 contribution of the paper. This can be a frustrating experience for the reader. In the words of one  
4  
5 reviewer: “If I haven't reached the author's own contribution by pages 10-12, I start getting  
6  
7 annoyed. Much of the literature review material can often be worked into background support  
8  
9 for one's theoretical contribution, rather than needing to address all of it within a dedicated  
10  
11 literature review.” Another reviewer wrote, “My BIGGEST pet peeve is that authors sometimes  
12  
13 don't get to the point of their paper until many many pages into the text. It's like they are waiting  
14  
15 for the paper to inspire THEM (rather than the reader) in terms of its overall contribution.” The  
16  
17 reviewers observed that a consequence of “wait for it” stories is that the manuscript may “begin  
18  
19 in the middle” or “begin at the end.” This leads to under-developed manuscripts; the authors  
20  
21 spend more time building the paper’s foundation than presenting and developing their own  
22  
23 original ideas.  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28

29 **The reasons.** The reviewers identified a number of reasons for muddled and fragmented  
30  
31 stories. The process of writing may give authors new insights that take the paper in a very  
32  
33 different direction. In this case, they may need to rewrite the paper rather than trying to salvage  
34  
35 text that is no longer needed or relevant. Cobbling together extraneous text can lead to muddled  
36  
37 and disjointed stories.  
38  
39

40  
41 Disjointed stories may also be due to “too many cooks in the kitchen.” The reviewers  
42  
43 observed that parceling sections of the paper out to different co-authors could create a multi-  
44  
45 headed monster if the authors do not share a common vision or unifying “voice” that connects  
46  
47 the sections together. Co-authors may also be unwilling to cut and critique each other’s work,  
48  
49 which adds to the challenge of creating a clear, consistent, and coherent story.  
50  
51  
52

53 Another key insight offered by the reviewers is that storylines suffer when authors try to  
54  
55 do too much in one manuscript. Authors mistakenly believe they need to develop “the grand epic  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 theory” that explains every conceivable aspect of the phenomenon. The story becomes an epic  
4  
5 novel, rather than a tightly focused short story. In the words of one reviewer, “Great papers are  
6  
7 often amazingly simple papers. They have one message, not five.” Another concurred: “You  
8  
9 don't have to create a model of everything in a single manuscript.” As observed by another  
10  
11 reviewer:  
12  
13

14  
15       ...it's impossible (to) develop a wide-sweeping, perfectly generalizable, grand theory in  
16  
17 30 pages, so temper your aspirations and focus on observationally based explanations of a  
18  
19 particular phenomenon of interest to management scholars and practitioners.

20       **The remedies.** The reviewers gave a gold mine of advice and recommendations on how  
21  
22 to create a clear story for *AMR* readers. As mentioned earlier, authors need to immediately draw  
23  
24 the reader into the story with strong introductions, compelling hooks and clear justifications.  
25  
26 Once the reader is hooked, the author needs to “deliver on the promise” and not disappoint or  
27  
28 abandon the reader. The author should guide the reader through the manuscript -- the more  
29  
30 complex the story, the greater the need for guidance. As one reviewer advised: “provide a clear  
31  
32 roadmap to show the reader step-by-step how you arrived at your theory.” Another explained  
33  
34 how reviewers could be used to assess the clarity of your story:  
35  
36  
37

38       Give your paper to someone else and ask them to tell you what the story of the paper is.  
39  
40       If they can't tell you the story that you think you wrote, you haven't written it. Ask them  
41  
42 questions, find out where they got off-track and edit so that the next person who reads it  
43  
44 doesn't get stuck in the same place.

45  
46       The reviewers also counseled authors to find the right balance in *AMR* manuscripts  
47  
48 between attempting too much (e.g., the epic grand theory approach discussed earlier) and doing  
49  
50 too little. As one reviewer remarked, “An *AMR* paper is not the front end of an *AMJ* paper.”  
51  
52 Another reviewer concurred: “I think there is a sweet spot for *AMR* papers that isn't always easy  
53  
54 to find,” he wrote, “where a model is novel enough that they warrant publication in *AMR* but not  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 so novel that the arguments can't be supported in a compelling manner.” He goes on to explain:  
4

5  
6 Both as an author and as a reviewer, I've seen manuscripts miss on either side of the  
7 sweet spot. If you have had an AMR submission rejected with feedback that it basically  
8 looks like the front end of an empirical manuscript, it may be that you missed on the side  
9 of not being novel enough (or perhaps not big enough; either way the manuscript didn't  
10 reach far enough). If you have had an AMR submission rejected with feedback that the  
11 arguments were not compelling enough, you may have tried to reach too far. Try to think  
12 through this issue early in the process of drafting your manuscript.  
13  
14

15  
16 Clear stories require clear structure, and the reviewers offered a bounty of practical  
17 advice, techniques and “recipes” for creating a focused, tightly written manuscript. I’ve listed a  
18 few of these tried and true recipes in Table 1.  
19  
20  
21

22  
23 -----  
24 Insert Table 1 about here  
25 -----  
26

## 27 28 29 30 **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE CRAFT OF CLEAR WRITING**

31  
32 Writing is a craft, but when it is done well, it becomes an art. For many of us, nothing is  
33 as beautiful as an elegant, tightly written manuscript that conveys a complex idea in a clear, crisp  
34 way. The paper draws us in, engages us, and changes the way we think and feel. We linger over  
35 sentences and savor paragraphs. These are the papers we treasure, print, and keep on our desks.  
36  
37

38  
39 As writers, we strive to find the art in our craft. But as the reviewers observed, foggy  
40 writing, combined with a lack of empathy for the reader and a meandering story, can lead to a  
41 muddled mess that is far from the work of art we desire. The craft of writing has to be mastered  
42 before it transforms to art. With this in mind, I’d like to offer a few concluding comments on the  
43 craft of clear writing.  
44  
45

46  
47 First, *clear writing takes a substantial amount of time and effort*. There are no short cuts  
48 to writing clearly. Every word needs to be scrutinized for meaning, clarity, and purpose. As  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Gunning (1968:4) advised, we need to eliminate words that don't say what they mean, words that  
4 don't say anything, and words that are used merely for display. Every sentence should serve a  
5 precise purpose and be part of a clear, concise, and compelling story that engages the reader and  
6 brings her with you on the inevitable journey that leads to your model. Eliminate anything that  
7 stands between you and your reader. Reject the assumption that scholarly writing should be  
8 esoteric; our ideas are complex, but our writing should be accessible and as clear as a bell. We  
9 are well served by Gunning's advice to "Resist the mischief of making what you have to say  
10 even more complex in the telling." (1968: 67)

11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Second, *clear writing refines our ideas*. We need to think clearly in order to write clearly, but the process of writing with the reader in mind also helps us clarify our thoughts. As one reviewer commented: "The most important thing about good writing is that it helps you think. That is, there is great, great validity to E.M. Forster's point: 'how do I know what I think until I see what I say?' (Aspects of the Novel (1927))." By poring over each sentence; making sure it is clear and connected to the sentences that come before and after; by not hiding behind needlessly complex text, jargon, and foggy writing; we drill down to the essence of our thoughts. The process of clear writing helps us develop, distill, and crystallize our ideas, which ultimately improves the contribution of our manuscript. Some authors hire copy editors to polish their manuscripts and correct grammatical errors. Although editors can be helpful, resist the urge to use them in early drafts or depend on them to clarify your writing. You'll miss the heuristic benefits of the clear writing process and the opportunity to develop your writing skills.

Third, *clear writing is all about rewriting*. As Zinsser explained, "Rewriting is the essence of writing well; it's where the game is won or lost. That idea is hard to accept. We all have emotional equity in our first draft; we can't believe it wasn't born perfect." (2006: 83) The

1  
2  
3 process of clear writing helps us sharpen our ideas. It can also illuminate flaws in our logic or  
4  
5 approach. When we drill down to the core of our ideas, we may discover a diamond in the rough  
6  
7 or a lump of coal. If it is coal – don't try to pass it off as a diamond. Start fresh. Part with your  
8  
9 words; it is part of the process. As Zinsser points out "You won't write well until you  
10  
11 understand that writing is an evolving *process*, not a finished *product*." (2006: 84).  
12  
13  
14

15 The last point is to *have fun and find your voice*. Be creative in your writing – but always  
16  
17 keep the reader in mind. Look to other writers and emulate their work, but only if it fits your  
18  
19 voice. As Zinsser reminds us, "be yourself when you write.... Never say anything in writing that  
20  
21 you wouldn't comfortably say in conversation." (2006: 25-26)  
22  
23  
24

25 In conclusion, the goal is not just to publish your paper in *AMR*, but also to write a paper  
26  
27 that will be read, used and cited. To do this, we need to see ourselves not only as scholars but  
28  
29 also as writers. What does it take to become a successful writer? As expected, Gunning gives a  
30  
31 crystal clear answer to this question:  
32  
33

34 In general, you can define successful writers as *those who have something to say and who*  
35  
36 *have learned how to say it simply. No writer ever gained a large audience by making his*  
37  
38 *style more complicated than his thought required.* The writers who gain an audience – the  
39  
40 writers you read and can name – write surprisingly simply. They observe a strict  
41  
42 discipline, but they introduce within that discipline much variety. They write simply but  
43  
44 they don't get caught at it. To a great degree, that is the key to writing craftsmanship  
45  
46 (1968: 12).  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

**Belle Rose Ragins**  
Associate Editor

## REFERENCES\*

- 1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7 \* Alvesson, M., & Sandberg, J. 2011. Generating research questions through problematization.  
8  
9 *Academy of Management Review*, 36: 247-271.
- 10  
11 \* Ashkanasy, N. M. 2011. Advancing theory: More than just “gap filling.” *Journal of*  
12  
13 *Organizational Behavior*, 32: 819-821.
- 14  
15  
16 \*Cook, C. K. 1985. *Line by line: How to edit your own writing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin  
17  
18 Harcourt.
- 19  
20  
21 \*Corley, K. G. & Gioia, D. A. 2011. Building theory about theory building: What constitutes a  
22  
23 theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review*, 36: 12-32.
- 24  
25  
26 Dane, E. 2011. Changing the tune of academic writing: Muting cognitive entrenchment.  
27  
28 *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 20: 332-336.
- 29  
30  
31 Fulmer, I. S. The craft of writing theory articles: Variety and similarity in *Academy of*  
32  
33 *Management Review*. *Academy of Management Review*, in press.
- 34  
35  
36 Grant, A. M. & Pollock, T. G. 2011. Publishing in *AMJ* - part 3: Setting the hook. *Academy of*  
37  
38 *Management Journal*, 54: 873-879.
- 39  
40  
41 Gunning, R. 1968. *The technique of clear writing* (revised edition). New York: McGraw Hill.
- 42  
43 \*Hale, C. 1999. *Sin and syntax: How to craft wickedly effective prose*. New York: Three  
44  
45 Rivers Press.
- 46  
47 \*Hollenbeck, J. R. 2008. The role of editing in knowledge development: Consensus shifting and  
48  
49 consensus creation. In Y. Baruch, A. M, Konrad, H. Aguinis, and W. H. Starbuck (Eds.),  
50  
51 *Opening the black box of editorship*: 16-26. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- 52  
53  
54 Huff, A. S. 1999. *Writing for scholarly publication*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- 55  
56  
57 \*Lanham, R. A. 2007. *Revising prose* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Pearson/Longman.
- 58  
59  
60

- 1  
2  
3 \*Locke, K. & Golden-Biddle, K. Constructing opportunities for contribution: Structuring  
4  
5  
6 intertextual coherence and “problematizing” in organizational studies. *Academy of*  
7  
8 *Management Journal*, 40, 5: 1023-1062.  
9
- 10 \*Silvia, P. J. 2007. *How to write a lot: A practical guide to productive academic writing*.  
11  
12 Washington DC: American Psychological Association.  
13  
14
- 15 \*Strunk, W., Jr. & White, E. B. 2009. *The elements of style* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.  
16  
17
- 18 \*Suddaby, R. 2010. Editor’s comments: Construct clarity in theories of management and  
19  
20 organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 35: 346-357.  
21
- 22 \*Toulmin, S.E. 1958. *The uses of argument*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.  
23  
24
- 25 \*Weick, K. E. 1989. Theory construction as disciplined imagination. *Academy of Management*  
26  
27 *Review*, 14: 516-531.  
28
- 29 \*Weick, K. E. 1995. What theory is not, theorizing is. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40  
30  
31
- 32 Williams, J. M. & Colomb, G. G. 2010. *Style: Lessons in clarity and grace* (10<sup>th</sup> ed.) Boston:  
33  
34 Longman.  
35
- 36 \*Whetten, D. A. What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review*,  
37  
38 14: 490-495.  
39
- 40 Zinsser, W. 2006. *On writing well: The classic guide to writing nonfiction* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). New  
41  
42 York: Harper Collins.  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47
- 48 \* Recommended by reviewers.  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

**TABLE 1**  
**Clear Writing Recipes: Advice From the Reviewers**

---

***The Hook: Creating a Tasty Appetizer***

Sell the unique, "value-added" contribution early, to keep the reader's attention and focus. I like the last line of the first paragraph to provide a brief preview of the intended contribution, with a more comprehensive statement of the intended contribution somewhere within the first 3 pages.

Once you have specified the stream of literature that you're contributing to in your first paragraph, and articulated what problem(s) you're trying to solve in that literature in your second paragraph, you should use the third paragraph to answer the question: How will you solve the problem(s) that you have identified? Give a brief overview of how your approach differs from earlier approaches, how it works, and why it is superior. Give the bare essentials of the answers to these questions, and nothing more. Then, immediately end the introduction, and move directly to your contribution.

If an author can write 3-7 solid paragraphs at the very beginning of the manuscript, they are giving both the reader and themselves a nice roadmap to what follows.... [T]hose paragraphs can work as a standalone...[i.e.,] a short précis that the author can share with lots of people for informal feedback (is it a compelling reason to write paper? Have I hooked your attention?) before they make a commitment to the full paper.

Write out the first five paragraphs (FFP) 100 times if that is what it takes to hook the reader.

---

***Creating Coherence and Cohesion: Knowing your Ingredients***

Read the topic sentences of each paragraph alone, and see if you are developing to a point in each section illustrative of the ideas you want to develop. Everything should be driving me to an unavoidable conclusion in concert with your model or theory. Then make sure all the sentences under each topic sentence drive to explain and expand on that topic sentence.

Write the entire storyline as bullets on one page, ensuring that the different key terms and relations cover the main aspects and are related in a logical, sequential way. Afterwards, refine the key terms and relations to come with a more fine-grained structure.

---

***Getting to the Core: Embracing the Lean Cuisine Approach***

One exercise that I do as an author (after I have written the first draft) is to go back and justify the need for each and every one of the para[graphs] that I have written. This forces me to make connections between the different ideas in the paper and develop a good map of the overall landscape – which then helps the reader and makes it easy for them to follow my (author's) thought process.

---