

Part 2. BETTER GRAMMAR

Match singulars with singulars, and plurals with plurals

Illogical and ungrammatical singulars or plurals usually involve singular nouns where plural nouns should appear. **And, simplify your terms. Eliminate verbiage.**

- the technical and social basis for wage attainments — bases
- are themselves the result of — results
- the role of causal attributions in organizational responses — roles
- the role of individuals in relation to the organization — organizational roles
- the properties of the environment of particular organizations — environments
- the number and size distribution of sellers and buyers in different industrial sectors — numbers, distributions
- the internal structure of organizational forms — structures
- the impact of role diversity, job level, and organizational size — **effects**
- the height of barriers — heights
- the level of social phenomena — levels
- the extent and character of product differentiation — characteristics
- the cognitive and motivational orientation of decision makers — orientations
- the location of particular organizational forms and species — locations
- Multiplicative interaction terms in regression analysis limit the form of the interaction — analyses, forms, interactions
- The senior human-resource executive from 65 companies — executives
- Proxies can be seen as varying on a number of dimensions, including the degree of the relationship of the proxy to — degrees, relationships, proxies
- those persons deserving of an opportunity — opportunities
- variables whose relationship to — relationships
- factors which vary in their locus — loci
- institutions play a key role — roles
- they serve as a proxy for — proxies
- a lack of fit results from a deviation — deviations
- actions organizations undertake when confronted with a downturn — downturns
- Some organizations occupy narrow niches since their degree of specialization permits them to exploit intensively a narrow range of resources — degrees, ranges
- Correlations among structure and context — structures, contexts [In general, one needs more than three structures and more than three contexts even to calculate a single correlation.]
- a number of relationships between niche type and organizational form — types, forms

Distinguish definite articles and indefinite articles

Many singular-plural problems arise because authors use definite articles (the) where they ought to use indefinite articles (a, an). In particular, authors frequently use definite articles with singular nouns where they should use plural nouns.

The definite article (the) denotes a specific, nameable instance. (The words “instance” and “example” should not be used interchangeably for this reason.) *The environment* means one specific environment, such as the British steel industry or Indianapolis; and *the organization* means one specific, nameable organization, such as Control Data or the University of Wyoming. An indefinite article (a, an) designates a typical, nonspecific instance. Thus, *an environment* means one typical environment, and *an organization* means one typical organization.

- the role of institutional factors in the economic process — the roles of
- institutional factors in economic processes
- the task environment of populations of organizations — the task environments of organizational populations
- the properties of the environment of organizations — organizations' environments
- the internal structure of organizational forms — organizations' structures
- how decision makers frame or formulate the problem will influence their response — how decision makers formulate problems influences their responses
- buyer power is concentrated in the vertical flow — buyer power concentrates in the vertical flows
- top management decision makers are responsible for positioning the organization — top managers should position their organizations
- Although the total sample may — Although a total sample may

Use specific words and terms

- healthcare institution — mental hospital or, even better, Happydale Nursing Home
- handle conflict — reduce dissent
- financial performance — profit
- organizations — firms — corporations
- relation between X and Y — correlation between X and Y
- marketing subunit — advertising department or sales office

Use only one term per concept

What you may regard as interesting variety may cause your readers confusion or complete bewilderment. Once you have referred to *the clients*, for example, continue to call them *the clients*; do not refer to them as *the beneficiaries* or *the program's participants*. Similarly, if you have designated someone as *the consultant*, maintain this label and do not substitute *the change agent*, *the intervener*, or *the facilitator*. It is fine to use synonyms for terms common to all research papers, such as:

- goals = outcomes = actions
- results = findings

- rules = regulation
- organization = firm

Write complete sentences. **Most of the time.**

Rarely use sentence fragments such as these:

- Still less, to move into the fascinating area of drawing out differences among the departmental subcultures within it. [ugh]
- So much for the sins of omission. Now for a short discussion of the sins of commission. [I like this one.]
- Guns and ammunition. [intriguing]
- As defect finding and removal have been major objectives for years, and no results have been obtained. [nope]

Use parallel phrasings

- making decisions and to create and maintain systems of shared meaning — making decisions and creating and maintaining systems of shared meaning, or to make decisions and to create and maintain systems of shared meaning
- those who have praised Agee's investment strategy but have been critical of his — those who have praised Agee's investment strategy but have criticized his import restrictions and export subsidies.
- Any effort by business to achieve these goals, as well as examination of how and in what direction big business has attempted to influence exchange rate policies, definitely should be within the purview of this book. — This book should encompass all of business's efforts to obtain import restrictions or export subsidies, and it should examine the ways big business has attempted to influence exchange-rate policies.
- Reference frames may also vary in content, with one organization's collective frame of reference best typified as "entrepreneurial," while that of another as "scientific" or "humanistic," as illustrated by the organizational studies conducted by Litterer and Young. — Reference frames may exhibit primarily entrepreneurial, scientific, or humanistic orientations (Litterer and Young).
- The magic number so far has been that of the four largest firms produce more than 50 or 70 percent of domestic output, a monopolistic situation exists, following the "bust 'em up" school of reasoning. [sic] — A monopolistic situation warrants dissolution when the four largest firms produce more than half of domestic output.

Beware of short, trailing predicates

Watch out for clauses in which short predicates—often a To Be verb and an adjective—trail after very long subjects. These make difficult reading.

But believing that firms can achieve cost leadership by accumulating volume faster along this (or another) given slope is fallacious. — But firms cannot achieve cost leadership by accumulating volume faster along any constant slope.

To the extent that the local operation is extractive in nature or otherwise deals with natural resources, the question of the manner in which local laborers are treated is likely to be sensitive. — Operations that exploit natural resources often mistreat laborers.

and the inability of either sociology or psychology to absorb it in a status position appropriate to its importance is becoming increasingly evident — and events are proving that neither sociology nor psychology can absorb it in a status position appropriate to its importance

Don't use double negatives!!!

Double negatives give ideas a negative, pessimistic cast, and they foster convoluted logic.

If governmental process never generated negative outcomes — If governmental processes always generated good results

Try not to use nouns as modifiers, and especially avoid long strings of nouns

Enhance clarity by using adjectives and possessives, instead of nouns, as modifiers.

CEO rewards — CEOs' rewards

employee beliefs — employees' beliefs

the Clegg book — Clegg's book

Organization Responses to — Organizations' Responses to

the result of confirmation hypothesis testing — confirmatory hypothesis testing

management decisions — managerial decisions

strategy management — strategic management

organization behavior — organizational behavior

organization and/or environment characteristics — organizational or environmental characteristics

But do make sure that the adjectives and possessives say what you intend! One author used the phrase "personal causal models" to denote "models in which persons cause events."

When you do use a noun as a modifier, use the noun's singular form.

in rewards systems — in reward systems

six-months period — six-month period
the employee job turnover phenomenon — turnover
human resources management policy — human-resource-management policies —
policies for managing human resources
statistical quality-control applications — statistical quality control
state electric utility regulation — electric-utility regulation by the states

Sometimes you can shorten a string of nouns by deleting the primary noun. Pay special attention to the words *behavior*, *process*, and *system* because these rarely add information. **Agreed.**

the structural-adaptation process — structural adaptation (Adaptation is a process by definition.)

decision-making process — decision making (Decision making is a process by definition.)

management-information system — managerial information (In this instance, the author was talking about information rather than about a system for gathering and storing information.)

within organizational science individual turnover behavior — turnover

Hyphenate (**and sometimes abbreviate**) nouns used as adjectives

United States is written out when used as a noun, but is abbreviated when used as an adjective. I live in the United States; I am a U.S. citizen.

Insert hyphens between the components of compound adjectives. A compound adjective is a pair of words—(can be an adjective and a noun) or two nouns—that jointly act as a single adjective. Thus, you should hyphenate "environmental-resource variation" because environmental-resource is a compound adjective modifying variation. You should hyphenate "population-ecology model" because population-ecology is a compound adjective modifying model. Other examples would be:

management-information systems

upper-management persons

question-and-answer session

short-term experience

double-loop learning

order-entry program

six-month period

human-resources management

goal-linkage theory

53-year life

asset-reduction programs

large-sample data

natural-selection model

decision-making process

But do not mislead your readers by hyphenating unrelated words, as did the authors who said "geographic-market location," "the managerial-role making process" and "management-organization-behavior-science discipline."

Although most journals and publishers make no distinction, some publishers use two sizes of hyphens. Because they transform two or more words into one, the above examples call for narrow (non-breaking hyphen). Wider hyphens, or an en dash, link two words or dates without converting them into a single term and indicate a range; for example, technology–structure relations or 1998–2000. Em dashes—set off an explanation or a series of descriptives in a complex sentence—and often stand for *and* or *versus*.

Avoid quotation marks unless you cite a specific source

Use italics (the modern equivalent of pencil-and-paper underlining) rather than quotation marks to highlight key words. Do not put quotation marks around your own words in order to pretend that you are not saying what you are saying. If your words embarrass you, use different words.

Why, for example, do you think the following authors used quotation marks? Whom are they quoting?

- General hypotheses about regulatory behavior, however, are not "tested" using agency data
- It is also a "must read" for change agents who
- Such employees may view their jobs as a "choice of necessity" and
- A more "normal" age distribution would be possible,
- to the "bottom line" explanation that stresses
- and "just-in-time" materials arrival
- Classification of specific and situational strategies into "generic" strategies can prove useful
- through which they "get the message"
- newcomers diagnose their "fit" to the setting

Use italics only to emphasize key words.

Do not use italics to emphasize important words that readers might overlook: If you fear that readers might overlook an important word, you have phrased that sentence poorly, and you should rewrite it, putting the important word at the beginning or end.

Don't write this: Each question will be followed by an answer, the *sum of such answers* representing a unified perspective. **Write this:** An answer follows each question. These answers add up to a unified perspective.

Don't write this: All the inconsistencies, ambiguities, and even cynicism of the study of organizational effectiveness aside, what *does* organizational behavior have to offer organizational effectiveness as a theoretical *and* applied issue? **Write this:** What could organizational behavior contribute to organizational effectiveness, either theoretically or practically?

Don't write this: If governmental process never generated negative outcomes, political activities of the domain maintenance variety more than likely would be *generally* inconsistent with organizational effectiveness and long term survival. **Write this:** If governmental processes always generated good results, political activities would likely reduce organizational effectiveness and impede long-term survival.

Don't write this: This referent will enhance effectiveness *as long as* conditions of competition among subunits is sustained. **Write this:** Only if subunits compete with each other would this standard of performance enhance effectiveness.

Don't write this: The conditions necessary to achieve these criteria are usually present only in the *case of trivial performances*. **Write this:** Only when performing trivial tasks can individuals meet such standards.

Distinguish between *must* and *should*

Must means that some constraint or force compels: if "some action must be taken to upgrade the capacity of the organization," the organization is *always* upgraded because people do not have the alternative of leaving the organization alone. In this instance, the author actually appeared to mean *should* rather than *must*: *Should* means that some event or action ought to happen or is very likely to happen.

turnaround attempts must address the source of the problem — turnaround attempts should address the sources of problems

we must note that — Why must we? (In such a case, one should delete the entire phrase "we must note that.")

Future research must investigate this hypothesis. — Yes Sir! I cannot disobey your command.

When prescribing, say *should* or *ought to*

Should and *ought to* signal that you are talking about how things ought to be or what should happen.

The author who said "efforts at education could be given importance by a supportive management" evidently meant "managers should support educational efforts."

If you insist on using *must* in a prescriptive statement, also state the condition that makes the prescribed action necessary: *In order to achieve X, you must do Y.*

Avoid explanations in parentheses (unless absolutely necessary).

Parentheses usually indicate excessively complex phrasings. Rephrase complex statements more simply. **Please.**

infer the cause of performance (i.e., make attributions) prior to — If inferring one cause were precisely the same thing as making multiple attributions, this author would not have felt the need to insert the parenthetical remark. The author probably regarded causal inference as a specific instance of attribution behavior in general, but the author's statement does not explain in what ways causal inference might resemble or differ from other attribution behaviors.

Avoid footnotes (unless the journal requires them)

The idea is to make it easy for your reader to get through your entire manuscript without the distraction of looking up stuff. Every time a reader has to stop and look for an explanation or a term that isn't fully defined, you risk losing him or her and a possible citation. Because a footnote requires more effort of readers than does a statement in the main body of text, you should use a footnote only for content that is more important than the main text. But this makes no sense! Thus, if readers should read a statement, include it in the main text. If it is not that important, omit it.