Part 4. COPYEDIT WHAT YOU WROTE

After you get it down on paper, copyedit it.

Writing a manuscript constitutes no more than a beginning, and it should take perhaps half of the writing time. Copyediting should take the other half.

When you examine your ideas in microscopic detail, you may discover that basic concepts need drastic revisions. Nitpicking through your words may show you that paragraphs or sections ought to follow different sequences. Clarity should be your primary goal.

Avoid platitudes, clichés, obvious statements, and excessive redundancy.

Do not undercut your writing by creating the impression that you have little to say. For example:
- Performances were suggested to be directly related to effectiveness.
- Interaction is not all one general kind, but can be meaningfully distinguished in…
- In common parlance, this smacks of "throwing good money after bad."

Do not begin paragraphs with uninformative sentences such as these.
- There are, however, fundamental limitations to such approaches.
- Organizational cultures do more than filter information.
- Public management does not operate in a political vacuum.
- Interdependence is discussed here in terms of mutual dependence.

Beware of the words obviously and clearly. If something is truly obvious or clear, you don’t need to say that it is.

Use intriguing titles and section headings
- Camping on seesaws
- Knee-deep in the Big Muddy
- The science of 'muddling through'
- The technology of foolishness
- Speaking truth to power
- The structure of 'unstructured' decision processes

Avoid long titles and titles that include colons

Make the main title say it. A title need not be a synopsis, and a long title may say less than a short one.
Countercyclical hiring as a staffing strategy for managers and professional personnel: Some considerations and issues — Countercyclical hiring of managers and professionals

Man versus model of man: A rationale, plus some evidence, for a method of improving clinical inferences — How to draw better clinical inferences

The contradiction of domination and production in bureaucracy: The contribution of organizational efficiency to the decline of the Roman Empire — Why domination brought down the Roman Empire

Do not advertise your ideas as being new or criticize others' ideas for not being new

Nearly all news is only noise, and a scientific journal should differ from a newspaper. More important than newness of scientific contributions are their accuracy, clarity, generality, persuasiveness, relevance, usefulness, and validity.

Avoid academic quibbles

Do not label ideas as belonging to specific disciplines. Do not argue about the proper dividing lines between, say, psychology and sociology.

Avoid first-person and second-person pronouns as much as possible

First-person pronouns do sometimes serve well, but you should recognize the disadvantages of saying I, we, our or you. When you refer explicitly to yourself, you remind your readers that they are reading your ideas, not their ideas. Consequently, you make it more difficult for your readers to adopt your ideas as their own. Thus, taking credit for your ideas makes your writing less persuasive and gives your ideas less impact.

For example,

In this paper we argue that focusing on — Focusing on

I will concentrate my efforts on the coordination mechanisms between departments. — This research focuses on coordination between departments.

We suggest, furthermore, that assessing — Furthermore, assessing

In presenting our typology, we will therefore give concrete examples — Concrete examples illustrate each type.
For similar reasons, do not talk about the reader or the author.

**When you prescribe, state your goals: In order to achieve X, do Y**

Statements of the form *Do Y* appear opinionated and highhanded, whereas statements of the form *To achieve X, do Y* do not.

**Avoid the past and future tenses, use the present tense as much as possible**

The present tense keeps readers more involved than do the past or future tenses. But do use past tenses when attributing quotations or ideas to people. Max Weber may no longer be saying what he once said.

**Obey Ames's Law:**

- **Active verbs > Adverbs > Adjectives > Nouns > Passive verbs or To Be verbs**

  where > stands for *work better than*.

Ed Ames regarded this law as a way to hold readers' interest, and he was right. Passive verbs, To Be verbs, and nouns make boring reading, and they also produce verbose phrasings.

More importantly, passive verbs and nouns seem to encourage social scientists to view themselves as passive observers, to see other individuals as puppets of impersonal forces, and to build static theories. Using static words to describe reality leads scientists to create static frames of reference, to view social worlds as stable, and thus to overlook dynamic events. Using active verbs and adverbs, on the other hand, subtly encourages scientists to notice changes and reactions and histories, and to see themselves as actual and potential actors.

The basic rule for converting to active phrasings is: identify the source of action and make this actor the subject of the sentence. To do this, you have to analyze causality, with the result that you may have to explicate processes that you had previously left implicit. Not only does this make your theories clearer, it also makes them more dynamic.

**Eliminate passive verbs.**
You can often convert passive verbs merely by substituting active verbs, or you can write around the problem by flipping the sentence.

First, the three approaches are briefly introduced — The first section introduces the three approaches

Conclusions will be drawn — The final section draws conclusions regarding the data we have been offered to date — the published data

The data were obtained from — The data came from

perceptions were related to structure — perceptions correlated with structure

Our analysis is constrained, and limited, to those characteristics covered by the survey. — This analysis focuses on the survey data.

These concepts are drawn from — These concepts arise from

The concept is borrowed from — The concept originated in

Some attention has been devoted to this issue — This issue has attracted attention

when findings representing only one approach are presented — when findings reflect only one approach

When service industries are classified, behavioral routines and mutual agreements between must be scrutinized — When economists classify service industries, they scrutinize behavioral routines and mutual agreements between

This is achieved by analyzing the environment as — This framework treats the environment as
Eliminate phrases of the form: To Be + adjective

The properties of the environment are in part characteristic of — Environmental properties partly characterize

Decision makers were responsible for scanning — Decision makers scanned

Asset-reduction programs are illustrative of — Asset-reduction programs illustrate

Sharp discontinuities among classes are clear in — Classes differ sharply in

The linkages are not rational, but are subject to the — The linkages lack rationality, but reflect the

than those organizations that are not effective — than ineffective organizations

Eliminate phrases of the form: To Be + noun.

If such is the case, — If so,

One focus of this research has been the identification of — This research has identified

Fit is the essence of design. — Fit undergirds design.

The criteria used in salary decisions are issues of great importance, both for organizations and individuals — Salary decisions affect both organizations and individuals

The purpose of this article is to develop — This article develops (An infinitive acts as a noun.)

if advances in our understanding of theory are to occur — before we can build better theories

The problem, however, was that such rational processes — Rational processes, however,

Eliminate lead-in phrases.

Many of these are merely special cases of the To Be verbs.

it is this conception of environment which makes — this conception of environment makes

It is useful to distinguish from the start three primary forms of interdependence — Interdependence has three primary forms. (For what purpose is it useful?)
It is only in the open systems perspective that the organization environment is given (passive verb) a central role — Only the open-systems perspective assigns central roles to organizations' environments.

It should be noted that this isomorphism is not a necessary condition. — This isomorphism is unnecessary.

It is argued here that the nature of attribution will influence — attribution influences

It is suggested that the number and size distribution influence — The number and size distribution of firms influence

Even if this is broadly true, we must note that X — X

This should not be surprising given that top managers — Top managers (Who was it that claimed it was surprising?)

There are, however, fundamental limitations to such approaches — The limitations of such approaches include

**Eliminate Phrases of the form: Article + Noun + Of.**

You should be especially alert when the noun is a verb stem plus *ation*. To find these, watch for the word *of*.

One focus of this research has been the identification of — This research has identified

The construction of these explanations involves — Individuals construct these explanations by

Common to all three literatures is a depiction of — All three literatures depict

The purpose of this paper is to provide — This paper provides

are themselves the results of — result from

provides an illustration of — illustrates

the rationale for the use of variables — the rationale for using variables

the occurrence of unsuccessful — unsuccessful

the prevention of anticipated — preventing anticipated

the complexities of — the complex

offers a synthesis of — synthesizes