

## Scholarly Writing and Publishing: Your Take-Aways

- 1. At the start of your doctoral candidacy, study your discipline to help anticipate research, specialization, and demographic trends in specialization(s).** Remember that retirements, changes in methodology, theoretical assumptions, and disciplinary trends will create dramatically different demand for the years when you're on the job market. Unless your mentor is working in an underrepresented area or is willing to aggressively mentor and co-author articles with you, avoid his/her specialization.
- 2. Recognize the importance of publications at all stages in your career.** Publications can help you secure a job, a change in discipline, and tenure/promotion. Convert talks and conference presentations into publications. Plan to have at least several in press or print prior to embarking on a job search.
- 3. All research isn't bottom-up.** Use bottom-up research to identify fruitful topics for research, then establish main tenets of your thesis and argument. After this stage, all research should be top-down and dedicated to marshalling sufficient resources to prove your points.
- 4. Identify strong research focuses or opportunities.** Collaborate with faculty in other disciplines, look at disciplinary/demographic/technological trends, and identify underrepresented areas of research. Read widely: methodologies and assumptions from other disciplines traditionally provide the most vital breakthroughs in research and innovation.
- 5. Harness the power of gambits in shaping your research.** Gambits rely on oppositional or paradoxical relationships to snag attention and remain memorable. Some confounding or disappointing outcomes can yield superb gambits – and lucrative grants, as well as publications in top journals.

6. **Plan your articles/grants in a series.** Whenever feasible, conceive of your research in a series: articles targeted at different publications, using the same data with a slightly different focus. Or spin articles into grants to extend the reach and utility of research.
7. **Make your work more publishable by relying on the 4Cs.** See guidelines in “Writing for the Reader’s Eye,” below.
8. **Allow for a multi-stage writing process.** Recognize that writing falls into at least four stages: (1) brainstorming/outlining, (2) drafting to get ideas and order straight, (3) writing to focus on argument and language, and (4) revising and proofreading. Allow for cooling-off periods between stages.
9. **Boost your odds of publication by targeting specific journals or RFPs/CFPs.** Do your homework by reading the mission statement of the organization behind the journal, as well as the writers’ guidelines. Read at least several issues of the journal and its full range of articles. Similarly, read and follow all guidelines from federal grants makers and foundations. If possible, find and read either abstracts from successful previous applications or published research funded by those grants.
10. **Bolster your productivity.** Always have ongoing projects to ensure articles and grants at various stages of preparation. Collaborate with colleagues in other disciplines to leverage other methodologies or extend your disciplinary research – useful in retooling for jobs in other disciplines.

## Writing for the Reader's Eye: Maximizing Clarity, Continuity, Coherence, and Concision

### **1. Readers expect subject-verb-object structure in sentences.**

Readers interpret by projecting forward, so we tend to focus our attention on the verb that resolves a sentence's syntax. We also tend to resist absorbing other information until after we identify the verb. To ensure maximum clarity in your writing, try to place subjects as close to verbs as possible. While you might want to qualify your subject immediately, your reader will better understand and recall both subject and qualifications if you qualify them in separate clauses—or even sentences.

### **2. Place subjects as close to the openings of sentences as possible.**

Again, since readers are unconsciously searching for the subject, your readers will tend to skim over the qualifying clauses or phrases preceding your subject, especially if your subject debuts more than 12-15 words into the sentence.

### **3. Ensure your grammatical subject refers to the central thing, issue, or focus in the sentence.**

Most readers expect a sentence to be about whatever noun shows up first, making the grammatical subject the single feature that controls readers' perspectives on the entire sentence (see also Item 2, above). The more tangible the subject, the more likely your readers are to see the sentence as illustrating a familiar schema—and more likely to grasp its meaning immediately and to later recall its content easily.

The usual “there is/there are,” or “it is” openings to sentences can waste your precious topic position—the place where readers expect to encounter the grammatical subject—with an adverb or empty pronoun, in addition to inverting the expected order of the sentence. In the sentence “[t]here was some variability among studies in either choice and definition of fatal outcomes,” the sentence actually reads V-S-O (verb-subject-object), since “there is” construction always inverts the order of subject and verb, usually obliging your reader to perform a few mental calisthenics.

### **4. Active construction maintains the chronological order in which events occur, making information easier for readers to recall.**

In sentences relying on passive construction, the action in the sentence flows in reverse, originating toward the end of the sentence with an actor who is usually only implied or supplied in a minor phrase, with the outcome usually named in the

grammatical subject. In contrast, in active construction, the action originates with the grammatical subject, flows through the verb, and results in an outcome or event in the object. This order more nearly corresponds to the chronological order in which events occur, making sentences seem to express causes and effects. A growing body of research (Labov, 1972; Schank, 1990) has documented that readers understand and recall information mostly clearly when it corresponds to cause-effect sequences.

**5. Active construction also usually lends itself to more concise writing than passive construction.** Sentences using active construction require fewer positioning or prepositional phrases to express relationships between the subject, verb, and object.

**6. Make your verbs portray action whenever possible.**

Readers tend to recall active verbs more readily than their passive counterparts. Active verbs, furthermore, tend to do more “work” within a sentence, shortening its overall length and eliminating some prepositional phrases.

**7. Know how to handle stress.**

Empirical studies of readers have demonstrated that readers recall information best and longest when it appears at the ends of sentences, sections, and documents—the position that Gopen (1987) calls *emphasis* and Williams (1990) dubs *stress*. Placing important information in the stress position ensures readers both focus on and recall it.

**8. Beware lengthy lists or strings of phrases/clauses.**

Clinical studies of reading (Orasanu, 1980) have revealed that readers seldom recall more than four items when they occur in a list in the midst of a paragraph. Consider Churchill’s famous quote, remembered as “I have nothing to give you but blood, sweat, and tears,” which was actually “. . . blood, sweat, *toil*, and tears.” A pair or trio of items, discussed in a sentence, is always more memorable than four or more items. Further, if you must qualify information in a list, phrase, or clause, load the items in order of increasing length, which supplies a rhythmic cadence to inform your readers they’re nearing the close of the sentence.

**9. Readers most easily absorb carefully sequenced information.**

Readers make predictions about where scenarios and sentences are headed based both on suitable schemas and on earlier information. As a result, readers understand sentences most easily when writers begin sentences with already familiar information that recalls data presented in preceding sentences. Placing familiar information at the outset of sentences also nudges newer information toward the stress position, where it belongs. Readers easily absorb even complex detail when they encounter it in “Familiar-new. Familiar-new” order, often introduced by transitions.

**10. Transitions make explicit the relationship between the sentence readers are about to encounter and the sentence(s) immediately preceding it.**

Woefully underused in all fields outside journalism, transitions tell your readers how to receive the information they're about to encounter, relative to the information they've just processed—usually with only a single word or phrase. Transitions, moreover, help break up the rhythm of your sentences, softening the often-repetitive rhythm of sentences beginning with an article or subject.

**11. Begin paragraphs with a head, a 1-3 sentence overview of the contents in the paragraph.**

Readers absorb information in paragraphs easily when you provide a sentence or several that preview the overall contents of the paragraph. Be sure that your sentence or sentences touch on the full scope of your paragraph. And also ensure that readers know when your paragraph head ends by *avoiding* using a sequence or transition to create a smooth bridge between the last sentence of your head and the first sentence of the paragraph body.

**12. Support the paragraph head with a paragraph body.**

The remaining two-thirds of your paragraph should consist of sentences that flesh out, provide examples, analogies, statistics, and other evidence to stake, explore, and shore up the broad claims you make in the paragraph head. Paragraphs should include a minimum of three sentences to complete—one to lay out the claims in the paragraph head and two more to substantiate or flesh out those claims.

**13. Complete complex paragraphs with a paragraph foot or conclusion.**

If your paragraph is especially complex, lengthy, or important, summarize your conclusions in a single sentence that occupies the end of the paragraph. Because readers recall items in the stress of paragraphs better than any other details, you'll ensure that they both recall your conclusions clearly and also draw from the paragraph precisely the conclusions you intend.

**14. Make your writing concise by eliminating redundant pairs and modifiers and throat clearing.**

English has a long history as a language that doubles its words, courtesy of the Norman Conquest, which brought French and Latin into Anglo-Saxon speaking England. To ensure they were understood, speakers in England used pairs of words, usually one derived from Latin or French and one from Anglo-Saxon. As a result, today English features an entire raft of doubled modifiers and pairs, including *each and every*, *each individual*, *first and foremost*, *basic and fundamental*, *future plans*, *continue on*, *final outcome*, and *consensus of opinion*.

Furthermore, English also relies on *throat-clearing*, expressions that convey nothing to readers or, worse, call attention to your subjectivity. Throat-clearing expressions

include *in order to*\_\_\_\_, which should become simply *to*\_\_\_\_. Other examples of throat-clearing are *due to the fact that*, *at this point in time*, *to all intents and purposes*, *it is interesting to note that*, and belief statements like *I am convinced that*. When you spot these expressions, cut them.

### **15. Avoid negatives.**

Since readers process negatives by turning them into positive statements, every writer who uses a negative is obliging readers to perform the equivalent of a mental contortion. Instead of implying what is by telling readers what isn't, stick to the affirmative. You can replace *not the same as* with *different from*, *not many* with *few*, *did not consider* with *ignored*, *does not have* with *lacks* and *did not remember* with *forgot*.

## The 4Cs in Action—Before and After Samples

### Passive versus Active Construction:

*Passive*—These planning steps will need to be adjusted to reflect many of the decisions that are necessary for employers to make in order to address specific organizational and regulatory requirements that are likely to apply in your situation and jurisdiction.

*Active*—Employers will need to adjust these planning steps to reflect organizational and regulatory requirements that apply specifically to them.

### California State Statute on Wire-Tapping:

#### Before:

*Any person who, by means of any machine, instrument, or contrivance, or in any other manner, intentionally taps, or makes any unauthorized connection, whether physically, electrically, acoustically, inductively, or otherwise, with any telegraph or telephone wire, line, cable, or instrument, including the wire, line, cable, or instrument of any internal telephonic communication system, or who willfully and without the consent of all parties to the communication, or in any unauthorized manner, reads, or attempts to read, or to learn the contents or meaning of any message, report, or communication while the same is in transit or passing over any wire, line, or cable, or is being sent from, or received at any place within this state; or who uses, or attempts to use, in any manner, or for any purpose, or to communicate in any way, any information so obtained, or who aids, agrees with, employs, or conspires with any person or persons to unlawfully do, or permit, or cause to be done any of the acts or things mentioned above in this section, is punishable by a fine not exceeding two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500), or by imprisonment in the county jail not exceeding one year, or by imprisonment in the state prison, or by both a fine and imprisonment in the county jail or in the state prison.*

#### After:

*California law prohibits the intentional tapping or monitoring of phone calls without the consent of both parties, as well as the employment or abetting of these activities. This law also prohibits the use of any information obtained through wire-tapping or monitoring. If convicted of illegally monitoring of phone calls, you may be fined up to \$2,500 or sentenced to as long as a year in county jail or state prison.*

**Fund Prospectus**Before:

*Maturity and duration management decisions are made in the context of an intermediate maturity orientation. The maturity structure of the portfolio is adjusted in anticipation of cyclical interest rate changes. Such adjustments are not made in an effort to capture short-term, day-to-day movements in the market, but instead are implemented in anticipation of longer term, secular shifts in the level of interest rates (ie. shifts transcending and/or not inherent in the business cycle). Adjustments made to shorten portfolio maturity and duration are made to limit capital losses during periods when interest rates are expected to rise. Conversely, adjustments made to lengthen maturation for the portfolio's maturity and duration strategy lie in analysis of the U.S. and global economies, focusing on levels of real interest rates, monetary and fiscal policy actions, and cyclical indicators. (133 words)*

After: Warren Buffet's revised version:

We will try to profit by correctly predicting future interest rates. When we have no strong opinion, we will generally hold intermediate term bonds. But when we expect a major and sustained interest in rates, we will concentrate on short-term issues. And, conversely, if we expect a major shift to lower rates, we will buy long bonds. We will focus on the big picture and won't make moves based on short-term considerations. (72 words)

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