

## EDITOR'S COMMENTS: REFLECTIONS ON THE CRAFT OF CLEAR WRITING

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

Most of us struggle with our writing. We thrash and hack our way through paragraphs, writing and editing and rewriting until we think we've made some progress on that God-forsaken manuscript. The next morning we turn on the computer, read the file, and realize that our work of art is a muddled mess. We curse, hit the delete key, and start again. It can be a frustrating process, particularly for theory papers, which are all about the writing.

But we hang in there. We finish the manuscript and submit it to *AMR*. We wait. We wait some more. We get the reviews. The rejection stings, but the reviewer's comments are worse: "I'm puzzled as to what exactly you are trying to accomplish here." "The first twenty-three pages are an endless literature review." "I had to read several pages into the manuscript to get a hint about what you are trying to achieve." "What exactly is this paper about? After reading it twice, I'm still not sure."<sup>1</sup>

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

The first challenge of clear writing is to understand your reader. With this in mind, I polled current and past *AMR* board members, associate editors, editors, and special issue reviewers to

get their insights and recommendations on the craft of clear writing, particularly as it applies to theoretical articles. I asked them to share (1) their *pet peeves* about the writing style, organization, and presentation of theoretical manuscripts; (2) their thoughts on *why* authors engage in poor writing practices; and, perhaps most important, (3) their *advice and recommendations* for writing clear theoretical articles. This simple request opened a floodgate: sixty-seven reviewers responded with over a hundred pages of advice and reflections on the craft of writing. I've selected a few of the most common themes and practical recommendations, which I hope you find interesting and helpful.

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

My second objective is to add the topic of clear writing to the growing conversation about the importance of writing in our profession (cf. Dane, 2011; Fulmer, 2012; Grant & Pollock, 2011; Hollenbeck, 2008; Huff, 1999). Writing is not just a support-level activity; it is the primary way in which we develop and disseminate knowledge. I hope this essay will spark dialogue and personal reflection about our shared challenges of writing clearly and the importance of clear writing in our profession.

So here's the road map for this essay: I begin with a definition of clear writing, followed by a short description of the informal poll so you can get a sense of what was done and why. I then present three of the most common *pet peeves* identified by the reviewers, their views on why authors engage in these practices, and their recommendations and advice for authors who want to improve their writing. I end with some

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

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

thoughts and reflections about the process and role of clear writing in our profession.

### WHAT IS CLEAR WRITING?

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

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

The beauty of clear writing is that it creates nearly effortless reading. The reader should be able to understand your key points and follow your logic without having to reread the manuscript. This allows the reader to focus on the content and meaning of your message, rather than how it is presented. The better the writer, the more invisible he or she becomes as his/her ideas are "*transferred clearly from one head to another*" (Gunning, 1968: 11). When writing clearly, the focus is never on the writer; it is always on the reader. Clear writing may be elegant, but it is never pretentious. The goal is not to show the reader how smart you are but, rather, to take the reader with you on a journey that is clear, logical, and direct.

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, since 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 logi-

cally 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 over forty years ago: "*Clear writing is based on clear thinking*" (1968: 11). 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.

### THE INFORMAL POLL

I invited current (2011–2013) and past (2009–2011) editorial board members, associate editors, editors, and 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 seventeen pet peeves, and another wrote nearly five pages of advice for authors. I was overwhelmed by the quality and breadth of their responses, which totaled over a hundred pages.

There was some variation in their pet peeves, which ranged from typos and grammatical errors to the use of lifeless, "emotionally gray" text. I also found quite a bit of overlap in their responses. I selected three pet peeves that were frequently cited and, in line with the developmental focus of this essay, accompanied by straightforward remedies. Some of the reviewers recommended writing resources that they themselves have found helpful, and I've included these books and articles in the reference section of this essay.

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

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

### Pet Peeve 1: Foggy Writing

**The problem.** One of the most common pet peeves cited by the reviewers is the use of needlessly complex language that obscures meaning and keeps the reader in what Gunning (1968) would call a fog. One reviewer captured both the problem and root of foggy writing:

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

Many other reviewers voiced their frustration and annoyance with authors who "use overly complex language to describe straightforward concepts" and those who write with "needless complexity—e.g., by using more than one term for the same concept, by not using parallel construction, or by showing off with 'big' or 'impressive' words."

**The reasons.** The reviewers offered a number of reasons for why authors engage in foggy writing. Some hypothesized that authors may be trying to "position their contribution as novel by describing it differently," while others suspected that the authors were simply trying to sound impressive.

In line with these reflections, Gunning observed that foggy writing often stems from "*writing to impress rather than express*" and offered this perceptive insight:

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

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

Gunning's insights from forty years ago still resonate today and are reflected in these reviewers' comments:

Perhaps some authors think that the use of more "esoteric" words makes their manuscript seem more "theoretical" or "deep." I prefer to read ar-

ticles that use simple language regardless of how complex the ideas they are trying to convey.

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

The reviewers agreed with Gunning's (1968) observation that "clear writing is based on clear thinking" and observed that dense and needlessly complex writing "may indicate the lack of clarity in the author's own mind." The reviewers also pointed out that the writer's own insecurities and faulty assumptions about writing may contribute to the problem. One reviewer wrote that authors may "think that papers must sound appropriately scholarly—and that clarity somehow detracts from this goal." Another reflected, "Perhaps they think content is all that is important in writing—they forget that if the paper is not clear and concise, content will not matter." Another reviewer raised this intriguing point: "I think sometimes that people are afraid to reveal just how simple some of our ideas and theories are—that somehow it devalues them."

Gunning pointed out that writers who use needlessly complex language lose sight of their readers and explained that some writers engage in this practice because "they think complexly and will not take the time or trouble to card out their thoughts before trying to communicate them" (1968: 21). He went on to note that "almost any writer, if he can get away with it, will write less simply than readers prefer" (1968: 21).

Foggy writing may be due to writers' insecurities, their misperceptions about writing, or their lack of clarity about what they want to say, why they want to say it, and who their reader is. However, there is another simple reason for foggy writing. As one reviewer pointed out:

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

**The remedies.** The reviewers offered quite a bit of advice on how to eliminate foggy writing. They also emphasized that there are no easy fixes or formulas for eliminating the fog of writing—it takes work.

The primary antidote for foggy writing is to take the time to really think through your ideas before you start to write. As Gunning advised, "To write well and simply you must train your mind to cut through the surface details and get at the bones of your thought" (1968: 9). The reviewers agreed: "I believe that if an author has really thought through the ideas in the manuscript, then she/he will be able to use relatively simple language to express them." One reviewer described the process and prerequisites for tackling the first draft of an *AMR* manuscript:

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

The most frequent and emphatic piece of advice offered by the reviewers is to *make absolutely sure that your manuscript is peer reviewed before submitting it to AMR*. As stated by one reviewer, "Never, ever, ever send a manuscript to a journal that hasn't been peer reviewed by people who will give you blatantly honest feedback about not just the theoretical contribution but the clarity of your writing." Another reviewer cautioned that

if your "friendly reviewer" is too friendly (i.e., has few negative comments), get another one. It may be someone who didn't take the time, or else is afraid of hurting your feelings, or is in a power relationship with you where they worry that they can't be honest (i.e., your Ph.D. student).

The reviewers also point out that going through the motions of a peer review is not enough; it's what you do with the review that really matters. Ignoring comments or trying to "tweak" papers that need a major overhaul dilutes and destroys the value of peer reviews. There are two barriers that keep writers from getting the full value of peer reviews. The first is our tender ego and our tendency to internalize the critique of the paper as a critique of our own ability. As one reviewer counseled, "Don't get defensive about negative feedback—treat it like a gift (you'd rather have it now before you submit, than get a paper rejected over these things)." The second is that we are hopeless

romantics when it comes to our writing: we fall in love with our words and we just can't cut them loose. But as Zinsser advises:

Look for the clutter in your writing and prune it ruthlessly. Be grateful for everything you can throw away. Reexamine each sentence you put on paper. Is every word doing new work? Can any thought be expressed with more economy? Is anything pompous or pretentious or faddish? Are you hanging on to something useless just because you think it's beautiful?

Simplify, simplify (2006: 16).

Clear writing not only reduces the clutter; it also shortens the paper. Given the belt-tightening page restrictions adopted by many journals, clear writing has moved from a desired to a required style of writing.

## Pet Peeve 2: Read My Mind

**The problem.** This writing pitfall is the evil cousin of foggy writing. The reader is presented with concepts, jargon, and acronyms that are not defined or are used inconsistently in the manuscript. As one reviewer put it, authors assume that the "reader is inside their mind." Another reviewer elaborated:

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

Other reviewers also expressed their annoyance with the excessive use of jargon and incomprehensible text. "There is nothing worse," wrote one, "than needing to learn an entire language to follow the point of the article."

**The reasons.** The reasons for the "read my mind" problem are relatively straightforward. The first is that authors may be too close to the material. As one reviewer explained, "They 'know' the topic so well that they assume others will."

Another reason is lack of empathy and perspective. The authors fail to put themselves in the shoes of the reader. As Williams and Colomb explain:

What we write always seems clearer to us than to our readers, because we read into it what we want them to get out of it. And so instead of



revising our writing to meet their needs, we call it done the moment it meets ours (2010: 7).

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

**The remedies.** The reviewers offered straightforward advice for addressing this problem. As one advised, “Jargon should be introduced for only 2–5 variables; the rest should be colloquial words. Do not wholesale incorporate the jargon of other literatures. . . . just incorporate their relevant meaning.” Another reviewer offered a litmus test for eliminating jargon: “If spell check thinks it isn’t a word, it probably isn’t needed.”

The reviewers gave other practical suggestions and techniques for improving the clarity of manuscripts. One advised, “Leave a written paper for a few days and reread it. If you don’t understand any sentence or other part of it, be assured that the reader won’t either.” Another offered this useful approach: “One technique for improving succinctness and readability is for two coauthors to read the paper together aloud. Reading aloud also catches typos.”

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

My advice to authors is to use their imaginations to take the perspective of an intelligent but naïve reader who has limited time and resources in reading their own manuscripts. Make their papers worth the reader’s effort and don’t make the reader work harder than necessary to get the point.

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

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

### Pet Peeve 3: Story, Story, What’s the Story?

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

Many papers are fragmented, have no thread, and tell no story. Authors have to understand that it is not my responsibility as a reviewer to search for the thread but their responsibility to make it as easy as possible for me to follow their story.

Good stories start with good introductions. As Grant and Pollock (2011) point out, writing a strong introduction is one of the most important and challenging tasks in writing an effective paper. The reviewers agreed and identified a number of common problems with introductions to *AMR* papers. In the words of one reviewer, “Many papers have horrible introductions. . . . [A] good introduction tells the story in a nutshell, embeds the paper in its research context, explains the contribution (answer to the ‘so what question’) and draws the reader into the story.” Another observed that *AMR* manuscripts often suffer from “long and winding introductions that fail to concisely specify the contribution and how the research is situated within the literature.” The reviewers noted that many introductions lack a “road map,” which gives the reader an overview of the manuscript, and a hook, which captures the reader’s attention. As one reviewer advised, “Pay attention to your introduction—that first page is where you capture the reader or kill them off. Make me want to read your paper.”

The introduction should also provide a clear and compelling justification for the manuscript.

The reviewers identified a number of shortcomings in this regard. As one reviewer observed, "Many authors fail to effectively problematize the literature and articulate a compelling theoretical contribution."<sup>3</sup> Building on this point, another reviewer noted that authors often fail to answer the problematization question: "Without this work, what can't we understand?" or even more seriously: "what do we get wrong?" Many reviewers expressed annoyance with a "fill in the gap" approach to justifying a manuscript. As one wrote:

It drives me crazy when the motivation for a manuscript is because "no one has looked at X before." Chances are that no one has ever studied the causal link between managers' favorite cheeses and their leadership style, but that doesn't mean someone should.

Another reviewer agreed: "It's common for an author to point out that a gap exists, but often gaps exist because they don't need to be filled." One reviewer described his reaction to the gap approach as "a total turn off. . . if there is no better reason to write a manuscript, there is no good reason to read it!"

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 contribution of the paper. This can be a frustrating experience for the reader. In the words of one reviewer:

If I haven't reached the author's own contribution by pages 10–12, I start getting annoyed. Much of the literature review material can often be worked into background support for one's theoretical contribution, rather than needing to address all of it within a dedicated literature review.

Another reviewer wrote, "My BIGGEST pet peeve is that authors sometimes don't get to the point of their paper until many pages into the text. It's like they are waiting for the paper to inspire THEM (rather than the reader) in terms of its overall contribution." The reviewers observed that a consequence of wait for it stories is that the manuscript may "begin in the middle" or "begin at the end." This leads to underdeveloped manuscripts; the authors spend more time

building the paper's foundation than presenting and developing their own original ideas.

**The reasons.** The reviewers identified a number of reasons for muddled and fragmented stories. The process of writing may give authors new insights that take their paper in a very different direction. In this case they may need to rewrite the paper rather than try to salvage text that is no longer needed or relevant. Cobbling together extraneous text can lead to muddled and disjointed stories.

Disjointed stories may also be due to "too many cooks in the kitchen." The reviewers observed that parceling out sections of the paper to different coauthors can create a multiheaded monster if the authors do not share a common vision or unifying "voice" that connects the sections together. Coauthors may also be unwilling to cut and critique each other's work, which adds to the challenge of creating a clear, consistent, and coherent story.

Another key insight offered by the reviewers is that story lines suffer when authors try to do too much in one manuscript. Authors mistakenly believe they need to develop "the grand epic theory" that explains every conceivable aspect of the phenomenon. The story becomes an epic novel rather than a tightly focused short story. In the words of one reviewer, "Great papers are often amazingly simple papers. They have one message, not five." Another concurred: "You don't have to create a model of everything in a single manuscript." As observed by another reviewer:

It's impossible to develop a wide-sweeping, perfectly generalizable, grand theory in 30 pages, so temper your aspirations and focus on observationally based explanations of a particular phenomenon of interest to management scholars and practitioners.

**The remedies.** The reviewers gave a gold mine of advice and recommendations on how to create a clear story for *AMR* readers. As mentioned earlier, authors need to immediately draw the reader into the story with strong introductions, compelling hooks, and clear justifications. Once the reader is hooked, authors need to "deliver on the promise" and not disappoint or abandon the reader. Authors should guide the reader through the manuscript—the more complex the story, the greater the need for guidance. As one reviewer advised, "Provide a clear road map to show the reader step-by-step how you

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

arrived at your theory." Another explained how reviewers could be used to assess the clarity of the story:

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

The reviewers also counseled authors to find the right balance in *AMR* manuscripts between attempting too much (e.g., the epic grand theory approach discussed earlier) and doing too little. As one reviewer remarked, "An *AMR* paper is not the front end of an *AMJ* paper." Another reviewer concurred. "I think there is a sweet spot for *AMR* papers that isn't always easy to find," he wrote, "where a model is novel enough that it warrants publication in *AMR* but not so novel that the arguments can't be supported in a compelling manner." He went on to explain:

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

Clear stories require clear structure, and the reviewers offered a bounty of practical advice, techniques, and "recipes" for creating a focused, tightly written manuscript. I've listed a few of these tried and true recipes in Figure 1.

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE CRAFT OF CLEAR WRITING**

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

**FIGURE 1**  
**Clear Writing Recipes: Advice from the Reviewers**

<p><i>The Hook: Creating a Tasty Appetizer</i></p> <p>"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."</p> <p>"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."</p> <p>"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. . . . those 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."</p> <p>"Write out the first five paragraphs (FFP) 100 times if that is what it takes to hook the reader."</p>
<p><i>Creating Coherence and Cohesion: Knowing Your Ingredients</i></p> <p>"Read the topic sentence of each paragraph alone, and see if you are developing . . . 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."</p> <p>"Write the entire story line 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."</p>
<p><i>Getting to the Core: Embracing the Lean Cuisine Approach</i></p> <p>"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 thought process."</p>

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

First, *clear writing takes a substantial amount of time and effort*. There are no shortcuts to writing clearly. Every word needs to be scrutinized for meaning, clarity, and purpose. As Gunning (1968: 4) advised, we need to eliminate words that don't say what they mean, words that don't say anything, and words that are used merely for display. Every sentence should serve a precise purpose and be part of a clear, concise, and compelling story that engages the reader and brings the reader with you on the inevitable journey that leads to your model. Eliminate anything that stands between you and your reader. Reject the assumption that scholarly writing should be esoteric; our ideas are complex, but our writing should be accessible and as clear as a bell. We are well served by Gunning's advice to "resist the mischief of making what you have to say even more complex in the telling" (1968: 67).

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

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

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

In general, you can define successful writers as those who have something to say and who have learned how to say it simply. No writer ever gained a large audience by making his style more complicated than his thought required. The writers who gain an audience—the writers you read and can name—write surprisingly simply. They observe a strict discipline, but they introduce within that discipline much variety. They write simply but they don't get caught at it. To a great degree, that is the key to writing craftsmanship (1968: 12).

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