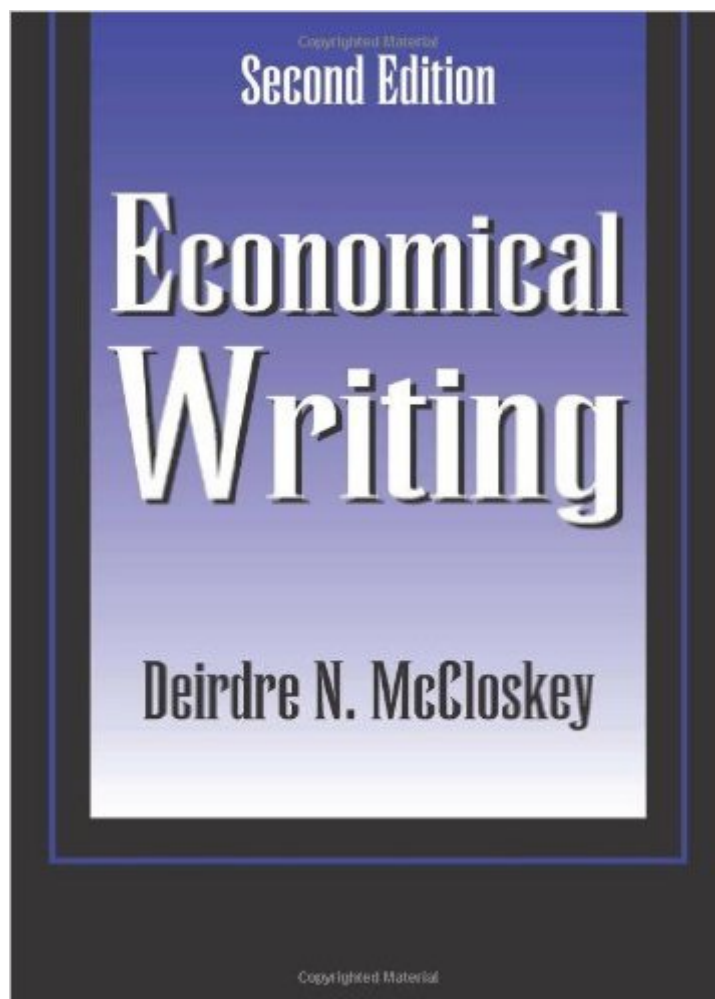


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# Economical Writing



## Synopsis

Anyone who cares about direct, clear expression should read this lucid, delightful gem by an author who practices what she advises. Titles of related interest also available from Waveland Press: Brooks-Quigley, *Words' Worth: Write Well and Prosper*, Second Edition (ISBN 978-1577666776) and Gerard, *Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life* (ISBN 9781577663393).

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## Customer Reviews

I became acquainted with *Economical Writing*'s predecessor when McCloskey first served as my advisor at the University of Iowa. I've found *Economical Writing* a pleasure to read--and reread. I've used *Economical Writing* and its predecessor to good effect during the ensuing 10 years, teaching students of history and rhetoric to write more clearly and persuasively. McCloskey, considered by some to write more clearly than any other economist, shares a good number of basic and advanced techniques for writing better. She uses brevity, humor and examples to persuade the student that writing clearly matters and that anyone, no matter how skilled (or unskilled), can write more clearly. When I use *Economical Writing* in a class I don't teach from it; rather, I refer students to small portions of the book which further (and perhaps more effectively) illustrate points I make in comments I write on student papers. In the past I've found the book invaluable for helping students write more clearly and persuasively. I plan to use *Economical Writing* once again next semester in rhetoric and I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to write better--or to help teach others to

write better. McCloskey divides her economical little book of 98 pages into 33 chapters, including suggestions on everything from which rules of your grammar-school teacher you should break (many), to how to make your writing cohere (repetition), to why even the cynical student (or professor) should write better ("good writing pays well and bad writing pays badly"). In providing suggestions for improvement, McCloskey clearly demonstrates the same depth and breadth of knowledge that she brings to all of her academic ventures. McCloskey may well have written the best brief book on how to write well. By limiting *Economical Writing* to 98 pages and at such a low price, she certainly has written the most economical superb book on writing well.

Professor McCloskey presents 31 rules for rhetoric (invention, arrangement, and especially style) that cross outmoded traditional teachings. Writing with verve, her practical rules combined with concrete examples of wordcraft motivate and encourage. I have a shelf of writer's guides and style manuals, but it took this small classic to get me over a three-year long writer's block. It would be difficult to praise this book too highly. It has been a classic from its first incarnation in April 1985.

This is a wonderful little book that every college undergraduate--not just Econ majors--should read carefully. It's a clear, lively, and witty guide to good expository writing. I assigned a few chapters from it to first-year college students taking a seminar on writing, and they found it excellent--much better than the main writing textbook used in the class. McCloskey covers most of the topics that college writing textbooks address, but hers is not a reference textbook. It's an actual book that you read and enjoy from cover to cover. Her advice is priceless, and so many students could become much stronger writers by following it closely. I first read this book (in its first edition) as a graduate student. I disliked much of it and was quite mad at the author. When she described what "bad writers" do, she was describing everything that I was in the habit of doing! Over time I've become a better writer and I've had to recognize that her advice was sound and my writing poor. If you're a student, please read this book--you'll be glad that you did. If you're a professor, please require your students to read it--you'll be doing them a big favor. And you'll see the results in their papers, which won't be quite as painful to grade...

McCloskey delivers a thoughtful, fun, and very slim volume, focused on economics writing but also applicable to most non-fiction writing. The chapters in this book address everything from the fundamental ("Write in Complete Sentences") to the nuanced ("Make Your Writing Cohere," with clear tips on how to do so). I hadn't encountered many of the ideas previously, such as putting the

importance material at the end of the sentence and only elaborate one of the three parts of a sentence (i.e. the subject, the verb, or the object). Two strengths of the book are that it's funny (my friends couldn't believe I was laughing aloud at a style manual) and that it gives a host of references to other books on writing. On McClosky's recommendation, one of my next books will be Tufte's *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. Her main list of writing books is on pages 8 and 9, but she peppers recommendations throughout. She also gives a list of good economics writers (p. 15). I didn't agree with everything in the book because, after all, "good style is...a matter of taste" (p. 88). If you want axioms, go to Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* (which is also wittier than you might expect). But McCloskey takes us beyond axioms to think hard about style and the process is well worth our while. ("Process" is one of her no-no words (p. 73), but I'll leave it, just this once.)

Professor Deirdre McCloskey writes about 'the dismal science' in an accessible, elegant, and affecting way. Her humor punches one's funny bone at all the right times. This book should be required reading, not just for all Ph.D. candidates in all business disciplines, but for all undergraduates, as well. In fact, any non-fiction writer will benefit from reading this book. It's first-rate in every respect.

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