Writing for Social Scientists by Howard Becker – Book Review

Howard Becker is the author of the book that I read this week. Becker (1986) in his “Writing for Social Scientists” explains the details about the academic writing process and his personal experiences through his academic career mostly dominates the chapters. He focuses on several real world examples about the kinds of problems that an academician can experience while dealing with writing an article or a research paper.

Although Becker advises in this book to avoid the replication of the same ideas with different sentences, he keeps giving the same recommendations for several times. On the other hand there are many useful hints in this book. Since it is quite difficult to explain all those useful recommendations in a one-page summary, I preferred to list them below as brief items:

- Don’t get afraid that what you wrote would be “wrong” and that people would laugh at you.
- Don’t assume that you will get it right for the first time.
- There is no One Right Way
- Get over your fear of failure
- Talk about the topic you will write about
- Begin by writing down everything
- An outline can help you get started
- Remember that any sentence can be changed, rewritten, thrown out or contradicted
- Do whatever is easiest first.
- Cut the words that don’t do much work
- Substitute active verbs for passive ones
- Don’t repeat words when you can get the same result without doing it.
- Take your metaphors seriously and see if they still make sense
- Use good examples to present your ideas
- Write specifically and concretely
- Clarify ambiguities
- Paying to much attention to the literature can deform the real argument you want to make
- Let others see your work, accept critics from friends
- Nothing will happen without the work.